

## FANON/LACAN: SITES OF INTERSECTION

*Derek Hook, Pittsburgh, USA*

DEREK HOOK is an Associate Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA and an Extraordinary Professor of Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria South Africa. He is the author of *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial*, *(Post)apartheid Conditions* and *Six Moments in Lacan*. [hookd@duq.edu]

### **ABSTRACT**

Three questions motivate this paper's investigation of various intersections between the work of Frantz Fanon and Jacques Lacan. Firstly, what hitherto under-explored references to Lacan's work are to be found in Fanon's earliest (recently translated) psychiatric work? Secondly, moving beyond the remit of explicit citation: what subtle conceptual parallels and affinities exist between the work of these two theorists? Thirdly, what contemporary re-articulations of Fanon's thought and political agendas are made possible via Lacanian theory? Exploring Fanon's earliest work shows that a number of Lacanian postulates exercised an influence on the young Martinican, including, amongst others: ideas of imaginary misrecognition, the paranoiac ego, the role of the image, and the notion of a historically-founded logic of madness. Reviewing the literature on Fanon-Lacan helps, furthermore, in foregrounding a series of often understated conceptual parallels between the two theorists, including: the priority afforded language and speech, the question of sociogeny, the role of social (or symbolic) structure, the notions of fantasy (Fanon's 'Negro myth') and of a social (or trans-individual) unconscious (as in Fanon's 'European collective unconscious'). A notable finding regards how contemporary theorists have applied Lacanian ideas in re-articulations of Fanon's thought concerns the predominance of the topic of racist temporality. There are thus greater possibilities for critical analysis to be found in conjoining Fanonian and Lacanian theory than has generally been acknowledged by Fanon scholars.

*Key words:* colonial fantasy, historical madness, interpellation, psychopolitical, racism, sociogeny, temporality

### *Introduction: Fanon by Lacanian Means...?*

Given the urgency with which the work of Frantz Fanon has been successively embraced by scholars within cultural studies (Alessandri, 1999; Hall, 1996), postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1986, 1994; McClintock, 1995; Said, 1993; Young, 1990;), Africana philosophy (Gordon, 2000; Henry, 2000), continental philosophy (Bernasconi, 2001; Bernasconi & Cook, 2003), psychology (Burman, 2019; Desai, 2014; Hook, 2011) and, more urgently yet, by rallying cries of decolonization sweeping through the academy particularly in (post)colonial contexts (Hoppe & Nichols, 2010; Gibson, 2011; More, 2014), it seems a timely juncture to review the role of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in articulations of Fanon's thought. This is not to attempt another periodization of Fanon's work in the style of Gates (1991), nor is it to assert a Lacanian analysis of race and racism in which Fanon plays only a minor, supporting role (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). Similarly, it is not to offer further commentary on the various historical examples of how and when Fanon utilized facets of Lacanian theory in *Black Skin White Masks* (Frosh, 2013; Khanna, 2003; Oliver, 2004, Vergès, 1997). I am proposing a different type of overview: one which foregrounds evident engagements with Lacan in the recently published Fanon literature (Gibson & Beneduce, 2017; Khalfa, 2018) and which then goes on to trace a succession of contemporary Lacanian articulations of Fanon (George, 2016; Marriott, 2018; Mbembe, 2017; Ward, 2015).

A critical overview of this sort is necessary not only because of the groundswell of recent literature developing such novel conjunctions and articulations (Burman, 2019; George, 2016; Marriott, 2018; Stephens, 2018; Ward, 2015), but – perhaps as importantly – because for a significant period much of the secondary literature on Fanon took a decidedly anti-Lacanian bias. Indeed, after the initial success of Homi K. Bhabha's (1986, 1994) innovative exploratory Lacanian readings of Fanon, Lacanian theory – perceived as Eurocentric (Gordon, 2015), de-politicizing (Oliver, 2004) overly psychological (Sekyi-Out, 1996), and all too distant from the revolutionary agendas of Fanon's work (Gibson, 1999, 2003b) – quickly became *persona non-grata* within Fanon scholarship. This general trend of dis-articulating the Fanon/Lacan relationship has had the result of dismissing the value of Lacanian theory as a prospective resource for political conceptualization, thus forestalling also the possibility of *furthering Fanon by Lacanian means*.

A focus on the recent history of the Lacan-Fanon relation is useful for another reason also. By tracing the themes and agendas that emerge in this literature we are able to grasp not only the prospect of a type of ‘Lacanian Fanonism’ to come, but to foreground a ‘meta-theoretical’ convergence of conceptual and political imperatives that would not otherwise come as clearly to light. We are, I would argue, approaching a new phase in the Lacan-Fanon relation, and foregrounding the most promising interventions occurring at the interface of Lacanian-Fanonian theory will enable us to better appreciate what novel conceptual horizons lie ahead. It seems that there are at least three prospective lines of enquiry we could pursue. Firstly, we could ask – via Fanon’s recently translated early writings published as *Alienation and Freedom* (Khalifa, 2018) – what hitherto under-explored references does Fanon make to Lacan prior to the publication of *Black Skin White Masks* (the latter being, as a rule, the focus of most examinations of Fanon’s use of Lacan)? Secondly, moving beyond the field of explicit citations, we could ask: what conceptual parallels and affinities exist between these two theorists? Thirdly, focusing more directly on work published in the last half dozen years: what contemporary re-articulations of Fanon’s thought and political agendas are made possible via Lacanian theory?

I propose to offer answers to each of these questions, and this paper is divided into three sections accordingly. Two provisos need to be added as regards my explorations of the Fanon-Lacan relation. Firstly, given the amount of literature investigating the Fanon-Lacan relation, I have opted to be selective rather than attempt an exhaustive exploration of the most recent literature.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, I have found it useful to move between reviewing the field broadly and – given the complexity of many of the ideas in question – adopting a ‘zoom-in’ reading strategy when it comes to the work of those scholars who have offered the most historically important and detailed work regarding Fanon’s use of Lacan.

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<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, I do not offer another exploration of how Fanon makes use of Lacan’s mirror stage (see Frosh (2013) for a good summary of the literature, but also Khanna (2003), Oliver (2005) and Vergès (1997)). Similarly, I do not add to the already considerable literature discussing Bhabha’s (1986, 1994) Lacanian readings of Fanon (Bird-Pollan, 2015; Gibson, 2003b; Greedharry, 2008; Moore-Gilbert, 1997).

## ***1. Early citations: Lacan in Fanon's earliest work***

We begin our exploration of the Fanon-Lacan relationship by turning to discussions of Fanon's earliest published work, only recently translated into English (Khalifa & Young, 2018).

### *1.1 Desire, image and discordance, or: Symbolic, imaginary and real in Fanon?*

Jean Khalifa's (2018) introduction to the recently published English translation of Fanon's doctoral thesis notes that Fanon devoted a section of his dissertation 'to the Lacanian theory of the pure psychogenesis of madness' and underlined 'Lacan's insistence on the social constitution of personality' (p. 171). In Fanon's thesis, Lacan is characterized – aptly enough – as 'the logician of madness', and Fanon approvingly cites Lacan's arguments that organic components, 'a deranged imagination, and conflicts beyond one's capacities do not suffice to cause madness' (Lacan cited in Fanon, 1951/2018, p. 262). One general conclusion reached by Fanon is succinctly stated: 'The social category of human reality, to which I personally attach so much importance, is one to which Lacan has been attentive' (1951/2018, p. 266).

