ANOTHER DECOLONIAL POLITICS IS POSSIBLE

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Introductory Digression: *Sans Mains*

It's not very orthodox to start with a digression, but this is not a very orthodox paper either stylistically or in content. It's a paper that mixes the anecdotal and the ethnographic, the personal and the theoretical, hoping all of it adds up to a mildly different space of reflection for, and perhaps another dimension to, thinking about the politics of decolonization. I was tempted with the title to write "another/an additional" rather than just "another." This is because when writing "Another Decolonial Politics is Possible," people more often than not read "another" to mean an alternative one that can/should be pursued *instead* of the one that exists today. Such is the hegemony of monorealism that the logic of the "either/or" is a default position, and despite a long history of works critiquing such a logic, many of us still have to labor on ourselves to think and give primacy to the "and" and the "as well as." Another thing I was tempted to do was to characterize this other/additional politics as a minor one. It does not aspire—I would even say that it should not aspire—to take a central place in any decolonial thinking, let alone decolonial politics. I perhaps like to see myself as pointing here to something that is of the order of the "necessary but not sufficient" to think about—nowhere near sufficient in fact, and certainly not always the most important. Nonetheless by declaring it of the order of the "necessary" I am saying that I think it to be important enough to think about, and that by failing to think about it, minor as it might be, those who are thinking about the ways in which the colonial remains present in our lives today are missing an important dimension of the way it is articulated to our current reality.

But I am failing to digress by saying all this. I'll come back to the above soon enough though. I like the idea of one's main argument being a digression from one's digression. But I'd better set out on my introductory digressive path. And please bear with me here, even if you could legitimately be asking yourself, "In what way is this related to decolonial politics?" I am confident that it'll all come together midway through this text. So here we go.

It started with a mundane observation. But it was an observation that was clearly made possible by years of being attentive to, studying, and writing about strategies of domestication and that was intensified during the writing of *Is Racism an Environmental*

Threat?[1] This made me sensitive to the variety of ways that power and domination are yielded within intra-human and inter-species domesticating processes.

I was walking my dogs to the park, not far from my house. To do so, I have to cross the main road between the house and the park. The traffic is reasonably heavy, and we always cross at an intersection where there is a combined traffic and pedestrian light. Opposite us on that day was a man about to cross from the other side. He had his dog on a leash. As is always the case, this made me conscious that my dogs are trained—mainly by my partner—to stop at the pedestrian red light without needing a leash. The green light comes with a rattling noise that the dogs recognize as, "It's time to get ready to cross." I say, "Go!" as an extra prompt, and they go. When this situation occurs, I am not only conscious of the fact that, unlike some other people, I don't need to leash my dogs, but also of the fact that I actually feel superior to them. That is, somehow, in the back of my mind, there is this idea, never explicitly formulated but clearly there, that having instilled in my dogs the knowledge that allows them to control themselves in front of the pedestrian light, I have taken my human-dog relation of domestication to a higher realm that made it a superior relation to the human-dog relation of the people who need a leash.

Things were little different that day. I looked at the man-leash-dog assemblage coming towards me and immediately felt as superior as I always do. Yet something that was different was that for whatever reason—maybe it had been slowly ripening and ready to come forth—for the first time I started seriously reflecting on the significance of this feeling of superiority. "Why on Earth? You're so ridiculous," I was saying to myself. The thought that we humans don't need much to feel superior to others came to my mind. But at the same time, it was also clear to me that ridiculous as it may be, phenomenologically speaking, the experience of being in control of my dogs and feeling confident that they stay with me and that I can steer them in whatever direction I want without needing physical restraints was a pleasing sensation. But it wasn't, and it still isn't, fully clear to me why it is so pleasing. Somewhat out of nowhere the words, "*Regarde! Sans mains!*" popped into my consciousness. And then the memory of myself as a kid riding my bike and managing for the first time to do so "with no hands" and screaming for my friend to see me doing it. My unconscious was inviting me to make a link between the two situations. A French Belgian song from the early nineties intruded into the mental mix:

[1] Ghassan Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

Le bonheur c'est comme faire
du vélo sans les mains

(Happiness is like riding
Your bike with no hands).

My mind was racing: what is it about dominating your surroundings "without using your hands" that makes it such a particularly enjoyable and even sublime mode of being as a will to power, something of the order of *jouissance?* Was I touching onto a dimension that was of the essence of power and control, and the social and psychoanalytic fantasies in which they are grounded? I was now thinking of the unlimited, mundane, everyday joy that the remote control has brought into the lives of human beings. Despite being scientifically explainable, does not the sentiment of the power to affect things at a distance generated by the remote control have its genealogy in the sentiments generated by the practices of magic and voodoo? I curse you here, and you develop a fever there. I put a pin in this doll here, and I paralyze your arm there. *Regarde! Sans mains!* Not entirely "s*ans main*s" but the principle behind it all is similar enough.

