



<https://doi.org/10.36592/opiniaofilosofica.v13.1081>

From the Generic to the *Ultrablack*: Badiou in France, French Decolonial Theory and Critical Race Theory

*Do Genérico ao Ultrapreto: Badiou na França, a Teoria Decolonial
francesa e a Teoria Crítica da Raça*

Norman Madarasz¹



Pierre Soulages, *Peinture*. 296 x 165 cm, 4 janvier 2014, acrylic on canvas
(Soulages Archives, 2014, photo: © Vincent Cunillère, courtesy Dominique Lévy Gallery)²

¹ Capes-Print Senior Invited Fellow at the Philosophy Department of Université Paris 8 Vincennes à Saint-Denis, where he is lecturing on Alain Badiou's Philosophical System. This study was partly funded by Brazil's Capes-Print Program.

E-mail: norman.madarasz@puers.br; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7574-3744>

² Disponível em: Fonte :< <https://www.painters-table.com/link/hyperallergic/pierre-soulages-painter-black-light>>.

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to engage in an extended conversation with the book, *Universal Emancipation: Race beyond Badiou*. Minneapolis, Min.: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, written by Elisabeth Paquette. First, we present the book in a standard book review style. Then we discuss Paquette's argument, according to which she claims Alain Badiou's philosophy is "Eurocentric" and ultimately blind to "race" as understood within the framework of contemporary North American Critical Race Theory. We then go on to set the bases for a critical assessment of her claims, arguing that Paquette's framework is too culturally restrictive to fully account for the state of postcolonial studies in France today and that this restriction leads her to misinterpret Badiou. Notwithstanding her misinterpretations, we argue that through the selection and dependence on secondary sources, Paquette's strategy is not incidental. Instead, she misrepresents Badiou by deliberately ignoring the distinctions in his philosophical system regarding the relationship between philosophy and the political.

Keywords: race; decolonial theory; colonialism; racism; accumulation; the political condition.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é o de engajar em uma conversa estendida com o livro, *Universal Emancipation: Race beyond Badiou*. Minneapolis, Min.: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, escrito por Elisabeth Paquette. Primeiro, pretende-se apresentar o livro no formato clássico de uma resenha. Depois, aborda-se seu argumento, de acordo com o qual a autora defende que a filosofia de Alain Badiou é "eurocêntrica" e cega ao conceito de "raça", entendido no contexto da teoria norte-americana crítica da raça contemporânea. Encaminhamo-nos em seguida a organizar as bases para uma avaliação crítica das suas posições, argumentando que o contexto teórico de Paquette é demasiado restritivo culturalmente para que possa dar conta do estado dos estudos decoloniais na França hoje, e que esta restrição conduz a autora a mal interpretar Badiou. Não obstante suas interpretações equivocadas, defendemos que pela seleção e pela dependência em comentadores e demais fontes secundárias, a estratégia de Paquette não é acidental. Ao invés, ela deturpa a filosofia de Badiou ao ignorar deliberadamente as distinções no seu sistema filosófico na relação entre a filosofia e a política.

Palavras-chave: raça; teoria decolonial; colonialismo; racismo; acumulação; a condição política.

Philosophes, vous êtes de votre Occident.
Arthur Rimbaud

Scholarship grows historically through debates and disputes the quality of which builds upon creative solutions dealing with critical impasses. For younger scholars seeking consolidation in their field, the dispute form bears real risks. Such risks often test the limits of freedom of expression in academia. A norm that ensures disputes stay cogent is the commitment to adequately represent the thoughts of an

interlocutor. Failing this, a reader may question whether opportunism might be the reason for drawing a philosopher or philosophy into the circle of a dispute. Michel Foucault, for example, once questioned the motives for Jean Baudrillard to title a book *Forget Foucault*, when the latter sought neither partnership nor public debate with him before publishing his theoretic-sensationalist diatribe.³ Moreover, critics of Foucault never seem to tire of berating his “death of the author” thesis. Seldom do they perceive how their contempt of it manages little else than prove his point. As a name ventures through academic circuits, it often acquires more value than the system of thought its bearer actually built.

A similar impression arises, at least for this reader and scholar, with *Universal Emancipation*, a recent book penned by Elisabeth Paquette. Its subtitle leaves little to the reader’s imagination: “Race beyond Badiou”. Publishing a critical volume on any theorist can surely be justified, not least for the legacy such scholarship entails. Alain Badiou’s vast philosophical system, so un-American and classically French in many regards, offers seemingly unending reasons for discussion and debate. Oddly, the wealth of ideas inscribed in this system, representing a summary and towering synthesis of decades of intellectual production in French philosophy and the social sciences, is not what most seems to interest Professor Paquette’s inquiry. Given her stated ambition, one might even wonder why she chose to pursue such an endeavor in the first place.

To be sure, Paquette has written a provocative book from the theoretical perspective of North American critical race theory (CRT) on a leading French philosopher. Even before ending her main discussion, she accuses the “Eurocentrism” and critical omissions toward the main question of race driving CRT in a thinker she restrictively labels a “political philosopher”. Her verdict: “Given the structure of Badiou’s political theory, his conception of what counts as political becomes quite limited and, as a result, much labor and activism get lost.” (p. 122)⁴ Four chapters later, Cuban-born philosopher and novelist, Sylvia Wynter, is called upon to provide solutions and alternatives to the open slot allegedly debarring race in Badiou. That Wynter, to our knowledge at least, has not written explicitly about Badiou only makes her inclusion in this work more *ad hoc* than Paquette’s very

³ J. Baudrillard, *Oublier Foucault*. Paris: Editions Galilée, réédition 2004 [1977].

⁴ I shall integrate into my text the page numbers (p. x) of Paquette’s *Universal Emancipation*, with the exception of the citation referenced in footnote 7.

decision to deal with Badiou's "political philosophy" in these terms. However, the ways in which Badiou has engaged extra-textually with French-language decolonial activism is kept silent. Admittedly, Paquette prefers to berate him for not having dealt with its English-language version instead.

Badiou's primary focus has perhaps dealt less with "political philosophy" as such, hence the irony of my scare quotes. His thoughts on the political have concentrated on the nature of different revolutionary events whose organizational aftermath has been powerful enough to overthrow State structures. As such, he has relentlessly analyzed what could be the most adequate forms of collective organizations ensuring, from a theoretical perspective, they are neither swallowed immediately by an existing State apparatus nor violently annihilated by its armed forces. In short, Badiou has tended to concentrate on precisely the point Vladimir I. Lenin saw as lacking in the short-lived communist experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, namely "the time to think out and undertake the fulfillment of its program".⁵

Despite its argumentative structure, Paquette's book does not profess to be an addition to Critical Race Theory as such. Rather, by means of a partial repetition, she evokes the 2008 entitled *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, by Nick Nesbitt, a scholar who has written on Badiou as well. In this work, Nesbitt examines scholarship since the 1990s on the revolution of the enslaved that overthrew the French "sugarcane colony" of Saint-Domingue in 1791. The colony's subsequent independence as Haiti provoked a future of ostracism from the European order in the Americas. The misery and poverty Haiti has suffered to this very day stems mainly from the gunboat diplomacy forcing the country to pay compensatory damages to mainland France for lost "property" in enslaved bodies. While there is much more to be said about Haiti, including how subsequent invasions of the island served the rising colonial ambitions in the Americas of the United States, suffice it to state that the debt burden enforced upon it by the Enlightenment State of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, was only paid off in the 1950s.

