

Afropessimism

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Afropessimism, Frank B. Wilderson III

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When the author Frank Wilderson III was recently asked in an interview to summarize his third book *Afropessimism* in one sentence, he replied: ‘With the narrative drive of a captivating novel and the intellectual rigor of critical theory, “Afropessimism” illustrates how black death is necessary for the material and psychic life of the human species’ (Williams, 2020). I partly agree with his characterization: *Afropessimism* is a mixture of memoir and theory, which intersect in almost every chapter, and the narrative part of this non-linear book does function as ‘captivating novel’. But with the second part of Wilderson’s characterization, namely ‘with the intellectual rigor of critical theory’ and his subsequent core argument about the death of Blacks, I cannot possibly agree. The compelling nature of Wilderson’s prose makes it tempting to overlook the shortcomings of his theorizations. In the end, I came to the conclusion that I find *Afropessimism*, as expressed in this book, loveless, hopeless and divisive. Moreover, this body of thought, although it claims otherwise, lapses into the old laziness of not being intersectional in any way.¹

The insight Wilderson offers us into a contemporary Black boy’s and man’s life from a male perspective is rare these days and he paints his life, recent American political and social history, and his relationships with women with verve, sometimes conjuring up beautiful, vivid images. The book may, according to Vinson Cunningham (2020), be seen as a genre, termed ‘auto-theory’, an attempt to arrive at a philosophy by way of the self. Several African American academics, especially women, have taken up this exciting genre in recent years. A personal narrative is linked to a theoretical deepening of the important themes in a text, which, often have to do with Black death, with fungibility, the absolute substitutability and interchangeability of Black people. Christina Sharpe (2016) does this with *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* and Saidiya Hartman (2007) had previously used the genre with *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Yet, Hartman (1997), like other authors, will have an axe to grind with Wilderson, because he derives all kinds of important insights and concepts from her work, especially

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from *Scenes of Subjection; Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, which although he references her, also incorporates her into the current of Afropessimism, while she herself emphatically rejects that positioning (Royal Tropical Institute, personal communication, Amsterdam, October 2018).

African American academic thought

In this article, I will undertake a critical reading of *Afropessimism*, using an intersectional and Black feminist European perspective. First, I give some much-needed context. It exceeds the limitations of this article to give a comprehensive overview of the academic thought that Black America has produced, starting with the first Black sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963), founder of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), who, educated at Harvard and the Humboldt University in Berlin, was long associated with Atlanta University. His contributions to modern sociology are still not sufficiently appreciated. Whether it concerns the rewriting of American history during the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction, in which he takes as a starting point the important roles that Black people themselves played²; his contributions to urban sociology, to Pan-Africanism, to a vision of the future for Black people in America, led by ‘the talented tenth’, or to the description of Black consciousness in the heart-breaking collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois is incorrectly not included among the founders of modern sociology. He is also hardly mentioned, let alone taught in introductory courses in that discipline, in The Netherlands and other European countries. For a description of the meaning of Du Bois and the conflict of ideas with his contemporary and rival Booker T. Washington, I refer to the beautiful study by Aldon Morris (2015), *The Scholar Denied*.³

If I now confine myself to the last few decades, intersectionality is important Black American feminist intellectual heritage. Intersectionality was initiated by the second wave of feminists of colour, and in particular by Black feminists, including The Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, but Chicana and Asian feminists, such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and Mari Matsuda, have also contributed to it. Crenshaw formulated the term intersectionality in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989). According to some interpretations, including mine, intersectionality goes back to the ideas of 19th-century Black women, such as the women’s rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth with her famous speech *Ain’t I a woman?* in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. At a meeting of White women who were fighting only for their own suffrage, she asked again and again, ‘Ain’t I a woman?’⁴

Intersectionality is the key concept within the discipline Gender and Women’s Studies in the Netherlands. In short, intersectionality means that it is not enough to analyse reality using just one analytical toolbox, whether it concerns gender, race, class, sexuality or another variable, but that all these different grammars of difference work simultaneously, influencing and co-creating each other. They should therefore be studied simultaneously and not alongside or separately from each other.⁵ Intersectionality is characterized by systematic attention to power differences, by complexity and by a certain ‘elasticity’.⁶ In my ‘pliable’ view, it is possible for anyone to make intersectional analyses, not only Black women; intersectionality is not only concerned with subjectivity/identity, but

lends itself well to the analysis of structural social power relations, and finally, the object of research does not have to be Black, but can very well be applied, for example, to the study of Whiteness or sexuality.