The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that the idea of a domination that does not require excessively visible physical restraint was really at the heart of all fantasies of domination. It is certainly at the heart of we humans' most common understanding of domestication as a mode of dominating other species. Domestication is perceived as the ultimate mode of domination because unlike capture, which needs visible restraints such as cages, and unlike taming, which only applies to an individual of a species and has to be repeated again and again, domestication involves species reproducing themselves in captivity; as always already accepting of the state of domination into which they are born. That is, domestication is the fantasy that there are species born in a state of subjugation and that internalize it, such that humans are left with as little as possible to do that is of the order of visible domination. The idea is to be in control without appearing to be *manipulating* anything. This is also of the essence of making a relation of domestication pass as a relation of cooperation and of mutual benefit that some people still like to theorize it to be. But it is also clear that even from the perspective of the domesticated, the less visible/physical the restraint the more bearable, and as such, the more viable a life lived in domination can be. Those who prefer the chicken they are eating to have lived a "free range" life as opposed to in a cage are after not only delicious, high quality chicken meat but also "delicious," high quality forms of power and domination. Such sublimated power undoubtedly infuses itself

into the chicken meat, giving it an even more "high quality" taste. But there is no doubt that "free range" chooks (Australian for chicken) are "happier" in their captivity. One can feel their joy oozing out of their body compared to battery hens in their miserable and immiserating cages. So both the dominator and the dominant are better off in "*sans mains*" forms of domination. It's a win-win situation if there ever was one: the dominated prefers a bearable rather than an unbearable life, and a bearable life makes the dominated more pleasurably exploitable and nicer to consume in the eyes of the dominant.

The early history of caging and cages clearly points to this: those who began building cages to keep birds in them were faced precisely with the problem of the unbearability of an overly present form of domination from the perspective of the dominated: the over-visibility of the cage.[2] The birds that were in cages that were too present/visible—because the bars were too thick, for instance—felt their cages to be unbearable. They kept trying to break free by flying straight into them, thereby hurting themselves and dying. So the makers of the cages were faced with the problem of creating a structure that encages without it being overly present: a cage yearning to be a "*sans mains*" cage. Technically, then, the history of refining cages is a history of creating something that is strong enough to ensure that the caged does not break free, while at the same time ensuring that this search for strength does not mean a more "in your face" visibility which clearly created in the caged an excessive claustrophobic and *unbearable* feeling of encagement. It is understood that such an experience of an unbearable moment in life triggers in the caged a "freedom or death" disposition that leads precisely to that: freedom or death. Thus those aiming for a prolonged self-reproducing relation of domination aim to avoid forms of domination reliant on continuous, overt manipulation. If the dominant do not care about the caged experiencing such claustrophobia as a result of over-visibility, it means they have no interest in them staying alive and in perpetuating their domination.

Have not all the theorists of power who have foregrounded the problematic of the perpetuation of domination through its internalization and passive acceptance by the dominated recognize, and indeed idealize, this domination "*sans mains*" and posit it as the ultimate mode of domination? This is true, whether it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau telling us that the "slaves lose everything in their chains, even the desire of escaping from them" or Bourdieu via Marx and Gramsci highlighting the problematic of "the acquiescence" and "the

2 Julia Breittruck, "Pet Birds: Cages and Practices of Domestication in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *InterDisciplines* 1, 6-24

participation of the dominated in their domination." Let us hear Bourdieu make this clearer (while having an implicit conversation with Weber):

> The command that makes itself obeyed, if it is an exception to the laws of physics in that it obtains an effect out of proportion to the energy expended, and thus liable to appear as a form of magic, is in perfect conformity with the law of the conservation of social energy, that is, of capital: it turns out that, to be in a position to act at a distance and without expense of energy, by virtue of an act of social magic, as with the order or the watchword [*ordre et mot d'ordre*], one must be endowed with authority, that is, authorized, in one's personal capacity or by proxy, as delegate, representative, or functionary, to set off, as by a trigger mechanism, the social energy that has been accumulated in a group or an institution by the work, often protracted and difficult, that is the condition of the acquisition and conservation of symbolic capital.[3]

But it should be clear that what we are really talking about here in highlighting this "*sans mains*" imaginary is the fantasy of domination *as it is fantasized by the dominant*. For the process of domestication in practice, as any domesticator knows, is never complete and requires continuous "hands-on" work. I might well feel superior when I am crossing with my leash-free dogs but the truth is that I never fully trust them to do the right thing (by me) and I am continuously watching in case the situation requires a "hands-on" intervention. And is it really the case that slaves ever lose the desire to escape from their chains? At the very least, this seems doubtful to me or very rare. This is why we are dealing more with the fantasies of power of the dominant. These hopes of maximal domination are not *opposed to* as much as *entangled with* the practical reality of domination. The extent to which a domination is "*sans mains*" is a matter of degree rather than of "either/or": some don't need to show and make visible their domination as much as others. But there is no doubt that those whose domination is less visible always project a greater image of power.

