Black Hope-in-Practice

Notes on Hope in the Political World and toward Black Refusal

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We are told to "hold on to hope" for a better tomorrow. This "hope" we hold on to is part of what keeps us "keeping on" in the political world[1] today. It grants and guides our resilience; it undergirds our resistance.

But what is "a better tomorrow", when is it going to come, and why should we "hold on to hope" for it? What type of hope can be "[held] on to", what's to gain in letting go of it, and through what means, in what ways, may we make the choice to let go of such hope? How may hope look different in or through us upon making that choice?

These are the questions we engage with here, through an anti-political lens, toward a conception of Black hope-in-practice.

The Hope[less] of the Political World

Those of us made Black live (dying) – both socially and ontologically – as the hope[less] of the political world. The contradiction we embody in this world, living-dying, finds its synthesis in the function of the Political – that is, to make ongoing Black death[2] the vehicle through which political "life" is secured.

Political "life", or life secured through the Political, is a way of life granted on a condition, and that condition is this: insofar as we invest ourselves in the political world; insofar as we become subjects, vessels, of the Political; insofar as we build our life on, and live our life through, ongoing Black death; we may "live" in the political world.

For 'the white man'[3] to secure his status as master-owner in the political world, he must turn the concept of human-chattel – of people turned property, of humans made non-human – into an expressed reality. So, he goes about Blackening the African. Engendering genocidal – physical, psychological, spiritual, and ontological – violence upon African people, in an ongoing process of subjugation, he ripens us to live as his functional objects secured through the Political.

'The white man' names us Black to signify our embodiment of the living-dying contradiction to the Political; the Political synthesizes this contradiction systematizing our ongoing death through the structure of racial capitalism,[VE4] reifying our Blackness through the same genoci-

[1] "The political world" is the emergent product of imposed order (the Political). "The Political" is the channeling of human life and energies (i.e. becoming-together/relational-becoming) toward the sustainment of a relation(s) of control (e.g. white hegemony) through systematic dehumanization; it (i.e. the Political) systematizes the violence necessary to reproduce itself, through structures of subjection (e.g. racial capitalism) which manifest and perpetuate in and through political institutions and political "life" – realizing the political world.

[2] "Ongoing Black death" is the perpetual 'Blackening' of the African. This ongoing process of subjugation is one of engendering genocidal violence upon African people, not with the aim of exterminating the people, but instead with the aim of folding African people into white hegemonic society as "functional objects" secured through the Political and integrating us into the political world as a necessarily dehumanized element. Blackness, here, marks one as property/object, as non-human; but the purpose of this mark lies in the process it systematizes – of making the Black subject a "functional object", making the Black human necessarily dehumanized. This process necessitates the prior mentioned process of subjugation we call "ongoing Black death", which is the synthesis of the living-dying contradiction embodied by "those of us made Black by the Political".

[3] "The white man" here is a representation of white hegemonic society. This society is one whose establishment, expansion, justification and sustainment roots to the following process of ongoing violence: naming the world (i.e. conceiving of 'the political world'); securing the world (i.e. attaining, and legitimating, the hegemonic status of whiteness through 'the Political'); reproducing the world (i.e. channeling life, relations, institutions, and more into the realizing of the political world; 'the Political', here, expresses itself through systems of violence manifest through political "life").

dal violence we were Blackened by way of; 'the white man' is granted "life" as master-owner in the political world – political "life", built on and lived through the lifeless of the political world (i.e. the Black).

Political "hope", or hope secured through the Political, is not much different as it is built on, and lives through, the hopeless of the political world (i.e. the Black). This should not be read as some abstraction.

To understand hope in the political world, we must recognize and reckon with those of us marked as non-human in the political world and dehumanized as such by the Political; those of us whose human-being can never be acknowledged, accepted, projected nor reflected in the structures, systems, institutions, and relationships through which the Political operates and reproduces itself. Us made Black by the Political: the hope[less] of the political world.

