



## Against Afropessimism: A Phenomenological Structural Reading

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### Abstract

Building on Frantz Fanon's sociogeny, this work, using Mocombeian structurationism, argues, against Afropessimism that antiblackness is not ontological and foundational to the constitution of Western culture and society; instead, it is, following the end of de jure segregationist laws in the West and America, a sociogenetic phenomenon promulgated by both Blacks and Whites. That is, race, a sociogenetic phenomenon emanating from the social relations of production, has been ontologized by Whites, via capitalist slavery and White supremacist ideologies and ideological apparatuses, and reified by Blacks through their embrace of the othering terms by which they were discriminated against as their practical consciousness (i.e., culture). Whites, in turn, post-slavery and colonization, have re-ontologized blackness, around Black practical consciousness and consumptive tastes fueled by their (Black) reification of the othering terms by which they were discriminated against as culture, for the purpose of generating surplus-value, through diversified consumerism, for their (Whites) postindustrial (finance) economies.

**Keywords:** Blackness, Critical Race Theory, Phenomenological Structuralism, Structurationism, Neoliberalism, Globalization, Capitalist World-System

### Introduction

Building on Frantz Fanon's sociogeny, this work, using Mocombe's structurationist theory of phenomenological structuralism, argues that Blackness is not ontological; instead, it is sociogenetic [1]. That is, race has been ontologized by Whites, via capitalist slavery and White supremacist ideologies and ideological apparatuses (i.e., laws and institutional practices such as segregation), and reified by Blacks through their embrace of the othering terms by which they were marginalized and discriminated against as their practical consciousness/culture. In other words, there is no Black American identity and community to speak of in America, or the diaspora (the Atlantic) for that matter, outside of so-called black social relations to the modes and means of production constituting the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism world-system under American hegemony [1-4]. Black folks in America and the diaspora, following their interpellation, embourgeoisement, and integration into the universality and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, via slavery and White supremacy, by their White

colonial slave masters, became agents of White supremacy, i.e., Black-White supremacist agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Contemporarily, the Black American comprador bourgeoisie, are now used by the upper-class of White owners and high-level executives in an American (neoliberal) global neomercantilist/capitalist world-system that is tantamount to the colonial project of the Europeans to perpetuate White supremacy and the inferiority of Black people and other people of color around the world through their labor, labor power, and consumptive patterns around entertainment and athletic industries, identity politics, and diversified consumerism within the universality and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Whites, post-slavery and colonialism, have re-ontologized blackness, around their, urban, (Black) practical consciousness and consumptive tastes fueled by their (Black) embrace and reification of the othering terms by which they were discriminated against as culture, for the purpose of generating surplus-value, through diversified consumerism, for their (White) postindustrial (finance) economies.

In other words, race/blackness is not ontological, it is sociogenetic (social relational) [5,6]. Race, i.e., blackness, has been reified and universalized around White socioeconomic norms, values, ideas, and ideals embedded in the universality and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, and their differentiating and discriminatory effects, which Blacks embrace, reify, and adopt (as culture or practical consciousness) to define their so-called communities (and access the universality of the ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism), which become differentiated between Blacks who more, culturally, resemble their white counterparts, the Black comprador bourgeoisie, in terms of their practical consciousness (norms, ideas, ideals, and values), and those (the Black underclasses in America and elsewhere) who do not because they, completely, embrace the discriminatory terms by which whites define their communities against so-called Black practices (urban, emotional, improvisational, irrational, physical, lewd, promiscuous, etc.) to become agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism.

Put differently, the majority of Black American identity/practical consciousness, like their White American counterparts, has been determined by their relations to, and differentiations within, the ontology and universality of the modes and means of production of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism under White oligarchical domination. Segregation and the embrace of the “other” terms and practices of blackness, i.e., a standpoint embodied in nonsensical theories such as negritude and Afrocentrism, emerging from structural differentiation, highlighted by Whites for Black identity-in-differential to Whiteness, as Fanon highlights in his work *Black Skin White Mask*, is the sole basis for this talk about a so-called Black American identity and community in the Atlantic and elsewhere, which is a fictitious community as it (Black sociogenetics) does not offer an alternative (ontological) form of system and social integration that is distinct from the systemicity, universality, and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism [2,5]. Instead, they (Blacks) embrace and recursively organize and reproduce the othering terms (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, promiscuous, and inferior to whites), by which Whites have ontologized, reified, and marginalized blackness in order to constitute their social structure, as the basis upon which they constitute and reify their black cultural identities and communities in order to become human, i.e., agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, i.e., the ontology by which Whites seek to universally organize and reproduce the world-over through the practices of neoliberal globalization. Contemporarily, both Whites and Blacks use these othering terms and