In a Lebanese village, the patriarchal male patron (in the sense of patron-client relations) who is exceptionally confident about his control of "his" women (wife, daughters, sisters) or "his" men that he lets them go around "wherever they want" because they know where to not go and what to not do, remains even today a living fantasy of the ideal-type patriarchal *zaïm* (leader). He is an embodiment of the type of social magic Bourdieu is talking about above. His confidence is imagined to come from his "*wahra*," which in the Lebanese village is a

3 Pierre Bourdieu, "Scattered Remarks," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2, no. 3 (1999), 338.

form of symbolic capital equivalent to "masculine aura of authority." The man who has a "*wahra*" doesn't need to "exercise" and "exhibit" his domination, he does not have to "do" anything; he apparently lets it happen by the mere fact that he is "there," the mere fact that he exists. For he only needs to show up for people to take notice of him, fear him, and even know what he wants. The very idea of needing to "do something" diminishes his power, in contrast with the man who asserts patriarchal authority through domestic violence and thereby pathologizes himself and patriarchal authority.

Now a man with a smooth capacity to deploy his "aura" to rule in this way clearly does not exist except within the idealized imaginary of power as it circulates in the village. Some "hands-on" intervention, not necessarily in the form of physical violence, is always necessary for the continual reproduction of domination. Nonetheless, there are men who are closer to the ideal "*sans mains*" than others. And like me and my dogs without leashes, the men who have *wahra*, and who do little in terms of visible control, are seen as by far superior to the men who need to restrain freedom, let alone use physical violence, to assert their domination over "their" women or "their" male patrons.[4]

It can thus be said that the excessive need for physical restraint, or any other visible mode of domination, is really an indication of a pathological power, a capacity for domination that is already in decline. "Hands-on" domination is the domination of those who are "*bala wahra*" (deprived of a manly aura of authority). Let us be clear here: it is not that those who dominate "*bala wahra*" do not have the power necessary to dominate. Rather, it is that they are *insecure* and *uncertain* about the power that they have because they don't feel their power is sufficiently recognized, which may or may not be for good reasons. To use Nietzschean language, we can say that they have a weak *sense of power*. It could well be because they have less power, but it could also be that they feel that they have a tenuous hold on their power and fear losing it, or that they have a sense that it is declining. What is clear is that their experience of the degree of power that they have makes them feel brittle and fragile despite remaining in a dominant position. They believe less and less in themselves, and those who are dominated by them believe less and less in them. Thus, they are forced to compensate for this insecure hold on power with overt "hands-on" means, which only manages to highlight their insecurity. Their mode of deploying power and dominating becomes more and more tainted with anxiety, it becomes more and more cruel, but just as

4 For a discussion of male authority in rural Lebanon, see Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

importantly, it becomes more and more obvious and visible, and perhaps one might even say vulgar, in that, in this Nietzschean world, a stronger and secure sense of domination makes for a *refined* deployment of power. It is not coincidental that someone like Trump and the deployment of American imperial power under him comes to mind when speaking of such powerful "*bala wahra*" men throwing their weight around in a very visible and unsubtle way. And this is indeed where I want to get to with this digression that started with my relation to my dogs.

Colonialism *Bala Wahra*

Indeed, it is hard to think of a nation today where the gap between the actual "high amount" of power at its disposal and the "low amount" of aura of authority it generates is greater than in the case of Trump's United States. It can be said that Trump's United States's sense of colonial/imperial power is symptomatic of the state of colonial domination in the world today. It is a colonialism that is powerful enough to dominate but far more insecure and anxious about its capacity to do so than ever before. Such a situation is leading to a proliferation of hands-on forms of American intervention and domination in the world. It is making American imperialism inch closer to the European colonialism it historically superseded.

The above is important. For let us not forget, the decline of European colonialism, of which the British colonization of India or the French colonization of Algeria were prototypes, involved the decline of what this colonialism represented in terms of direct military invasion, direct military repression, direct domination, direct exploitation of resources, etc. Confident of being able to dominate internationally through the imposition of a free market in which it was the most powerful economy, the United States used its post-World War Two strength to help previously colonized nations become free independent nations. The United States' interest in nations becoming free in an international system was no different from humans's interest in chicken becoming free range. And in much the same way as in the new "free range"-era humans continue to dominate the "range" where the chicken are roaming free, in the new colonial era, the United States continues to dominate the international world where nations are free. It is in this sense that we can say that the transition from the European to the American -led colonialism was a transition from direct visible military occupation to indirect economic colonialism, *sans mains*, which became the ideal type-form of domination of this era.

Needless to say, and as the history of American imperialism clearly shows, there was always a necessity of hands-on imperialist intervention here and there. But it would be incorrect to let this history of intervention obscure the fact that the United States' era of economic imperialism made the old European deployment of naked domination look increasingly outdated in its obviousness, visibility, and even, one could say, vulgarity. Consequently, that we find ourselves now before an American imperial power that has been increasingly returning to more and more hands-on forms of intervention such as we are seeing in the Middle East, signals a historical shift that needs to be noted. Just as important as the rise of this hands-on exercise of domination is a decline in ideological legitimacy. European colonialism believed in itself as a civilizing mission and made at least some, among the colonized, believe in it as well, despite the monstrosities it unleashed on the world. Likewise, American economic colonialism in its early stages also believed in itself, believed that it was actually helping the propagation of democracy and freedom around the world, and in much the same way it also made some people from the former colonies believe in it. What marks this new hands-on stage of American imperial power is how absent, except among the few who are serious about ideology, such self-belief is. While democracy and freedom are still invoked rhetorically and continue to be deployed around the world, what used to be the view of the radical few is now a more generalized belief. That is, there is a more prevailing impression in the United States and globally that they are vacuous sound bites with no practical consequences other than a naked justification of military intervention.