Political Hope[lessness] in Black Resilience

Dr. King regularly valorized Black resilience when advocating his philosophy of, and commitment to, nonviolence as the "proper" (i.e. practical and moral) method of struggle. In his 1965 sermon, *The American Dream*, King posed the following:

> *[In] seeking to make the [American] dream a reality we must use and adopt a proper method…we need not use violence. We can [and must] stand up against our most violent opponent and say: we will match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering… we will ride you down by our capacity to suffer.* (King Jr., 1965)

Kwame Ture, from his Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) days pushing 'Black Power' to his decades of Revolutionary Pan-Africanist commitment through the All-African People's Revolutionary Party (A-APRP), was one of many who critiqued this aspect of King's analysis – centering nonviolence as the object of critique.

Rejection of King's frame of and position on nonviolent struggle, for Kwame Ture, was grounded in an understanding that *"Nonviolence is not a principle… It can only be a tactic; it is a means to achieve certain ends."* Recognizing America as being devoid of any moral conscience, his critique extended from a sober, principled, perspective, that recognized peace as an impossibility in a world necessitated through, built through, and sustained through genocidal violence against the African. This made any binding commitment to nonviolence self-destructive and, thus, strategically misguided. So, when Kwame Ture said, *"Dr. King's major error was that he confused a tactic [of nonviolence] with a principle"*, he was signaling a strategic misstep on King's part, unveiling the inevitability and necessity of revolutionary violence to achieve liberation. (Ture, 1979)

Many have rightly pointed out this strategic flaw in King's analysis – along with its accompanying tactical faults. But we'd be remiss not to acknowledge the analytical consistency of King's means (i.e. "our capacity to endure suffering"; in other words, Black resilience) in relation to his stated end (i.e. the "American Dream"; in other words, our full integration into the political world). We should take seriously King's mischanneled clarity – his maybe unintentional diagnostic precision – regarding what the American Dream requires. And in doing so, we must reckon with the hope[lessness] emblemized in King's belief in Black resilience as the vehicle for our integration into the political world.

In *Black Nihilism & the Politics of Hope*, Calvin Warren unearths an implication of the American Dream in the production of ongoing Black death, expressed implicitly by King when he proclaimed, *"… we will ride you down by our capacity to suffer. One day [through this capacity] we will win our freedom… [and] we will win you in the process."* Warren, referencing the same sermon, states:

> *The American dream, then, is realized through black suffering. It is the humiliated, incarcerated, mutilated, and terrorized black body that [necessarily] serves as the vestibule for [the American Dream] … Thus, non-violence is a misnomer, or somewhat of a ruse. Black-sacrifice, or a violence directed toward the self, is necessary to achieve the American dream and its promise of coherence, progress, and equality.* (Warren, 2015, 221-222)

The American dream King seeks to make real through Black resilience is simply Black integration into the political world; Warren's clear-eyed interpretation of King, here, makes the violence of that "dream" plain to see. What Warren calls "the terrorized Black body" is the material manifestation of ongoing Black death – which is systematized by the Political – necessitated in, by, through, and for the realizing of the political world. This is why, in Warren's words, *"…it almost becomes impossible to think [of] the Political without black suffering…"*, and in our words, the Political functions against Black life.

As was previously stated, political "life" is only granted conditionally; it requires one to build their life on, and live through, ongoing Black death. This "life" is the only form of life that can possibly be acquired through integration into the political world (i.e. through realizing the "American Dream"). For us, those made Black by the Political and who thus live (dying) in the political world, what is on the table, what King proposes, is our tethering embrace of our ongoing death in an unending pursuit of political "life" through which we may be granted political life[lessness]. Our reaching for political "hope" is synonymous with this pursuit.

Political "hope", or hope secured through the Political, manifests itself in deluded stasis; that is, when we hold on to political "hope", we look to the Political to change the political world. This "hope" is what steers Black resilience. We say, "If we just keep on keeping on – appealing to the same institutions, believing in the same systems, buying into the same dream, building the same world (i.e. making the same hell), living the same way, and suffering (dying) throughout – then one day we'll be free."

