

Mina Heydari-Waite
*In sleep it made itself present
to them*
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COLLECTIVE

Reworking the world's past from the very beginning
Hussein Mitha

Dreaming is my profession¹

– Mahmoud Darwish

In sleep it made itself present to them opens up a space that allows us to think collectively about dreams; a space where the sharing of dreams constitutes a sharing-of-the-world. In this (partly imaginary) space, dreams present urgent matter for a collective working-through and form the basis for mass action. Mina's work highlights the inadequacies of a Western psychoanalytic regime whose aim is geared towards individual emancipation: "what we think of as individual stress or private pains are actually social suffering and social pains - or social dreams. One way to neutralise them is to locate them inside individual people, to take their potency away and their collective power away."²

This statement, taken from a conversation between the artist and her mother, made me think about how the radical potential of dreams is strategically managed by capitalism. The project of Western psychoanalysis fulfils a capitalist intention, it subsumes the radical potential for dreaming and buries it within the personal story of the individual (implicitly bourgeois) dreamer. The significance of these dreams is limited to the enclosed field of the 'private life' of a discrete, heroic persona, rather than the political horizons of an oppressed collective. In this way, psychoanalysis files dreams under

'case history' rather than history; dreams are pacified and made ahistorical; "the history of the dream remains to be written",³ writes Walter Benjamin in 'Dream Kitsch' (1927). For Benjamin, a Marxist interpretation of history (historical materialism) must engage with dreams because "dreaming has a share in history."⁴

In a recent intervention 'Impermanence: On Frantz Fanon's Geographies', by the theorist Katherine McKittrick and her students at Queens University, Ontario, they write collectively about colonial geography and situate Frantz Fanon's recourse to dreaming as part of a strategy for and rehearsal of spatial liberation. They trace a vocabulary of geography through which Fanon is able to construct paradoxical possibilities and prospects of liberation at the heart of colonial situations. They write of places "that are nested in, yet cannot be fully defined by, the colonial imperative";⁵ sites where "one place holds multiple selves". They note Fanon's exclamation "I existed in triple",⁶ which one among many instances in his writing of an overdetermined psychic-social space, inhabited by the racialised, colonised subject. The dream, for Fanon, they write, "serves as a reminder of an unconstrained, decolonized, future in which the grasps of colonialism no longer limit movement or imagination."

For McKittrick and the group, "liberation is achieved through both the spatial occupation

of land and psychic spatialisation of anti-colonial thought.”⁷ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes of this rehearsive psychic spatialisation, of the “same old” dreams:

*I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonisation the colonised subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning.*⁸

A Fanonian, anti-colonial, psychic apparatus affirms the social function of dreaming and in doing so elides the distinction between dreaming and sleeping as a restorative activity. The dream subverts a colonial temporality as well as a capitalist labour regime (“between nine in the evening and six in the morning”) and points to those spaces which the coloniser cannot fully access. The colonised subject’s dream of freedom in space, has the potential to counter the coloniser’s whole narrative, while providing a simulation or rehearsal of revolutionary freedom. Dreaming is a political act for Fanon because “disalienation will come from refusing to consider their reality as definitive. [...] I have to rework the world’s past from the very beginning.”⁹

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*My refusal doesn’t try to dream up a new category. It is rather a refusal to accept that our predecessors’ dreams—not necessarily our parents’, but their parents’ or grandparents’—can no longer be ours, as if the three tenses of past, present, and future that separate us and fix us in different eras were not invented exactly for this purpose.*¹⁰

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s work *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* deeply informed and resonated with my reading of Mina’s work. Like Mina’s work, with its speculative-historical character, its sense of a shared world and its recourse to dreaming, *Potential History* roots its position in a politics of refusal to accept the coloniser’s version

of events. It refuses to accept imperialist reality as definitive and refuses to accept the fabrications of an imperial regime. It denies its victories as faits accomplis and won’t be beguiled by, or accept as natural, an imperialist temporality that divides dreams across eras and generations through rigid segregation of past, present and future.

Azoulay’s speculative emancipation from imperialism does not stem from a future oriented imagining of utopian visions, nor does it stem from grand revolutionary projects. Strangely, it is raised through returning to the dreams of predecessors, ancestors and antecedents; those who refused to submit to empire as well as those who might have refused or who might yet be tempted to and whose speculative, possible refusals imperialism has foreclosed; whose claims on life and the shared world imperialism says have ended. Refusing to consider their reality as definitive...*Potential History* instead refuses to acknowledge the outcomes of imperialism as irreversible, as it refuses to acknowledge the deft categorical reification of ‘violence’ into ‘history’ – an imperialist technology that seems to say ‘the violence has now ended’.

Through Azoulay then, even across a history segregated by imperialist temporality, we can find ourselves dreaming their ‘same old’ dreams. To me, what makes those dreams irresistible is their quotidian, rehearsive character. If capitalism and imperialism seek to fragment, individualise and pathologise experience to limit the collective and revolutionary potential of the collective who understand the historical significance of their dreams, then we must be willing to return to dreams, to rehearse their demands of joy in space and to act upon the political injunctions within them.

Endnotes

1. Mahmoud Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, Archipelago, 2011, p. 60
2. Mina Heydari-Waite in conversation with Hamideh Heydari-Waite, *In sleep it made itself present to them* (Collective, Edinburgh, 2021)
3. Walter Benjamin, 'Dream Kitsch', *Selected Writings vol 2*, Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 4
4. Ibid.
5. Katherine McKittrick, 'Impermanence: On Frantz Fanon's Geographies', *Antipode Online* (18/08/2021)
URL: <https://antipodeonline.org/2021/08/18/frantz-fanons-geographies/>
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans R Philcox). Grove Press, 2004, p.15
9. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (trans R Philcox). Grove Press, 2008, p. 201
10. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism*, Verso, 2019, p. xiv

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