

Foreword

Black . . . A Color? A Kaleidoscope!

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What must we remind the world?

That we are its majority.

That we resemble those who populate every continent.

That with a joyous deceit, we know how to take on the guise—even to the extent of averting our eyes—of those who could be born anywhere in the world. This extraordinary gift terrorized the inventors of the infamous one-drop rule.

However, it was and still is nothing more than a demonstration that we, Black women, are alchemists, forever possessing the secret of the unexpected, capable of transforming the sordid sap of rape into beauty and grace. Purifying improbable love. Ennobling the fleeting or subterranean passions resisted by the plantation slaveowner. Offering thus to the world a diversity that men could never have imagined. And, in so doing, fleeing the madness of this world of indescribable violence.

What is left to say to the world?

That we are not dupes. Neither are we naive. Nor are we stupefied by the absurdities of a religious indoctrination embroidered with docility, submission, resignation; absolving servitude; forgiving of subordination; promising heaven as recompense. That we know what was the vicious circle of the collusion of the sword, the Church, the scale, and the scourge, at the service of the most common and widespread of cupidities.

That if we have resorted to rancor, resentment, revenge, retribution, it is neither through candor nor holiness, neither with joy, nor without

rage. We only do so in order not to burden ourselves with despair nor bitterness, not to transport nor transmit them to our loved ones, not to evade our present nor miss out on our future.

And, nevertheless, not to forget. With the exception of what we choose to remove, to retrench in the dormant space of our memories, for our own good.

What do we want to shout to the world?

That its order is disorder. That it will remain so as long as a tiny financial elite is able to speculate on the common good of all life on this Earth; as long as the great mass of the disinherited has the power to envy or condemn this ill-gotten opulence; as long as human relations go from domination to domination; that even the most contemptible, the most despised, the most excluded man who can dominate a woman yields a paradoxical effect such that by crushing someone perceived weaker than he—the woman whom he has oppressed—he will be accepted into the society of men.

Disorder will remain as long as the world pretends to delude itself by an act of “race,” inventing an illusory purity and sinking into a barren, rampant, sermonizing nostalgia, obscuring its endogamous violence, laying a cumbersome foot and a heavy hand on the world. This disorder manifests for us, the wretched of the earth who represent many colors including white, its material violence. Worse still, its symbolic violence.

Precisely. All my brothers are not Black and all Blacks are not my brothers. Our common misery has never prevented an uneven commitment to common causes, inglorious self-interest, lazy accommodations, shameless capitulations. Indeed, already during those times of denied humanity, we had divided our hearts between those who were necessary to protect and save, and those to be distrusted. The culture of fugitive slaves is a culture of silence, secrecy, mistrust. The underground railway imposed silence or defeat, suppressing those too talkative as would be excised a mutilated or gangrenous organ to protect the body. Inflexible ideals were necessary to survive and act at such a price! It appears that there are no more ideologies, that the torrent that swept all before it also drowned ideals.

How to set the world straight?

To see clearly is not the end of ideals. Without a doubt, ideologies,

as they were conceived of in the nineteenth century, have collapsed completely, shipwrecked by the excesses of those who, taking themselves for God, wanted to create man's collective happiness by refusing the individual man's right to tinker with his own vision of happiness, the privilege of being imperfect. But the doctrines remain, even devastated, even dilapidated. If ideologies have perished body and soul, this sad fate impedes neither the cynical desecration of their graves nor the theft of their doctrines. When the powerful financiers announce their wish to moralize their system that has gone mad, when ethical funds invade the trading floor and take over portfolios, when the proponents of the "clash of civilizations" defeat their laws to accommodate the funding of Islamic *sukuks* (bonds), when the fiercest defenders of the free market invoke great minds to justify the regulation of extravagant bonuses, the accommodation of abuses and the excesses of top-up pensions and golden parachutes, when fail-safe false prophets hold up the revolutionary and progressive pantheon to disguise the brutality of their acts—hostile to the most vulnerable—the ruse is everywhere, and even if it is enormous, it still abuses. Simply put, everything must change so that nothing changes. So preached *Il Gattopardo de Lampe-dusa* (*The Leopard*).

As for ideals, we rightly continue to water them. And we sow utopias. For we must not surrender.

How to teach the world?

There is no "Black question." Neither in France nor elsewhere.

There is the issue of stratagems invented by the status quo to forge, if not its legitimacy, at least its supremacy.