Fanon goes on to make a series of thoughtful observations which demonstrate that he both grasped and appreciated how the young Lacan was attempting to re-conceptualise the psychiatric domain of psychopathology:

It seems to me that the essential value of Lacan's work resides in the definition he gives of desire...In the detailed analysis that he gives of the case of Aimé [e] [in Lacan's own doctoral dissertation], Lacan appears to conceive of psychosis as a cycle of behavior, such that the point is to...grasp the organizing mechanism of desire and its satisfaction... In effect, the vital experience in which the end of desire is recognized is essentially social in its origin, exercise and meaning. (Fanon, 1951/2018, p. 264)

The 'organizing mechanism of desire' would, of course, be of paramount importance throughout Lacan's career, and Fanon clearly grasps how the notion of desire both severs Lacanian psychoanalysis from biology and prioritizes the domain of the intersubjective and social. Lacan, indeed, is credited with devising a 'phenomenology of personality' (Fanon, 1951/2018, p. 265),

with the postulate of psychogenetic determinism (indeed with ‘giving the lie to the notion of constitution, which he considers as absolutely mythical’ (p. 266)), and with prioritizing ‘an intersubjectivist perspective on madness’ (p. 267). Each of these ideas would be of considerable importance to Fanon particularly inasmuch – as Khalifa (2018) stresses – they enabled him to reject the ethnopsychiatry of the Algiers School, founded precisely on the ideas of psychic *constitution*.

The role of the image (or, in the technical terms of psychoanalysis, the *imago*) in Lacan’s work is underlined by Fanon and linked both to the notion of the ego and – interestingly – the death drive. The image, in Lacan

becomes the fellow human in its human generality, for the adult, and in its intoxicated ingenuity, for the child. The author grounds the history of psychic life in the mirror phase. Within this phase, two instances join up: the primordial Ego, which remains ontologically unstable, and the existential complex engaged in a struggle, in which Freud...distinguished the death instinct... Thus, Lacan says: ‘there is an essential discordance within human reality.’ (Fanon, 1951/2018, p. 269)

The above is particularly notable inasmuch as it suggests that even the elusive concept of the real, which of course proved so important in Lacan’s later teaching, was, at least in this preliminary form (of a discordance or non-reconcilability of human subjectivity unto itself), something that Fanon had already understood.

Just as Fanon had recognized the importance to Lacan of the intersubjectivity of desire, the role of image (and the associated dynamics of the mirror stage, even if, as Vergès (1997) stresses, in the earliest stage of Lacan’s formulations circa 1938), he also appreciated the notion of *meconnaissance* or imaginary misrecognition (for Fanon ‘the phenomenon of misjudging’ (p. 267)) that is so characteristic of the Lacanian imaginary domain. Crucial also was the function of language:

‘Madness’ Lacan says, ‘is lived within the register of meaning. And...its metaphysical impact is revealed in that the phenomenon of madness is not separable from the

problem of meaning for being in general, that is to say, of language for human beings.’  
(Fanon, 1951/2018, p. 267)

With this cross-section of ideas – many of which will reappear when we consider current Lacanian re-articulations of Fanonian theory – we have evidence that Fanon grasped, even if in preliminary form, the rudiments of Lacan’s three registers, namely: the imaginary (as evinced in the concepts of the mirror stage, imaginary identification, *meconnaissance*), the symbolic (the pivotal role of language, desire, the intersubjective) and the real (death drive, the notion of essential discordance). This of course is not to say that Fanon fundamentally agreed with these concepts – his attitude to Lacan in his thesis is enthusiastic yet not uncritical – although it is to suggest that Fanon had a good deal more than a passing familiarity with such ideas. As we will see, Fanon’s fluency with many of the above ideas meant that he was able to anticipate many of the developments of Lacan’s later theorizing. More importantly perhaps, many of these ideas would prove foundational also to Fanon’s subsequent work.

### *1.2 The role of historical context and imaginary misrecognition*

Gibson & Beneduce’s *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics* (2017) offers insightful commentary on Fanon’s early, and hitherto neglected, psychiatric writings. Fanon’s interest overall in Lacan, say Gibson & Beneduce (2017),

can be summarized as having been motivated and organized around three subjects. The first is Lacan’s work on the ‘mirror stage,’...[t]he second is Lacan’s book on the ‘family complex’...which Fanon might have considered useful in deconstructing the universality of the Oedipus myth... [t]he third is Lacan’s work on psychic causality....All three of Lacan’s works contain decisive insights that Fanon drew from to build his own critical approach to alienation in [*Black Skin White Masks*].’ (p. 43)

In addition to this overview of those topics in Lacan that were most obviously influential on Fanon, Gibson and Beneduce (2017) identify three themes that played as crucial – if less obvious – a role in Fanon’s subsequent theorizations (some of which have already been noted):

Lacan's ideas of misrecognition (or *meconnaissance*), Lacan's preference for a historically located notion of psychic life, and the priority afforded by Lacan to the role of paranoia in human intersubjectivity.

'It is easy' say Gibson & Beneduce, 'to see why the dialectic between recognition and misrecognition placed at the heart of delusion by Lacan, was of interest to Fanon', certainly inasmuch as 'this played a part in his subversive analysis of alienation and persecutory ideas among the dominated' (p. 43). Presumably Gibson & Beneduce have in mind here Fanon's notions of a 'white-mask psychology' or 'lactification', that is, the unconscious wishes of the colonized to become white or somehow possess whiteness. Such investments, identifications or desires would be constitutively alienating, and Lacan's (1949/2006) idea that the ego's attempts at recognizing itself, and at gaining social recognition, are always essentially forms of *meconnaissance*, that is, *misrecognition* or *misunderstanding*, is thus given a new acuity and pertinence in the politically oppressive circumstances of colonial racism.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, given the foregoing account of the ego, which, for Lacan, is always mistaking (indeed, *misrecognizing*) itself for – or in – the images and others that serve as its most elementary points of identification, we can appreciate also the inherently paranoid (or delusional) quality of this ego. If 'I is other' and 'other is I', as is indeed the case in Lacan's mirror stage, then what the other is getting up to, what they are thinking is always, troublingly, to do with *me*, the perceiving ego. What Lacan treats as an inherent quality of the ego might thus again be profitably applied to the colonial realm, where the political realities of what various racial others have in mind in respect of me might rightfully be characterized as paranoid. Fanon's (1961/1990) later assertion, in *The Wretched of the Earth* that 'there is no native who does not dream, at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place' (p. 30), and not one settler who does fear, just as frequently, the prospect of the native's violent reprisals, could be said to build on, and add the vital historical context of colonial domination to, Lacanian ideas of the ego as both paranoid of and never fully separable from its others.

This discussion of the ego's misrecognition also sheds light on the question of psychical causality noted briefly above. Whereas an influential French psychiatrist like Henri Ey had

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<sup>2</sup> Fanon was not of course alone in considering the prospective value of the Lacanian notion of misrecognition for the political realm. Louis Althusser (1969/1971) famously applied Lacanian concepts – primarily that of the imaginary – to the task of conceptualizing ideology, as in his well-known assertion that 'Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence' (p. 109).

considered delusional beliefs the result of a type of deficit or lack of control, Lacan, stresses Fanon (1951/2018), approached such delusional beliefs as predicated on the dynamics of misrecognition/*meconnaissance* (Gibson & Beneduce, 2017). While properly delusional beliefs presumably represented a more extreme version of imaginary misrecognition, this imaginary recognition was, for Lacan, to be expected of every ego and should not be viewed as necessarily psychopathological. We can appreciate then the value of such ideas for Fanon, who could now argue that the senses of persecution, alienation and even delusion caused within the context of colonial relations in dominated people were not, as they might have been for Ey, the result of constitutional deficits, or, for colonial psychiatry, inherent inferiorities. By contrast, these are structural qualities of *any* ego, which clearly would be hugely exacerbated in particular historical situations such as the oppressive context of settler-colonialism.