practices to integrate the Black diaspora on the basis of their reifying and ontologizing the sociogenetics of blackness, which are the discriminatory ideals of whiteness into the neoliberal (Protestant) capitalist democracy of the American empire with the Black American serving as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for all so-called Blacks worldwide who attempt to reify and constitute their communities, like the Black American, around their consumptive patterns, labor, and labor power as entertainers, athletes, and service workers in the global (Protestant) neomercantilist system under American hegemony for the purpose of identity politics and diversified consumerism. The so-called Black radical tradition of Marxists and socialists would become obsolete as they failed to institutionalize the other ontological form of system and social integration, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, amongst so-called Black people, whether in America, the diaspora, or the African continent, against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism post-slavery and colonialism.

### **Background of the Problem**

In the academic literature, race has been theorized as either a product of social relations or an ontological and biological given by which different groups recursively organize and reproduce their being-in-the-world [2, 5-8]. In this work, I build on Afropessimism’s and Fanon’s sociogenetic positions, which posit race as a product of social relations, against the ontological position [5]. Unlike the Afropessimist perspective, building off of Fanon, which posits that anti-Blackness is a foundational principle of the modern world, essential for the formation and maintenance of global society, and that Black people are permanently positioned as outsiders or property rather than full humans, I conclude, like Fanon, that both Blacks and whites are responsible for establishing anti-Blackness as a foundational principle of the modern world [6].

For me, like Fanon, slavery within the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, was a socioeconomic institution that introduced race as an ontology by which practical consciousness was and is determined [2,6, 9-18]. That is, race was given, immutable, and hierarchical with certain (biological) characteristics that differentiated different groups of so-called human races, i.e., White, Black, Yellow, and Red, from each other based on their racial features and behaviors, which were a result of their biological race [7]. Whites were the superior race (given their superior intellect and ability to reason), followed by the Asian Yellow group, the native American Red person, and the African Blacks who were at the bottom of the human racial hierarchy given their physical characteristics, irrationality, and emotionality vis-à-vis the other groups in the hierarchy [7].

Thus, Whites, given their accumulation of power and power positions in the material resource framework that is the earth, ontologized and sociologized race, to justify their socioeconomic positions, and attributed given and immutable (biological) characteristic markers and behaviors to it, which distinguished, and continues to distinguish, one so-called racial group from another. These racial markers and behaviors would become the cultural attributes of the different racial groups who, I want to argue here using Mocombe's theory of phenomenological structuralism, in the case of Blacks, reified their so-called identities and cultural communities by embracing, both theoretically (through theories such as Afrocentrism, Du Boisian double consciousness, Black Modernity, and negritude) and practically (through, urban, hip-hop culture and other black underclass practices), the discriminatory markers and behaviors (improvisational, emotional, fluid, musically inclined, etc.) by which they were ontologically and sociogenetically classified as a group by Whites, who now use these discriminatory markers for the purpose of generating surplus-value, via diversified consumerism, in their post-industrial (finance version of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism) economies in the age of neoliberal globalization and identity politics.

Hence, Black embrace and reification of the discriminatory terms by which they were marginalized and discriminated against as so-called Black culture and practical consciousness has allowed for Blackness, and therefore anti-Blackness to serve as a foundational principle of the modern world, essential for the formation and maintenance of global society, and as such Black people (via their culture and practical consciousness) are permanently positioned as outsiders or property (commodities) rather than full humans. As Sartre highlighted about Fanon, who used Negritude in the same light as in the aforementioned position (Blacks embracing and utilizing the discriminatory terms by which they were discriminated against as their culture and practical consciousness), Blacks failed to realize, given the *de jure* end to racism, racial ideology, and segregation by Whites, that race and racial identities were not the universal basis upon which the West and America constituted the foundation of their societies; instead, it was class and the mode of production of one of the two ontological forms of system and social integration by which the human species recursively organize and reproduce their being-in-the-world.