This brief historical overview of some key transitions in the forms of colonial domination highlights something important: domination does not only involve a multiplicity of forms but also involves a multiplicity of psychologies and senses of power, all of which shape it into what it is. This is why, while "domination" can be and indeed has been an analytically important concept, it can be ethnographically and descriptively underwhelming without a minute description of what it entails. Many of us who work on colonialism and its legacy like to quote the late Patrick Wolfe's wonderfully concise characterization of settler colonialism (and, by extension, any colonialism) as "a structure, not an event." We do so because we are often faced with attempts at belittling and underestimating the extent to which colonialism, both as a relation of domination and exploitation and as a set of cultural attitudes, racist classifications and assumptions affecting the distribution of power and opportunities in the current world, remains diffused in so many aspects of the social spaces in which we live. These attempts can sometimes be political—"colonialism happened long ago, get over it"—

sometimes analytical—"this is too binary, things are more complex than this"—and sometimes both. But for those of us who relate to Wolfe's formulation, we know that there are many other "things" going on, but we also know that it is critical to keep in mind that there is an important dimension of our lives where "things" are *not* "more complex than this." It is because colonialism is an enduring structure that postcolonial societies as much as settler colonial societies remain structured by it.

Yet for all its importance and the need to continue *politically and analytically* to push the above point, "structure," when referring to "power structures," can, like "domination," be very wanting descriptively and ethnographically. And it would not be either intellectually or politically useful to think that highlighting the existence of colonialism as a structure is the endpoint of analysis. Pointing to the existence of relations of power and domination in social reality can be as analytically illuminating as pointing to the existence of life there. And needless to say, to say that colonial and postcolonial realities are organized around the same colonial structure is not to say that they are the same realities. In this sense, we can say that the claim that colonialism still exists as a structure points to a beginning and a direction that analysis must take rather than an end. This is why what we have begun examining above is important. An analytics of the changing colonial "sense of power" and the issues of the visibility and invisibility of domination are all important questions that are just as needed as the affirmation of the existence of a structure of colonial domination.

But if an emphasis on structural continuity blunts the analytics of the diversity of forms and senses of domination, it is nothing compared to how impoverished it leaves the dominated's modes of living their domination. The structural binary subjection/resistance is, to say the least, a poor classificatory repertoire to account for the multiple ways in which the dominated live their domination. Are the dominated really destined to always relate to the dominant in a way that can be defined within the subjugated/resisting spectrum? A richer ethnography of modes of subjection, endurance, survival, and resistance is much needed here. And more importantly, we need a better understanding of the way the dominated live through the changes in the dominant's sense of power referred to above, and indeed, how they might contribute to bringing them about. How do colonizers and colonized exist together? That is, what modes of interaction happen between them as they are reproducing/not reproducing colonial structures of domination?

The Relational Imperative

It is in light of the above that I want to explore an argument made in my book *Alter-Politics* regarding the Palestinian politics of decolonization vis-a-vis Israeli settler-colonialism.[5] The initial argument was made in 2009 at a lecture at the Australian Catholic University but the point has grown in importance for me.[6] My implicit starting point in that lecture was a simple observation: while there are struggles in history where the aim has been to eliminate the dominant either physically or symbolically, there are other struggles where the elimination of the dominant is neither possible nor desirable. For instance, while I am sure that there are some feminists who have fantasies of eliminating males altogether, the majority of feminists do not harbor eliminationist fantasies towards males in the same way, for example, that slaves wished to eliminate slave-owners, or in the way the French revolutionaries aimed to eliminate France's aristocracy. Rather, feminists aim for a transformed, better, more egalitarian, non-exploitative, more respectful, etc. relation with men. The lecture made me increasingly aware that the decline of eliminationist fantasies on the part of the colonized is one of the most important defining characteristics of our current colonial era. Indeed, this difference is what might invite us to refer to our era as post-, or perhaps better, neo- colonial. In the colonial era anti-colonial fantasies of elimination were possible, thinkable and sometimes even desirable, and indeed the dominant imaginary of anti-colonial struggles was an imaginary of cleansing: cleansing society from the colonizers as people, cleansing the colonized culture from the traces of colonial culture. It was also a narcissistic imaginary of revalorization: recovering and revalorizing oneself, one's society, one's nation and one's cultural heritage, all of which have long been repressed, devalorized, and distorted, by colonialism. In our current post- or neo- colonial era that is nonetheless still very colonial, such fantasies of elimination have become less and less possible. In some places they have become even unthinkable. This is how I imagined it to be for Palestinians in their anticolonial struggles in that lecture. While "driving the Jews to the sea" can be used for rhetorical purposes by some and can be exploited by the Zionists themselves as an example of what they are really facing, the fact is that the aim of most Palestinian anticolonial struggles today is not (and, I argued, should not be) to eliminate Israeli Jews, even if this was remotely possible (which it isn't). Rather, the aim is to radically transform the existing colonial relations that are defined by Zionism into something better. My fantasy was a transformation

5 Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015).
6 Ghassan Hage, "Gaza: On Narcissistic Victimhood," filmed July 2009 at The Australian Catholic University School of Philosophy, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvr_afwrejY.

of the relation Zionist-Palestinian up to the point where the category Zionist would become useless and fade away. That is, to put it more generally, hard or impossible as this might be, I saw that a crucial aim of anticolonial politics in the current era is not to fantasize the physical elimination of the colonizers but the transformation of a bad relatio—colonialism—into a good relation:a relation that is not colonial and therefore whose subjects are not "colonizer" and "colonized."