Lacan's work on psychical causality took issue with a trans-historical or universalist understanding of the Oedipus complex, say Gibson and Beneduce (2017). Fanon welcomed Lacan's assertion that 'the Oedipus complex did not appear with the history of man... but at the threshold of historical history' (2006, p. 150). It is of particular significance that Fanon used Lacan's ideas as part of a critique of more doctrinal psychoanalytic concepts: 'Here Fanon found important insights for a model of psychic development that was anchored to culture and history...and moved beyond Freud's ontogeny' (Gibson & Beneduce, p. 44).<sup>3</sup> Certain of Lacan's critical insights then were deployed by Fanon precisely as a critique of more reductive versions of Freudianism.

'Without doubt', note Gibson & Beneduce,

Lacan's efforts to understand the architecture of delusion and the sense of madness pushed Fanon to discuss Lacan's theory in his dissertation... The search for a historically founded logic of madness, and the singular definition of history as the 'systematic valorization of collective complexes' was decisive in Fanon's reading of Lacan (2017, pp. 42-43).

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<sup>3</sup> There is a degree of irony thus in critics such as Oliver (2004) who take Lacanian analysis to task for its ostensibly universalizing tendencies. While there may be some truth in such claims – in Lacan's 1950's gravitation to structuralism and in the tendency of Lacanian theory to offer structural accounts, some such universalization may seem implicit – the irony is to be found in the fact that Lacan serves as something of an inspiration for Fanon precisely in contesting the ahistorical claims of psychoanalysis.



The phrase ‘historically founded logic of madness’ points to a crucial common denominator between the two psychiatric thinkers. It pertains as much to Fanon’s own subsequent theorizations of the pathogenic nature of the *colonial condition* (an approach, in other words, which favors *sociogenesis* over psychogenesis (Hallward, 2011)) as it does to Lacan’s own preference for viewing disruptions of psychic life via a detailed consideration of the symbolic order through – and by means of which – subjectivity becomes at all possible. Burman (2019) nicely highlights this prospective parallel between the two thinkers when she observes that

Lacan’s linguistic reading of Freud, elaborating how ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’, has offered a route for social theorists to ground a psychodynamic account of subjectivity within the symbolic order, and more particularly within specific social and material conditions, that enable psychoanalysis to offer a critical reading of that order (as a racist, heteropatriarchal order, for example), rather than an endorsement of it (p. 90).

We have then a much overlooked critical parallel in the work of both theorists. Via Lacan’s attention to the symbolic order (as manifest in very specific historical and material sites) and Fanon’s constant reiteration of the colonial context as an over-riding factor in how one explores the psychological life of the colonized, we can no longer permit a form of psychoanalytic engagement that focalizes the intra-psychic as cut off from the historical, the political, the socio-symbolic.

Gibson & Beneduce conclude their thoughts on Lacan’s influence on Fanon’s thinking as follows:

Lacan’s interest in the social dimensions of the unconscious offered Fanon an important perspective...to interpret ‘inferiority complexes’ in the Martinican society... ....Lacan’s work on paranoia (which he called a ‘phenomenology of madness’) might have also attracted Fanon’s attention: namely his interest in understanding the genealogy of delirium...in social and political terms... Lacan’s doctoral thesis...offered Fanon further insights with which to build a political context-related phenomenology of psychic development and mental disorders. (Gibson & Beneduce, 2017, p. 44).

Suffice to say, Fanon had more than a passing competence with many of these ideas. We can go further. The young Fanon, I think it is safe to say, was inspired by Lacan's earliest work. We shouldn't therefore be overly surprised if there are some conceptual resonances or affinities, moments when Lacanian ideas appear, directly or tacitly, intentionally – or otherwise – later in Fanon's work. Neither should we be surprised if certain legitimate conceptual extensions – augmentations, supplementations of Fanon – might be possible via forms of Lacanian thinking, even in contexts where it is obvious that Fanon is dialoguing with other philosophical sources (the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, for example).

## 2. *Conceptual parallels and affinities*

The second of the three areas of enquiry that we are focusing on in our exploration of the Fanon-Lacan relationship concerns the conceptual parallels, overlaps and affinities that can be said to exist between the two theorists. So, having provided a general overview of Lacanian themes in the early Fanon, let us now turn to a series of shared themes that have tended to remain underdeveloped in the literature.

### 2.1 *Speech, language, and the symbolic Other*

In Jonathan Lee's (2017) unpublished paper 'From Delirium to Confession: The Early Lacan's Influence on Frantz Fanon's Revolutionary Psychiatry,' Lee argues that 'Fanon's Lacanian orientation' is evident in 'his consistent emphasis on the importance of language both in the work of psychotherapy and in the analysis of the socio-political realities of colonialism and the struggle against colonialism' (p. 6). Lee supplies two examples to support his contention. The first is Fanon's declaration, on the first page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, that

We attach a fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language and consequently consider the study of language essential for providing us with one element in understanding the black man's dimension of being-for-others, it being understood that to speak is to exist absolutely for the Other (Fanon, 1952/1986, p. 1).

The second example is drawn from *The Wretched of the Earth* where Fanon insists that confession is – strictly speaking – impossible for the colonized subject in the colonial realm. Paraphrasing Fanon’s argument, Lee (2017) stresses that the successful speech act of confession

requires the rich and well-defined context of a shared language in relation to which a confession can be meaningful. In the colonial context, there is no such language shared by the colonizer and the colonized...no act of confession is really possible’ (p. 7).

For both the colonizer, who sees the colonized merely as an inveterate liar, and for the colonized who sees the colonial regime’s justice as wholly illegitimate in the first place, there can be no establishing of a consensual truth – no shared symbolic Other, in Lacanian terms – through which any viable intersubjectivity of confession can be established.

Now while it is of course true that Fanon’s emphasis on the importance of language may have been influenced by thinkers other than Lacan – Sartre being an obvious contender – it does seem telling that Lacan’s would have been the most prominent proponent of the essential role of speech in clinical encounters. Lacan would also have been the foremost advocate of the importance of a given culturally-situated language (again, a shared symbolic Other) as a means of mediating intersubjectivity. Lee (2017) makes the argument well:

Fanon’s theoretical analyses regularly foregrounded the central importance of the human intersubjectivity that is only possible within the framework of a shared language...Fanon’s theoretical work and practice (both psychiatric and political, to the extent these two categories can be distinguished) presupposes a continuing commitment to the fundamentally Lacanian claim that ‘speech engages the very being’ of the human being.... Fanon’s insistence on the importance of sociogenesis presupposes something like an account of psychogenesis as mediated by speech and language (p. 8).

This establishes an important parallel – indeed, a shared foundation – between Lacan and Fanon. As Burman (2019) notes, Fanon, like Lacan, ‘recognizes the necessity of language both for subjectivity...and access to the social (existing for the other), while also highlighting how this is what installs racialized meanings and inferiorized subjectivities’ (p. 91). This goes some way to

explaining why the opening chapter of Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* is focused on language, a fact which, given the more obviously phenomenological focus of latter chapters (the ostensibly 'more primary' concerns of lived experience, bodily schemata, the gaze, etc.) understandably strikes some first-time readers as a little odd.