Afropessimism and Afropessimism 2.0

In the last two decades, the most recent Black American academic body of thought and export product 'Afropessimism' has emerged, in the form in which it is now presented to us by Frank Wilderson et al. Some critics refer to this new form as Afropessimism 2.0 (AP 2.0), and I will do so, too, because Afropessimism was and still is prevalent in White Western circles and it is related to the 'unrelentingly negative coverage of Africa in Western news media, especially in terms of its tendency toward arrested development'.⁷ In this discourse, hopelessness about the African continent and neo-coloniality fight for priority. The denial of the complete superfluosity and counterproductivity of the development industry on the continent is also part of this discourse. From this perspective, Africa is seen as one big tragic mess: 'corruption, cronyism and ethnic conflict are thought to provide the governing logics of politics and other daily experiences'.⁸ However, Wilderson et al. do not say a word about this first, widespread movement of Afropessimism, which is strange because AP 2.0 would gain credibility as a theoretical framework, if it were to situate itself and indicate how it relates to this earlier Afropessimism, which was and is deeply rooted in Western culture. This total omission of the original and still ubiquitous Afropessimism is symptomatic and gives a first impression of an ahistorical slant, of intellectual carelessness, of African American exceptionalism, that is, being stuck in an African American framework, blind to knowledge from other parts of the Black Diaspora. British researcher Kevin Ochieng Okoth reproaches Afropessimists 2.0 for erasing all post-war anti-colonial African thought⁹ – and I would add Négritude from France and decolonial thought, which originates mainly from Latin America. Moreover, other Black authors, such as Frantz Fanon, Orlando Patterson, Silvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, are being cannibalized. Finally, there is an apodictic propensity, an unsubstantiated grandstanding, with which there can be no dialogue under penalty of the accusation of 'anti-Black racism'.

AP 2.0 comes from circles of Black Studies or African American Studies and Frank Wilderson III and Jared Sexton are its founders. AP 2.0 is a theoretical lens, a metatheory, which, using Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism and other critical theories, has the ambition to clarify the irreconcilable difference between, on one hand, the violence of capitalism, gender oppression and White supremacy, and, on the other hand, Anti-Black violence. In this metatheory, the world is divided into People, that is, Whites and their *junior partners*; that concept includes everyone except White heterosexual men and Black men and women. *Junior partners*, which quite intentionally already sounds nasty, are people of colour (POC), or Non-Black POC (NBPOC) members of all other minority groups, such as Palestinians and Indigenous people, the working class, all women and LGBTIQs (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex and queer) who are not Black. On the other side of this classification are Blacks, who are not Human. Whites and their *junior partners* become Human by separating themselves from Blacks, also called, confusingly, BPOC, who are ontologically placed outside the Human order (pp.

78, 84). There can be no analogy or equivalence between the suffering of Blacks and that of Whites and their *junior partners* and therefore no solidarity. Black suffering is incomparable and unique.