### Theory and Method

Against biological race as the bearer of practical consciousness, Mocombeian structuration's, phenomenological structuralism, posits that societal and agential constitution are a result of power relations, interpellation, and socialization or embourgeoisement

via five systems, i.e., mode of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, which are reified as one of two types of universal and ontological social structures (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism) or form of system and social integration, or what Mocombe calls a "social class language game," determined by how humanity as a species (economically) recursively organize and reproduce their being-in-the-world [1-4].

The initial experiences of people, power elites, who control the means and modes of production in a material resource framework, determine the form of system and social integration by which society was or is constituted. For the most part, in a bountiful environment, the (Vodou) communal form of system and social integration (what Marx calls primitive communism) would emerge; and in a scarce environment the antagonistic and individualistic capitalist form of system and social integration would emerge. Hence, both forms of system and social integration represent the means by which the human species, like all other species, satisfy their biological needs. Culture, for Mocombe, is the characteristics placed upon one of the two ontological forms of system and social integration (the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism and the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism), which are reified via five subsystems to constitute a social class language game, which, contrary to Marx and Hegel, are not dialectically related.

Once interpellated and socialized by the five systems, which are reified as a social structure and society (social class language game), social actors, for their ontological security, recursively (re)organize, reproduce, and are differentiated by the rules of conduct of (one of the two) the social structure, which are sanctioned by the power elites who control the means and modes of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse in a material resource framework. Hence, societal and agential constitution are both a duality and dualism: a dualism given the reification of the social structure (social class language games) via the five systems; and a duality given the internalization of the rules of the five systems, which become the agential initiatives or praxes of social actors differentiated by the rules of conduct that are sanctioned based on the economic mode of production, which is (in the aforementioned two social class language games) ontological. Difference, or alternative social praxis, in Mocombe's structuration theory, phenomenological structuralism, is not structural differentiation as articulated by traditional structurationists such as Bourdieu, Sahlins, Habermas, and Giddens; instead, it is a result of purposive actions arising from the deferment of meaning and ego-cen-

tered communication given the interaction of two other structuring structures (physiological drives of the body and brain; and phenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute the human subject) vis-à-vis the mental stance of the ego during the interpellation and socialization of social actors throughout their life span or cycle in the dominant social class language game or social structure, which produces alternative praxis that is exercised at the expense of the threat these practices may pose to the ontological security of social actors in the social structure or society, which, as previously mentioned, is of one of two (ontological) types (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism metaphors for representing how the human species recursively organize and reproduce their being-in-the-world, i.e., communally or individualistically and antagonistically).

This difference (associated with the deferment of meaning in ego-centered communicative discourse), however, becomes structural difference or differentiation in the structurationist sense once it is (dialectically, negative dialectically, and anti-dialectically) interpellated in the language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse of those who own the means and modes of production in order to control and direct the alternative praxis towards structural functionalism and equilibrium. Hence, True difference, *différance*, is practice associated with interpellated social actors of one of the two ontological forms of system and social integration operating, as purposive-action, in, and against, its opposite counterpart for social change.

For in the latter sense, the social praxes of the social actor, unlike in the standpoint of the former, structural differentiation, are permanently differentiated, marginalized, and incommensurable within the alternative social class language game it is operating within. For examples, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism (Haitian socialism) of the Africans of Haiti as it stood against the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the *Affranchis* class, 1791 to the present; the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism (Soviet socialism or Marxism) of the Soviets as it stood against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the West and America post-World War II to 1991; and, contemporarily, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism (Chinese socialism) of China as it stands against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of America, the contemporary hegemon of the Protestant capitalist world-system.