## 2.2 Lacanian sociogeny....?

Reviewing the literature on Fanon's uses and/or critique of psychoanalysis (Bulhan, 1985; Gibson, 2003a; Greedharry, 2008, Macey, 1999), there is a central theme that cannot be ignored: the idea that Fanon categorically rejects Freud's ontogeny in favor of a properly *sociogenic* perspective. Unfortunately, it is often the case in the secondary literature that Fanon's critique of 'Freud's ontogenetic reductionism' (Bulhan, 1985, p. 72) is read as a dismissal of all ontogenetic and phylogenetic issues, and indeed, as a rejection of psychoanalysis *tout court*. A Lacanian perspective on this issue can, I think, prove critically fruitful. Let us proceed cautiously however in exploring this debate, following the lead of Marilyn Nissin-Sabat (2010), whose careful clarification of what Fanon's sociogeny entails come as a welcome corrective to those who would seemingly eradicate individual and psychological questions from the purview of a sociogenic analysis.

To be clear, Freud's ontogeny has – and not without good reason – been equated with psychological reductionism, depoliticization and a neglect of the societal, historical and political circumstances, particularly so in the colonial domain (Bulhan, 1985; Gibson, 2003c, Parker, 2004; Taylor, 2010). Such arguments are very much in line with Fanon's well-known attack on Octave Mannoni, whose *Prospero & Caliban* (1950/1964) exemplifies the reduction of the political factors of colonial oppression to the internal domain of psychical conflicts and/or dispositions. There can be little doubt: such a heavy-handed ontogenetic and psychologizing approach not only sidelines but in effect camouflages – even implicitly justifies – the structural force of antiblack racism and colonial oppression.

All this being said, if the turn to sociogeny is equated with a wholehearted rejection of the psychological and/or psychoanalytic, then problems begin to emerge. Many who have been inspired by Fanon's insistence on sociogeny as a critique of psychology – take Bulhan's (1985) work as an example – come very close, I think, to risking a type of *sociological* or even *political*

reductionism. That is to say, in attempting to grasp the full extent of the structural role of oppression on the psyche, clinicians sometimes run the risk of not adequately exploring the intricate ways in which individual subjects have understood and (possibly *unconsciously*) internalized such structures. The irony of this situation is that the attempt to be fully aware of the ostensibly determining role of antiblack/colonial structures upon the psyche, might be profoundly limiting clinically, at least in the sense that clinicians may end up bypassing the agency of those who are suffering.<sup>4</sup> To sideline all psychological considerations, to bypass an analysis of the particularity of the psychic impact of political oppression on given individuals, would be to miss altogether the fact that Fanon was – and in some senses always remained (Taylor, 2010) – a psychiatrist.

The above concerns are shared by Marilyn Nissim-Sabat (2010) who clarifies that sociogeny ‘is Fanon’s term for the process whereby social structures and meanings, including the ideology of racial inferiority, are formed and internalized, resulting in self-negation’ (Nissim-Sabat, 2010, p. 42). Sociogeny, she insists, needs to be differentiated both from phylogeny (which concerns the evolution of the species) and ontogeny (the progressive development of the individual). Fanon’s concept of epidermalization – glossed by Nissim-Sabat as the process whereby the projection of racist ideologies onto black skin comes to be psychically internalized, leading to the internalization of inferiority – stands here as an exemplary case of sociogeny. It is important, she continues, that Fanon describes and explains sociogeny in terms of the effect on *individual* psychology of socio-economic processes. Why? Precisely because ‘social process leading to black alienation affects...individual human beings as individual in both their intrapsychic and intersubjective or social existence (Nissim-Sabat, 2010, p. 43). Hence, Fanon’s critique of Freud

is not that the later saw the development of the individual as the object of psychoanalytic work, for, as a psychiatrist, Fanon worked with both individuals and groups; rather, it was that in so doing Freud at the same time radically excluded sociogeny, with respect to either origin or cure. (p. 43)

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<sup>4</sup> This is one way of reading McClintock’s (1995) warning that to read Fanon as presenting a purely formal (which is to say *exclusively theoretical*) psychoanalysis ‘risks foreclosing precisely those suggestive tensions that animate....the most subversive elements in his work’ (p. 361)

So, whereas a critic like Bulhan (1985) is certainly right to follow Fanon in insisting upon the political and material conditions that underlie historical instances of psychopathology, he arguably fails to follow Fanon in thinking how such a ‘psycho-political’ (Lebeau, 1998; Hook, 2011; Marriott, 2018) relation works, as it were, *both ways*. Anne McClintock is thus right in insisting that

Relations between the individual unconscious and political life are, I argue, neither separable from each other nor reducible to each other....they comprise crisscrossing and dynamic mediations, reciprocally and untidily transforming each other, rather than duplicating a relation of structural analogy. (p. 361)

We need to bear in mind that racist structure is – as Lacanian psychoanalysis would insist – also necessarily *psychically mediated*. To put this idea in more explicitly Lacanian terms, we could say – following Hudson (2013) in his own Lacanian engagement with the Fanonian idea of the colonial unconscious – that the colonial symbolic undoubtedly exerts a powerful and even determining influence on its subjects. Nevertheless, we require a further analytical term, a concept linking the social/structural/historical domain and the subject. The Lacanian name for the intermediary area of how this oppressive symbolic order is particularized for each subject would be – still following Hudson (2013) – ‘the colonial big Other’. Fanon’s turn to sociogeny is, I would argue, fundamentally compatible with Lacan’s stressing of the role of the symbolic order, and the Other (or, in Lacanian shorthand ‘the signifier’) in the clinical realm.

Taking a slightly different tack: if we jettison the notion of the unconscious, as David Macey (1999a, 2000) so often seems to read Fanon as urging us to do, then we lose an awareness of *the psychic life* of power. This is arguably why a Fanonian project of decolonization can – or should – never jettison psychoanalysis, at least insofar as the latter provides a means of uprooting the subjective and unconscious dimensions of oppression. After all, it is Fanon himself who declares that ‘[a]s a psychoanalyst I must help my patient “*consciousnessize*” his unconscious, to no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification [whitening], but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure’ (1952/2008, p. 80).

One of the foremost recent commentators on Lacanian/psychoanalytic re-readings of Fanon, David Marriott (2018), offers a further insight on what would be lost to Fanonian forms of analysis if we were to excise all psychoanalytic conceptualization from his work:

Fanon constantly wants to discover a reading of culture that is psychopolitical, but a psychopolitics that, *in its analysis of unconscious fantasy and colonial reality*,...show[s] how racist fantasy can not only be fully integrated and institutionalized, but remains a kind of traumatic – albeit disavowed – memory *in the unconscious life of the colonized* (p. 70, added emphasis).

To insist on the role of sociogeny in the clinical psychotherapeutic domain is, as Lee (2017) avers, to question what medium of the given sociogenesis might be clinically applied and – more than just this – *prioritized* as a vehicle of the treatment. This is not, I should add, merely to insist upon a shared cultural background or language between clinician and patient (although this would, no doubt, help). Neither is it merely to foreground the importance of the particularity of the patient’s signifiers, of *how* the patient speaks (although again, this would certainly be clinically beneficial). It is to consider the patient’s *relationship* to the cultural situation (in Lacanian terms, to the symbolic order, ‘the big Other’), a relationship necessarily mediated both by salient social and political factors and by the particularities of fantasy and transference.