One of the core beliefs of AP 2.0 is that there is a fundamental Human need for violence against Blacks, the free, naked violence of social death. The core of AP 2.0 is that being Black equals being a Slave, during slavery, but also afterwards, ‘the afterlife of slavery’, it has remained so, with violence against Blacks being the structuring mechanism of the modern world. Human life depends on the death of Blacks for its existence and cohesion (p. 39). AP 2.0 relies heavily on the work of Jamaican sociologist Orlando Patterson (1982), particularly *Slavery and Social Death*, in which he introduces the concept of ‘social death’ as a characteristic of the life of Blacks. Social death is what characterizes the position of Blacks: not being a subject, not having property, not being able to assert rights to land or to family. There are three central concepts within AP 2.0 when it comes to Blacks: naked, unpunished violence against them is possible, desirable and completely normalized; total powerlessness and general dishonour; and alienation from birth, in generations before and beyond (p. 177). Black suffering and the death of Blacks is the life force of the world, and that death must be constantly repeated visually. What society needs from Blacks is not their labour force, their country or their sexuality, as is the case with the *junior partners*, the Marxist proletariat, the (neo)colonial subject, or White and coloured women, respectively, but the affirmation of their Humanity. Because Blacks are excluded from being Human from the outset, they lend cohesion to that Humanity. The Black/Slave is ontologically absent, a living dead person. While Blacks know ‘We are a kind of sentient beings [not persons/subjects] who cannot be wounded or killed, because we are already dead to the world’ (p. 155), Whites and their *junior partners* think ‘I know I am a Human, because I am not Black’ (p. 175). So the fundamental distinction in AP 2.0 is that between being a Black Non-Person and being a Non-Black Person. Anyone who does not want to see or take account of this fundamental difference is guilty of anti-Black racism.

It is important to determine how and for whom the term ‘Black’ is used in AP 2.0. Annie Olaloku-Teriba (2018) devotes an incisive study to this and concludes that there is conceptual ambiguity about who is Black in AP 2.0, because it is never explicitly mentioned, and consequently also about what Anti-Black racism is. Being Black is a stable category that ‘refers to a historically coherent group of people, whose experiences of violence are necessarily linked by a common ethnicity’ (p. 10). Being a Slave is something that is permeated by both being Black and being African (p. 8), ignoring the very different historical circumstances in which different collectivities have come into being – and which is precisely what should be investigated – and thus there is an implicit biological, essentialist conception of being Black. AP 2.0 is essentially an ethnocentric, African American analysis of being Black that applies to all others classified as Slaves.

Notwithstanding this conceptual muddiness, Afropessimism is high-profile both within the academy and in circles of Black activists, in the United States and in Europe. At the same time, it is controversial thinking that divides Black communities and communities of colour, internally and in relation to each other. This way of thinking has been initiated by Black men, and recently Black feminists and feminists of colour have been trying to reconcile and bring together AP 2.0 and intersectionality, which are in a complex and

often tense relationship with each other (Bilge, 2020). It is still too early for me to say whether this reconciliation project is fruitful; in any case, it is urgent explicitly to mention the merits and shortcomings of AP 2.0, and I have to confess that I have some difficulty seeing the merits. I find it difficult to think how AP 2.0, with its essentialist, unshakeable and irreconcilable division of the world, can be worth saving or rethinking. That is why I find it shocking that many, especially of the younger generation in the Netherlands as well, apparently find AP 2.0 so attractive. This is particularly shocking in the light of a Black, migrant and refugee (BMR) feminist history of the late 1970s and early 1980s, in which solidarity between different groups of women, who initially identified themselves as (politically) Black and later as BMR women, was paramount (Deekman and Hermans, 2001).¹⁰ I add that it was BMR *women*, not BMR men, who developed a joint, proto-intersectional analysis of their/our situation across all their own and institutional boundaries. Women from the former Dutch East Indies, including from the Moluccan islands, Surinamese-, Antillean-, Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch women worked on change, both within their own women's groups and communities and with each other. Researcher Chandra Frank recently uncovered a letter from the archives of Atria in which the Black lesbian group Sister Outsider, of which I was a member, introduced ourselves to Audre Lorde after she accepted our invitation to visit us in the Netherlands. The letter makes clear that we are Black lesbian women from South Africa, Suriname and Indonesia. I had forgotten about that letter, which is not dated, but was written sometime in 1983, but when Chandra showed it to me, I realized this is an intersectional analysis, which moreover shows our shared colonial histories with the Netherlands and with each other (Frank, 2019). It was great to see that our joint study sessions, our hours of discussions, and the feverish devouring of Black American and Black British feminist stencils and pamphlets gave us an analysis of the Netherlands that still stands.