The history of the Haitian revolution plays a pivotal role in Paquette's argument in more ways than one. We return to her discussion in the third section of our discussion. For now, let us point out that Paquette is assistant professor of

⁵ V. Lenin, "Lenin on the Paris Commune (April 1911)", *The Militant*, Vol. V No. 12 (Whole No. 108), 19 March 1932, p. 1.
< <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1932/no12/lenin.htm> >

philosophy and women's and gender studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, having earned her Ph.D. from York University, Toronto. In line with her research focus in feminist theory, Indigenous theory, critical race theory, and post-colonial theory, she has turned her attention to deal with the absence of race in Badiou's thought. Reducing the latter to the political is problematic, though. Since the 1980s, Badiou has argued that for philosophy to remain proximate to its historical vocation of studying thought through the concepts of Being, Truth and Subject, it has to concede and attend to the wealth of thought produced beforehand in the experiential contexts pre-existing its conceptual systematization. Philosophy would thus be the result in thought of what is produced, created and lived simultaneously in four event-determined truths procedures: love, art, science as well as the political.

Conditions denote the multiple areas in which truths are produced and recognized as an end for which to live, be changed and radically transform the ruling order. The upshot of this literally implies that truths emerge and form in particularly and locally, indeed in *pre-philosophical* contexts. And from a philosophical perspective, these truths can be analyzed in what they hold in common, anonymously and generically. One can recognize truths as "processes of creation of a concrete reality having universal value."⁶ That the conditions are as diverse as the sciences, the arts, the political and love is ascertained materially from conceptual analysis of historical truth productions. By contrast, they are *formally* warranted through derivation of a model common to the four. The latter position is reflective of the field of philosophical study concerning Being, namely, ontology. In this more general field in the system, the question of Being becomes inseparable from the novel forms of thought triggered by the singular occurrence of events, the essential condition validating Badiou's novel theory of a subject relative to a condition, and conditioned by it.

Given this level of multiple crosscurrents meshed into a theoretical system, the lesson to be had for philosophy is to resist the temptation of focusing merely on one condition alone, be it the political. Disregarding this prescriptive parameter, Paquette delves into the political as if nothing counted more for Badiou. Although

⁶ A. Badiou, *Qu'est-Ce Que J'entends Par Marxisme ? - Une Conférence Donnée Le 18 Avril 2016 Au Séminaire Lectures De Marx À L'école Normale Supérieure De La Rue D'Ulm. Paris : Collection : Les Propédeutiques*, 2015.

notably modest in her aims, she espouses a critical position regarding what she views as the way Badiou allegedly discards the question of race. Her own approach aims to warrant and be warranted by critical race theory. It also suggestively strives to be justified from the perspective of gender studies. What is perhaps most unsettling in the argument unpacked in her book is how Paquette accredits Badiou with judging and adjudicating on what passes for political truth.

My aim in this essay is to present her argument objectively by considering its scope and expectations. As a scholar involved in examining the generic extensions that can be derived from Badiou's construction of a philosophical system, it is also my concern to question what appear as questionable inferences on Paquette's behalf – and numerous they are. I intend to complement my reading of her argument with some perhaps more favorable proposals regarding the issues she rejects. In the end, I explain why I sternly oppose a series of conclusions resulting from what ought to be considered serious misinterpretations in her understanding of his system.

Analytical Breakdown

As Elisabeth Paquette rightly informs her reader, Alain Badiou joins an illustrious tradition of French thinkers, to which belong Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser. Despite this pedigree, she reveals a growing concern in her reading of Badiou's work over its "Eurocentrism", marked by its seeming avoidance of references to the authors of the *Négritude* movement. Sparked by the aspiring poets Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas, *Négritude* stands as the first collective expression of writers of either African or Afro-Antillean origin to study in modern-day France. Although forged in the 1930s, it can be argued the movement only achieved its broader recognition in the 1950s, as different wars of independence began to rock the French colonial empire.⁷ By then, Franz Fanon would come to represent a newer generation driven to take the ideas of the movement even further beyond university lecture rooms and literary salons.

Following its methodological introduction, *Universal Emancipation* begins with a first chapter devoted to the question "Indifference to Difference and Badiou's

⁷ Alain Mabanckou devotes the first lesson of his astounding course given at the Collège de France in 2015 on the *Négritude* movement. Cf. Alain Mabanckou, *Huit leçons sur l'Afrique*. Paris : Grasset, 2020.

Theory of Emancipation”. Paquette initiates her discussion of the philosopher’s work by isolating one of its most polemical themes. Contrary to the generation of thinkers, to which belong Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, and the second wave of French feminists, including Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, Badiou argues that the concept of difference deserves to be removed from its centrality regarding what is inherently constitutive of a general theory of the revolutionary subject. By contrast, Paquette holds that, as a concept, race points to historical and cultural movements only later converging with theories of difference, a heritage Badiou apparently disparages. Furthermore, Paquette suggests Badiou’s Marxist background clashes with the theoretical and cultural orientations espoused by critical race theory. According to CRT, racial difference is precisely what constitutes an identity for African-Americans. Difference would thus have to be seen as a fundamental theoretical operator ensuring the cohesion of an empirical and historical reality.

Despite her generally objective presentation in this chapter, Paquette skips over where and when difference does indeed mark the subject with “difference” in Badiou’s philosophical system. This occurs in one of the other subject-producing conditions, that of love. In discussions related to that matter, the term used to express difference is the Two, that is, the irreducible figure of a “non-relation”. Referring back to Jacques Lacan’s formulas of sexuation, the Two inscribes truth at the event level of generic becoming as a local emergence strictly delimited by the parameters of the condition. The idea summons a difference that is irreducible to the individual identities making up the Two. In fact, the Two is what constitutes identities as part of the new alliance created by love. In his writings of the 1980s, Badiou treats the condition of love formally and nominalistically, stripped of any reference to biology, anthropology, or gender.⁸ Difference idealizes the channel through which truths inscribed upon an event build to form a novel experience of love in a world yet to be created.

The next chapter in Paquette’s book approaches “Badiou on Race and the Sartre/Fanon Debate”. Here the author returns to examining Badiou’s statements in his recent essay, *The Black*, following a tendentious presentation of in her general

⁸ For example, “What is Love?” in *Conditions*. Translated by S. Corcoran. London: Continuum Press, 2008 [1992], pp. 179-198.

introduction.⁹ Despite its rather self-evident subtitle, “The Brilliance of a noncolor”, Paquette isolates five terms used by Badiou having so relation to race in order to suggest something else would be going on in the essay. As she writes (p. 4), “one could analyze Badiou’s use of (a) the “dark continent” (25), (b) the “dark Phallus” (39), (c) his discussion of blackness as dirty (3), (d) blackness as subverting virginity (16), or (e) blackness as connoting an impurity when juxtaposed against whiteness (a color that connotes both purity and female virginity) (38).”¹⁰ While she suggests, “one could analyze”, the question is whether we ought to. The context simply fails to sufficiently provide us with the elements that could justify reading it through the framework of CRT. Still, Paquette sees such passages in the book as triggering her “need” to deal with this question. The fact of the matter is that in neither of these passages is he speaking of race. Instead, the philosopher unfolds a “dialectics of colors”, explicitly undermining the association of black as either a quality or essence by which to refer to persons.

Nevertheless, Paquette then moves to re-examine the aftermath of the emergence of the *Négritude* philosophy and movement in France. Despite its factual accuracy, she offers little material to update French postcolonial theory from the 1980s onward, namely the period coinciding with Badiou’s consolidation as a major thinker. This was a time when Aimé Césaire began his later work. Edouard Glissant published his rhizomatic poetry. S.O.S. Racism overturned the notion of a political organization. In sum, Paquette uses the writings on *Négritude* as they are and have been present in English-language CRT since the early 1980s, thus ignoring its course within France.¹¹

Focusing on the heated debates occurring in the wake of Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* in the 1950s, Paquette moves toward reconstituting the discussion in Paris between Sartre and Fanon. In her understanding, Sartre’s radical conceptions emphasized the historical notion of class as the most generic concept required to ensure the universal nature of the revolutions underway in what was then the Third World. As for Fanon, she shows how the psychiatrist turned militant

⁹ Alain Badiou, *The Black: Brilliance of a noncolor*. Translated by Susan Spitzer. New York: Polity Press, 2019 [2015].