There is the issue of representations that produce economic systems and their roots in the mental world of those who, through their conscious or accidental acceptance, become the guardians of social hierarchies, even if those hierarchies work to their own detriment.

There is the question of otherness. For the most deadly ignorance is the one that ignores the original diversity of the world.

There is a white issue with regard to difference.

There is the question of the creative capacities of humanity that weaken or destroy exclusions, domination, corruption, preconceptions. And there are the contradictions of the societies of the North, preying on the goods and the cultural knowledge of the South, who are passionate about the supposed "primitive" or "first" arts while

taking life from them by uprooting them from their places, ridding them of their authors, and desecrating their magical virtues integral to the communities from which they originate.

“The whole world is creolizing,” warns Édouard Glissant. All societies in the world are indeed plural, but, in particular, the contact, the mixing, the syncretism, the multiple affiliations produce unpredictability. And this world in the making, like previous worlds, escapes official diagrams and legal categories because life is effervescence, and if legislation is needed to make society whole, it is not in order to control everything in the lives of others but rather to provide a framework for the development of an elusive humanity.

Segalen, already in the nineteenth century: “Variety shrinks, such is the threat.”

But what does the world reveal?

The French Republic is the largest manufacturer of communitarianism. It was built on a delightful and wonderful fiction: egalitarianism. It ostentatiously adorns itself in order to face with dignity challenges to its flagrant violations of this fiction when manufacturing communities of elites, believers, relegated people, Jewish representatives, Muslim spokesmen, Black delegates, correspondents from the *banlieue*. It acts coy when it is caught red-handed in reinforcing the transgression of airtight seraglios from which it draws these yes-men for public enterprises, banks, Theodule commissions, promoting apprentices toward the narrowing of identities, favoring intermediaries of all sorts of causes defined in haste. Still working with the management methods of colonial populations, this republic, which disregards gender, origin, creed, color, disability, sexual preferences, claims to treat all equally, blindly, stubbornly neutral, and impartial. So blind and so stubborn that it no longer sees biases and inhibitions.

But ah! Let’s be specific. The Republic is not the culprit. Its first community, the Government, is. And in its continuity, the Executive branch, hermetically sealed from differences, disparities, and variations that are precisely defined one at a time, does not understand that it is faced by its citizens. Instead it sees believers, even among those convinced that heaven is uninhabited at times by “foreigners.”

And it is within this egalitarianist republic, which, in order to keep its positive image, proclaims itself democratic, social, and secular, that

difference is organized not only by laws but by mediating mechanisms, practices, and discriminatory procedures.

How does one demand equality and not merely content oneself with formal statements, contradicted by a merciless reality of persistent and often renewed inequalities? The trap, and that which causes us grief, is that this ambiguity, instituted because it resists the claim of equality on the grounds that it is egalitarian, allows fundamentalist Republicans to verbalize their selfish assumptions similar to the generous ideals formulated by those who refuse to accept these ambiguities. Worse, they express this by citing countries that have officially implemented laws of segregation and discrimination. More subtly, the egalitarianist republic does not make assumptions. But this would be a very tragic irony if all these countries, whose apartheid is more or less abjectly pronounced, should lead the way faster and more decisively to equal rights, less formally stated but more realized in voluntary public policies.

This would be the final defeat of the republican idea itself.

What do we desire from the world?

To improve it? This is the concern of clergy and charitable activists. To change it? A stimulating chimera! To fight against injustices of all kinds is a priority of the insomniac. To reduce social injustice remains a startling urgency when, rather than having differential treatments to correct inequalities of birth, nature, fortune, and luck, they dig them into a deeper hole, all the while chirping at the peril of the poorest.

Do we allow selfishness and fear to rule the world?

We come from peoples who have vanquished fear, from the dark depths of the ship's hold to the whips and the mastiffs. And we understand the illusions of individualism, for we had to be numerous, across all ages, all colors, from all continents, joined together with the same indomitable fighting spirit, in order to strangle slavery, to destroy the colonial regime!

Indeed, as we seize the helm of public Power to ease our immediate condition, we must invent the future in all its finery. And in so doing, the most elegant and most fruitful of insanities for some consist in entrusting this century to the minds and hands of these blossoming youth—held by some to be barbarians, yet who are our most promis-

ing heirs—each accompanied by one lesson, a single lesson from Frantz Fanon: “There is my life, roped in by existence. There is my liberty, which brings me back to myself. No, I’m not allowed to be Black. . . . The destiny of mankind is to be set free.”