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I am on sabbatical in Paris when I receive a request from *Qui Parle* to write about the question “Who speaks?” There are many ways to answer it. But in the here-now where I am located—with my lesbian, queer, and trans siblings of color in France in mind—the most relevant response consists of a series of other questions: “Who cannot speak (here-now)?,” followed by “Who is beginning to speak (herenow)?,” and finally, “Who is speaking (here-now)?”

Remain without answers.

Folks too long gone.

The immediate context: after the Trump election in the United States, just a few weeks before the elections in France. In Paris, atmosphere of anxieties, fears, indifference, panic. Manic efforts in which I am involved to save James Baldwin’s home in St. Paul. Constant backdrop-frontdrop of bombardments on Syria, Palestine, anywhere else, potentially nearly everywhere else. Continued invisibilization of colonial and postcolonial daily massacres in the Horn of Africa. Shortly after, the first ever Lesbian, Trans, Queer of Color and Allies Town Hall Meeting during Queer Week (Paris, March 18, 2017). Brought back hope, opened capacities to dream together. Had the first panel on black trans folk. First discussion of lesbian, trans, and queer of color alliances (topic of my closing keynote). Audience flagged and underlined need for more such spaces. And interspecies alliances.

Otherwise feminist and queer and trans of color activism have been on the rise in France over the past few years, but they manifest all too many avoidable reinventions of the wheel (again) because our pasts have been so thoroughly erased. At present the predominant antiracist people of color activism, which draws inspiration from US Black Lives Matter (ironically founded by three out black lesbians, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi), has produced an analytic and forms of organizing in France that do not necessarily include how race-racialization-racism is always already queer, how the passage à l’acte of banlieue, urban, and rural racist warfare is always already queer. Meanwhile we lesbian, trans, queer folk of color and allies are quickly getting hoarse with all these shout-outs against police violence that targets women of color and trans of color sisters. Calls to notice dead bodies. So many we have lost count. Calls to pull attention to how the relations of power that produce this situation are embedded structurally: histories and present of coloniality, advanced capitalism, barred from jobs, white supremacist education, cultural and linguistic imperialism, humiliation, deprivation of dignity, aggressive state presence in workingclass racialized neighborhoods, crushing of disabled subjects considered materiality not subjects, et cetera. At the same time, the world lives with the ongoing torture of folks in prisons in Palestine. With the racial-gendered-capitalist murder-by-toxicity of peoples and all beings across the planet-made-silent (the waters can no longer be heard). With how the massiveness of the localized to planetary, the planetary inside the local, continually reinforces, expands, deepens relations of power. No screams, no whispers, no poetry can adequately describe it. Too deep. Takes away words. Takes away breath. Leaves lesbians, trans, and queers of color nowhere. Without (a) question.

Cannot speak. Not in the sense of Spivak's "Subaltern" defined in terms of "notspeakingness," which is not about speech but about the always-already-elsewhereness of the extreme-subaltern-subject and all her/their/his expressions in relation to the dominant field of intelligibility. Such that speech and subjects float under or over or elsewhere from the dominant field's categories, logics, presuppositions, and conclusions and, further, from its very modalities of perception. Uncaptured.

Cannot speak. Not in the sense of the "I" defined by lack in a world of ability/disability. In a world of relations of power erroneously imagined as binary and thus imagined as coherent with man/woman, white/black, het/homo, et cetera, ad infinitum, which evacuates from the scene of life all so many subjects and relations of power. Evacuation that manifests in subtle exclusion ("overlooked"), enactments by apparatuses of the state onto registers of life (economy/culture-socialities-imaginaries-symbolics-more), fascist elimination (walled into death camps), premature death produced by deathbound conditions (in its corporeality, ghostliness, spirit, mind, affect), slow death (genocide, Native land theft, toxicities, prisons), quick death (genocide, police murders, ambulant targeting). Thus, not the "I" that has-no-vocal-chords. Thus, not the "I" that has capacities other than the physical capacity to utter-word and thereby is understood—by those who have not yet learned to feel-understand otherwise—as worrying, troubling, even persecuting. We realize. How the dominant is always reviving discourses of self-victimization (white tears, good folk vs. bad folk binary, center of attention obliterating everyone else, divide and rule) and then accusing the subaltern of self-victimization (makes wrong accusations, is aggressive, violent, better when erased into assimilation). How subalterns are subjected to the gestures of what Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco call "murderous inclusion," of the deadly violence of the dominant assimilative be-like-us-or-else or the Bhabha almost-white-but-not-quite thing (in which white stands in for all so many relations of power including and exceeding race).⁵²

Big no to that.

Cannot speak. Because cannot be alive. Because nowhere. Already eliminated from the start. No ground to stand on because stolen.

Even today (2017) inside the French academy there is not a single lesbian of color writing and teaching about lesbians of color. Kept out. All things previously said about this outside the academy wiped away. Totally. Nonexistent.

I am here in Paris coediting with Nawo Crawford a book of absent words of lesbians of color in France: activists, essayists, songwriters, singers, performers, artists, filmmakers, poets. An army of lovers that cannot fail. That can(not) speak. Here-now. Because. Labor of love. We don't know if it will ever be published. Last attempt by sisters earlier was a fiasco.

Many folk want to keep us off the pages. They like to keep all the pages white.

In 1989 France's first autonomous lesbian of color group, the 6 November Group: Lesbians out of Colonialism, Slavery and Racism, wrote this about their (non)reception: To them: "our words" are "an immense bruhaha, cry of savages. . . . As soon as we construct them, they are deconstructed."⁵³

In 2017. We are (still) not whom you imagine. We are (still) not those whom you (do not) hear. Erase. Make nonexistent.

We are here-now. Belong to ourselves.

Alive.

Other words, our words, soar, dance, play, circulate, among ourselves.

Free.

Emerging, flocking, scattering, converging. Across all so many pages like all so many skies.

You cannot kill.

You cannot stop.

So many birds in flight.

(Paris, April 2017)

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