What is the curious, topical appeal of AP 2.0 to younger generations? I suspect there are three things at play here. I'm following Myriam Aouragh (2018, 2019) and Annie Olaloku-Teriba,¹¹ who point out the complex constellation of political and social factors that have come together in the last two decades. These include a general pull to the right, a weakening of the left, and the usual erasure of BMR men and women and their activities as well as (Black) anti-racist left-wing activism that has now embraced a narrowed conception of anti-racist struggle. Priority has been given to checking and disciplining White, but in particular NBPOC privilege, that personal and individualized measure of 'undeserved privileges', instead of paying attention to social justice in a structural sense, to transnational and anti-imperialist perspectives and to intersectionality. In particular, the relationship between race and class requires a well-considered analysis, as developed earlier, from Black Panthers to WOC women's movements. Apart from the fact that such an approach to anti-racism is more complex, takes a longer breath and calls for alliances, tackling White and – what is seen as – NBPOC Privilege offers the immediate advantage of a positioning that puts supporters of AP 2.0 a priori in the right. After all, the basic principles do not lend themselves to refutation and the accusation of Anti-Black racism is easily made. I will come back to this in the last paragraph, but within AP 2.0, nothing is in fact asked of Black people other than to be Black.

In addition, I have to conclude with pain that there is simply a lack of transgenerational knowledge about our own Dutch BMR feminist and anti-racist history, in which the search

for alliances and solidarity were so prominent. Audre Lorde (1984) says noteworthy things about that in the collection of essays *Sister Outsider*: 'Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all' (p. 115). It was precisely externally imposed, essentialist identity constructions that were questioned, while they simultaneously led a double life, in the sense that it was acknowledged that there were, of course, differences between women from different countries of origin, but that those differences should not in any way stand in the way of cooperation. And finally, related to the previous point, I think that the popular misinterpretation of intersectionality, as if it only had to do with subjectivity and identity, is apparently also at issue.

A memoir on Black masculinity

But first let me say something about the successful part of *Afropessimism*. It is a compelling and beautifully told narrative; an exciting and adventurous coming of age story, a memoir of a Black man in his mid-sixties, who is now a professor in African American Studies and Drama, at the University of California, Irvine. Born in 1957, he gives us a picture of how he experienced the end of the Vietnam War; the Black liberation struggle; accompanied by the soundtrack of end of 1960s, 1970s Black music; and the birth of the AIM, American Indian Movement. Raised as the eldest son in the family of two Black psychologists, who were also activists in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in an overwhelmingly White neighbourhood, he attends a White elementary school, and he never feels at ease either in the neighbourhood or at school. He is always the Other, as when he describes that the mother of a friend, through the friend, asks him 'what is it like to be a Negro?' At the same time, it is a privileged childhood, in which the family travels a lot during summer vacations, especially to other American university cities. The parents are constantly on study trips or on trips with an activist purpose. When he is 18, he goes to study at élite Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, where, just before graduation, he gets kicked out for starting a political action for the poorly paid White cleaners and cafeteria staff. When he lives with his considerably older, Black lover Stella, a beautifully described, psychoanalytically analysed quarrel with their White flatmate Josephine, drives them on a hallucinatory escape from their apartment, driven by invisible assailants of an initially obscure nature. He finishes his studies at Dartmouth anyway and then becomes the first Black real estate agent in Minneapolis and earns big money. However, this existence does not give him satisfaction and after a few short episodes as a waiter and as an usher in a museum, he leaves for South Africa, to support the fight of the African National Congress (ANC) against Apartheid. He described his time in South Africa in his second book *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (2008). He subsequently went back to the university and obtained his PhD, in the process suffering a psychic breakdown. This collapse has great symbolic significance and marks his entry into AP 2.0. His description of international academic conferences and presentations, which he gives as a much sought-after academic, are amusing and recognizable. Occasionally it is rather over the top, as when he compares the comments of his Marxist colleagues at a conference in Berlin, who do not take kindly to AP 2.0, without any irony

or noticeable sense of exaggeration, with a lynching party, which he refers to as a 'mixture of pleasure and psychological renewal' (p. 74).