From this Mocombeian perspective, Blackness is not *différance*. That is, it does not offer the other (which the so-called Black radical tradition failed to institutionalize amongst the general

Black population in the capitalist world-system), the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, ontological form of system and social integration against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Instead, it is a social relational construct (sociogeny), a standpoint, which has no ontological status outside of its sociogenetic unfolding within one of the two ontological forms of system and social integration, i.e., the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, that would emerge amongst the human species to recursively organize and reproduce their-being-in-the-phenomenal-world.

In other words, ontologically speaking, there is no Black American identity and community, i.e., Black Modernity in the Atlantic or elsewhere, for their practical consciousnesses are not constituted as an alternative, and permanently incommensurable, social class language game (alternative form of system and social integration) to that of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of their former White slavemasters. Instead, they are a structurally differentiated group, created by Whites and their relations to the means and modes of production, whose practical consciousness emerges from their segregation based on, and embrace of, the structurally differentiated (reified) othering terms (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, and inferior to whites) and behaviors incorporated in the social class language game of their former White slave masters to constitute their (White) socioeconomic values, ideas, and ideals embedded in the universality and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. It is in relation to these defining terms of Whiteness (as embodied by both Whites and Blacks) and differentiating effects of the Protestant mode of production that Blacks constitute their so-called communities and identities. They do so not in their traditional ontological form prior to slavery, which was an alternative form of system and social integration as found in Haiti, for example; instead, they negative dialectically, attempt to integrate the ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism as universalized and organized by whites in the material resource framework via White supremacy.

That is to say, it is as a discriminated against minority with a standpoint driven by their desire for social integration against their derision for the discriminatory effects of the systemicity of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism (i.e., Du Boisian double consciousness), which many embrace and practice on top of the othering terms for which they were, and are, discriminated against, by which so-called black folks sought, and seek, to be, universally, human, i.e., Black-White supremacist agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. In that sense, Afropessimism is correct to highlight the fact that Whites

established their modern society, ontologically and foundationally, on anti-Blackness; however, they fail to continue Fanon's logic, highlighted by Jean-Paul Sartre, which demonstrates that Blacks initially embraced that foundation to construct their own so-called communities by attempting to exercise White practical consciousness or culture [19].

However, in their postmodern turn to recursively organize and reproduce the anti-Blackness foundations for which they were discriminated against as their culture and commodity, or practical consciousness, they now, with White support in the form of finance capital, perpetuate the anti-Blackness foundation of modernity and so-called postmodernity, which ended with de jure segregation and discrimination on account of racial identity [20-75].

### Discussion and Conclusion

Prior to their interpellation and embourgeoisement into the ontology and universality of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, the majority of so-called Black people in Africa and the diaspora came from the universality and ontology of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism as maintained amongst the Africans in the mountains and provinces of Haiti. Given that seventy percent of the Haitian population were directly from Africa when their revolution commenced, the majority were able to maintain their original ontological and universal form of existence, which was not constituted around race, but the ontology of the mode of production, subsistence living, and balance and harmony between humanity and nature, associated with the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism. This is not to say that there were no groups of Africans on the continent who exercised an African cultural version of the ontology of the spirit of capitalism, which was de-culturalized from its European and American variants. Only that the majority, especially from West Africa, recursively organized and reproduced their being-in-the-world via the communal ontology of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism.

However, given the totality of the institution of slavery in America and elsewhere, most of the Africans in those regions were interpellated and embourgeoisied around the organization of work associated with the universality and ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism via White supremacy. Hence, in the end, the so-called Black community in America and the Atlantic became, and has always been, a construct of Whites with their agential initiatives determined by their relations to, and differentiations within, the ontology and universality of the modes and means of production of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism via White supremacy. Instead, of constituting

an alternative rational (ontological) form of system and social integration (the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism) with its own mode of production, language (i.e., Black English Vernacular), (medium of) communicative discourse, ideology, and ideological apparatuses from that of their White counterparts, which would have made them permanently unable to integrate the social class language game of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, under the leadership (appointed by Whites) of the Black bourgeoisie, i.e., the best of the house servants, mulattoes, and free Blacks in the north whose practices and behavior were a simulacra of whiteness, and the Black underclass, whose ideals, ideas, and practices (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, and inferior to whites) represented the othering terms by which whiteness was constituted they recursively organize(d) and reproduce(d) their so-called community and identity, for the purpose of system and social integration (and equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution), which they have achieved through the identity politics and diversified consumerism of post-industrial neoliberal capitalism, contemporarily.