¹⁰ Here I retain Paquette’s own integrated references of the translated version of Badiou’s book.

¹¹ Published in French in 1950, the first English-language translation of Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* appeared in 1972. Despite Césaire having lived his life as mayor of Port-de-France, Martinique, well into his nineties, he remained a prolific writer and playwright. He passed away in 2008.

orchestrated a sizeable shift in cultural perspectives even when compared to Sartre's. Fanon registered his conviction over how colonial oppression transforms through the revolutionary process into a race-based identity, at least as a first stage. Notwithstanding, colonial identity and mentality is what Césaire and Sartre in addition to Fanon all sought to smash. This is conviction is taken to its logical limits in the concluding section of the latter's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon reinforces how the concept of race – still largely mired by its eugenic overtones – is what militants and intellectuals ought to transcend.¹² In passing, Achille Mbembe considers this conclusion to be worthy of integrating into Edouard Glissant's theme of the One-World.¹³

What in fact Paquette organizes by evoking the Sartre-Fanon debate is something more problematic. Within it, she sees an analogous discursive faceoff taking shape through the decades between Badiou and CRT. As she writes,

The debate between Fanon and Sartre is important for this project for several reasons. First, [...], Badiou's theorization of race closely maps on to Sartre's view. Namely, I argue that Badiou proposes a theory of emancipation that attempts *to sublimate particular identities* such as race for the purpose of universal emancipation. This correlation is evident in Badiou's discussion of *Négritude*. (p. 62)

Not only is this declaration problematic insofar as Badiou cannot accurately be said to theorize race, it is wrong in what it suggests his conclusions are had he indeed theorized it. In fact, the statement becomes a prototype of several recurrent ones in the book, in which Paquette accounts herself with a reading made by Badiou himself. His theory of an event-triggered subject is not so much a sublation in the dialectical sense than it is an inference applicable to each of the conditions in the philosophical system. Paquette's misinterpretation grows from her passion for the historically accurate, but conceptually anachronistic concept of *Négritude*. After all, the question might be asked: what French decolonial thinker today thinks of *Négritude* in her terms?

What exist in fact are two divergent traditions on race. The partial overlapping of contemporary French decolonial thought with CRT is hardly overcome by Paquette's reliance throughout the book on other scholars. As much as

¹² Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, New York: Grove Press, Year: 1967 [1952], p. 231.

¹³ Achilles Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre*. Paris: La Découverte, 2013, p. 258.

it demonstrates the seriousness of her research endeavor, such reliance eventually weakens the ground of her arguments. Her preference for English-speaking commentators on the different problems encountered within the French framework stands out. I cite as a case in point: “there continues to exist a sizable distinction between the proposed projects and methods employed by each of these figures [Sartre and Fanon]. Robert Bernasconi suggests that the raceless society Fanon advocates for is ‘not of the same kind or arrived at in the same way as that proposed by Sartre.’” (p. 55) Paquette embeds this conclusion as her own, despite how it might leave her reader in muddled waters. For it is not clear what Badiou has to do with this debate, nor whom it was who had made claims about race regarding his work in the first place. Is it Paquette herself, based on some unknown variable in the Fanon-Sartre debate, or was it Bernasconi? To this reader’s dismay, this approach is not limited to chapter two. Rather, it initiates a process leaving the reader with doubts as to what the author herself makes of the questions she herself raises. All the reader really understands is that due to their common whiteness, Badiou aligns with Sartre, whereas Fanon sides with CRT. Yet in no moment in his writings does Badiou claim as much, leaving Paquette’s inference clearly presumptive in relation to the “race” of these thinkers.

The third chapter offers “A critique of a politics of Indifference”. Therein, Paquette extends what she claims to have confirmed in the previous chapter, namely that Badiou’s position is analogous to Sartre’s regarding the primacy of class over race. Emphasizing how Marxism’s theoretical edifice has faced critical pressures to reconsider his alleged essentialist view on class, Paquette also recalls Marx’s own avoidance of the category of unpaid women’s labor in the model systematizing the mode of capitalist production. She could also have added how Marx failed to account for the industrial revolution’s dependence on the transatlantic slave trade for the labor power used to extract natural resources and agricultural production. Instead, what Paquette strives to reach is the superstructure, as it were. She sets up another analogy whereby just as Marx would have perpetuated a culturalist perspective on race, which is both Eurocentric and Europatriarchal, so does Badiou.

To be sure, the success of Paquette’s argument depends on her interpretation and assessment of the printed record. That her analogies might leave loose ends dangling, or that her generalizations might appear hasty, oblige us nonetheless to examine how her interpretation and inferences border on simplifications not just of

Badiou's "political philosophy", but of his philosophical system as a whole. The cool innocence and respectful tone of her critique do not dispense her from the charge of obfuscating what Badiou truly does defend. Regarding the alleged lack of consideration of women in Marx and Engel's writings, for instance, one cannot forget Engel's work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, at least as having inaugurated the inquiry. Perhaps, it would also be appropriate to mention the fact that Marx's own daughters were among the British activists working on socialism, in which universal suffrage for women was less a matter of commitment than was mobilizing for a general revolution. Eleanor, Laura and Jenny, the latter two both French-speaking and residents of France, extended Marx and Engel's legacy after the tragic outcome of the Paris Commune. Lenin's own political organizing in France shows how the historical context of communism regularly brings to the foreground the circulation of foreign nationals involved in revolutionary movements, be they Europeans, Asians, Africans or Latin Americans. As such, Paquette's idea of Eurocentrism ignores the *internationalism* of communist organizations. She simply overlooks how this history conditions Badiou's concept of the political as well as the subject form it bears.

Indicative of perhaps an even deeper level of misunderstanding is Paquette's interpretation, still in "Indifference to Difference", of the reasons for which Badiou seems to deprive the Haitian revolution of its historical and conceptual status as a genuine revolution. In the terms specific to his system, she takes issue with the reasons for which it is not identified as an "event" within the political condition. In the ontological sequence to which he devoted his research in the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of *event* presents a break in a historically-indexed state of affairs – the "state of the situation". The event is defined minimally as what ushers in a new thought, provided certain criteria of irreducible novelty be met. It must be emphasized that, in his philosophical system, Badiou never ventures into actually predicting new events. However, one easily encounters hefty doses of historical analyses explaining how past events morphed into the material procedures by which truth production is diminished faced. Being on the realist side, his philosophy is well aware of the obstacles any growth of a radical subject encounters after the State resumes control and imposes order. To state otherwise is to misrepresent his philosophy.

Chapter four then turns to another analogy, “Politics is to Culture as Class is to Race”. Here Paquette opens a critique of the apparent remnants of Marx and Sartre’s thought in Badiou’s understanding of the political, reinforcing further still her conviction that his political theory is at best blind to race and essentialist regarding class.

Chapter five then summons “Sylvia Wynter’s Theory of Emancipation”. This chapter could stand on its own as a discussion of the interesting contributions made by the Cuban writer and thinker to theories of emancipation.¹⁴ Paquette employs Wynter’s writings in a bid to confirm partiality in Badiou’s theory and seal the fate of his alleged Eurocentrism – a problematic term when wielded by a North American, even if not solely of European ancestry. In the rest of this essay, I do not intend to discuss Wynter’s work.

Difference, non-relation, and the irreducible

Were the reader already sensing my reluctance to agree with the author’s argumentative strategy, she would surely not be mistaken. Unfortunately, the book’s conclusion hardly resolves the various problems left unsolved. In fact, the conclusion actually undermines the argument as a whole and rather perilously drives it to the verge of discredit.

