

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

RE-THEORIZING FANON THROUGH DERRIDA, DELEUZE, AND MBEMBE

A Dissertation in

Philosophy

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2015

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ABSTRACT

In my dissertation I explore four specific themes in the work of Frantz Fanon: race, hospitality, language, and violence. Although a fair number of works have been published on these particular issues, especially on the question of race and violence, I argue that they have been undertheorized and, as a result, misunderstood. To interpret Fanon's work in our contemporary context I draw on the political philosophies of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Achille Mbembe. In chapter one, I revisit the question of race in Fanon's work and explore the historical, political, and philosophical reasons behind the general success of a specific portion of his work (notably *Black Skin, White Masks*) as opposed to his later interventions on race in *Wretched of the Earth* or *Toward an African Revolution*. It is in this chapter that I build the case as to how Fanon's work on race was prematurely and inadequately categorized under what we today may call "racial eliminativism". I argue that Fanon's anti-racism discourse is bound up with his specific understanding of culture in the context on postindependence/postcolonial politics. In chapter two, I take up what Achille Mbembe's has called Fanon's politics of dis-enclosure and I contend that, far more than critics have been willing to recognize, Fanon's anti-racial nationalism and his idiosyncratic conception of culture give way to a kind radical theory of cosmopolitanism and hospitality. Here I specifically rely on the work of Derrida and I argue that, in fact, Fanon's concrete experience validates Derridean politics of unconditionality. In chapter 3, I return to a rather controversial text in his early work: chapter 1 of *Black Skin, White Masks* devoted to the question of colonial language. I argue that far beyond merely rejecting the colonial language and allegedly advocating for the use of indigenous languages, Fanon was primarily interested in finding a

revolutionary language regardless of its cultural origin. I take his multiple attempt to re-appropriate Enlightenment's ethical language as a case in point. In this chapter, I also use the work of Derrida on "monolingualism" and Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor language and, as in the previous chapter, argue that Fanon's life and work exemplify the concrete dimensions of Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari's formal structures. Finally, in chapter 4, I return to the much-heated debate around the question of violence. I argue that Fanon's messianic discourse on violence was never naïve. Instead I propose to take seriously into consideration the anxiety that always accompanied his exhortation and hyperbolic discourses on the issue. I try to show how Derrida, Deleuze, and Mbembe echo, in their respective articulations of epistemological uncertainties, their indictment of philosophy's binary or oppositional thinking, and their criticisms of any politics based on geo-political insularities, Fanon's own attack on colonialism's enclosure of the world and racialization of life. The goal of the dissertation is to show how Fanon's work is still vital to our practices of combatting issues of violence, racism, and socio-political insularities. I contend that the successful translation of his contribution into the language of our own time will depend on our ability to revisit both critically and creatively some of the least popular dimension of his work.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation became a possibility, and now a reality, with the help of many friends, colleagues, and mentors.

I began thinking about Fanon late in my undergraduate education. However, the chances of studying race and racism in a philosophy department were slim to none in Canada. For me, part of yet another generation of Africans carrying the scars of failed independences and the burden of a history of unspeakable disasters, in which race continues to function as an ideological tool in the service of postcolonial power, nothing but race was worth the laborious years of dedication required for academic research.

I visited Penn State philosophy department for the first time in the summer of 2008 as a PIKSI student. In less than a week, my vision of a future as scholar completely changed. I found out that, after all, that philosophy department in fact existed. During my PIKSI visit, I met Kathryn T. Gines and Camisha Russell, in addition to many students from underrepresented groups in philosophy. I think that is really when I knew I belonged to this department.

In spite of the initial excitement, my journey would not have been what it has been if it were not for the incredible mentors I found right upon my arrival. Thank you Robert Bernasconi for making philosophy more responsible and for conveying that knowledge to all of your students whenever your busy schedule permits. You taught me not only how to be a thinker who matters, through both observing your pedagogical practices and through many conversations about my own teaching, you also taught me how to be an engaged and relevant teacher. Thank you Len Lawlor for your commitment to my success but, above all, thank you for introducing me to continental philosophy, especially deconstruction and Deleuze's philosophy. Both are and will continue to be an integral part of my research. The rigor and precisions of your work as well as the prolific pace of your various interventions in the discipline are immensely inspiring. I am extremely grateful to have learned from you what it means to be a scholar. Thank you Kathryn T. Gines for being an innovator and a precursor of many things. The space and the support you have extended to me are practically immeasurable and will be vastly instrumental to my future in the discipline. Thank you Gabeba Baderoon for your constant support. You have always valued my ideas, even when they were extremely temporary. Your relentless belief in my intellectual capabilities and my future as a scholar has kept me afloat, more than you know, even when the ship was sinking.

