AGAINST RACISM IN SOUTH AFRICA
The objective in what follows is to analyse the status of colonialism under contemporary South African conditions after the democratic breakthrough of 1994.

The notion of a democratic breakthrough is (by itself) too blunt to capture what has happened vis-à-vis the articulation of colonialism and democracy in South Africa. In particular, it fails to rule out the thesis according to which the reproduction of colonialism in South Africa can be reduced to an effect of the inertia of the past, with colonialism itself already neutralised in the present, cut off from any structural motor and thus eventually vanishing. All the conceptions of colonialism that identify it as a residue of the past, of apartheid/colonialism, or even of an earlier articulation of modes of production (Wolpe 1988), thus also subscribe to the inertia thesis. Across the left, from the Tripartite Alliance to the Economic Freedom Fighters, the United Front and the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, there is agreement that South Africa is still a colonial society. At the same time, reference is made to the democratic breakthrough of 1994 (Turok 2011: 247). This understanding
of the current relationship between colonialism and democracy pulls in two opposing directions — one emphasising the break with colonialism and the other the latter’s resilience. But what we are not offered is any conceptualisation able to hold these together. Attempts to invoke (see Turok 2011: 234) the form (democracy)/content (colonialism) distinction get us nowhere because they merely repeat the problem in the guise of a solution. What is not confronted is the question of just how colonialism lives on in the democratic state, that is to say, of how democracy is able simultaneously to repress and accommodate — if not legitimate — colonialism.

It is argued here that post-1994 colonialism does not disappear but is repressed and unconscious. This does not, however, prevent it from continuing to structure social practice. It does this without seeming to disrupt the democratic non-racial order by inserting itself in an ambivalence at the heart of capitalism.

Colonialism is inserted into democracy via capitalism, with the result that it accedes to the place of capital and its correlative powers that are unconsciously in the service of the reproduction of colonialism. It is thus argued that in order to account for capitalist practice in South Africa today, the hypothesis of the colonial unconscious has to be invoked.

It is proposed that only by approaching colonialism today as unconscious can its status after the democratic breakthrough be precisely articulated. Far from being the mere effect of an earlier structure, as claimed by the inertia and residue argument, colonialism is constantly reproduced in the present by the intervention of the colonial unconscious into the structure of democratic life.

THE UNCONSCIOUS IS HISTORY

Subsequent to its discursive turn, the psychoanalytic (concept of the) unconscious is a set of practices of signification that produce meaning and subjectivity.¹ This decentred and differentially constituted subject is the subject of the unconscious. In other words, it is the subject of the signifier, which, since Saussure, we have known as negative and relational. The signifier does not constitute itself but depends entirely on its difference from other signifiers, on what it is not. The unconscious is therefore relational in its structure, not self-centred
and self-sufficient – it is neither individual nor collective substance but structured practice (Eagleton 2016; Tomsic 2015).

It is only in the contingent and arbitrary practice of articulating signifiers that meaning, the signified, and lived experience, are produced. The order of the signifier is a formal autonomous order of difference that produces and does not reproduce or express social objectivity: neither God, Nature, History nor the Economy is the foundation of the order of the signifier.

The process of the production of meaning is structurally absent from consciousness by virtue of its relational character, which makes it impossible for it to be transparent to consciousness. If the articulation of signifiers productive of meaning were transparent to consciousness, the effect of meaning would not be produced. Thus ‘false consciousness’ is a pleonasm – all consciousness is false (Tomsic 2015). The result is that consciousness itself is fetishised and represses its structural determination. The absence of the structural cause has as its correlate the effect of fetishism (Althusser 1972; Rancière 1967; Tomsic 2015).

The concept of the unconscious flows directly from the theory of the signifier in so far as this involves the distinction between the signifier and the signified. The differential structure of the signifier means that its subject is not the unified and centred subject of consciousness but the relationally structured subject of the unconscious; this is repressed by the subject of consciousness, which takes itself as causa sui.

The unconscious refers then to those relationally structured practices that sustain and account for the fetishism of the imaginary, of lived experience.