Therein, the reader can find Paquette’s perspective summarized *en bloc* in more conceptual terms:

Badiou seems to propose that race can only be construed as a negative concept, bound up with notions of white supremacy (for instance) and, for this reason, that race is a concept that must be overcome in order to engage in political emancipation. His negative conception of race, I proposed, recenters whiteness as wholly determining. Furthermore, the presumption that race is antithetical to politics because it is divisive or essentialist offers a limited conception of race that fails to properly account for the many rich and diverse discussions available regarding positive conceptions of race. (p. 160)

¹⁴ In this chapter, Paquette calls upon Wynter’s concept of liminality as an example of a concept strong enough to appreciate how particularities such as race can ground a more fruitful theory of emancipation. However, she forgets to mention how the liminal, and one of its conceptual variants, the threshold, are well researched concepts within the contemporary French philosophical tradition Badiou systematizes in his philosophy. Your own humble book reviewer launched the concept back into the realms of philosophical research with the publication in Brazil this year of his *Foucault, O Quinto Limiar: Estruturalismo e ontologia queer*. Porto Alegre, RS: Editora Fundação Fênix, 2022.

Paquette’s allegation regarding Badiou’s recentering of whiteness, let alone how this would afford an “essentialist” and “negative” conception of race, is misplaced. Given the context of his philosophical system, this implication is a *non sequitur* and, I would like to suggest, a blatant distortion. Consider, if you will, the final sentences of his recent essay, *Migrants and Militants*:

In the mental maintenance of this tattered sense of superiority, I hear all too well that, rather than ‘beware of white men’ – which we should be hearing, and by which I mean ‘beware of the system they invented and spread everywhere by force’ – what we are hearing is ‘beware of blacks, Arabs, Asians, and ‘migrants’ of all kinds’,¹⁵

After a period of resentment toward the inverted consequences of colonialism, white Europeans have grown paranoid by immigrants due precisely to their accomplishments. To claim Badiou’s theory of oppression and postulations regarding emancipation fail to contemplate race positively is, I would insist, a willful misrepresentation.

Having said that, examined within the context of French decolonial history, “race” is not so much neutralized in its negation as it is divergent regarding its referent. The nomadic proletarian working classes do not have but one “race”, albeit their revolutionary potential can surely be universalized. Nowhere does Paquette seem more inclined to misrepresent Badiou’s reworking of the revolutionary subject as in her admittedly objective assertion: “Badiou [calls] for the subtraction of all predicates from the subject” (p. 163). As I said, the assertion does not lack objectivity, although it does deliberately displace the purpose of the definition. Firstly, Badiou does not “call for” any more than “believe” or “give his opinion on” what is derived as an inference. As said, the ontologically grounded the theory of subject allows for a broad variety of truth procedures. The criteria upon which it warrants recursive applicability is hypothetical and formal. Still, such speculation on categories describes only what occurs at ground zero of the theory. As we rise in stages of sedimented meaning, material and historical levels explore perspectives seeking to validate the claim according to which a generic subject is true if and only

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Migrants and militants*, translated by Joseph Litvak. Cambridge; Medford, MA : Polity, 2020 [2019].

if fostered by an event. To claim this has anything to do with “humanism” (p. 164) simply missed the point.¹⁶

In line with the generation of structuralist philosophers under whom he studied, Badiou has repeatedly situated the epistemic field of his theory of subject as post-humanist. In the conclusion to 2005’s *The Century*, he labels his orientation as a “formalized in-humanism”. Yet, Paquette seems at times to thrive on preempting the reader’s discernment. In the conclusion, she yearns to convince: “[...] with increasingly frequency I am asked whether one should continue to engage with the work of Alain Badiou.” (p. 165) To that confession, a reader might simply answer: who asked her to do so in the first place? Or, at least, to do so in this way... That her self-representation of her own work should be to fill in what she claims is the absence of “critical analyses of Badiou’s project” (p. 165) is overblown. What most lacks in the critical literature on Badiou’s philosophical system are analyses keen enough to capture the finesse and scope of his philosophy as it winds through the conceptual obstacles typical to academia. From without, requests from the public sphere in France have only increased in number. Notwithstanding the complexity of his system, the clarity, relevance, and rigor of his philosophy have catapulted Badiou to become one of the public sphere’s most notable keynote speakers. Invitations have come from a myriad of cultural and political associations, as well as from cultural and political media outlets.

As for Eurocentrism, it names the belief whereby all significant developments in the world would correspond to frameworks and norms issued by “European” thinkers. However, Europe today is in large part a Union, comprised of two dozen different languages populated by persons from over a hundred different cultures. Were Badiou Eurocentric – rather than the *European* he is – his references would

¹⁶ Paquette rightly touches on how Badiou’s ontology is grounded in set theory. And it must be that his entire derivation of the “generic subject” is conditional and conditioned. As such, one should restate his assertion that mathematics is ontology as a conditional proposition: *if* mathematics can be grounded by axiomatic set theory, *then* it is ontology. In other words, the axiomatic set theory conditionally provides the terms according to which the notion of generic subject is bound to the preservation of its truth-value as truth itself. That said, this is a philosophical system that willingly places itself “under condition” and within conditional logic. *If* two sets have the members, *then* they are equivalent. *If* a state has no elements, *then* it is empty. *If* the power of the set of all sets is larger than the initial set, *then* either it is countable or it is not... Such are only a few of the statements comprising the ontology. What they entail specifically and what the implications are for philosophy requires detailed inquiry and careful reading. Just as Badiou’s assertion that the generic subject is a well-ordered albeit independent set submits to verification and validation by means of the *if... then...*, so also does his entire philosophical system.

not be to Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Caribbean, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Atheist, let alone North and South American figures. Over five decades, his system has integrated thinkers, writers, artists, poets, and activists from all of these traditions, mostly from the perspective of the radical novelties they have brought to philosophy trans-historically as well as transculturally. If Eurocentrism means anything today, it is a context of intercultural living with all of its tensions, violence and conflicts, but also joys. It could be argued that at least until the NATO-provoked Russian special operation in Ukraine, white supremacist movements on the Continent had actually decreased.

That said, it is true Badiou's philosophical system does not build upon the contributions of African logicians, mathematicians, or even Arabic ontologists. Still, the 2006 publication of *Logiques des mondes* drew the writers of *Négritude* into topical analyses beyond random footnoting. Even Paquette construal that Badiou's "class-essentialist" "Marxism" is to account for the lack of recognition he has given to "identitarian" movements reveals its liberal internationalist stripes. Badiou only rejects an association between identitarian culture and revolution insofar as the term "culture" represents a feature of the dominant, hegemonic State-warranted structure in his system.

All in all, one would be hard-pressed to deny how hastily the author of *Universal Emancipation* embraces a critical stance. To be kind, in her introduction, Paquette does confess her concern regarding the terms lifted from *Le Noir*, no matter how key a role they are to play in her critique. Aware of possibly citing the aforementioned metaphors out of context, she adds a caveat: "While each of these five examples introduced by Badiou are located in the first part of this book, *which does not specifically discuss race but is instead focused on "color," his intentions in this instance can neither wholly dictate* whether these concepts are imbued with racial significance nor whether they can be dissociated from race." (p. 4) Again, in the guise of interpretation one finds equivocation. Is Paquette really suggesting to her reader that if Badiou has not written explicitly about a matter, he considers it worthless? If we follow her argument, this becomes pertinent due especially to his color choice being "black". One can only presume in turn that had he used "red" instead, which is not a purely speculative possibility, it would immediately connote communism, despite how the blood spilt from the gang violence wrought by poverty and privatized war would surely recall the symbolic value the color had acquired

prior to be associated with political organizations past or present. What Badiou decidedly strives to carry out in *Le Noir* is a *dialectics* of color forming the range of its semantic experience, albeit none of it particularly related to race – not least when he speaks explicitly in the essay of *Négritude*. As philosophical dialectics, there is no doubt about its conceptual finality being that in which the universal becomes colorless through sublation.