### 2.3 Racism as ‘real fantasy’

Having stressed that racism is not reducible to the psychological for Fanon, we should nevertheless recall that one of the challenges Fanon faced in *Black Skin White Masks* was accounting for the omnipresence and inescapability of racial (and of course racist) consciousness in the colony. As House (2005) puts it: ‘the colonial order’s culturalist assumptions and racializing processes are internalized by everyone in these societies’ (p. 51). This is, in part, no doubt, an issue of discourse and representation. The pervasiveness of racism as a cultural schema that over-rides, indeed, over-determines individual experience is part of what made Fanon’s work so important to critical theorists of race, discourse theorists and cultural studies scholars in the 1980s and 1990s (Alessandri, 1999, Hall, 1996; McClintock, 1995). Fanon, however, is

interested in more than the content of discourse or a critique of dominant representational forms; he is concerned also with what underlies and fundamentally arranges such understandings and depictions, in what guarantees their repetition.

Fanon makes us understand that we need to take seriously not just that racism operates as a regime of representation, but that it possesses a formidable affective intensity, that there is enormous libidinal investment in racist stereotypes. Stephen Frosh makes this point in his consideration of how Fanon utilizes psychoanalytic notions of sexuality in his theorization of colonial racism. Fanon, he says, provides a description of a ‘libidinally inflected racialized passion...[which] is a necessary component of an account...of why colonialism and racism are such inflamed, so personally *felt*, structures’ (Frosh, 2013, p. 148). ‘Racism’, Frosh continues, in a striking phrase, ‘is made viral by this’ (p. 148).

So, while Fanon’s work is often taken as a foreshadowing of Edward Said’s (1978) discursive notion of Orientalism, I think his theoretical concerns might better be described as focused on a political mode of *fantasy*. Fanon, is, I think, trying to conceptualize an obdurate yet mobile set of intersecting stereotypes and racist presumptions that come to function as effectively automatic, as prior to rational thoughts. Consider Fanon’s descriptions of how blackness, within the colonial setting exists as ‘a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs’ and of ‘a thousand details, anecdotes, stories...woven [into] prejudices, myths, the collective attitudes of a given group’ (Fanon, cited in Hudson, 2013, p. 265). This is a latent, pre-propositional type of social comprehension that situates the colonial subject in reference to questions of difference and identity. The clue that Fanon (1952/1986) is mapping racist fantasy in his description of colonial racism lies in what seem to be the exaggerated claims and (seemingly) outlandish examples he provides (‘The negro...is a penis’ (p. 170), ‘The negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual’ (p. 51) etc.). These are associative trains of thought, or in Lacanian terms – chains of signifiers – fantasmatic thoughts that are not consciously acknowledged. This, I think, is what Fanon offers in his attention to what he calls ‘the Negro myth’: an outlining of the fantasy frame, the configuring parameters of racist ideation which are not themselves explicitly stated but nonetheless condition racial comprehension.

The necessity of the concept of fantasy in Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* is also – although perhaps unintentionally – reiterated by Macey (1999b). Even as Macey attempts to de-



emphasize the role of psychoanalysis in Fanon's work – citing Fanon's rejection of psychoanalytic interpretations of dreams of the colonized in which rifles are read as phallic symbols – he is nonetheless forced to concede that Fanon uses the notion of 'real fantasies' (1999a, p. 103). Macey's attempt to minimize the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy in Fanon's work leads him to rely on a false opposition between fantasy and trauma. For Macey, psychoanalysis routinely speaks of fantasy, whereas Fanon speaks of the role of (real, historical, political) trauma. Whereas psychoanalysis routinely speaks of fantasy, Macey (2000) tells us, Fanon by contrast speaks of the role of (real, historical, political) trauma. Psychoanalytically, of course – certainly for Lacan – trauma is intimately related to fantasy. What is effectively traumatic is not simply an isolated act of violence (for example), but how such an event shatters a person's subjective alignment in the world, how it disrupts the fantasy framework of values and desires that ensures the consistency of their everyday psychic experience. To imply that explanations by way of trauma can be opposed to accounts of fantasy as Macey (2000) appears to do is arguably not to have adequately explored the nuances of the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy.

### *3. Contemporary Lacanian re-articulations*

We have examined Fanon's earliest citations of Lacan in addition to identifying a series of conceptual parallels existing between the work of the two theorists. Now we consider some recent Lacanian efforts to re-articulate aspects of Fanon's work. I focus here on contributions made by Ward (2015), George (2016) and Marriott (2018) because they share a certain family resemblance, paying attention, as they do, to the effects of racializing temporality.<sup>5</sup>

#### *3.1 Resistance via the signifier*

In a sympathetic critique of Bhabha's Lacanian readings of Fanon, Ward (2015) stresses that Bhabha overlooks the significance of subjective freedom. Ward draws on Lacan in order to think a mode of resistance which, whilst effective, need not be wholly conscious, and which must be

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<sup>5</sup> Given the limits of space here, I will reserve a discussion of the contributions of Burman (2019), Hudson (2013), Stephens (2018) and Basu Thakur (2019) for a subsequent publication.

read within the relation of the black subject to the signifier. Importantly, in Ward's example – which I have adapted – the signifier in question is one with a potentially racist loading, such as a white subject asking a black person, in a white dominated space, 'Can I help you?', which of course brings with it the implication, 'What are you doing here?'

Ward (2015) draws on three key Lacanian postulates in developing his argument. The first is the notion that the subject is alienated in the signifier, that is, the idea that the subject needs to take on the language, laws and social norms of their cultural milieu if they are to communicate with others. This means that they will – to some extent at least – be overdetermined by such signifiers, *spoken by* them. Nonetheless, the subject will never be completely identified or harmonized with the signifiers spoken by the Other. We are thus more alienated in our use of language than we realize, and it is this very over-determination – paradoxically – which opens up a margin of freedom, because we never coincide completely with the Other's signifiers that we are forced to use in our attempts at communication.

The second key Lacanian element in Ward's conceptualization is the idea of subjectivity itself as a fundamentally paranoid structure. We should read paranoia here – as discussed above – not as a psychopathology, but as a necessary feature of the ego (even if, needless to say, it is exacerbated by radical asymmetries of power in the colonial context). Paranoia connotes the ego's constant inter-relations with others, and the ongoing questioning of what the other does and means. Ward (2015) hence argues that 'a particular position of resistance for the black man is structurally mediated by his paranoia' (p. 233). Furthermore – and perhaps surprisingly – it is by virtue of this mediation that he finds himself 'in a position to freely assume his new orientation as a potential subject of resistance' (p. 233).

A third Lacanian idea mobilized by Ward is that of repetition automatism, that is, Lacan's re-articulation of Freud's notion of repetition compulsion in which repetition is understood not as a psychological operation but as a result of the symbolic order itself. Repetition automatism, in other words, results from the fact that subjects necessarily draw on signifiers – indeed, chains of signifiers – in order to express and understand themselves. There is thus a type of agency within the symbolic chain itself. An utterance repeated in different situations has differing effects, and these effects 'can give the subject an orientation with both purpose and direction' (Ward, 2015, p. 235).