Another way of putting this is to say that because the Big Other does not exist (being nothing but untotalisable difference), the subject is split between consciousness and differential value, the structural cause. The Saussurian bar that separates the signifier (value) from the signified (meaning) says it all already – signifier and signified are not aligned, that is, there is no immanent link between them, and the unconscious/consciousness distinction is the necessary effect of this lack of a relation.

The unconscious is thus both historical and political. It is not a timeless universal or symbolic transcendental, but refers to antagonisms, tensions and torsions within determinate social formations, and the concept of the unconscious thus has explanatory traction in social and political analysis. As Samo Tomsic (2015) says, ‘the unconscious is history pressing in on itself’ and manifesting in symptomatic disturbances of the dominant order.
COLONIALISM AND THE COLONIAL UNCONSCIOUS

‘The Black man does not exist; anymore than the White man.’
– Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

Frantz Fanon’s revolution in the theory of colonialism is twofold. Firstly, he introduces modern structuralism by focusing on the relation between black and white as the structural cause of both: white and black become signifiers, neither of which has meaning independently of the other, with the pure difference between them constitutive of both. Colonialism is an autonomous formal order of difference, which constitutes forms of subjectivity and of lived experience, the imaginary. The black/white relation is, then, an arbitrary and contingent relation between signifiers without an external foundation.

In a second move (which has to be read carefully), Fanon (1968) ontologises the colonial differential: white is equated with plenitude and black with lack, non-existence. But, remember, this is the ontology of a determinate articulation of signifiers, thus arbitrary and contingent. This black alienation and negativity is not constitutive – the necessary consequence of the subject’s dependence on the signifier – but historically, that is, colonially, constituted (see Tomsic 2015 on the constitutive/constituted distinction). Colonialism, in other words, constitutes the white as a full Althusserian ego-subject and the black as a non-subject lacking self-possession and ‘subsisting at the level of non-being’ (Fanon 1968: 131). In this sense, colonialism for Fanon amounts to a specific distribution of being, of lack and plenitude, with the white subject minimally out of joint and the black subject maximally so.

As non-existent and indescribable (Fanon 1968), the black non-subject is the internal condition of possibility of the self-centred and full white subject. Here, the figure of the black colonised complements, i.e., sutures and totalises, whiteness. At the same time, however, its very heterogeneity prevents it from being digested by the colonial order, and, as a bone in the throat, it functions as the condition of impossibility of this order, as antagonism.

Understood as a formal difference, as having the structure of a signifier, colonialism immediately involves the unconscious. All those practices of signification fixing white and black comprise the colonial unconscious, and the colonial subject is unconscious of them in virtue of their relational, hence absent, character. Colonial subjectivity is thus unaware of its structural cause.
and takes itself as *causa sui*. Racial fetishism is the objective form necessarily, that is, structurally, assumed by the colonial antagonism.

The colonial unconscious is, thus, the differential and antagonistic subject of the colonial signifier.

THE CAPITALIST UNCONSCIOUS AND THE COLONIAL UNCONSCIOUS

Under capitalism, the antagonistic class signifier, the irresolvable antagonism between capital and the proletariat, is repressed by its own product, fetishised subjectivity. Classes only ever appear objectively as homo economicus, and class antagonism and struggle as competition. As Glyn Daly (2011: 373) puts it: ‘Class functions as a kind of objectified unconscious: the collective markers of the constitutive repression inherent in the reproduction of capitalism.’ The class antagonism thus *objectively* appears as a relation of equality between autonomous individuals: homo economicus is the form taken by fetishism under capitalist conditions. Marx famously showed, in the chapter on ‘Simple Reproduction’ in *Capital, Volume 1*, how, because they exist as relations of commodity exchange, capitalist relations of production are *experienced* as between free and equal individuals. This effect of fetishisation occultates the antagonism constitutive of capitalism, which comprises its unconscious. Note, however, that the relations of production, the separation of the working class from the means of production, cannot on their own produce the experience of free subjectivity. The intervention of the ideological and juridico-political instances is decisive here. What democracy produces vis-à-vis capitalism in South Africa is, therefore, the realisation of the process of capitalist fetishisation, that is, the occultation of the exploitative and antagonistic relations of production by the *objective* appearance of free subjectivity. It does the same for colonialism.