For the sake of argumentation, let us remain at a historical perspective and ask what does – or could – Anglo-American critical race theory mean in France in the context of French colonialism in Africa and the post-Haitian-Revolution *Antilles*? Take Françoise Vergès' 2020 "*postface*" to the translation of her interview with Aimé Césaire some fifteen years earlier. The title of the book, *Resolutely Black*, is already testimony to how transposition of "race" from the French-speaking to the English-speaking world encounters semantic obstacles, perhaps insurmountable ones. No stranger to CRT, Vergès nonetheless stresses how France's contemporary policies of "*colonialité*" toward its former colonial domains requires theoretical analysis so as to remain accurate to historical specificities. Holding nothing back from admonishing France for ridding itself of its responsibility toward the Transatlantic slave trade, Vergès recognizes how the question of race in France arises and circulates under a different set of conditions to those in North America. Her point raises issues not unlike those questioning the justifications for keeping Indigenous movements of emancipation outside the boundaries of CRT.¹⁷

One of the problems I single out is how Paquette's methodology appears too often to lean on other interpretations of Badiou, the fluctuating precision of which ends up weakening her own stance. For example, she acknowledges how her central thesis, objectively presented in the third section of chapter 1, "draws extensively from the work of Madhavi Menon, whose book *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (2015) offers a constructive and clear account of Badiou's conception of a politics of indifference." (p. 17) Unfortunately, she also leans on Adriel Trott, whose definition of event on p. 21, as what "performs the unity of the world as a

¹⁷ For example, Vergès writes: "[In the nineteenth century], France still congratulated itself for the generous gift of freedom it had given to the slaves. Having abolished slavery, the Republic was now free of blame for any past offenses. Never mind the fact that 1848 was also the year Algeria was officially brought under French administration, which effectively stripped inhabitants of their homes and land, or that France sought to curtail the freedom of the newly enfranchised with a series of new measures". Aimé Césaire, *Resolutely Black: Conversations with Françoise Vergès*. Translated by Matthew B. Smith. New York City: Polity Press, 2020, p. 55.

disruption to the totalizing and excluding effort of the State” is simply wrong. In the context of *Logics of Worlds*, as a singularity of maximum force, the event triggers a truth procedure strong enough to do nothing less than overthrow the State, dissolving the world it had reproduced. Even though Paquette’s reliance on these commentators often makes her own interpretations appear second-hand, I consider those regarding Badiou’s alleged positions, according to which class is universal or race is something to get over, the most moot.

Whatever her convictions regarding political organization and even what “politics” is, insofar as it refers to a single homogenous field, the issue here is really how accurately she renders what she refers to as Badiou’s “political philosophy”. Drawing Badiou into terms that are recognizable from the North American perspective does not make things easier to understand his objectives. Yet for him there is little doubt “political philosophy” has been *defeated*, the acknowledgement of which becomes vital for the future of philosophy itself.

In this regard, a lack of knowledge regarding terms relative to the linguistic and national context of their inception blatantly proliferates throughout the book. None more so than when Paquette claims Badiou uses a “social constructivist conception” of race. (p. 34). The circulation of this term is specific to the Anglo-American reception of “French theory” – an attempt at uniformly labelling French philosophers they themselves have long rejected. Symptomatic of her overarching categories is her grouping of the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau into the general category of “European political philosophy”.

That the consequences of this are annoying merely results from the fact of how meticulous classification is a feature of Badiou’s thought. As one of philosophy’s oldest categories, “identity” undergoes a throughout examination. Badiou states explicitly that “identity is in reality a political process” (p. 38, taken from “Twenty-Four Notes”). This does not imply it is either essentialist or merely a construction. Formally, at least, identity refers to the founding principle of the existing state of the situation. Displacing its centrality as an ontological category allows the Other to prove it is “always present in any Identity [thus preserving Being] against all racism.”¹⁸ There we have why Badiou’s philosophy displays so

¹⁸ Any discussion of the subordination of identity to a conditional qualifier requires a retreat into the formal sphere of philosophical inquiry first. *Being and Event* and *Briefings on Existence* are the readings required in this case. This heuristic formulation on identity is taken from his recent *Alain Badiou par Alain Badiou*, Paris, PUF, 2021, p. 132.

much care toward the notion. Identity is what reduces to the same, whereas what maintains difference *in-different*, that is, neither the same nor different, and therefore in no relation of symmetrical equivalence, is *singularity*. Moreover, singularity denotes an event as practiced into the thought that becomes the generic subject.

Regarding the concept of “race”, then, Paquette’s perspective literally draws from only a segment of the history of French language post-colonialism. Given how linguistic belonging slices a global assessment of colonialism into separate strands, the integration of the French-language tradition into North American critical race theory often leaves a sense of *déjà vu*. This impression arises most evidently in Paquette’s treatment of Senghor. It is no doubt true that the Senegalese poet projected a beam of revolutionary thought through the “*Métropole*” when both he and Césaire met while studying in Paris. Even though they could major only in literature as part of France’s project of training its future colonial elite, neither of them let the French Empire down in the end. Senghor accomplished what the French state expected of him during the Cold War by limiting the radical turn in political options for his native land, where he acted as the first president of independent Senegal from 1960 to 1980. Whereas in his writing, his associate and friend Aimé Césaire developed a towering oeuvre in poetry and theater, he also used his position first as *député* in the *Assemblée nationale* and then as mayor in his native Fort-de-France, Martinique for over fifty years to fend off separatist political movements.

What Paquette overlooks is how Senghor, with power in his hands, became an authoritarian president. Among the leaders he sent to jail was renown scientist, Cheik Anta Diop, whose monumental work in the 1960s and 1970s prepared the grounds for what Henry Louis Gates Jr. decades later would go on to explore as Africa’s great civilizations. In exchange for his allegiance to France, Senghor got a bridge over the river Seine named after him. Meanwhile, in Dakar, a gigantic statue of Diop stands at the gates to the national university bearing his name. As for Césaire, some twenty years after his death, the French subway corporation (RATP) lent his name to a station proximate to the new north-suburban campus of the *Université de Paris*.

More important is how Césaire’s political legacy is still in discussion, making clear how in Martinique there can be no cultural autonomy without economic

equality. Besides, this is a view common to W.E.B. Dubois's later philosophy, underscoring how for Badiou "class" or "proletariat" only stands as essentialist when it *fails* to express its internationalism. An identitarian offspring if there ever was once, the nation-state is structurally in contradiction with the generic subject. In the end, few minimize Césaire's role in reorganizing the French state's responsibilities toward its former slave colonies by drafting the bill by which Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana, and Réunion became administrative "*départements*". Its inhabitants benefit, or almost, from all the rights afforded to French citizens. Nevertheless, these rights only became effective in the course of the 1990s at a time when the Antillean islands succumbed to ever-greater economic disadvantage.