I am grateful to have shared the past six years with incredible colleagues. Thank you Ronke Oke, Shaeeda Mensah, Ayesha Abdullah, Kimberly Harris, Aminah Hasan, William Paris, Eyo Ewara, Ursula Roessinger, Dan Palumbo, Danny Smith, Joe Balay, Joey Barker, Romy Opperman, Tiffany Tsantsoulas, Peter Giannopoulos, Claire Griffin, Kris Klotz, Ryan Pollock, Nathalie Nya, Denniz Durmuz, Elif Yavnik, and Desirée Valentine.

Last, but not least, thank you Natacha Nsabimana for being an incredible friend and sister on a tumultuous journey, albeit with its own incredible triumphs.

Introduction: On Claiming One's own Fanon

Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation.

Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection.

*It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the
dismembered past to make sense of the trauma*

of the present

Homi K. Bhabha

The work of Frantz Fanon has frequently been placed into the following three discursive categories: Existentialism, Marxism, and Psychoanalysis. The aim of my dissertation is to find lines of fruitful “displacement” – that is, to investigate the ways in which Fanon is a writer of our time. A few words on the questions which have prompted my own return to the work of a thinker, a philosopher, who has yet to cease igniting socio-political imaginaries across the globe, are in order. In his latest book, *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics*, Anthony C. Alessandrini rightly points out that by 2011, a year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of Fanon’s untimely death, his work and his life had not stopped soliciting our attention, in fact had not stopped demanding our attention. The feeling that Fanon never left, the sentiment that in spite of his deeply polemical reputation, he will not stop haunting us is widely shared. In fact, an anthology entirely devoted to assess the impact of Fanon’s work in the decades that followed his death, edited by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharply, and Renée White, outlined five stages in what became a quasi-independent site of intellectual production: Fanon

Studies.¹ From various applications of his work by revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, Huey P. Newton, Armical Cabral, and Thomas Sankara to the publication of multiple biographies and, ultimately, to his long and relentlessly growing theoretical library within the walls of academic ivory towers, Fanon's life has outlived many ideas and generations of thinkers. Notwithstanding the description of each of these 5 stages, however, this new return to Fanon has in fact generated a very specific set of questions. Alessandrini, for instance, asks: "Why is Fanon, who died in 1961, our contemporary?"² More or less the exact same question can be found in the introduction to many other new books on Fanon for the last decade. Though the answers to this question may not always have been the same, it seems that all investigations were driven by one and the same point.

Since the issue around Fanon's relevance to the contemporary world was treated as a fact, the concern became the following: How to read Fanon with imagination and clarity. Whereas for Achille Mbembe the question was formulated around the language of translation – i.e. how do we translate Fanon into the language of our time – for Alessandrini and other promoters of what came to be labelled "postmodernist Fanon", the task was to avoid turning Fanon into an "empty idol" and discovering ways in which his thought could be pluralized for the benefit of contemporary readers. To be sure, Alessandrini offers the following warning:

This is not an invitation to an easy, unthinking pluralism. But what I am suggesting is that if Fanon's legacy is to have any real meaning for us today, it will be only insofar as we are able to appropriate his work in order to apply it –

¹ Lewis R. Gordon & al., *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996)

² Anthony C. Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics: Finding Something Different* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 3

with all of its insights and all of its limitations – to the pressing issues of contemporary cultural politics.³

The question of epistemic purity was also a concern for thinkers like Gayatri Spivak, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Homi K. Bhabha. In the case of Bhabha, for example, the radically open character of Fanon’s work led him to probe the routes of several symptomatic readings. For instance, thinking with and against Fanon on the issue of colonial Manichaeism, Bhabha wrote:

Unlike Fanon, I think the *nondialectical* moment of Manichaeism suggests an answer. By following a trajectory of colonial desire – in the company of that bizarre colonial figure, the tethered shadow – it becomes possible to cross, even to shift the Manichean boundaries.⁴

