

Fragment of “Can a mestizo asshole speak?” (2):

In her essay “The Mask: Colonialism, Memory, Trauma and Decolonization,” Grada Kilomba seeks to politically retell a repeatedly produced childhood memory of hers regarding a mask used by enslaved Black people upon order of their white owners so as to hinder them from eating cocoa and sugarcane in the plantations: “It was composed of a bit, placed inside the mouth of the Black subject, clamped between the tongue and the jaw, and fixed behind the head with two strings: one surrounding the chin and the second surrounding the nose and the forehead.”¹

Yet, Kilomba proceeds, more than the control of a white owner over the cocoa or sugarcane plantations, the mask unveils a much more violent effect: that of implementing mutism to the mouths of enslaved Black subjects, thus territorializing this organ as a place of torture. In this sense, it is rather a mask of speechlessness symbolizing the ever-brutal regime of silencing Black people in the context of colonial domination and, therefore, white colonization as a whole.

It is by territorializing the mouths of slaves as the place of speech taboo that the white colonizer ensures his control over the conceptual world of enslaving. In other words, silencing Black subjects allows the white colonial speech to consolidate itself as truth, without the interference of diverging speeches. The unfeasibility of the Black speech is the condition through which the white subject reproduces itself. In such a way that, on the racism landmark, a white subject depends on the arbitrary production of a Black subject as a silenced “Other” to be able to become, hence updating a wide range of binary formulas ensuing from the white/black binomial, such as good/bad, right/wrong, human/inhuman, rational/wild, in which the Black subject does not cease to be represented as bad, wrong, inhuman, and wild. Therefore, the Black subject is never at stake, being rather replaced by the dominating images and narratives on him/herself from a colonial perspective.

¹Grada Kilomba, “The Mask: Colonialism, Memory, Trauma and Decolonization,” in *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*, Münster: Unrast, 2010, p. 16.