The colonial antagonism is not repressed in the same way as the capitalist antagonism. Under capitalism, the antagonism is repressed by the exchange of equivalents between autonomous subjects. The specifically capitalist effect of fetishism erases antagonism from the capitalist imaginary. Under colonialism, the colonial signifier bleeds into the colonial signified with the result that colonial fetishism does not bar antagonism: in other words, racial antagonism is integral to the colonial imaginary itself (the so-called immediacy of colonial antagonism). Therefore, under colonialism, the lacking black subject is never
anything other than a bone in the throat of the system. Capitalism represses and reproduces itself via an ‘antagonism-free’ imaginary, colonialism via a ‘fetishised antagonism’. Under the conditions of colonialism *stricto sensu*, only the discursive processes that produce subjectivity are repressed and unconscious: the fundamental antagonism between white plenitude and black lack is fetishised but not removed from the theatre of consciousness: the antagonism between white being and black non-being is not repressed but is a category of experience. Only when we move from colonialism *stricto sensu* to colonialism under conditions of democracy is the colonial/racial antagonism itself repressed and colonial forms of subjectivity made unconscious.

**THE COLONIAL UNCONSCIOUS AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY**

‘They do not know it, but they are doing it.’

– Karl Marx, *Capital*

The capitalist unconscious – the practice of class antagonism – produces and is repressed by the fetishisation of homo economicus. The combination of capitalism with liberal democracy has the effect of repressing the class antagonism under the democratic regime of individual liberty and equality. However, liberal democracy has a different relationship to and effect on colonialism and the colonial unconscious. Bear in mind that colonial lived experience is shot through with racial antagonism (the immediacy of colonialism) whereas the capitalist imaginary occultates antagonism. Democracy does not have to repress the product of the capitalist symbolic, that is, homo economicus, it complements it, but it does have to repress the product of the colonial symbolic, that is, self-identification in racially antagonistic terms. Under democratic conditions, the colonial unconscious must then be understood as referring to not only the discursive production of racist beliefs but to those beliefs (the signified of the colonial unconscious) as well. In this sense, colonialism becomes unconscious when it is displaced by a set of relations, practices and subject positions incompatible with it.

Even before 1994, colonial subjectivity was not fully conscious in that colonial subjects took themselves ‘seriously’, that is, as self-sufficient, with the symbolic relations and mechanisms responsible for their constitution (the colonial symbolic) remaining unknown to them. In this sense, all colonial subjects are
unconscious, that is, cut off (in the imaginary) from their real structural cause. But the point being made here is that before 1994, whites were conscious of themselves as ‘white’, even if unconscious of the mechanism producing this effect of subjectivity. After 1994, they are still unconscious of their symbolic construction but now they are also unconscious of being ‘white’ because their dominant identity is as ‘citizen’. Now, they are constituted by two mechanisms, both unconscious, but one of whose effects (democratic egalitarian subjectivity) is conscious of itself. And note that the repression of colonial consciousness is fundamentally structural here in that the self-consciousness of a subject cannot simultaneously be colonial and democratic – to the extent it is one, the other just is repressed. However, if it is repressed, how do we know it exists and is active?

Here we need to refer to the specificity of the psychoanalytic transcendental turn – psychoanalysis sets out to derive the conditions that involve ‘the gaps in the phenomena of our consciousness’ (Freud 1940: 119). Thus, ‘the oldest and best meaning of the word unconscious is the descriptive one; we call unconscious any process the existence of which we are obliged to assume – because we infer it from its effects’ (Freud 1933: 63).