Here Bhabha attempted to forge his own subversive politics by suggesting that a strict politics of radical oppositionality could be supplanted in their effectiveness by subversive means, which would be more attentive to the constitutive contradictions and contingencies of rigid colonial structures. Not all readers of Fanon, however, have been willing to get on board with Bhabha’s Fanon. Nigel Gibson, for instance, wondered whether imposing such a politics of subversion on Fanon in direct contrast to the more explicitly radical tone of his revolutionary politics would not result in “a domesticated Fanon”.⁵ Ghanaian philosopher, Ato Sekyi-Otu, was even more dismissive of Bhabha’s Fanon:

Enamored of the Fanon who is “the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth”, Bhabha is anxious to stop his sometimes aberrant mentor in his track when, driven by a humanist pathos, he unaccountably forgets the “nondialectical”

³ Ibid., p. 23

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition”, in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 192

⁵ Nigel Gibson, “Fanon and the Pitfall of Cultural Studies”, in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Alessandrini (New York: Routledge 1999), p. 111

contingencies of his narrative and strains after the universal in a “desperate, doomed search for a dialectic of deliverance”. If only Fanon were free from this “deep hunger for humanism”. If only he kept faith with his own dismal news of the death of “Man” at the hands of colonial violence. Bhabha prefers his Fanon to be a precocious postmodernist who is not “principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence”.⁶

Bhabha’s Fanon was, according to Sekyi-Otu, a Fanon “much too dialectical for his own good”.⁷

Fanon has attracted a powerful array of critics and readers whose life experiences (of migration, of terror under neocolonialism, and so on) and geographical contexts have led them to radically different theoretical approaches to his work. While most American readers continue to resonate with Fanon’s existentialism and Phenomenology, there were also Subaltern scholars who were more interested in investigating those dimensions of his discourse that shared his implicit belief in the ambivalence of colonial discourse and the hybridity of postcolonial/postindependence subjects. Nevertheless, Fanon’s legacy began earlier during the anti-colonial struggle of the early 1960s and the reception of his ideas was marked by the extended self-reflection on the part of the oppressed at that time. The publication of *Black Skin, White Mask* marked the beginning of a moment when the psychological impacts of oppression and colonialism became a crucial question for the victims of these traumatic times. In that book, Fanon described the servile psychology imposed on the colonized and it served as the basis upon which many theorists committed to anti-racist work – both academic and otherwise – constructed their own assessment of oppression.

⁶ Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 45

⁷ Ibid.

Fanon, however, had also various detractors. Most pertinent to my work in this dissertation, especially my final chapter devoted to the question of violence in Fanon, was Hannah Arendt. In her famous work on the relationship between violence and power, *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt vehemently criticizes, via Sartre's preface, what she perceives to be the mere glorification of violence in Fanon's first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Like many other critics, Arendt was suspicious of the claims that violence indeed had the power to overturn the colonial situation to the benefits of the oppressed. Arendt attacked Fanon's claim, which she would have done better to attribute to Sartre on the basis of his preface to the book, that violence had not only "creative" power to render justice to the oppressed but that it was also a process through which the humanity of the colonized could be repossessed. Unsurprisingly, this first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* loudly resonated with emerging revolutionary organizations, like the Black Power movement in North America. Through its thorough critique of imperialism, *The Wretched of the Earth* gathered a wide range of supporters within intellectual ranks as well. This specific chapter of the book became an irrevocable source of revolutionary slogans for political organizations such as the Black Panther Party: Eldridge Cleaver once said that "every brother on a rooftop can quote Fanon". African American scholars without exception stood behind Fanon's prophetic message. In addition to their conviction that Fanon's characterization of revolutionary violence had the capacity to create out of the carcasses of the degraded colonial being new forms of humanity, these scholars were almost unanimous in responding positively to the chapter.