In much the same way, Indigenous Australians are not going to eliminate the white settlers and the immigrants who have colonized their land and exploited their resources and continue to do so. Such fantasies of elimination might be entertained by some and even voiced on Facebook by a couple of enthusiastic "symbolic warriors," but the fact is that such elimination is neither possible nor desirable, nor is it realistically entertained or even wished for by the various Indigenous Australians who are in a position to voice and formulate Indigenous demands. In many ways, the outcome of the struggle against the settler colonialist Apartheid regime in South Africa is paradigmatic for our postcolonial times. It already pointed us in the direction of what is and is not possible or desirable. If Apartheid as a form of colonization has exhausted itself, so has decolonization as a desire to eradicate physically the colonizers by killing them or chasing them away from the lands their ancestors and they have and continue to colonize. Bad as they were and are, they are here to stay. Not only can they not be eliminated, they cannot be made to go back to wherever Western country they originally came from.

A few years after giving the lecture on the importance of the relational imperative in Israel/Palestine, it was with great pleasure that I read in Achille Mbembe's *avant-propos* to the second French edition of *De la Postcolonie* similar arguments, presented with Mbembe's characteristic philosophical sophistication and ethical depth, and made on the basis of a critique of Fanon. For Fanon, Mbembe argues, "To kill the enemy is not only a necessity, but a politico-ethical responsibility" since he sees that "life" for the colonized can only emerge from the "decomposing body of the colonizer."[7] Mbembe argues that such a way of thinking about decolonization is not satisfactory in "our context" where it is less "about taking away the colonizer's life" and more about opposing the politics that is still driven by fratricidal tendencies and the refusal to "constitute a community."[8] Thus, Mbembe argues with the help of Derrida's *Donner la Mort* that the aim is to struggle against the politics of death with a

7 Achille Mbembe, *De La Postcolonie*, 14-16.
8 Ibid

politics motivated by what Mbembe considers the highest ethical horizon: giving death to death.

As should be clear from the above, I think there are some crucial points of agreement between Mbembe's argument and mine. There are also, if I understand his argument, some differences in emphasis that create an interesting space of reflection. Because he formulates his arguments primarily in terms of politico-ethical differences, Mbembe's subjects are not historicized as the descendants or inheritors of the Fanonian politics that he wants to distance himself from in "our context." As such, they are not seen as marked by it. The forms that colonial and anticolonial politics have taken in the past are not merely options that one can simply ditch, they are inheritances that have contributed to making the colonizers, the colonized, and the descendants of them both who they are today. Because he sees his subjects as free from such constitutive inheritances, Mbembe sees the difference between the Fanonian colonial ethic of "giving death to the colonist" and his postcolonial ethic of "giving death to death" as an "either/or" matter. Thinking through this issue, I also increasingly felt that both my initial argument in *Alter-Politics* and Mbembe's in his *avant-propos* could be criticized for offering a linear historical logic which does not allow for the possibility of a return to the conditions that constituted the old colonial world into the current one. What makes for the difficulty of analyzing and struggling politically against colonial relations in our era is that we have to deal not only with the leftovers of the processes of colonization but also the leftovers of the processes of decolonization that marked the colonial era. These leftovers are economic, political, social, cultural, and affective. What's more, these leftovers are not some kind of inevitably disappearing remains. They are more like embers that can turn and be turned into fires at any moment. As mentioned above, the return to forms of "hands-on" imperialist global politics is more reminiscent of the old colonialism than of anything new, especially since it includes an attempted restoration of white supremacy within the western nation-state itself. Likewise, the land-grabbing racializing colonialism of the Israeli state is more like a fully-fledged 18th century colonialism than anything postmodern. Yet at the same time, there is no doubt that years of anticolonial struggles have led to a decline in the legitimacy of Western colonial modernity, and the ecological crisis has particularly delegitimized its developmental ethos.

Thus we have unachieved colonization here, and unachieved decolonization there, and indeed we ourselves are such leftovers, neither fully colonized nor fully decolonized, inheritors of the best and the worst of Western culture, stuck with each other and with whatever else these

unachieved processes of colonization and decolonization have bequeathed to us. In such a situation, it is crucial to think through this permanent entanglement between the colonial and the postcolonial. This is what makes for the difficulty of the postcolonial imperative of transforming a bad relation into a good relation. If for the colonized and their descendants, postcolonialism is an invitation to reimagine a "better" relation than the one they had or have with the colonizers and their descendants, what does "better" mean in such circumstances, and what kind of "better" is possible? How are we to contemplate a decolonial politics today that is not fed by eliminationist desire and is condemned to maintain a relation with those who are still grounded in colonialism and benefiting from it, and who still harbor colonial fantasies of superiority towards many places and people? How can one even begin to imagine a different relation with such people? It is particularly to account for this difficult, fluctuating relationality that I started deploying the concept of *colonial anisogamy*.