Slavoj Zizek (2004) then uses this transcendental argument for the unconscious as correlative to the ‘gaps in consciousness’ for the purpose of social analysis in an account of anti-Semitism. He firstly points out the concept of the unconscious transforms the standard opposition of subjective and objective:

It subverts the standard opposition of subjective and objective. Of course, fantasy is, by definition, not objective (in the naïve sense of existing independently of the subject’s perceptions). However, it is also not subjective (in the sense of being reducible to the subject’s consciously experienced intuitions). Rather, fantasy belongs to the bizarre category of the objectively-subjective – the way things actually, objectively, seem to you even if they don’t seem that way to you. (Zizek 2004: 94)

So, here, the unconscious is not really ‘hidden away’ at all but present, ‘embedded’ in social practice, in all those instances where social normativity ‘breaks down’ and one does or says something that interrupts the ‘normal’ flow of practice and meaning: it is in its practice that the subject ‘bears witness’ to how things ‘effectively’ appear to it, as opposed to how they ‘immediately’ appear to it. The (Freudian) unconscious thus refers to ‘the knowledge which doesn’t know itself’, the ‘unknown knowns’, ‘the disavowed beliefs and suppositions we are not even aware of adhering to ourselves’ but which still govern our practice (Zizek 2004: 94–95).
The anti-Semite
The ‘anti-Semite’ consciously defines himself as universalist – and experiences himself in his interactions with others in purely egalitarian terms. He insists he is not an anti-Semite and he is being sincere. But in his social interaction with others we can discern – even if he cannot see it – a pattern of, for example, aggressively bumping into Jews or turning away from Jews when he should not by the norms of etiquette to which he consciously subscribes. From this we conclude that he must believe Jews to be as defined in anti-Semitism – even if – as is the case – he is unconscious of holding this belief: we have to posit it, otherwise we cannot account for his social practice. This unconscious belief is not hidden away from us, only from him. He can deny we are interpreting his behaviour correctly, but, there it is – we can pick it out – even if he cannot – an objective pattern – which compels us to attribute to him qua subject, beliefs of which he is unconscious, that is, he is not aware of how Jews ‘really seem to him’ (Zizek 2004: 95).6

And as we have pointed out, the standard ‘subjective/objective’ distinction is crossed several ways here – this unconscious is subjective but not consciously subjective; it is objective too, but in so far as it is, it is also immediately subjective.

Zizek goes further in the elucidation of the status of this unconscious when he points out where it is to be located vis-à-vis consciousness by underlining its reflexivity. In this sense, it is ‘equivalent’ to the Cartesian cogito. What this subject does not know is what he thinks about what he thinks. Here at this point of self-reflexivity is to be located the ‘unknown knowns’, which are responsible for the unconscious judgement he passes on what he consciously thinks ‘is the case’ and ‘is to be done’. Far from being ‘beneath’ thought, expressing some ‘primitive substrate’, some substantial instinct, this unconscious, that is, these disavowed beliefs, relates to consciousness as the site where its reflexivity breaks down, where it cannot access what it thinks about its thought (Zizek 2012: 554).

THE COLONIAL UNCONSCIOUS AND CAPITALISM:
‘COLONIALISM OF A (VERY) SPECIAL TYPE’

The colonial unconscious is on display in contemporary South Africa everywhere; the texture of democratic life is ambivalent enough for this unconscious
to appear without openly defying the non-racial democratic imperative. Capitalism is one such site of weakness in the fabric of democracy.

Under capitalism, a class relation of antagonism is occluded by the exchange of equivalents by free and equal individuals. Capitalism objectively appears to comprise free exchanges between equals but this conceals the exercise of class powers. Capitalist relations of production and class are, as Marx insisted, ‘invisible’. Here is the ambiguity in capitalism that gives the colonial unconscious its entry point, viz-à-viz this two-sidedness. The capitalist in South Africa can thus objectively appear to treat individuals as free and equal, and, at the same time, because he is still in thrall to the colonial unconscious, be the vector of a specifically colonial/racial distribution of assets and opportunities. Occupying the place of capital, the colonial unconscious intervenes in the texture of democratic, non-racial egalitarianism to impose and reproduce colonial inequality and colonial relations of production without objectively appearing to do so. It is this ambiguity of capitalism, combined with the property powers of capital, that enable the colonial unconscious to determine the distribution of assets, resources and opportunities silently and invisibly. It is precisely because the class powers of capital are concealed by the fetishism of man and the commodity, that is, objectively appear as relations among individuals/subjects, that the colonial unconscious, via its occupancy of the place of capital, can distribute resources and opportunities along colonial/racial lines while seeming to obey the imperatives of homo economicus.