Though the theoretical scope of my dissertation does not allow me to pursue this matter in detail, it is important to point out briefly the reasons behind the prevalence of

the phenomenological approaches to Fanon's work. Undoubtedly, Jean-Paul Sartre played a pivotal role in Fanon's intellectual journey. On their visit to Fanon in the summer of 1960 in Tunis, emissaries of *Les Temps Modernes*, Claude Lanzmann and Marcel Péju, recall a very ill and suffering Fanon speaking of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* for hours. In fact, Lanzmann and Péju remember that Fanon called Sartre: "a god".⁸ The "Fanon-Sartre axis", as Cohen-Solal called it, was in fact initiated during this visit. Fanon had followed Sartre's work in favor of the colonized African minorities. More specifically, Fanon had appreciated Sartre's "Black Orpheus" – his preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's anthology of Négritude poetry. He had also relied on Sartre's analysis of Négritude in the most famous chapter of *Black Skin White Masks* – even though this also provided Fanon with the opportunity to offer a critique of Sartre – long before their first real meeting in Rome during the summer of 1961 where their inexhaustible mutual interests transpired during hours on hours worth of conversation. There is scarcely any commentary on Fanon's work that does not point to the Sartrean influence in his thinking. Though it is not my intention to argue in this dissertation for a legitimate and accurate reading of Fanon that omits Sartre's influence on his work, a number of reasons have led me away from the phenomenological tradition. I do not deny the crucial role Sartre played in Fanon's intellectual life. It is through their sustained dialogue that Fanon radicalized his philosophical understanding of race, as I will argue more explicitly in chapter 1 by showing how it unfolds in his later essays, such as the third chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* and "Racism and Culture" in *Toward the African Revolution*. But I believe more attention should be paid to how Fanon's

⁸ See Annie Cohen-Solal's biography *Sartre: A Life* (New York, Patheon Books, 1987), p. 431-435

understanding of race develops from his dialogue with Sartre. I went beyond Sartre and this vein to tease out Fanon's late understanding of race from the very moment of his famous lamentation against Sartre in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Furthermore, the central endeavor of my project is to expound a Fanon for our times.

In what follows, I will draw on the work of a new group of scholars who probe dimensions of Fanon's work and life which were not always on the foreground of his textual expositions. They focus on his hesitations, his anxieties, his equivocations, and all the aporias that punctured the perceived categorical character of his claims and in so doing they are a whole other discursive lexicon capable of describing those ambiguous aspects of Fanon's work and life. For them, understanding Fanon requires two crucial movements of contextualization. The first demands recalls that Fanon belonged to a generation that faced the catastrophes of World War II, the Holocaust, and the disastrous effects of European colonialism. To these catastrophic experiences one may also add his equally traumatic encounter with metropolitan France when, for the first time, Fanon was blatantly confronted with the complexities of French racism. The work of Fanon is born and subsequently developed within these concrete experiences – what Mbembe has called “*ces cliniques du réel*”.⁹ Mbembe often remarks that one must not consider these moments of Fanon life as irrelevant biographical details. Rather, they must be perceived as keys to entering his language and his work. This is why, beyond my attempt to retain the spirit of his methodology, I will constantly be mindful of remaining aware of the relationship between Fanon's work and his multiple displacements. For instance, Mbembe and Alessandrini believe that the prevalent biographical uprooting of Fanon's

⁹ See his preface to *Frantz Fanon: Oeuvres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011)

life and work, whereby much of the scholarship did not perceive the demands of contextualizing his work to be vital, produced more conservative readings than one would think. If, in fact, the task of today's generation of Fanon readers is to find ways to appropriate his work creatively in order to apply it to our current socio-political grievances, Mbembe and others suggest that our first efforts should be to realize, and thus begin from the fact, that Fanon's work is fundamentally one of the founding texts of the postcolonial African world responsible of providing us with the "anguished premonitions of congenital errors and imminent tragedies [of] the fledging promises and prospect of independence".¹⁰ For, the time of seeing Fanon simply as "a messianic prophet of violence naively imagining that independence would be followed by the inevitable reign of a utopian 'peasant democracy'", has ran its course.¹¹ Fanon indeed inaugurated "*la pensée monde*" for postcolonial thinkers. Since Fanon, thinking for postcolonial African thinkers have inherently been intertwined with discourses of circulation and multiplicity whereby the world is not only home but also a method of philosophizing. Since Fanon, postcolonial thinking must address complexities such as the relationship between thought and the institutions of borders (chapter 2), the gray areas that define the dialectical relationship between violence and non-violence (chapter 4), and the possibility of a future indifferent to difference. Fanon has undoubtedly played a crucial role in the course of the development of postcolonial theory and in this dissertation I use Fanon to think the reality, and the possibility, of a postcolonial Africa.