Anisogamic Relations

"Anisogamy" is the concept used by Levi-Strauss to refer to marriages between people of unequal status. In its Levi-Straussian usage the inequality of status is an accepted fact. As lived by most people however, inequality of status is itself a domain of anisogamic struggle: a party claiming superiority does not necessarily mean an acknowledgment of this superiority by the other party. I nonetheless use "anisogamic relations" to describe any relation requiring a form of reciprocal exchange where the inequality of status of the two parties and the inequality of what is being given and what is being received is an issue negotiated in the relation. I also use the notion of "anisogamic strategies" to speak of the symbolic labor that is involved in the maintenance of this type of relation. (To be clear, I don't see, as Bourdieu does, an analysis of practice of this sort as something opposed to Levi-Straussian structuralist analysis; it is, rather, concerned with a different dimension of this or other kinds of relations.) I initially developed the usage of these concepts in relation to my work on the Lebanese diaspora. In particular, I deploy it to analyze the situation of a Lebanese man, Adel, who migrated to the United States to live and work with a maternal uncle who supported his migration.[9] His maternal uncle and uncle's family were all much richer and well-educated than the man's own family. He nonetheless ended up marrying his uncle's daughter. This was in terms of class and cultural capital an anisogamic marriage which involved considerable upward social mobility for the man. At the same time, however, the man felt from a purely

9 See Ghassan Hage, "Migration and the Transformation of Male Sexuality" in John Gagnon and Samir Khalaf eds, *Sexuality in the Arab World*, (London: Al-Saqi Books, 2006).

patriarchal perspective that being associated with the maternal side of the family was a less prestigious move than being associated with the paternal side of the family (who were, however, from a class perspective, like him and his father, nowhere near as rich or as well-educated as the maternal side of the family). In the course of my research, I witnessed and analyzed the symbolic labor required by Adel and his wife, Lamya, to ensure everyone's dignity and honor was being preserved in an environment marked by economically dominant and dominated sides who nonetheless are also committed to maintain a viable conjugal relation between them. This was to me the domain of anisogamic strategies: the reciprocal management of relations by people who have structurally antagonistic positions but who nonetheless think themselves to be stuck with—having to have a relation with—each other. It is this aspect of the relation which made me think of it in relation to the "being stuck with the other" nature of postcolonialism that I have analyzed above.

Essentially, a positive anisogamic marriage involves reciprocal strategies of valorization. Both the dominant/high status and the dominated/low status parties have to participate in this, and both parties see themselves as having an interest in pumping up the prestige/dignity/honor/status of the other *up to a certain point.* For instance, the high-status spouse would clearly want the low-status spouse to show some recognition of and a certain degree of gratitude for the higher socio-economic or cultural status they have offered them through marriage. At the same time they would not want this recognition to be conferred in a too obvious, obsequious, and overly submissive manner that would end up being demeaning to all concerned. To put down one's own origins is a shameful thing to do, both to oneself and to the person one has married, and it is always important to show yourself capable of speaking highly of your own family. However, anisogamic logic is such that if the person of low status starts valorizing their family *too much* it can become a sign of disrespect to the high status spouse. That is, valorizing should not be done to the point where it becomes a form of excessive boasting that can make the spouse of high status feel like needing to remind their low status spouse of their lowly origins. There is always a need for the person of low status to show some gratitude to the person of high status for having helped them experience upward social mobility. But again, it has to be done with style and restraint so as not to demean oneself and one's high status spouse. For the latter usually also has an interest in highlighting what is exceptionally positive about the low status person they have married. After all, they have married them.

A positive anisogamic marriage depends, then, on both partners knowing how to valorize themselves, but not too much, and how to valorize each other, but not too much; how to show gratitude, but not too much, and how to show pride—but not too much. It is an artful process of knowing where the borders between maintaining one's dignity and excessive narcissism are and how not to cross them. These are also the borders between pride and boastfulness, a measured sense of appreciation of what has been received and excessive gratitude, and respect and servitude. Because of their dependence on all this subtle symbolic labour, which requires constant awareness of where one is positioned and continually adjusting to changing circumstances, anisogamic marriages can quickly degenerate from a process of mutual reciprocal covalorization to the exact opposite: an infernal dialectic of put-downs and devalorization. This is what I term as negative anisogamic relations. Here people still feel stuck with each other but nonetheless always engage in strategies of valorizing the self and devalorizing the other. This was where it was at with the relation between Adel and his uncle's family that I mentioned above. From what I gathered from listening to the various people concerned speak about it, a number of things led Adel to feel insecure and to continuously boast about the importance of his paternal side of the family; so much so that Lamya's family began feeling that this over-valorization of the paternal side of the family was a devalorization of their family. To his maternal uncle, Adel was being doubly ungrateful. Adel was not showing any gratitude for all the work his uncle had done to help him get a visa and migrate to the United States, nor was he showing the least gratitude for all the financial help he had received from him since marrying his daughter. So the uncle, according to Adel, in turn began to make barely disguised comments aimed at highlighting the low status, the economic poverty, and the lack of education of his nephew's paternal family.