I would like to dwell a little longer on his period as an usher in the museum, because it provides him with a key experience that will profoundly influence the development of his thinking. In conversation with his fellow hall guard, best friend and fellow revolutionary, the refugee Palestinian Sameer Bishara, the latter reveals that it is one thing to be searched by Israeli soldiers all the time, but that it is intolerable when this is done by Ethiopian Jews (p. 17, and further). Wilderson's world collapses when he realizes that this means that he occupies the same dishonoured place in the collective unconscious of Palestinians, whom he had until then seen as his brothers in the revolutionary struggle, as he does in that of Whites in America. He concludes that Palestinian insurgents have more in common with the Israeli state and Israeli civil society than with Blacks. Sameer may have lost his country, but that is of a totally different order than the ontological placing of Blacks outside the Human Order. Later, when he has converted to AP 2.0, he systematizes that experience into a theoretically hermetic vision and a worldview in which there can be no equivalence and solidarity between the suffering of Black people and that of Whites and their *junior partners*, such as Sameer.

A number of miraculous things happen here. The ease with which Wilderson lumps all others than Black people together, without applying any differentiations, is astonishing. Whites and their *junior partners*, who are subordinated and disadvantaged, but do belong to Mankind, have made common cause with each other in their *negrophobogenesis*, or negrophobia. With this statement, it becomes clear once again that Wilderson does not think intersectionally, but in singular terms. How is it possible to think about all these categories of people without considering the overlaps between them? Take a working-class Black woman: does she fall into the most damned category of Blacks or under the *junior partners*? Or how should we understand a Black Palestinian? According to Wilderson, their Blackness comes first and that cancels all their other characteristics. In other words, race is a more fundamental, ontological category, while class and gender are just 'conflicts' that can be resolved.

Furthermore, it is problematic that one extremely unpleasant, racist experience is identified as the genesis of his exclusive vision. The exceptionalism and uniqueness of Black suffering and his anti-Palestinian point of view, part of the broader anti-NBPOC stance, curiously resembles a Zionist argument in which the suffering of Jews cannot be compared or seen in relation to the suffering of other groups. Wilderson's position is also inconsistent with reality. In a public conversation with Gayatri Spivak in Berlin in June 2018, Angela Davis said about AP 2.0 and Palestinians:

When we think of the solidarity work that Palestinian activists did in 2014, when the protest against Ferguson served as a catalyst for a new movement in the US, a Black Freedom Movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, we realize how central Palestinians were to the production of a new historical moment for Black people in the US.¹²

Another possible interpretation would be that some Palestinians also take part in the older Afropessimism or, in my own terms, that they have mastered the dominant cultural archive, but I always want to keep open the possibility that they could liberate

themselves from it. There is no such exit with AP 2.0; the relationships between Blacks, their masters and the *junior partners* are chiselled in marble and there is no escaping it. That is why I call AP 2.0 loveless and hopeless.

Finally, what is striking about this fragment and AP 2.0 in general is, as Aouragh (2019) and Olaloku-Teriba (2018) also point out, that it is not so much Whites, but the NBPOC in particular, who, drawing parallels between Black struggles and the struggles of other groups, are the object of his ire. This is not only a break with earlier more comprehensive analyses of anti-racist struggles, it is also hopeless to fool other dominated groups into believing that they are fundamentally and irrevocably implicated in, and benefiting from, the oppression of Blacks. While we are in the midst of the uprising for the murder by a police officer of George Floyd in Minneapolis, it is tempting to think that Black suffering is unique and incomparable, but that suffering is related to other forms of suffering, and it is neither possible nor productive to establish a hierarchy in them.

Rigorous critical theory?