With this backdrop in place, we can illustrate the three locations or positionings that, for Ward, Fanon's black man might be taken through by the signifier. We begin with the black man's impulsive *reaction* to the signifier ('Can I help you?'):

the black man feels the anxiety of border control, of judgement; this position of emotional discomfort leads him to assume the position of one who does not belong in a foreign space. In response, the black man turns away. This first subjective positioning...[is] of non-belonging...Examples of such a reaction...abound in Fanon's work (Ward, 2015, p. 235).

In the second stage of Ward's Lacanian schema we need to consider the subject's *response* to the signifier. We need to consider what occurs as a result of the signifier impacting the subject, how the subject repositions themselves as a result of the signifier's repetition:

From the basis of his or her action, set up in the first stage [that of turning away]...the signifier repeats itself, not as nonbelonging but as...a self-directed orientation: *belonging*. To not belong means to belong to the group of those who do not belong (Ward, 2015, p. 236)

We see here the black subject's *will* to rectify their self-image, to negotiate the paranoia that besets them. This is a self-directed resituating of the subject that Ward sees – to cite two examples – both in the growth of diasporic communities and in Fanon's wish in *Black Skin White Masks*, to reclaim, via negritude, his blackness.

The third stage in the schema implies a repeated *vacillation* between the above positions of non-belonging and belonging to the point at which the black subject casts off the hopes of both these possibilities. We bear witness thus to 'a relinquishing of all group-based self representation[s]' a casting off of such ideas 'at the level of *thought*' (Ward, 2015, p. 236). In Fanon's work this is the moment of giving up on negritude, of jettisoning notions of a black essence as a result of the realization that there is no one singular form but instead a heterogeneity of blackness. It is thus via the repetition automatism of the signifier and the subject's paranoiac reaction to the signifier, that a shift toward a reflective attitude becomes possible. Ward (2105) offers 'these three stages of non-belonging – *reaction*, *will* and *thought* – as a potential subjective

trajectory in an effort to construct a notion of freedom that does not require conscious deliberation' (p. 236). In this model, Ward (2015) claims, active resistance arises inherently as an effect of subjugation itself. A viable sense of political agency thus need not be the result of a consciously developed response. It need not follow from a considered political outlook or even from a conscious grievance at injustice.

Ward can be credited with developing a Fanonian-Lacanian account of resistance, one which appreciates both the agency inherent in the symbolic realm itself (drawing here on a type of structuralist logic) and the subjective effects brought about by the repetition of the signifier (that is, the Lacanian move of considering the *subject-inducing* impact of the symbolic order). What is instructive about this model is that political resistance can be situated exclusively neither on the side of the symbolic nor on the side of the individual conscious political actor – a point which echoes both Marriott's (2018) insistence on the *psycho-political* and the Lacanian emphasis Seshadri-Crookes (2001) places on imaginary *and* symbolic dimensions of racism. This of course echoes the critical double imperative that Fanon (1952/1986) issues repeatedly in *Black Skin White Masks*. This imperative is to insist that psychiatric, psychoanalytic and psychological approaches need go further in the direction of *socio*-diagnosis (considering the structural, historical and socio-political underpinnings of the psychic) and that, correspondingly, we nonetheless still keep in mind – as the case-studies in *The Wretched of the Earth* affirm – not only the individuality, but the individualized psychological contents and processes of those suffering the psychic life of power.<sup>6</sup>

Detractors might claim that the agency Ward (2015) articulates is an odd agency indeed, inasmuch as it is neither fully conscious nor exclusively subject-driven. As such it poses problems. We could ask: how might such an agency be effectively coordinated? How might this potentiality of resistance – latent, less than fully conscious – reach a tipping-point of active realization? How, furthermore, might it be utilized as a component of strategic

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<sup>6</sup> As stated earlier, Fanon's (1952/1986) dismissal of crude Freudian interpretations of the dreams of the colonized is often cited as evidence of his jettisoning of psychoanalysis. Interestingly however, while clearly angered by such interpretations ('The rifle of the Senegalese soldier is not a penis but a genuine rifle' (p. 106)), Fanon does not reject the clinical use of dreams as such, insisting rather that dreams must be approached in their proper context. Consider his choice of words: 'What must be done is to restore...[the] dream to its proper time, and this time is the period during which eighty thousand natives were killed...and to its proper place, and this place is an island of four million people' (1952/1986, p. 104).

political action? <sup>7</sup> Relevant as these concerns might be, Ward's Fanonian-Lacanian theorization seems to offer an improvement on Bhabha's (1994) previous ostensibly a-subjective model of resistance, just as it reminds us that the unconscious and the subject's relation to the signifier (or the subject's relation to the symbolic Other) have a crucial role to play in effective forms of political resistance.

### 3.2 *The temporality of racist interpellation*

Sheldon George (2016) presents us with a second Lacanian re-articulation of Fanon. He utilizes the distinction between *tuché* and *automaton*, two Aristotelian terms that Lacan (1979) draws on in his *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* to distinguish between two modes of disruptive temporality. This distinction is sometimes glossed as the difference between *chance* and *accident*, or as the distinction between the unexpected event as it occurs in respect of a subject (*tuché*), and as it occurs in respect of an object (*automaton*). As seems evident however, both terms imply a repetition.

*Automaton* is described by Lacan (1979) as 'the return, the coming back, the insistence of the sign' (pp. 54-55), which implies that it is an element of a broader system that has the capacity for repetition. *Tuché* is quite different. Lacan (1979) speaks of *tuché*, as 'the encounter with the real' which implies a foregoing 'missed encounter' and which first presented itself within psychoanalysis 'in the form of trauma' (p. 53). This is no doubt a reference to Freud's notion of deferred action (*nachträglichkeit*), the idea, in other words, that what is experienced as traumatic necessarily entails, as a condition of its traumatic possibility, an earlier yet typically forgotten predisposing event or memory that has rendered the subject in some ways vulnerable. *Tuché* then, as 'the real as encounter' presents itself in

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Lacanian clinician Bruce Fink (2014) has recently argued, in his aptly titled *Against Understanding* that a successful psychoanalytic cure requires neither conscious insight nor overt understanding of underlying issues. More often than not, he argues, these typically celebrated ideals of psychotherapeutic efficacy in fact inhibit effective psychological change. It is tempting thus to suggest that, as Ward (2015) seemingly implies, effective political resistance may likewise bypass deliberative conscious insights and intellectual understandings.

‘the form of that which is unassimilable’ (Lacan, 1979, p. 53), it is traumatic, and, by the same token, it disrupts a fantasy.

With the above distinction in mind, let us turn back to George, who revisits Fanon’s response to the well-known moment of racist interpellation (‘Look, a Negro!’) in *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon’s (1952/1986) first reaction to this unexpected and unwelcome interpellation is to treat it ‘an external stimulus that flickered over me as I passed by’ (p. 111). This flickering, says George (2016), is our first indication of the *tuché*:

It is a gentle touch, if you will, whose power is not fully registered at first. However the hail creates a recognition, a responsibility, in Fanon, an ownership of something that demands he pay homage... [This interpellation brings with it a] weight [which] marks the initiation of the automaton, ‘the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs’ that imposes upon Fanon a racial identity grounded in the traumatic history of slavery. (p. 61)

There is something of an ‘echo chamber effect’ to this interpellation. An external event, a type of wounding, becomes an internal event (by means of its subjective impact), and this subjective impact, inasmuch it is tied to a broader system of signifiers, *further* extends the wounding. It does so because the signifier, as part of a network of signifiers, has a reverberation effect. It’s insistent momentum sets in play an array of associated signifiers and thereby memories, stereotypes, historical events, etc. As George (2016) explains:

Fanon’s confrontation with the signifier n[-----] forces him to accept a position in a pre-established signifying chain that unfolds through the historical lineage of this word... The automaton initiated externally by the other of the Symbolic comes to dominate Fanon’s psyche, producing through the repetition of its signifiers the *tuché* as an encounter with personal lack that becomes the very means of establishing Fanon’s identity as fundamentally racial (p. 61).