What is particularly of interest here is that at one point Adel talked about his father-in-law and said to me, "The way he treats me is no different from the way Americans treat most Lebanese. They think that because we come from a background where people have less money and are uncomfortable financially means that we are less worthy human beings." Similarly, he said: "He [his father-in-law] and all of America might have a lot of money, but I am not going to respect them just because of that. If you want to be respected you need to respect people. He acts as if he has given me his daughter or something archaic like this, and he conveniently forgets that she fell in love with me." At another point he sharply criticized something his brother-in-law said to marginalize him by saying, "So when do you stop being

the one who married into the family and become just part of the family?" This reminded me of the thankless dynamic of integration where immigrants are always "trying to be" American, Australian, etc. but never fully becoming so in the eyes of the white population who nonetheless expect them to keep on trying. Because of such statements, it slowly dawned on me that in fact Adel's imaginary of American-Lebanese relations was very close to the way he imagined his marriage. Both were seen as forms of negative anisogamy: a relation where the party that thinks itself superior is continuously trying to make the other forcibly acknowledge that superiority and where the other party reactively refuses to acknowledge any gratitude for what it has received, propelling the relation into this destructive dialectics. At the same time, because of the sense of stuckness in this sea of negativity, there is also a desire to see things get better. Of his relation to Lamya and after listing a litany of problems, Adel said: "What can I do? He's my uncle, she's my wife, and we've got children. If only we could go back to getting on a bit better than this." Of his relation with the United States, Adel also at one point said: "Leaving is not an option. I don't like saying it, and I wish it wasn't the case, but our future is here."

It was in many ways, then, that Adel led me to think that there could be much to be gained from perceiving the colonial or neocolonial relations that mark our postcolonial time through an anisogamic frame: as relations festering with antagonism and yet between people "stuck with each other." I am conscious as I write this of the possibly conservative implications of thinking about relations of exploitation and domination as relations one is stuck in and as inviting ways of searching for coexistence despite such relationality. This, however, is precisely where the importance of thinking of "another" as meaning "an additional" not "an alternative to." My point is that to come to terms with the fact that we non-Westerners who have acquired a Western inheritance are stuck in a relation with the inheritors of Western colonialism requires us to think *both* about the labor of opposing and resisting, and about the labor of transforming existing colonial relations from without and from within together rather than in opposition to each other. At the very least, this would make us aware of some of the shortcomings of any decolonial work that is blind to this dimension of "stuckedness with the colonizing other."

Conclusion: Postcoloniality as Negative Anisogamy

To see the core postcolonial relation as a negative anisogamic process gives us, I believe, a special insight into one of its dimensions. This finally takes us back to our introductory digression, which, considering where we are now, is no longer one. The difference between

the visible and *sans mains* deployments of power that we began with is also the mark of the difference between positive and negative anisogamic relations. While a positive anisogamic process of co-valorization buttresses the increased invisible deployment of power and authority, a negative anisogamic process tends on the contrary to make that deployment more visible, which as we noted is more often than not a sign of weakness and of dented authority. This allows us to come face to face with and better analyze, I think, a dimension of white power in the postcolonial era. For as much as white colonial domination remains the major structuring force of our life, it has nonetheless changed to involve increasingly a more visible and "hands-on" forms of domination. States of hegemony and symbolic violence that used to hint at a power so legitimate that it was exercised "*sans mains*" have become a thing of the past. In today's western colonial world, neither are the dominant white colonial subjects secure in their domination, nor do the dominated, while, to be clear, remaining dominated, feel particularly in awe of those dominating them. From the French banning the "*foulard Islamique*" to British politicians arguing that immigrants have to respect British values to a group of wealthy and conservative Australians aiming to save the university from the clutches of "cultural Marxism" and advocating a university degree that promotes the greatness of Western Civilization, the culture of power in the West just like so many other things today is becoming increasingly like that of Third World tyrannical regimes. To use a concept introduced in the introductory part, we have been for a long time entering an era of a whiteness "*bala wahra*" tending towards the vulgarity of a Sissi, the cruelness of an Assad, and the unrefined arrogance of Muhammad bin Salman. Like the man who beats his wife to assert his patriarchal power and in the process manages to appear weaker and less legitimate, so are these dominant white subjects increasingly caught in a negative dialectic where their assertion of power and demands for respect is more and more hands on, more and more visible, more and more obvious and vulgar, and, because of this, less and less legitimate, sometimes even laughable, and more and more easy to challenge intellectually—though not necessarily easy to get rid of politically. Reflecting on the international acceptance of the Khashoggi assassination as a fait accompli, Elias Khoury asks: "What does it mean when language strips its clothes and becomes naked? What does it mean when the language that prevails among the politicians occupying the international scene today is an unrefined, coarse, and raw language that ditches all pretense and lays reality there before us uncovered, taking us to an uncouth and barbaric bottom where a crime is crudely declared and we are

invited to accept it in a 'so-what' kind of manner?"[10] How can one speak truth to power when power itself speaks its own vulgar truth, embracing its crude visibility?