I find, as said, the book less successful in its second incarnation, as critical theory, whose ambition is to explain the incomparability of, and lack of analogy between, the suffering of Black people and that of any other group. It should be noted that I do not see the groups he distinguishes in front of me and I find his imaginary groupscapes witnesses to lazy thinking. Although I am sometimes charmed by his psychoanalytic analyses of the White and Black psyche, especially when he describes micro interactions or relationships, I find his use of language in the theoretical domain generally rather inaccessible to a wide audience. Ochieng Okoth highlights another aspect of AP 2.0 and places its rise within the development of the neo-liberal university. He is unmerciful in his rejection:

AP 2.0 is a product of middle-class academia; a framework either consciously or subconsciously created to allow relatively well-off academics to view themselves as the most discriminated and oppressed people in the world. (p. 5)

I agree with Ochieng Okoth that Wilderson et al. are engaged in the Oppression Olympics; yet another indication that there is no intersectionality in AP 2.0. Even more devastating is Ochieng Okoth's rhetorical question:

Is it in any way surprising that two professors working within the prestigious University of California system promote a theoretical framework that requires no political action from Black writers and activists other than simply being Black? [. . .] By creating a framework for the analysis of race, that lends itself to co-optation by corporate interests, AP 2.0 has certainly demonstrated that it can convert Blackness into profit. (pp. 8–9)¹³

Building on the insight that within AP 2.0 nothing is asked of Blacks other than to be Black, I find Wilderson's lack of thinking in political terms and lack of willingness, or even inclination, to take political action, totally unacceptable. This is especially the case in light of work done by, among others, BMR feminists in the context of the second wave

of feminism. Wilderson pays no attention to the question of how we can get out of this system. This does safeguard the business model.

There are three other important reasons why I cannot go along with Wilderson's theoretical exercises. First, there is the far-reaching generalization and the superficiality of the ideas that he eclectically borrowed from other authors, giving them his own, loveless and hopeless twist, which often goes against the intentions of the author in question. The tendency towards generalization is expressed in the lack of finesse in the text; he has no eye for specificity in his analyses. An extremely damaging aspect of this thinking, as we have seen, is that there can be no solidarity or alliances between Black people and all the others; there is no exit from this hermetic system. The accusation of anti-Black racism makes constructive criticism of, or discussions with, AP 2.0 unfeasible; it makes this metatheory an island, a hermetic whole, which cannot be questioned without the questioner being immediately accused of anti-Black racism. In the same conversation with Gayatri Spivak, Angela Davis warns, referring to the Netherlands:

I would like to take this opportunity to say something about the way the notion of 'anti-Black racism' has traveled. I know this concept does important work, but I am very cautious about the implications of this category, i.e. that Black people are the main group suffering from racism. [. . .] So we have to be careful with the assumption that Black people are always the primary target of racism. [. . .] And I think it's related to a kind of Black nationalism, which is being staged over and over again by Black movements. W.E.B. Du Bois said: 'anti-imperialism is more effective than nationalism'.¹⁴

Second, there is the idiosyncrasy that many African Americans project their own specific situation onto the rest of the Black Diaspora, be it Africa or Black Europe, without giving it much thought, assuming that the African American experience is universal to the experiences of all Black people in the world. Wilderson also shows, as mentioned above, no knowledge of the history of (inter)national Black intellectual currents. Many African Americans, just like White Americans, are Americans, even and perhaps more so than they are aware of themselves, although they tend to see themselves primarily as Black and not in national terms. As Americans, they are also the centre of the world, which is why Wilderson, although atypical in the fact that he has lived in South Africa for over 5 years, does not feel the need to have knowledge of other cultural modalities of being Black, nor to be informed about them.