It helps to recall that Althusser’s (1969/1971) notion of interpellation refers to the event in which a subject finds themselves caught in the structure of recognition. By virtue of the call-and-

response form of interpellation the subject is impelled not only to respond to a call, but to acknowledge themselves as *who* or *what* they have been categorized in that call. Bearing this in mind, we can appreciate what George (2016) helps us to better understand. The racist interpellation is an initially wounding subjective moment ('Look, a Negro!'), which then – to reiterate – echoes in two ways. It echoes, firstly, subjectively, within the structure of recognition (at the level of Lacan's imaginary) and then secondly, as automaton, by virtue of the associated set of historical signifiers to which it is linked (at the level of Lacan's symbolic).

By highlighting the symbolic dimension, George (2016) gives us an impression of the force – the automaticity one might say – of symbolic interpellation. We have here also a sense of how Levi Strauss's concept of symbolic efficacy – an idea of importance to Lacan himself – might be applied to the colonial setting: precisely so as to highlight the reiterative agency of the racist signifiers. In other words, once significations of race and racism start to play across the field of signification, they pick up momentum and *themselves become agentic* in the sense of engendering types of understanding and experiences of the world.

This utilization of Lacanian terms helps thus not only to understand the temporality of the racist interpellation (with its combination of *tuché* and *automaton* modes of repetition), but also the multiple levels of the traumatic effect thereby induced. George (2016) puts it well:

...the traumatic encounter produces a void, a Real gap in the universe of meaning, a lack around which subjectivity must resuture itself...[this lack] is replaced for Fanon by the automaton that now racially defines him...binding him to a racial identity...  
Unsutured from a more than racial self, Fanon can only reconstitute his identity and maintain his subjectivity through a resuturing [of black racial identity] that lacerates the bodily ego. (pp. 61-62)

George makes a further addition here. In his Lacanian temporalization of what we might call the logical times of a racist interpellation, he stresses, as we have seen, how the traumatic impact of such an event at the subjective level (*tuché*) is redoubled by the repetitive effects of the signifying system (*automaton*). However, the shock wave of such an event also incurs a type of bodily impact. While the bodily is often understood (via the role of the body-image and an increasingly ordered sense of corporeal experience) as aligned to the Lacanian imaginary, there

is clearly something here of the *real* also, in the sense of ego and bodily fragmentation that Fanon (1952/1986) captures so vividly in the image of dismemberment ‘What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood’ (p. 112) This leads to a further question. While we do not have the space to develop a sufficient response to this question here, it is one that I have addressed elsewhere (Hook, 2018), namely: how might a Lacanian notion of the bodily real be utilized alongside phenomenological and existing psychodynamic narratives to provide a novel perspective of racial embodiment?

### 3.3 Colonial untimeliness

Interestingly, David Marriott (2018), like George (2016), also has recourse to Lacan’s *tuché* and *automaton* couplet in his exploration of temporality in Fanon’s work. Marriott’s thoughts in this respect allow us to circle back to our earlier discussion of sociogeny. In contrast to the notion that Fanon’s sociogenetic account is necessarily antithetical to psychoanalysis, Marriott (2018) argues that ‘psychoanalytic theory is essential to sociogeny’ (p. 69). He continues: ‘it is Freud’s reading of fate and accident (or, in Lacan’s terms, *tuché* and *automaton*)’, or more directly yet ‘Freud’s notion of *nachträglichkeit* [deferred action/retroaction which] allows Fanon to explore, politically and ethically, the psychic and corporeal affects of colonialism’ (p. 68). Here it is crucial to reiterate that in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon embarks on a reading of colonialism as psychopathology (indeed he offers the psychoanalytically-inspired notion of negrophobogenesis as a result). I quote Marriott (2018) at length:

Fanon makes a demand on psychoanalysis, or a certain version of psychoanalysis, to show how [colonial] culture remains haunted by...[racist] hatred and phobia...[Fanon shows] the pressure of a certain phobic fantasy of the negro...[he] show[s] how racist fantasy cannot only be fully integrated and institutionalized, but remains as a kind of traumatic – albeit disavowed – memory in the unconscious life of the colonized....[Fanon’s] is a psychoanalysis...of the ways in which the unconscious is constituted by the real that halts and interrupts it: the imagos and stereotypes by means of which the colonial subject hates and enslaves itself as a subject, affirms its



immorality or malfeasance, and fails to know itself as anything but (a masked, white) European. (pp. 292-93)

Racist fantasy remains in (post)colonial domains, not, crucially – or, more accurately, *not only* – in conscious, institutionalized or discursive forms, but in disavowed, denied and repressed ideas and images. Racist fantasies remain then in types of cultural memory that have not attained propositional form, in ‘memories’ that are not even properly memories (at least in the sense of accessible memories). It is this surreptitious yet powerful form of memories not remembered, not amenable to conscious scrutiny, not admitted by the subject or culture and thus ‘worked through’, that enables racist fantasies to continue to exist, and to exist – paradoxically enough – all the more potently once they have been disavowed, denied or projected onto others. For some Fanonians Marriott may be sailing too close to the wind here, speaking of the traumatic effects of colonial subjugation in overly ‘psychologizing’ ways (fantasies, imagoes, the unconscious, etc.) which, furthermore, seem implicitly to blame the colonized – who ‘hates and enslaves itself... fails to know itself as anything but (a masked, white) European’ (Marriott, 2018, p. 293). While it is easy to anticipate such critiques, it is clear from the above, I think, that Marriott is approaching the issues precisely from a sociogenic standpoint which aims not to isolate colonialism as a type of psychical malady, but to trace its lingering, subliminal and reiterative effects which are locked into cycles of repetition and return precisely because they are (at least in part) unconscious. This point is perhaps made by reading Marriott in conjunction with Achille Mbembe.

In a different context – that of post-apartheid South Africa – Achille Mbembe (2013) also makes reference to Fanon (and implicitly, psychoanalysis) as a way of thinking how the effects of racism are realized at the level of temporality. For Fanon, says Mbembe, one of the most severe injuries suffered by victims of white supremacy is an ‘inability to project themselves forward in time’ (2013, p. 29). The misery of a dehumanizing and oppressive past results, for Mbembe (2013), in impaired modes of historical consciousness, and, more specifically, in a propensity for compulsive repetition and a profound disbelief in the capacity to shape one’s own future. Thus, what is often understood as an issue of psychical and political agency is recast as a crisis of (subjective) temporality.