The capitalist objectively and systematically privileges whites across all aspects of his practice – investment, procurement, management and employment. That he does this is not something that can be empirically doubted. However, it passes under the democratic radar – with the effect of reproducing the colonial distribution of assets, income and opportunity, colonial relations of production. Capitalist practice in South Africa has not changed, it is as colonial as ever. All that has changed is that it is now unconscious of its colonial character because this is now occulted by the combination of capitalism and liberal democracy.

The South African capitalist subject maintains he is non-racial and that if he favours whites in his practice that is only because he is acting in a context where there is already a racial distribution of capital and competence. He might be reproducing this through his practice, but this is just a by-product of the apartheid distribution of resources and opportunities that governs his economic decisions. He is not influenced by race itself, in fact he does not see race – it has
been effectively excluded from his consciousness and he is governed exclusively by the non-racial law of accumulation.

This is the inertia theory of the reproduction of colonial inequality in South Africa. On this colonial inequality in the present is an effect of colonial inequality in the past – apartheid lives on although it has been displaced by democracy and survives without the intervention of colonialism in the present. The critique of the inertia thesis that follows has political implications in that what it argues is that colonialism is not the by-product and vanishing effect of the past, but unconsciously structures the present; and this, in turn, has implications for how we understand inter alia the democratic breakthrough of 1994.

Although he disavows it, the capitalist really is (unconsciously) acting like a colonial subject. He claims he only gravitates towards whites because whites are historically advantaged but what he does not see, however, is that this historical advantage exercises no independent causality over him: its meaning depends entirely on how it is symbolically framed. The white-skill nexus, by which he claims to be objectively constrained, depends entirely on the colonial symbolic of white plenitude and black lack. Unless framed in these terms, historic advantage will not be taken as a given but will be transformed.

Only if one believes in it, that is, unconsciously believes in the colonial fantasy, will white historic advantage be allowed to constrain practice. Only if the subject of the colonial signifier is still producing an effect of whiteness will white historic advantage be taken as a given.

There is no neutral position vis-à-vis historic advantage: it always has to be framed by symbolic coordinates. If it is framed in non-racial democratic terms it immediately becomes the object of a transformative practice. To the extent to which this does not occur, the colonial unconscious is effective, underwriting the ontological permanence of white plenitude. The inertia theory does not hold up because the hypothesis of the colonial unconscious has to be invoked to account for objective capitalist practice in South Africa today.

The capitalist unconscious never works alone. In the South African case, it is articulated with the colonial unconscious. How are these two unconscious forms of practice articulated in South Africa today? To start with, what can we tell in this regard from the effect of their articulation? It is clear that colonialism constitutes the dominant axis of inequality and resource distribution; on the other hand, it is dominant because it occupies the place of capital, that is, because the colonial unconscious exercises the extensive range of powers constitutive of capitalism. If colonialism did not occupy the place of capital it would not
be able to exercise the powers of capital and through this impose a specifically colonial form of inequality.

In fact, capitalism as a socio-symbolic system is not an essence or substance that is self-sufficient and can fully occupy its own place. Hence, the capitalist universal is never pure. We can only ever have deformations of capitalism. Capitalism cannot, by definition, exist outside its over-determination by other social relations. It is never present as such, but only ever as impure, that is, some particular always and necessarily intrudes in the capitalist universal and commodity relations are themselves, thus, as a matter of structural necessity, always mediated: the fantasy of capital is that it can shake off extraneous conditions in order to achieve maximum self-realisation. Class antagonism is an absent, purely differential cause, always covered over by and inseparable from its actualisation (Zizek 2012: 488). Thus, the contingent conditions of the existence of capitalism are its very conditions of possibility and are internal to and constitutive of it; capitalism always functions through its outside, through some other social relation.