Third, despite paying lip service, he has no real insight into intersectional thought and therefore he does not put it into practice. I have already given some illustrations of this. The fact that he occasionally uses 'she' instead of 'he' as a universal personal pronoun does not make his thinking intersectional. This is culpable because he explicitly indicates that AP 2.0 is a meditation on the assumptions of among other bodies of thought, feminism. In fact, he always places the category 'race' above other simultaneous grammars of difference such as gender, class and sexuality, a phenomenon that occurs more often in Black Studies Departments at American universities, where Black men still predominate. Another way of saying this is that Black, heterosexual, middle-class masculinity is the unspoken, unquestioned, starting point, and I see that reflected in his analyses.

For instance, I absolutely demur from the way he writes about Black and White women, and I read those passages with extra attention. He believes that it is possible for a White woman to rape a Black man or a man of colour, not metaphorically, but literally. To prove this, he refers to a passage from the TV series *Homeland*, in which the CIA agent Carrie takes an Afghan boy into her bed, as bait so that she can later kill his powerful uncle. *Really?* So that's something that's reserved for White women, because they have more power, belonging to the Human species, and Black women can't? Amazing. It becomes even more miraculous when in Wilderson's categorically divorced and hierarchical worldview, it is possible that, after a series of relationships with often considerably older Black women – which he does not analyse – he marries an equally much older White woman, and does not see the need to explain or analyse this either. He does not have to explain this to me, but from his own worldview, in which the Black man is object and the White woman subject, even within intimate relationships. As he says, 'even the most persecuted White women are a priori positioned as mistresses in relation to [. . .] even Black men' (p. 131). It is, therefore, hard to imagine how such a relationship works or how Wilderson can reconcile it with his worldview. Only at the end of the book does he make two unconvincing remarks about it. Namely, that in his own relationship, the roles are exactly the same as he describes, but that in reality he is more pleasant and more generous towards his wife than in the book (p. 249). He is reluctant to praise her too abundantly, because a White reader might be relieved to think that such a mixed relationship is possible when Wilderson is keen to disabuse them of this illusion:

Structurally, there is no relationship between Black and Human lovers. But there is also no intra-Black relationship, although we often find ties of deep affection here. A prisoner who marries the one who captures him remains a prisoner. This was the raw truth of what we, for lack of another word, called our *love*. (p. 249)

Enough said! I have seldom read a more unloving, hopeless, contradictory and hypocritical text.

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2. Du Bois (1962 [1935]). For an excellent book review, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, 'Black Reconstruction in America'. In: *International Socialist Review*, Issue 57, 2008.
3. Aldon Morris (2015). Washington saw the future of Blacks as manual labourers and he entered into a covenant with the Chicago sociologist Robert E. Park who, fully using Du Bois' ideas and methods, was canonized.

4. www.thesojournertruthproject.com and <https://moed.online/nl/sojourner-truths-aint-i-a-woman-revisited>, for a Dutch translation of the speech by Nancy Jouwe and myself.
5. Intersectionality was introduced in the Netherlands by the text *Caleidoscopische Visies, De Geschiedenis van de zwarte, migranten en vluchtelingen Vrouwenbeweging in Nederland*, Botman, M., N. Jouwe en G. Wekker red., Amsterdam: KIT, 2001. Medio 2020 *Caleidoscopische Visies*, one of the influential texts of the second wave of the feminist movement, is now available on the website of Atria, the archives for the women's movement: www.atria.nl
6. *Black Feminism reimagined: After intersectionality* (Nash, 2019). Nash makes a plea that Black American women should no longer consider intersectionality as their 'property' that has to be defended tooth and nail against others who want to appropriate this body of thought.
7. Kevin Ochieng Okoth, <https://salvage.zone/?s=The+flatness+of+Blackness>, 2020, p. 2.
8. See Note 7, p. 3.
9. See Note 7, 2020.
10. See the chapter of Amalia Deekman and Mariëtte Hermans (2001). See Note 5.
11. See references.
12. Symposium 'Planetary Utopias: Hope, Desire and Imaginaries in a Postcolonial World', curated by Nikita Dhawan. Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 24 June 2018. www.radicalphilosophy.com
13. Ochieng Okoth uses the term AP™ instead of AP 2.0.
14. See Note 12. Symposium 'Planetary Utopias'.

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