Of course we are granted a sort of freedom; but freedom of this sort cannot be liberating because the title "free" is named by 'the white man' (i.e[VE5] . white hegemonic society), secured through the Political, and reproduced in and for the political world. It is this freedom that gifts us a Black capitalist class which presents itself as the epitome of Black achievement – corralling in millions and billions of dollars expanding its enterprise, profile, and influence – while the precarious conditions of the mass of our people worsens. It is through this freedom that we retain ourselves a Black political class – of "distinguished" Black folk with "seats at the table" – who have secured their livelihoods, raised their profiles, and gained institutional status by pacifying our anger and uprisings, co-opting and absorbing our grassroots projects, and upholding (in a great deal of cases, beefing up) anti-Black carceral and colonial systems of violence. This is the freedom – political life[lessness] – our "keeping on" has granted us; a freedom that is not ours in any capacity and that cannot exist without our ongoing death.

The "hope" steering our resilience, here, is our surrender to the political hope[lessness] guiding our deluded, self-destructive, pursuit/reproduction of political "life".

Political Hope[lessness] in Black Resistance

We have resisted our subjugation at every turn. We have exclaimed, "We are not the lifeless of the [political] world!", "We are not the hopeless of the [political] world!" We have demanded and threatened, "Call us by our name! Or we'll MAKE YOU call us by our name!", "Give us our freedom! Or we'll TAKE our freedom!" We have sworn, "By God, you can try and kill us, try and treat us as less than human, but we will RESIST! By any means necessary, you WILL be stopped, and our conditions WILL change! We will WIN OUR FREEDOM!" But the political world continues realizing itself despite our resistance. More accurately, the political world continues realizing itself **through** our resistance.

The world we have inherited; the world we have been conditioned to build (i.e. the hell we have been conditioned to make); the world we remain vested in out of political hope[lessness]. The political world, which can grant us nothing more than political life[lessness] through our resilience, **has** nothing more to offer beyond political life[lessness]. This is why the Political absorbs every ask for redress, every demand for justice, every exclamation of self-determination/sovereignty, every threat to rebel, every proclamation of a "coming change" and every accompanying vow to bring about "a better world".

Redress must come through the Political, and so long as there is political "life" to be secured – necessarily, through ongoing Black death – redress will always be required. Justice is "won" through the Political, and so long as there is political "life" to be secured there will continue to be justice to fight for. Self-determination/sovereignty in the political world is made legitimate through the Political, and so long as the political world persists, recognition will come with concessions. Rebellion in the political world is understood as rebellion through the Political, and so long as the political world persists, rebellion will go on as well. The "coming change" to be made must be made through the Political.

Because what world is there to change besides the political world? What vow is there to make, besides the vow to bring about a "better [political] world"? What freedom are we fighting for if not for political "freedom" – to live as free and equal in the political world? What are we resisting our subjugation for if not to take and secure our claim to political life[lessness]? What "hope" could be guiding our perpetual sprint on this hamster wheel – static in condition, but active in energy generation – fueling, building, reproducing the source of our ongoing death, if not political hope[lessness]?

Black Refusal as Hope-in-Practice

By what means may we step off this hamster wheel and let our legs walk us out of our cage and down wayward paths, carrying us to worlds lost, unseen, unimagined? What hope carries with it no guarantee but this walk – by which we refuse all that **can be** secured through the Political, and through which life necessarily leads us astray?

The Black Radical Tradition's anarchic undercurrent – first widely and explicitly surfaced and brought to the fore through the lived and written work of revolutionary elders Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin and Ashanti Alston, and resonant in the lived stories and praxes of so many revolutionary figures (e.g. elder Assata Shakur, elder JoNina Abron Ervin, the late Ella Baker,

the late Safiya Bukhari, the late Martin Sostre, the late Russell "Maroon" Shoatz) – has always intuited the necessity of Black refusal for liberation.