In an interview on the subject of postcolonial theory, Mbembe distinguishes postcolonial thought from the practice of thinking about the postcolony. According to the

¹⁰ Sekyi-Otu (1999), p. 11

¹¹ Alessandrini (2014), p. 29

Cameroonian philosopher, to think about the postcolony is essentially to ask the following questions:

What is today, and what are we today? What are the lines of fragility, the lines of precariousness, the fissures in contemporary African life? And, possibly, how could what is, be no more, how could it give birth to something else? And so, if you like, [thinking about the postcolony] is a way of reflecting on the fractures, on what remains of the promise of life when the enemy is no longer the colonist in a strict sense, but the "brother".

Hence, to think about the postcolony will involve not only a critique of discourses on community and brotherhood, it will force us to enter the problematic of responsibility and accountability, which many postcolonial theorists have neglected. That is why many aspects of Fanon's work continue to provide tools to the task of assessing our postcolonial situation. Ultimately, I hope to show that using Fanon's work to assess our current postcolonial situations will expose those areas of his work which have been undertheorized. Reading Fanon today entails translating the critical questions which uprooted him and propelled him toward the other into the language of our time. For, in spite of his untimely death, Fanon's work has not yet ceased to conjure up its own, ceaselessly growing, archive. This suggests that, beyond his life alone, those questions that compelled him to intervene still inspire what calls for thinking today. More specifically, one must continuously be reminded that the post-*Black Skin White Masks* Fanonian library begins in Africa as an intervention to colonial African problems. Indeed, as some Fanon scholars point out, the philosopher's work is an integral part of an African tradition of critical thinking for which thinking entailed primarily questions about the advent of the human subject, the rebirth of the African continent, and the "dis-enclosure" of the world. It is indeed this "politics of dis-enclosure" – as Achille Mbembe has termed

it – that underlines Fanon’s work. Mbembe reminds us that, for Fanon, race ran primarily on a logic of enclosure [*une logique de l’enclos*] that stood as an intoxicating obstacle to the efforts of anti-colonial praxis. To appreciate Fanon’s relevance to our world today, to understand why his work continues to hold a significant grip on the contemporary post-colonial critique, requires to read his oeuvre through the lenses of this “politics of dis-enclosure”. If pressed to situate or describe the Fanon I claim in this dissertation, my tentative answer (one that will, of course, never be final), is twofold: (1) Like Sekyi-Otu, I return to Fanon as a “postindependence” student of his work. That is, my Fanon is the “of those who have witnessed the desolation of the world after independence, observed the right of humanity smothered by the heavy fists of the self-anointed founders and seen the dream of community wrecked by class predation and ethnic violence”.¹² (2) In spite of identifying with Sekyi-Otu’s special mandate for postindependence readers of Fanon, I find crucial theoretical affinities with Subaltern scholars as well. More specifically, I refuse to reject the so-called “postmodernist” Fanon of Bhabha or Spivak. I disagree with African postcolonial thinkers and others who have perceived of the Subaltern scholars approach to Fanon as a “domestication” (Gibson) of his work or a project of depoliticizing him. In other words, I agree with Subaltern scholars who have condemned traditional readers of crafting a mythical Fanon, who they “either revered as the prophetic spirit of Third World Liberation or reviled as an exterminating angel”.¹³ Stuart Hall asks a difficult question, when he writes: “with what authority, but more significantly, with

¹² Sekyi-Out (1999), 45

¹³ Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition”, in Foreword to *Black Skin, Whites Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann (London: Pluto, 2008), p. xxii

what effects, do we actively appropriate Fanon's work against the textual grain?"¹⁴

Insofar as I identify with the second half of the question, i.e. "with what effects do we appropriate Fanon's work", my effort in this dissertation is to show that the real power of Fanon's discursive legacy rests in the fact that his work has always been profoundly averse to the conservative rules of any established discourse. His work always already demands from us practices of creative appropriation.