While Mbembe (2013) more strongly emphasizes the role of something akin to psychoanalysis's death-drive (or, for the early Lacan, repetition automatism), both theorists clearly stress the importance of exploring how the conditions of the colony are constantly re-inscribed in temporality itself. Back to Marriott, who offers an insightful reading of one of Fanon's most famous assertions:

This is, I think, the sense of the 'I should not seek the meaning of my destiny there [in History]' remark in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to the effect that the meaning of the future cannot by definition be a simple matter of what happened in the past, but involves a more complex articulation of time and repetition...[This] is a view that renders the time of trauma as the complex articulation of two moments and in which, to cite Lacan, 'past contingencies...[are given] the sense of necessities to come' only after the event...and in which 'the realization by the subject of its history in its relation to the future' may turn out to be, retrospectively, that subject's only means of escape from the past that haunts it... (Marriott, 2018, pp. 294)

With this insight Marriott highlights a new goal for Lacanian theorizations of Fanon's work: the importance of grasping the complex – indeed, repetitive, retroactive, transactive – nature of colonial and racist temporality which seems so very difficult to fully transcend. Marriott helps us think with more nuance about what we might call 'the deferred action of the colonial realm'.

Before bringing this section to a close, it interesting to stress a series of intersection-points in the above material dealing with the temporality of racism. We have, firstly, an interest in subject-positioning and interpellation. Following Lacan's preference for the delineation of logical moments of subjectivity, Ward (2015) outlines three positions of identification/agency (that is, *reaction*, *will*, *thought*) just as George (2016) offers his own Lacanian mode of subjective demarcation in thinking the logical times of racist interpellation (understood through the notions of *tuché* and *automaton*).<sup>8</sup> Secondly, Ward, George and Mbembe all note the role of a type of automatism in their work (be it in the respective forms of repetition automatism, the notion of *automaton*, or the deathly stasis of repetition compulsion). Thirdly, each of the above

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<sup>8</sup> Such an interest in joining Fanon and Lacan to better understand racism and interpellation within colonial contexts is likewise evident in the work of Burman (2019), Hudson (2010) and Stephens (2018).

theorists shows an interest in the prospects of types of unconscious political agency (be it in the repetitions, returns or deadlocks of the colonial symbolic and racist history, as in George (2016), Mbembe (2011) and Marriott (2018)), or in the more hopeful guise of conceptualizing a subjectivity of resistance as in Ward's work (2015). This set of intersections suggest that the theme of racist temporality represents one of the most promising future directions for Fanon-Lacan scholarship.

### *Conclusion*

I offered three questions at the outset of this paper as a means of guiding our investigation of the Fanon-Lacan relation. The first of these concerned the hitherto under-explored references to Lacan's work that had come to light in Fanon's (recently translated) early psychiatric work. The second, moving beyond the remit of explicit citation, considered the conceptual parallels and affinities existing between the work of these two influential theorists. The third asked what contemporary re-articulations of Fanon's thought and political agendas might be made possible via Lacanian theory?

An exploration of Fanon's earliest work suggests that a series of Lacanian postulates exercised an influence on the young Martinican, including, amongst others: ideas of imaginary misrecognition, the paranoid ego, the role of the image, and, perhaps more notably yet, the notion of a historically-founded logic of madness. Within Fanon's doctoral work we have evidence that he grasped, even if in preliminary form, the rudiments of Lacan's three registers, namely: the imaginary (as evinced in the concepts of the mirror stage, imaginary identification, *meconnaissance*), the symbolic (the pivotal role of language, desire, the intersubjective) and the real (death drive, the notion of essential discordance).

Reviewing the literature on the 'Fanon-Lacan relation' helped foreground a series of conceptual parallels and affinities between the work of the two theorists. Key themes here included the priority afforded language and speech, the question of sociogeny, the role of symbolic (or social) structure, the notions of fantasy (Fanon's 'Negro myth') and of a social (or trans-individual) unconscious (Fanon's 'European collective unconscious').

A notable finding within contemporary Lacanian re-articulations of Fanon is the predominance of the topic of racist temporality. The theorists discussed above (George, 2016; Marriott, 2018; Mbembe, 2013; Ward, 2015) can all be said to have made contributions to thinking the political temporality of the colony, offering vital insights into the psychical time of racism. A variety of concepts were discussed here including: the agency of the signifier and the role of repetition compulsion in subjective agency; the automatism and/or traumatic ('real') effects of the racist signifier in interpellation; and the notion of retroaction as essential to Fanon's ideas of sociogeny.

The above initiatives in Fanonian Lacanianism allow us to re-articulate Fanon's arguments, to draw out latent conceptual and political insights of his work, and to thereby bring novel critical possibilities to light. For example: the common thread of racist temporality in the work cited above brings to the fore a very Fanonian argument. While there are many psychological and psychoanalytic engagements with racial encounters in the colonial/racist world, far more attention needs to be directed – so Fanon appears to tell us – to the varying psychical and apparently intractable modes of *racist temporality* that characterize such domains.

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There are many possible reasons why this dimension has received so little critical attention.<sup>10</sup> Conceptual and methodological issues play their part here. What conceptual framework, what methodological options present themselves when it comes to an analysis of racist temporality? Where might we find an adequate vocabulary with which to speak of – and identify – the key mechanisms and modes of such a form of temporality? One option of course lies with phenomenology, and with the revitalized phenomenology of contemporary theorists of racism such as that of Helen Ngo (2016, 2017, 2019). A further option lies with psychoanalysis. Such a psychoanalytic vocabulary of temporality would not be limited to highlighting the diverse

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<sup>9</sup> For two notable recent examples, see the work of Fleming (2017) and Ngo (2017, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> It is standard practice in critical/cultural studies work on race and racism to highlight the dimensions of history, discourse and spatiality. The dimension of temporality, by contrast, seems less intuitive to grasp as factor in everyday critique. Similarly, the mechanisms and multiple prospective modalities of psychical temporality seem more difficult to apply in the field of one's analysis. Possibly this is due to the persistence of a Foucauldian paradigm of historicist critique which sees such considerations – of history, discourse, space – as *de rigueur* dimensions of critical analysis at the expense of the analysis of the psychical (fantasmatic, unconscious, *jouissance*-related) aspects of power (Copjec, 1994; Dean, 2006). Methodological considerations are also significant in this respect. We have well-developed analytical and positivist vocabularies with which to speak of history, discourse and spatiality. This seems less the case in respect of temporality.

effects of Freudian *nachträglichkeit* as it occurs within racism and the colonial realm (crucial as an analysis of such effects is). Such a vocabulary would enable us to engage with various mechanisms – and here Lacan’s contributions particularly come to the fore – of repetition compulsion/automatism (Mbembe, 2011), subject-positioning and interpellation (Burman, 2019; Ward, 2015), of haunting and/or stasis (Hook, 2015; Marriott, 2018). It would likewise assist us in understanding how these mechanisms impact the real of psychical and historical trauma (George, 2016).

One general conclusion of the above discussion can be stated unequivocally. There are greater possibilities for critical analysis to be found in conjoining Fanonian and Lacanian theory than has generally been acknowledged by Fanon scholars. Fanon’s recourse to Lacan was not, as is sometimes implied, a misadventure, a political dead-end, a research imperative no longer worth pursuing. By contrast, select forms of Lacanian theory represent a vital avenue of theoretical research in Fanon Studies precisely by allowing us to link Fanon’s political agendas to what comparative phenomenologist Louis Sass refers to as ‘the most sophisticated general theoretical vision of the human condition...currently on offer’ (Sass, 2015, p. 412). Returning to the hopes voiced at the outset of this paper, we can now stress again, in a more substantiated sense, that a critical form of Fanonian-Lacanianism is viable, and indeed, that Lacanian theory remains a valuable resource for the broader Fanonian project of decolonization. After all, was this not one of Fanon’s insights, that certain psychoanalytic conceptualizations (once augmented, altered or reformulated) can enlarge our ethico-political sensibilities?

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