By contrast, the implications of Diop's scientific work for pan-Africanism holds little interest for Paquette's argument, nor do, to state it plainly, Badiou's scientific writings. Doubtless, the most problematic element to Paquette's argument is her use of Césaire's split from the French Communist Party (PCF) as a general critique of Marxist philosophy. In a letter to the PCF published in 1956, Césaire voiced his offense over the arrogance demonstrated by the Party leadership toward politicians from the Territorial Domains. What Paquette never considers is how the upshot of breaking with the PCF was to have Césaire align by default with the French colonial system. Breaking with a Communist Party should never be equated with ditching communist thought. Césaire showed his pedigree late in life when he refused to meet with then Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, in repudiation over his government's attempt at whitewashing the policies of coloniality.¹⁹

Until 1956, attempts at communist revolution were still unsuccessful in the colonies due in no small part to how the French Imperial forces managed to crush popular uprisings and murder their leaders. Hô Chi Minh is an exception to the rule, indeed a true master in the way he guided his people to defeat the French in Indochina in 1954. Patrice Lumumba had yet to emerge as opposition to the Belgians, and Algerian rebels under Ali Ben Bellah had just triggered their moves toward independence. Tellingly, late in his life, Césaire himself rejected many of CRT's claims for reparations as he was also harshly critical of Haiti's independence

¹⁹ Cf. Françoise Vergès's 2019 "Postface" to her 2005 interviews with Césaire, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

process.²⁰ Well beyond Badiou, Césaire was the one to be most distraught with the defeat of Haiti's revolution from within, thereby recognizing it as a historical example not to be followed.²¹

As a lesson to learn from such reflections, philosophy can do no worse than merely assimilate history from its factual basis into a system of thought. Foucault, for one, clearly expressed such an idea when stressing how his attention grasped modes by which history could be problematized. By definition, Badiou's interest in the political *as a component of his system*, in which he grounds the idea of genericity built upon by the formal vantages of the category of truth, seeks for expressions of "history" that have as of yet to appear. "Indifference" ought to be understood in these terms above all. Besides, this is made clear when he writes in *Manifest for Philosophy*, "from its founding event, a politic (*une politique*) tends to delimit what cannot be delimited, to make exist in multiplicity people whose established language cannot grasp either their community or [common] interest."²²

In sum, Paquette could have appreciated Badiou's intent better had she held to Rousseau's assertion regarding a similar notion, the "general will", that is, that which "remains as the sum of differences". Due to the workings of multiplicity, this sum does not totalize difference, but further differentiates it. By means of Meditation 32 of *Being and Event*, devoted to Rousseau's concept, Badiou actually *introduces* the modern prototype of the generic. The general will is formally general due less to it being self-evident or clear either materially or legally, than to it postulating the formal and generic nature by which the common may display explanatory force. In her reading of *le Noir*, the question Paquette fails to ask is whether the motivations behind subtracting race from the dialectic do not precisely have to do with negativity investing in race over and over again. This is the reason why the subject of emancipation does not appear to arise through dialectical synthesis. Instead, it rises, and rises as high as truth.

²⁰ "Just look at Haiti. What was the result of their revolution? It benefitted a small group of people; as for the others ... This is the mark of an all-too-human selfishness, of cronyism, of putting one's self or party or clique above everything else. But it is incumbent on us to reach out beyond these limits, to broaden our horizons." Aimé Césaire, *Resolutely Black*: op. cit., p. 14.

²¹ Ibid.

²² A. Badiou, *Manifest for Philosophy, and two Essays*. Translated by N. Madarasz. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999 [1989], p. 70 in the original. "C'est qu'une politique, à partir de son événement fondateur, tend à délimiter de l'indélimitable, à faire exister en multiple des gens dont la langue établie ne peut saisir, ni la communauté ni l'intérêt. »

Badiou's assertion regarding what he terms in French as "*surmonter*" refers to a form of transcending far more than overcoming, let alone negating. The term "*transcender*" is a holdover signature of existentialist or even theological types of philosophical practice. This is the answer to the question as to why he uses (and continues to use) "*surmonter les différences immédiates entre des hommes*", as in his recent, *Badiou par Badiou*, p. 28. "Immediate difference" in Badiou's use of the term is not concept-specific, meaning that difference is not Derrida's *différance*. That said, Badiou's conceptual operator of the "generic" certainly partakes of a logic similar to Derrida's. Nonetheless, its degree of completion is greater as it is embedded within a *materialist* ontology.

All in all, whether the perspective espoused by Badiou is Marxist or post-Marxist becomes an academic question when it fails to consider the radical critique he applied to Marxism in the 1985 text, *Can the Political be Thought?* What one should recall from that book is how Badiou grants the "crisis in Marxism" serious consideration without negating the importance of Karl Marx the thinker, writer and activist's main discoveries. Instead of rejecting "Marxism" due to its failure at statecraft, Badiou moves to reorient its theoretical project to what it had since forgotten, namely the field of popular movements. In no way does he fail to admire Marx. Against attempts at diminishing the crucial contributions made by the *Communist Manifesto*, as if it were a display of determinisms inscribed into the dialectical transformation of civilizations through "class struggle", what one encounters instead in Badiou's concept of "the political condition" are the strategic and transparent *free* organizational actions of communists themselves.

Politically, Vladimir Lenin truly remains Badiou's predecessor in thought, even when the latter offers two alternate sources to Marxism, namely thoughts and popular events.²³ From this telescopic view onto a galaxy agglomerating the horrors of Reagan, Thatcher, Pinochet and Milton Friedman, Badiou had already introduced his basic framework for thinking the subject within the political condition: "political consistency can be given to events wherein the existence of the heterogeneous is asserted".²⁴ From a formal level, the heterogeneous denotes the multiplicity of race itself. Difference is a concept whose many synonyms and

²³ A. Badiou, *Can Politics be Thought?* Translated and with an introduction by Bruno Bosteels. New York City: Duke University Press, 2018 [1985], pp. 68-69.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

homophones contain the roots of interpretations that do not always guarantee its maintenance. By contrast, multiplicity only stands insofar as it is subtracted from the One and from reified Identity.

Badiou's microsystem thus takes shape through the threefold chord of popular movements and/or uprisings, the organizations emerging from them, and the State to be dispersed due to its inherently interest-based principles of governance. In the end, just as "class" has been dissolved within the political condition, so also have ethnicity, national identity and race given way to the proactive, subjective praxis of the "organization".

Race as metonymy

In the important methodological section devoted to the Haitian Revolution, Paquette begins her discussion on unstable ground by claiming Badiou considers this event "in proximity of the French Revolution". Never an easy question as such, one must take it up again and ask: what exactly does the term "French Revolution" refer to? Lacking deeper familiarity with his immersions into the political condition, it might not be entirely clear here that what holds significance for Badiou about this historical event is not the "Revolution" in itself, least of all the fact it was "French". Instead, what draws his attention is the short egalitarian sequence within the Montagnais Convention under the governance of the *Comité de Salut Public*, which liberal historians enjoy dubbing "La Terreur".²⁵

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou explicitly integrates the Haitian Revolution as a sequence of revolutions emancipating the enslaved and the proletariat. The figurehead of the discontinuous sequences of political genericity, as it were, is the Roman-era slave, Spartacus. What Spartacus' "race" was is simply unknown, and this is the point. Unless we are dealing with the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas, the color of "race" is undecidable. The Casbah during French Algeria was called the "Black Quarter", while its inhabitants were descendants of the

²⁵ Other historical references in Paquette's book repeat such disregard over the precision in the way Badiou deconstructs and relocates them in the philosophical system. Apart from her use of the "French Revolution" (p. 32), Paquette also spills the "Maoist Revolution" (p. 14) with none of the detail brought by the philosopher through examples in his political analyses. Regarding the "Maoist Revolution", does Paquette refer to the revolution after the Kuomintang retreat to Taiwan, thus sparking the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in Tiananmen Square in 1949? Or the Cultural Revolution beginning in 1962?

Saracens. Despised by the Berber Kabyle for having invaded their land in the 9th century, the French made no difference between the two peoples, as both were “noirs” and deserving of the atrocities suffered in their version of apartheid. Who are the “Blacks” for the “French”? By contrast, that Algerian natives were excluded from land ownership and privatized means of production was a constant – a regularity making any anti-colonial revolution in principle communist.

On these grounds, Paquette initiates another string of relentless non sequiturs meant to discredit not only Badiou’s political thoughts, but his philosophical system. For what else does she aim for when revealing her book to have as “a central goal [...] to demonstrate that Badiou’s theorization of emancipation and his political theory are limited because they cannot account for race or racial emancipation.” (p. 6) One grows distraught through repeated attempts at locating where his “theory” “cannot” (negative exclusionary mode) account for race. And what is the epistemic value of “limited?”