Throughout the dissertation, I will be using a number of terms, which perhaps call for clarification. "Postcolonial" or "postcoloniality" will here refer simultaneously to two aspects of post-independence African subjectivity: (1) it will refer to those modes of power and sovereignty that have culminated in the social and political atmosphere of current nation-states on the African continent. (2) It will refer to a very specific cultural genealogy founded on the territorialization of identity, on the one hand, and the racialization of geography on the other. I will be relying principally on Derrida's understanding of the terms "democracy", "cosmopolitanism", and "hospitality". Contrary to the popular dismissal of Derrida's work in relation to postcolonial concerns, Fanon's work and life concretizes the seemingly abstract character of the formal structure of Derrida's philosophical interventions. Finally, my use of the term "territory" – which will often be accompanied by the terms "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" – will essentially be used within a Deleuzian register. That is to say, that I will be ascribing to Deleuze and Guattari's basic conception of the word. The territory (or territoriality) will not, therefore, be merely denoting a geographical space or be reduced to a "principle of residence or geographic distribution". Rather, like Deleuze and Guattari, I will be

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, "The After Life of Fanon", in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), p. 25

referring to the workings of state apparatuses in the sense that they substitute geographically organized space for the radical organization of people along, in the purview of my dissertation, racial lines.¹⁵ Furthermore, I ascribe to Hall's description of postcolonial theory when he says that the tradition is essentially a "re-narrativisation" that "displaces the 'story' of capitalist modernity from its European centering to its dispersed global 'peripheries'", and a "reconstitution of the epistemic and power/knowledge fields around the relations of globalization".¹⁶

Each chapter is particularly geared to approach a specific question in the work of Fanon. To a certain extent, the first chapter shed lights on the orientation of the dissertation as whole: What are those dimension of Fanon's work that remain undertheorized, and how do we approach conventional themes in the Fanonian archive from the standpoint of contemporary postcoloniality. In this regard, chapter 1 is an attempt to return to the question of race in Fanon's work in light of the recent abuse of power in the postcolony. Rather than focusing on *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is arguably Fanon's most famous exposition of the effects of race, I focus on his later interventions and I show not only how Fanon's anticipated the postcolonial racial drama, I also argue that his late discourse on race reveals the danger of conflating race and culture, specifically when the conflation is used for political ends. Insofar as I consider my dissertation to be a contribution to emerging new voices in Fanon studies primarily interested in confronting the tragedies of politically sanctioned mass murders in

¹⁵ See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 145

¹⁶ Stuart Hall, "When was 'The Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the limit", in *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 250

postcolonial Africa – specifically sub-Saharan Africa – this chapter will be essentially my own attempt to revisit the status of contemporary postcolonial African politics, the functioning of which continues to be profoundly dictated by racial attitudes that operate in accordance with a specific kind of cultural politics. Most genocides (the majority of which have not yet been identified as such by the international community) and cycles of brutal ethnic cleansings were fundamentally fueled by ratified racial discourses within which culture became acutely racialized. From Rwanda in 1994, to Sudan shortly thereafter, to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the plight of black Libyans currently, the serious repercussions of this toxic conflation continue to threatened daily life across the continent. It is for this reason, I contend, that the problematic of race in postcolonial Africa cannot be tackled without confronting first and foremost its historical relation with postcolonial and postindependence conceptions of culture.

The next chapter theorizes perhaps an of Fanon’s work that has not been seriously investigated outside of the hints offered by Mbembe’s work on Fanon’s politics of dis-enclosure. On this basis, I identify what I call Fanon’s radical cosmopolitanism. I argue that even if Fanon’s vision of decolonization was based on the colonized’s radical refusal to remain subjugated and existentially disempowered on his/her own land, his anticolonial politics did not solely advocate land restitution in favor of the oppressed natives. Fanon’s position on colonial occupation was also primarily driven by a vision of hospitality radically antithetical to colonial and postcolonial modes of territoriality. I will attempt to show that his recognition of the problematic of the spatial organization of colonial territories preceded his hyperbolic rhetoric in the opening chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (since this issue systematically appear in *Black Skin, White Masks*

as well) and that his discourse on violence hinges upon this critique of colonial spatial occupation. Here, I rely specifically on Derrida's influential interventions on cosmopolitanism and hospitality. I will show how the period of Fanon's work leading to formal independence is one concrete example of the formal structures Derrida's describes in his work on hospitality. In a manner, I intend to argue that Fanon's life validates Derrida's alleged abstract thinking.