In other words, by reifying and ontologizing whiteness through the ideologies, ideological apparatuses, language, and communicative discourse of Whiteness and Europeaness encapsulated in the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, the black bourgeoisie, who contemporarily reify the othering terms of blackness of the black underclass for diversified consumerism in post-industrial finance capital in core nations like the United States of America, have constituted a so-called Black American community and intellectual standpoint, Black modernity in the Atlantic, where they, the black bourgeoisie (appointed by whites of any so-called ethnicities), serve as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for the community.

Whereas in previous modes of productions (agriculture and industrial) they (Black bourgeoisie) warred-against and marginalized the othering terms (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, and inferior to whites) of blackness, as exercised by the underclass of their so-called community, for the purpose of system and social integration, to be universally human, i.e., agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Contemporarily, under the ideological fallacies of postmodern and post-structural theorizing with their emphasis on the decentered subject and identity politics, which represents the ideology of postindustrial capitalism, they embrace and reify the othering terms (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, and inferior to whites), as culture, for the purpose of diversified consumerism, to constitute

their identity and community under their leadership while fighting against agents of the black underclass seeking to serve as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination by completely holding on to the othering practices and behaviors (improvisational, emotional, irrational, black, sense of musical style, athletic, no rational conception of time, and inferior to whites) without having to adopt the standard terms of whiteness as adopted by the original power elites (the best of the house servants, mulattoes, and free Blacks in the north) of the Black bourgeoisie, which is en vogue in the identity politics and diversified consumerism of postindustrial (finance) capitalism.

Today, in neoliberal globalization, both groups (the black underclass and comprador bourgeoisie) and their intersectional/serial members (queers, genders, etc.) are utilized by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives operating out of core (post-industrial) countries (America and Western Europe) as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination to integrate the Black diaspora into the systemicity of neoliberal identity capitalism governing the capitalist world-system under American hegemony. That is, the Black diaspora, like the so-called Black American community, encounters the systemicity of neoliberal identity capitalism under American hegemony via the sociogenetics of blackness under the control and codes of the Black American bourgeoisie (via the consumerism and materialism of the capitalist mode of production; the language, Black English Vernacular, of blackness; Historical Black Colleges and Universities/fraternities and sororities/Black churches serving as ideological apparatuses of blackness; and medium of black communicative discourse, i.e., Black Entertainment Television, and the athletic and entertainment industries).

The sociogenetics of blackness as constituted by black relations to the means and modes of production and the othering terms deployed by whites to marginalize them within the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism has been reified and ontologized via the consumerism and materialism of the capitalist postindustrial mode of production; the language, Black English Vernacular, of blackness; Historical Black Colleges and Universities/fraternities and sororities/Black churches serving as ideological apparatuses of blackness; and medium of black communicative discourse, i.e., Black Entertainment Television, and the athletic and entertainment industries for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites.

As such, the so-called black American community becomes, and is, a continuous fictitious community created by whites and blacks to define their (ontological) form of system and social integration, the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, which

is equated with the nature of reality as such. It does not offer the alternative (ontological) form (the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism) of system and social integration to the former (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism), and as such, the talk of Black Modernity in the Atlantic or the Black Atlantic is nothing more than white supremacy in black skin promulgated by their power elites appointed by Whites.

They export it, Black Modernity, globally to the diaspora via their consumption patterns, labor, and labor power organized around athletics, entertainment, and services, which are used, via diversified consumerism, to integrate other so-called black folks (Jamaicans, Haitians, South Africans, etc.), which come to organize and reify their societies, and so-called cultures, around a culture of athletes, entertainers, service workers, and their so-called cultural consumption patterns, similar to the black American, vying to become human, embourgeoisied, i.e., agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, as defined by Whites, in the aforementioned industries and consumption patterns (means of consumption) for the purpose of system and social integration into the ontology and universality of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, which threatens all life on earth with its pollution, overconsumption, and exploitation of humanity and the material resource framework.

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