Haiti gained independence from France in 1804. From then on, the land began to give rise to a host of writers and novelists. There was a veritable revolution of Negritude on the island in the course of the 19th century. So, what of the absence of this discussion in Badiou’s *poetic/artistic* condition? Does it make it less complete? In Paquette’s view, it seems it would suggest something less desirable. On page 16, she lets slip how such limitations would have Badiou indirectly fostering white supremacy, since he reduces “race” to “class”. Then on page 117, she tries her hand at having Badiou become a colonialist by claiming that “assimilationist, or even perhaps colonial, practices, thus lie at the heart of Badiou’s presumably universal politics of emancipation.”

Part of her allegations rests upon the implications of *Hayti’s* 1805 constitution and the terms it set for the future of decolonization and the emancipation of the enslaved. Let us recall that while the French Convention abolished slavery in all domains of the French Empire, Napoleon Bonaparte reinstated it in 1804. Fiercely rejected by the residents of the newly independent Saint-Domingue, the island revolutionaries drafted a new constitution banning slavery once again. Sparring with historians who apply Badiou’s categories, Paquette writes on page 112: “There are a number of reasons why the 1805 Constitution is excluded from, in particular, [Nick] Nesbitt’s analysis of the Haitian Revolution. Namely, The 1805 Constitution [...] fills identitarian opposition with a

new racial content by declaring all Haitians to be Black.” (p. 29) As such, unlike the 1801 Constitution and the 1792 letter written by François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, the 1805 Constitution does not purport to end slavery merely through the elimination of racial categories. Rather, it would upend slavery and seek the emancipation of those who were formerly enslaved by centering on the concept of Black people, thus constituting the racial category of Blackness as political and constitutional. Of particular importance are Articles 12–14 [...], which state the following:

12. No whiteman of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he in future acquire any property therein.

13. The preceding article cannot in the smallest degree affect white women who have been naturalized Haytians by Government, nor does it extend to children already born, or that may be born of the said women. The Germans and Polanders naturalized by government are also comprized (sic) in the dispositions of the present article.

14. All acception (sic) of colour among the children of one and the same family, of whom the chief magistrate is the father, being necessarily to cease, the Haytians shall hence forward be known only by the generic appellation of Blacks.²⁶

Paquette deserves credit for recalling attention to this important stage in the Revolution. Still, it is a shame she fails to see what the 1805 Constitution shares with Badiou’s position. For it actually proves his point correct about the nature of the political subject. According to Badiou’s analysis, the political subject inscribes its truth upon an event precisely in the form stated in Article 14. It consists of a *generic* attribution of notions to be negotiated during the period of struggle as the subject attempts to morph into an entity longer lasting than the oscillating thought acts of an organization. The *Haytian* revolution is nothing less than a prototype among generic subject forms shaped from the truth-events within the political condition.

The persistent shortcomings arising in her discussions reappear at this point as Paquette defers yet again to a commentator, Anne W. Gulick. The latter effaces the idea of the generic to lay claim on the “color” or “race” of the Haitians, despite the words written in the document. Accordingly, it is not so much Blackness against

²⁶ *The document of this translation was printed in the New York Evening Post, July 15, 1805.* It was transcribed into the version below by Bob Corbett on April 4, 1999. It was printed in 1805 in English. There is no mention in the newspaper who translated it. But, given that Henri Christophe was involved in the publication and that he had a strong liking of English, perhaps he is responsible. Given the use of “colour” and “honour”, a British translator may have been involved. < <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/history/earlyhaiti/1805-const.htm>>.

Whiteness in and of itself that is disputed in Article 12 as the need to expel the colonial “master or proprietor”. Germans and Slavs, instead of the French, are spared expulsion, provided they accept certain conditions. Women of foreign origin, whether they be white or not, become citizens, whereas the “*acception*” or meaning of color ceases and is replaced by the “generic appellation of Blacks”. What else is there to be understood in the concept of *generic* apart from *how it is rid of particularities*? Black is not a reference to race here but to free persons. This does not stop Paquette from shifting perspectives. Referring to how Haytians are purportedly “perceived already by the rest of the world as black, [the country] has the same claim to political legibility as the French Republic or the United States of America—not in spite of, or even without reference to, but *because* of its blackness” (808). Surely this is a subjective view, given that what European colonial powers perceived foremost was the menace the islanders now represented for having been emancipated as much from chains as from capital.

Perhaps according to Paquette, African nations ought to also be considered independent nations “because of their blackness”, instead of their constitutions. Or, indeed, African-Americans ought to have the moral right to a free republic “because of their blackness”, rather than through the pursuit for political and economic betterment. At any rate, the “right” to a sovereign land derives not from philosophical analysis per se, but from the struggles any people conduct for the freedom to live under laws they themselves have written.

By reducing Badiou’s philosophy to this mindset, it seems communication breaks down. The political condition is both historic, empirical and theoretical, having a logically formal structure inherently structuring its components. Indeed, the last attribution emancipation in this context could claim is “cultural”, as Paquette insists it ought to be. Culture, as academics like Paquette or myself well know, is a binomial, a rather unstable one at that, with nature. Unfortunately, it leads to ridiculous claims, such as: “the distinction that Badiou draws between culture and politics actually limits his ability to be applied to the Caribbean context, and non-European contexts broadly speaking.” (p. 97) That the theoretical structure of the truth conditions does not recognize the concept of “culture” seems to have escaped her. Besides, as aforementioned, what culture does refer to in this system is a fiction naturalized by the identity principle produced within the state of the situation.

So as to justify her difference from the philosopher, Paquette announces a “two-step” process of divergence with him. The first line takes issue with particularism being a feature of the existing state of the situation. As such, she points to the idea that by thus isolating particularism as a negation, the risk grows to exclude the richer transformational dimension indexed by an event. The second step argues how race “should not be excluded from politics” as it is “important” for a politics of emancipation. As enticing as it all sounds, what she does is merely repeat what Badiou himself spends considerable time clarifying.

In the end, Paquette’s continued insistence on how Badiou’s conception of indifference as not recognizing difference fails in turn to recognize multiplicity and heterogeneity. She argues that: “Unlike Badiou’s politics of indifference described in chapter 1, the 1805 Constitution does not propose truth that is indifferent to difference or particularity. Rather, it assumes difference as a political *necessity* for emancipation.” (p. 115). Yet how she equates particularity with a generic attribution is not fully coherent. Only a generic organization holds the internal dynamic required to maintain *independence* from a State order. For its drive is to *bring down* the State, the condition *sine qua non* for emancipation to materialize whenever history is examined.

In hindsight, are the reasons for the disasters suffered by the independent Haitians truly any different from those pointed out by Lenin regarding the failure of the Paris Commune? Whatever the answer might be, one must concede it has *nothing* to do with one being “Black” and the other “Proletarian”. This also means that the reason is in no way “cultural”. We can only conclude that Paquette simply misplaces Badiou’s position when asserting: “if one were to say that the Haitian Revolution is *not* political and therefore cultural because of the language of the 1805 Constitution, then it would seem unlikely that Badiou’s theory of emancipation could be properly inclusive of nonwhite persons.” (p. 115) Refuting her *modus ponens*, it is not the case that Badiou’s theory of emancipation is unlikely to properly include nonwhite persons, for nowhere does Badiou claim the Haitian Revolution to be *anything but political*. Culture is simply irrelevant as a political category within the framework of his thought. To put it in simple terms, culture is not as a legitimate category for a political subject. Whether it is for the artistic subject is another question. Examining this *particular* embedding would require a conceptual

patience regarding Badiou's philosophical system Paquette decidedly does not display.