In chapter 3, I return to the question of language in Fanon. Much have been written on this issue, but perhaps more than any other topic in this dissertation, I believe that the question of language in his work has been profoundly undertheorized. Though I will focus on Fanon's analysis of the colonized's relationship to the master language, my efforts to show how indeed Fanon never was a linguistic purist or ever advocated the utter rejection of the master's language will be essentially focused on his own relationship with the Western discursive archive, specifically the legacy of Enlightenment ethics. I will argue that ultimately Fanon was fundamentally committed to forging a language for the radical transformation of a world shaped by colonialism regardless of this language's cultural origins. This chapter, perhaps more than others, is where I attempt to revive that Fanon who belongs to a specific postcolonial philosophic tradition less devoted to the rhetoric of finding a coherent, self-defined, and collective postcolonial subjectivity as the preferred counter-narrative against colonialism's objectification. In a manner, this chapter is a more engaged response to Mbembe's invitation to think Fanon in today's world by venturing in those aspects of his work that did not necessarily abide to the clean politics of dialectical opposition. Here also, I will take Derrida's intervention on language, specifically his work on "monolingualism" to guide me in my return to Fanon

on this topic. With Derrida's important insight, I will argue that it is time to forego the tendency of extracting nativist politics of language from Fanon's chapter, and to realize that ultimately the crucial matter for Fanon was the complex relationship between cultural destitution, political marginality, territorialized identity, and geographical displacement. In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida brilliantly expressed the phenomenon – one necessarily colonial in nature – of having no other choice than forcibly to inhabit the outskirts of an imperial language in the aftermath of irretrievable cultural destitution.

Finally, in chapter 4, I return to arguably the most controversial issue in Fanon's entire oeuvre: the question of violence. Decolonization was to be, as Fanon infamously proclaimed, necessarily a violent phenomenon. The claim that violence is inevitably always at the core of radical political change is the topic of this chapter. I revisit Fanon's politics of decolonization not to engage in the polemic that surrounded his alleged glorification of violence but to attend to a more pressing question in Fanon studies today: How do we translate Fanon into the language of our time? I argue, however, that Fanon's messianic discourse on violence was never naïve. For, as Mbembe and Skeyi-Otu remind us, he surveyed the future of the postcolony with deep anxiety. He foresaw the coming nightmare of “an indigenous ruling class luxuriating in the delicious depravity of a Western bourgeoisie” and was sickened by the growing “spectacle of Africans representing themselves to the world as the archetypes of stupidity, brutality, and profligacy.”¹⁷ From the unrestrained proliferation of death since the early 1980s on a large portion of the continent, the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the extermination of

¹⁷ Mbembe, “Fanon's nightmare, our reality”, in *Mail&Guardian* (December 23, 2011)

“indigenous settlers” in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the plight of Black Libyans currently, the massacres in South Sudan, the current violent spread of religious fundamentalisms in Nigeria, northern Mali and the Central African Republic, the privatization of public prerogative and the socialization of arbitrariness which Mbembe has deemed “the cement of postcolonial Africa’s authoritarian regimes”, we undoubtedly belong to the generation that have witnessed most clearly the unfolding of Fanon’s nightmare. How do we then rethink Fanon on violence in these times?

Although each of these chapters intervene on a specific topic in the work of Fanon, I hope that eventually they will all contribute to a critical rethinking of what it means to return to a thinker from various historical vantage points, especially when the thinker – like Fanon – posthumously requires more from his reader than conventional academic practices of textual interpretation.

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I.

On Race in the Postcolony: From Independent to Murderous States

Everything, on Fanon's account of the social and symbolic conditions of postcolonial existence, requires to be reread and rewritten. Everything is an invitation to invention –
Ato Sekyi-Otu¹⁸

Black Skin, White Masks is undoubtedly Fanon's most famous exposition on race. In this first book, he confronts the problem of racial complexes from multiple angles. Dissecting the problem of living as a racialized body in a world essentially organized along racial lines. *Black Skin, White Masks* was written from a radical desire for freedom and racial emancipation. He analyzed the psychic life of racialized bodies and narrated the tragic social investments in blackness as biologically evil. These investment were tragic indeed to such an extent that blackness became quintessential a biological threat to all forms of life. When it came to the black body, the biological was essentially understood strictly in terms of the genital. He claims, for instance, that the "Negro symbolizes the biological".¹⁹ Then, in response to long quotation from Michel Cournot's *Martinique*, in which the latter wrote "[f]our negroes with their penises exposed would