The ongoing struggles toward Black Autonomy, as elaborated by Elder Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin in *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, are sites of material Black refusal – though this reality is not often named (or maybe, not often recognized). Elder Ashanti Alston's imagining of worlds beyond the political world (i.e. worlds the Political cannot hold, that emerge through the undoing of the political world) illustrates such refusal, and in doing so subtly unearths a Black hope-in-practice present in Black autonomist/anarchic struggles toward liberation. In *Beyond Nationalism But Not Without It,* he extends an invitation to those of us made Black by the Political:

> *[Envision] a world of worlds within our world where there's principled co-existence within the wonderful diversity of the Black Community… WHAT IF? and HOW? Ella Baker said we can do it if we can trust ourselves and get away from leadership-led revolution; Kwesi Balagoon said we can do it if we willing to create a chaos that will shut this mutha down; Audre Lorde said we can do it if we LEARN TO LOVE AND RESPECT OUR BEAUTIFUL DIVERSITY and reject the tools of our oppressors; Harriet Tubman said ain't a better way to live THAN AT-WAR FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE; and Franz Fanon said if we smack that mutha across the face, drive that pig outta our territory at the point of a gun, it IS LIBERATING FOR THE SOUL… Through the Imagination, All is possible.* (Alston, 1999)

At the center of this vision of *"a world of worlds"* and permeating throughout the recollection of wisdoms informing how *"we can do it"*, is a refusal rooted in Black life, which necessarily un-worlds the political world to make way for worlds envisioned *"through the imagination"* of *"principled co-existence"*.

If we trust ourselves enough to refuse "leadership-led revolution", trust ourselves to make "power to the people" our method of struggle, an expressed reality in our work; if we are "willing to create a chaos that will shut this mutha down", willing to be disorderly in a way that cannot be ordered; if we refuse "the tools of our oppressors", freeing ourselves to "learn [true] love and respect" for each other; if we are daring enough to refuse the veil of security disguising the reality of ongoing Black death – of genocidal violence systematized through the Political – and live "at-war for a righteous cause"; if we see each other, build with and for each other, and protect each other enough to recognize and refuse the things that do not belong in our communities, "smack[ing] that mutha across the face, driv[ing] that pig outta our territory at the point of a gun". If we refuse to buy the lie of the political world that says the only possible world lies within the bounds of the Political, and allow ourselves to imagine that "all is possible" beyond those bounds; maybe we will journey down paths that are liberating in themselves, build and live [through] life, and become living hope while walking out hope-in-practice.

In *Anarkata: A Statement*, the Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas present our refusal of the [political] world as foundational to the Anarkata tendency, recognizing the [political] world as a site of hope[lessness] for us whose ongoing death is necessitated by, for, and through it. Extending the refusal implicit in elder Ashanti Alston's invitation, they bring the trajectory of Black refusal to the fore. They state:

> *Blackness is the fertile ground on which the world stands, and when we rise, so too will the world built upon us crumble… What we are fighting for, (and to what end) is not*

> *to make this world we inherited better, improve upon it, or even change it in a radical sense. Our end goal is to end it, that is to say, its end is our beginning.* (Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas, 2019)

Black refusal is expressed materially in our organizing outside and against political legibility; in our building toward and protecting Black community autonomy, without compromise; in our unyielding posture and relationship of conflict with the Political. This is our refusal to live as the living-dying contradiction, as the vehicle through which political "life" is secured, as the life[less] foundation of the political world. This is our act of rising and letting *"the world built upon us crumble."* Our refusal to fight for any end in which the political world remains standing – refusal to be resilient in it, refusal to resist it being what it is. This is our refusal to be guided by political hope[lessness]; and as such, it is our walking out hope-in-practice.

Our saying, *"[the political world's] end is our beginning"*, while living as its undoing is Black hope-in-practice. And this hope speaks materially – in and through our struggle toward liberation. It says, "TO HELL WITH THIS WORLD! WE GONNA LIVE!", means it, and lives.

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