South Africa is no exception to this law of structure – and thus to say that colonialism is dominant in South Africa is not to say it is determinant. On the other hand, this same structural law entails that it (colonialism) is a sui generis antagonism and that it structures social practice.

Democracy represses colonialism but because democracy accommodates capitalism, colonialism, by occupying the place of capital, is able to exercise its class powers while appearing to respect equality.

Thus, owing to the ambivalence of capitalism – simultaneously a regime of free and equal individual subjects and of class antagonism – colonialism is able to elude the censorship of the democratic imperative and circumvents repression by playing on an ambivalence. Here capitalism is ambivalent and colonialism can only structure social practices under democratic conditions because this ambivalence allows it objectively to appear not to.

Because the capitalist regime of abstract individual equality is the flip side of class antagonism, whose place is occupied by the colonial unconscious, the latter can exist and disturb the logic of democracy without appearing to do so. Democracy constitutes individuals as free and equal and the South African capitalist subject also treats individuals as free and equal – he coerces no one, erases race and pursues only the law of accumulation. However, as we have seen, what his practice attests to is that he must be simultaneously obeying the law of the colonial unconscious.
What is the warrant for introducing the hypothesis of the colonial unconscious – what is it about the conduct of non-racial economic subjects that cannot be explained in its own terms, as homo economicus? Is there anything left over that needs to be accounted for? As before, the unconscious is inferred from practice, that is, as an attempt to account for those instances that deviate from the rules – it is not a matter of arbitrarily affixing the adjective unconscious or the adverb unconsciously to some set of practices, but of indicating how this performs an explanatory function.

The argument here is that capitalism, in particular the powers of property and the managerial prerogative, the class powers of capitalism, concealed by the objective appearance of equality and freedom, allow those whites unconsciously in thrall to colonial whiteness to enact this identity, to treat whites as whites and blacks as blacks. The latitude enjoyed vis-à-vis investment, procurement, remuneration and employment, makes it possible for the capitalist subject to unconsciously favour whites and impose the colonial dichotomy in all these areas, as all these decisions fall under the parameters of the authority of ownership.

Our capitalist subject will deny it; like the anti-Semite, he will insist his decisions involve only and strictly non-racial economic rationality – he has acted as homo economicus that is all. We, on the other hand, can grasp that mechanisms of social closure do not have to be conscious to be effective. Homo economicus can be white without this being apparent to him, without him being conscious of this. He denies he is racist but we can see that in his practice, unconsciously, he repeatedly and systematically enacts colonial whiteness quite legitimately in the terms of capitalism because nothing he does exceeds the powers ownership confer on him. Nothing has gone wrong from the point of view of the logic of capitalism – the gap is in the consciousness of the subject who defines himself as non-racial. This unconscious exclusion/closure is the mechanism via which colonialism operates today, and this explains the reproduction of colonial relations of production and inequality in South Africa.

We have to assume that our capitalist subject really is non-racial, that he genuinely subscribes to a generic humanism and that it really is the case that as far as he is concerned he does not even see race. We assume, in other words, that liberal democracy is not mere decoration, but constitutes specific forms of lived experience and subjectivity. Only then does a gap open up between his consciousness, his self-consciousness, and his practice, and only then is there any need to go any further in accounting for his practice.
The gap in his consciousness is that he does not see that he is systematically excluding blacks because they are black. He is not doing what he thinks he is doing; the gap in the consciousness of our subject is formally identical to that of the anti-Semite. His practice exceeds his consciousness – he thinks he is doing what capitalists do but, unconsciously, he is doing what colonial capitalists do.