A strategy that is commonly observed in relations governed by a negative anisogamic logic is the open belittling, in a "know your place" kind of way, of the person of low status to which they are married. Unlike in the tribal settings analyzed by Levi-Strauss, and as he would be the first to acknowledge, in an open complex system, the question of who is high status and who is low status is hardly a settled one. High status is something that is much more easily open to challenge. Still there are situations where a high status/low status logic practically imposes itself. When an immigrant from a poor social/national background migrates to a Western nation-state it is clear that the anisogamic relation involves a migrant who is suffering from some form or another of economic or social disadvantage and who benefits from the anisogamic relation implied by his or her migratory move. Thus it is not surprising that in today's West, as part of the sense of insecurity experienced by white people, the art of throwing the immigrants' disadvantages (whether social, cultural or economic) in their faces is rampant.

But as with the proverbial tango, it takes two to have an anisogamic relation and to send it into an upward positive or a downward negative spiral. And if a negative anisogamic dialectic is propelled by the insecurity of the high status person and their need for outward recognition of status, it is also perpetuated and amplified by what are also classically negative anisogamic strategies of devalorization of the high status party by the colonized and the inheritors of their structural location. Let me give a brief example.

John is a Lebanese man who arrived in Australia in the mid 1970s. I knew him well before I started researching migration, as I met him when he worked at a mechanics shop that serviced my car in the mid-1980s. I coincidentally saw him at a squash court playing with an Anglo guy who turned out to be his sister's husband. I, the person I was playing with, John, and his brother-in-law ended up having a beer together after the game. This ended up becoming a regular occurrence and I remember distinctly a time when an indigenous person entered the pub where we were drinking and both John and his brother-in-law engaged in what I considered to be a racist conversation about indigenous people. As this is hardly unusual, I did not pay excessive attention until a few months later when we were also having

[10] Elias Khoury, "The Naked Language," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, November 8, 2018. (My translation from the Arabic.)

a beer after a squash game, at the same place, and John and his brother-in-law had an argument about whether Australia was better than Lebanon, which degenerated into a fight over whether Australians were better than Lebanese. That's when his brother-in-law said something like, "Australians have done a better job making Australia a great country. That's why it is you Lebanese who are migrating to Australia. It's not us Australians migrating to Lebanon." To my amazement, John replied: "What have you achieved? You stole the land from indigenous people!" Given his racist sentiments towards indigenous people, I couldn't help note how convenient it was that John used his newly found consciousness of colonialism to avoid acknowledging any sense of debt towards white Australia. This is what I see now as a form of negative anisogamic strategy: the avoidance of acknowledging a debt for any advantage accrued from having engaged in an anisogamic relation. This contrasts with another Lebanese person I interviewed during the republican debate in Australia. He was a staunch monarchist who argued that the reason he is benefitting from everything that Australia has to offer is "because of the Queen." Here we have someone whose relation to Australia was positively anisogamic. I think, however, that it is negative anisogamic feelings that are becoming dominant today. I believe that a more sophisticated and intellectual usage of "This is Aboriginal land" to avoid the recognition of any debt towards white Australian and construe such recognition as a priori conservative can also be found in some of the postcolonial literature one reads today, and not only in Australia.

There is no doubt that one can value Western civilization too much, and this can end up being a conservative position. But is that valuation necessarily conservative? At the very least, the anisogamic perspective highlights the need to ask the question: should a postcolonial critique be aware and critical of some of its own, built-in anisogamic resentments? Some forms of colonial indebtedness are exceptionally hard to acknowledge. Achille Mbembe argues that colonialism in Africa was experienced as a form of rape: how can the black offspring of a colonial rape who has nonetheless inherited some whiteness that has given him some social privileges deal with their inheritance?[11] One can only begin to imagine the difficulty, and even, one might say, the traumatic effect, of thinking about one's white inheritance in such a situation. But there is no doubt that to think that one does not owe any anisogamic debt at all is a way of ironing out the difficulties rather than confronting them. It is still the case even if we accept that there is no possibility of confronting such difficulties and no other way of handling such a difficult situation than to block it. In the same way that Bourdieu asked in his

11 Achille Mbembe, *De La Postcolonie*, 2009.

lectures on the state, “how can one critically think the state with the very thoughts inculcated in us by the state?” we need to ask how we can think about the critique of Western colonialism with categories of thought that are at least partially but fundamentally inculcated in us by Western colonialism. But even more so: what happens when this inculcation takes the form of an “intellectual rape?” This is the difficulty before us.

As I said at the outset, I don’t want to center the mode of decolonial thinking highlighted by these questions, or to posit it as an alternative in an either/or sense, to the more common, oppositional anticolonialism that prevails—indeed that should prevail—today. That oppositional anticolonialism is especially needed in the face of the revival of colonial racist fantasies and colonial practices of land theft and exploitation. However, I do think that this other decolonial thinking is necessary. It can deepen our critical understanding of both the processes of colonization that exist today and the processes of decolonization in which we are participating.