Reconciliation?

All in all, the crucial problem raised within the political condition has less to do with race than privatization. The claim that “race is not central to a politics of emancipation” cannot expect to have a fruitful outcome if it disregards at least the hypothesis whereby race-based politics in and of itself is no guarantee to eliminate inequality. From within the political condition, the reason for this lies in deliberately diminishing the importance of the economic truths by which what produces inequality is private property and privatization of the means of production and circulation of capital.

Now, Paquette's omission of taking private property rights and legislation to task is not merely linked to a sense of resistance regarding French communist philosophy. She happens to bypasses one of the most brilliant exponents of CRT itself. Ta-Nehisi Coates' outcry against the Chicago municipal government's redlining residential policy in the city makes up one of the standout moments of *We Were Eight Years in Power*.²⁷ She disregards other key historical moments in the most brutal acts of primitive accumulation in U.S. history, such as the 1921 burning down of the “Black Wall Street” in Tulsa, Oklahoma by fanatical, and one should add *capitalist*, white supremacists. Indeed, she simply fails to identify privatization and dispossession as the key material tandem reproducing inequality and producing social stratification according to either class or race. More to the point, there is not a single comment in her book about this, let alone a reference to private property apart from its happenstance mention in a quote she lifts but does not develop from Marx. As for a more standard use of “property”, now in a United States-centric conception, she merely quotes its integrative function for the capitalist-parliamentary State in descriptions provided by Badiou himself.

In a system-specific assessment, this would make her political conception fall short of the “faithful subject”, letting her thought inch closer to a *reactive* subjective

²⁷ Cf. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Notes from the Sixth Year: The Case for Reparations”, *We Were Eight Years in Power: an American Tragedy*. New York City: One World Publishers, 2017, chapter 6, pp. 140-179.

form. If anyone could have served her in this specific discussion, Angela Davis's lifelong commitment to communism should certainly have deserved more attention. Davis is the only major equivalent in the United States to have shown similar courage as Badiou's toward maintaining the communist hypothesis alive when the most conservative counterrevolution unleashed its venom against anything Marxist. Instead of a passing reference to Davis intended to demonstrate how "limited" Badiou's philosophy seems to be regarding activism, Paquette could have spent more time examining Davis's own commitment to communism. When she discusses the "classless" society "after a communist revolution", according to "Marxists", and how just like the proletariat is destined to "disappear" so also is "race", her politics become blurred. In the end, her critique proves why "identity" is a concept that ultimately obfuscates the possibility of thinking beyond essence. At bottom, the question is not whether concepts of identity, the proletariat, or race are interesting to keep as "positive thoughts", but whether they actually *correspond* to transcultural experience. Paquette does not seem to consider that a "positive conception of race" still requires, at least in the United States, a type of social reorientation precisely involving the destruction of the country's class structure.

History has proved Badiou correct to assert a third, discontinuous temporality for communism as emerging within thought once the promises behind deregulation, deindustrialization, globalization and full-employment came crashing down in the global financial meltdown sparked in 2007. Nothing but an intensification of primitive accumulation has occurred in its wake. Angela Davis's own commitment to communism has too seldom been saluted. Without formulating her argument as from this hypothesis, Paquette's conclusion remains partial at best. What one hears through the lines, though, is the sound of skeptical liberalism.

Regardless, it behooves the scholar ethically to be cognizant of the historical background to ideas. That stands for Paquette's heuristic model of critical race theory. No such theory exists in France or in the French-language against which to judge Badiou's philosophical system. Even internationalist scholars like Françoise Vergès, Achille Mbembe or Columbia University scholar, Mamadou Diouf, recognize the need to explain the specifics of the decolonial critique as it has emerged *differentially* in the French language. Although one can argue that English-language philosophy seldom integrates CRT, can one really claim the same for Afro-French, French African or French Caribbean authors? Moreover, like

Mbembe, are Alain Mabanckou, Felwine Sarr, Françoise Vergès, and Edouard Glissant, anything but contemporary French philosophers? In sum, the oeuvre of “*L’Afrique francophone*” cannot be reduced to the situation of critical race theory in North America – despite how the State resistance waged against them can certainly be compared.

Today, few would argue *The Wretched of the Earth* is a superior work to *No Name in the Street*. However, in Paquette’s model one searches hard to find a reference to *Race Matters*, despite how Cornell West invited Badiou for a discussion at Princeton about philosophy and theology “beyond race” back in 2004. In the end, Paquette’s project errs in being indifferent to the difference of French history and French political philosophy since the 1980s. The term *immigré* in France could have been one to share meaning with race in the U.S.A. The perverse strangeness of its semantic construction transforms the immigrant into a quickly dispatchable ex-pat. That is precisely where the term has ended up with the more recent “*migrant*”.²⁸

Critical Race Theorists and African-American writers have done tremendous work to decouple race from biology.²⁹ Regardless, mid-20th century eugenicists still attempted to recenter racial hierarchies as the result of cultural evolution. As an anthropological category, race, ethnicity, class-belonging or gender are all marked by value, the source of which is broader than culture per se. For it was and remains in the interest of State to reproduce hierarchies based on either of those categories, which is why one has to argue that what promotes structural racism, structural xenophobia or classicism, and structural gender oppression is the State. This is what leads Badiou in ontological terms to forge a notion such as State of the Situation, in which culture proves not to be independent from capitalism itself.

Insofar as this term represents the world as that which repeats injustice through the reproduction of hierarchical value-invested differences, the State of the Situation can only be remote from truth production. Yet we do know that destabilizing events have occurred throughout history. Based on this knowledge, we can wager a good bet they shall continue to emerge and produce thought. This is the only sense I can think of by which “race” would *inexist* as a truth procedure, meaning that conceptually it remains anchored in the sedimented meanings

²⁸ A. Badiou, *Méfiez-vous des blancs, habitants du rivage*. Paris: Fayard/ouvertures, 2019.

²⁹ I cite one scholar among so many others: Gerald Horne. *The Dawning of the Apocalypse: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, Settler Colonialism, and Capitalism in the Long Sixteenth Century*. New York City: Monthly Review Press 2020.

previous with which power structures attempted to reify it. By contrast, nothing whatsoever in Badiou's philosophical system strips it from naming the becoming of a generic subject.

To Badiou's credit, and perhaps a lesser-known fact, is how he has been an activist for the rights of African migrant workers through his political organization, aptly named *L'Organisation Politique*. Badiou is also a playwright, whose Ahmed trilogy explores the plight of French youth of *Maghreb* descent living in the "outer cities" of urban centers, faced with economic disadvantage, cultural marginalization and police violence. In his book, *In Praise of Love*, Badiou also reminds us that "in my novel *Calme bloc ici-bas* - which follows the formal structure of [Victor] Hugo's *Les Misérables* - the revolutionary fresco encompasses the love of a Shi'ite worker, Ahmed Aazami, for a terrorist, Elisabeth Cathely, then, that of Elisabeth's son, Simon, adopted by Ahmed after the terrorist's death, for Claude Ogasawara, the poet and daughter of a leading reactionary."³⁰ *Calme bloc ici-bas* strives to connect the condition of love with that of art. Also worth mentioning is how Badiou has regularly, in the context of the independent media talk show "Contre-courant", engaged in discussions with trade unionists, working-class activists, organizers and ethnic leaders.

In such moments, Badiou exits the Eurocentre to meet Mao Zedong again, reminding the skeptic about the intellectual's responsibility toward returning to the masses in clarity what they had brought to her in confusion.

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³⁰ A. Badiou, with Nicholas Truong. *In Praise of Love*. Translated by Peter Bush. London, UK: The Serpent's Tail, 2012 [2009] P. 74

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Recebido em: 05/12/2022.

Aprovado em: 14/12/2022.

Publicado em: 14/12/2022.