Notice the novelty of this argument in relation to the debate about the articulation of capitalism and colonialism in South Africa. The liberal position merely poses capitalism and colonialism as two external and antagonistic logics and fails to come to grips with the complexity of this relation. The colonial unconscious, as subverting democracy via capitalism itself, resists incorporation in any liberal problematic that is constitutively unable to get to grips with colonialism in South Africa today.

Marxists might be familiar with the determinant/dominant distinction but colonialism is reduced in Marxism to an effect that has an effect – an effect of capital accumulation that has an effect on capital accumulation, and this falls short of acknowledging the sui generis character of colonialism as a formal autonomous difference that produces its own forms of the subject and of experience. This is related to the conception that colonialism is a residue of an earlier articulation of modes of production and regimes of accumulation (see Wolpe 1988). In this sense, then, Marxism may be said to subscribe to the inertia thesis discussed above. However, saying colonialism is a residue expressing only the inertia of apartheid fails to account for its structural dominance as well as the reproduction of colonial inequality in South Africa. In South Africa, capitalist practice itself enjoins us to invoke the hypothesis of the colonial unconscious. Restricted to the horizon of consciousness and by its reductionist conception of colonialism, Marxism, too, is at a loss when it comes to South Africa today.

NOTES
1 This account is indebted to Tomsic (2015). For an earlier attempt to conceptualise the colonial unconscious, see Hudson (2013).
2 ‘What we will observe in what follows is an attempt to analyse the black-white relation’ (Fanon 1968: 9). Fanon’s epistemological break with Sartrean theoretical humanism only goes so far, however, because when it comes to the white subject he sometimes ‘abstracts from circumstances’ (Fanon 1968) and ends up treating the white subject as a transcendental subject and not as a subject constituted to take itself for a transcendental subject (see Hudson 2015).
There are two positions to be avoided here. One takes black non-being as itself ontological, as inscribed in social being itself and irredeemable (see Wilderson 2008). The other sees in black non-being a form of subjectivity already free from the grip of the symbolic and already in between symbolic determinations. What risks being missed here is that symbolic failure for the black – who is by definition the subject of anxiety – is how colonialism is constituted and reproduces itself. This does not mean that under colonialism antagonism is domesticated but the opposite, i.e., under colonialism reproduction is immediately antagonised. From this it does not follow, however, that the colonised black non-subject is already free from the grip of the colonial symbolic. The subject must free itself from its colonial non-being to become a subject and this act of self-constitution/destruction is not performed by the condition of colonial non-being itself.

Is the exchange of commodities necessarily between juridically free and equal individuals and can we refer to capitalism in the absence of such a form of exchange? These questions have an obvious bearing on the dispute between liberals and Marxists over the relationship between capitalism and colonialism in South Africa. The point to be stressed is that the specifically capitalist form of fetishisation, homo economicus, never operates alone but always in combination with other effects of fetishisation, including the juridico-political constitution of subjectivity, none of which are reducible to structural effects of capitalism. Before 1994, capitalist relations of production do not objectively appear as relations between free and equal individuals and are not experienced as such. This does not entail that capitalist relations of production and exploitation do not exist under such conditions, which is the liberal claim. It is only if one essentialises capitalism and understands it as a self-sufficient totality with its own necessary forms of subjectivity, that one can claim it does not exist in the absence of liberal democracy.

Whites are understood, in what follows, to have sincerely jettisoned their identities as colonial whites and to have embraced the identity of a non-racial citizen. Their colonial whiteness still sticks to them, however, but now, in an unconscious mode. At the level of their conscious lived experience, they are no longer white in the colonial sense but citizens; unconsciously they remain colonial subjects, however. Unless we assume this, their (disavowed) racial practice remains inexplicable.

As Chabani Manganyi (1981: 77) reminds us, we need to avoid the connotation classically associated with the concept of the unconscious “... of energy, location and place.”

The grip of the colonial unconscious on the South African economy has been resisted since 1994 via the implementation of black economic empowerment and employment equity policies. These, it needs to be noted, are made necessary by only white incalcultrance, strenuously disavowed by whites themselves.

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