¹⁸ Ato Sekyi-Out, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 40

¹⁹ Fanon (1967), p. 167

fill a cathedral [and] would be unable to leave [...] until their erections had subsided”, Fanon asserts: “one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis. It is to imagine what such descriptions can stimulate in a young girl in Lyon. Horror? Lust? Not indifference, in any case”.²⁰ Much has been written on the issue of race in *Black Skin, White Masks*; and one could claim that this early scholarship on Fanon inaugurated the emergence of a specific intellectual tradition in the American academy, which came to be known as “Fanon Studies”. In a prominent anthology on the work of Fanon, Lewis R. Gordon and his co-authors, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renée T. White, distinguish five identifiable stages in Fanon Studies.²¹ In their insightful depiction of the fifth stage, which they claim was well underway by 1995, they says: “A key feature of these works is that even in the case where Fanon’s name is prominent in the title, the objectives are ultimately the disciplines themselves: Africana philosophy, philosophy of human sciences, and phenomenologies of experience”.²² Furthermore, they write that most scholarly interventions in this fifth stage “work within Fanon’s preference for independent thinking by using his work as a contribution to the author’s theoretical project”.²³ Even though they are describing the state of Fanon studies in 1999, I believe that their description of the current generation of Fanon studies still applies, and specifically in terms of current Fanon scholars’ attempt to shape their own theoretical intervention in light of current socio-political events, Gordon and his co-authors are right to point out that Fanon’s work

²⁰ Ibid., p. 170

²¹ See “Five Stages of Fanon Studies in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, & Renée T. White (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), p. 1-10

²² Ibid., p. 7

²³ Ibid.

has never truly disappeared from the stage of public discussion and have instead “taken on dimensions that suit the interests of each generation, with different insight”.²⁴ This is indeed a powerful indication of Fanon’s work and life story’s fecundity. It is within this same spirit that my dissertation is entirely written. As I mentioned in the introduction, each chapter of this dissertation is written in the attempt to grapple with four issues, which I consider to be significant problems – with arguably the most tragic ramifications for global history in the past five decades: race, hospitality, the politics of language, and violence. Though this chapter is dedicated to the question of race in the work of Fanon, I approach this issue from a different [...] that taken by most previous scholars. Even if various dimensions of the scholarship on race in Fanon studies continue to be valid, Fanon studies has hitherto not given sufficient attention to the question of the relationship between race and culture that is central to this chapter. Insofar as I consider my dissertation to be a contribution to the emergence of new voices in Fanon studies primarily interested in confronting the tragedies of politically sanctioned mass murders in postcolonial Africa – specifically sub-Saharan Africa – this chapter is my own attempt to revisit the status of contemporary postcolonial African politics, the functioning of which continues to be profoundly dictated by racial beliefs, which operate in accordance with a specific kind of cultural politics. Most genocides (the majority of which have not yet been identified as such by the international community) and cycles of brutal ethnic cleansings were fundamentally fueled by ratified racial discourses with which culture became acutely racialized. From Rwanda in 1994, to Sudan shortly thereafter, to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the plight of black Libyans currently, the serious

²⁴ Ibid., p. 7-8

repercussions of this toxic conflation continue to threatened daily life across the continent. It is for this reason, I contend, that the problematic of race in postcolonial Africa cannot be tackled without confronting first and foremost its historical relation with anti-decolonial and, soon thereafter, postcolonial conception of culture.

How to Read Fanon on Race: Probing New Directions

It was not until the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism* that we find Fanon's view on the relationship between race and culture. In both books, Fanon not only diagnoses the political atmosphere within which colonized people are brutally dehumanized, he situates this diagnosis within a larger ethical discourse, in which he famously asserts that every human being possesses equal rights to claims over his or her own humanity. In this section I attend to the relationship between race and culture in Fanon's corpus. I show that, in *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon never invoked one without the other. Indeed, I show that in order to understand Fanon's conceptualization of race and racism, take heed of his prophetic calls on the future of postcolonial politics, and benefit from the effects of the resurging interests in his work, we must attend to his insights on culture and race now and for the foreseeable future. Though I will return to these texts from a different problematic in the next chapter of this dissertation, here I will focus my investigation on following two specific texts: "Racism and Culture" and "On National Culture: Mutual Foundations for National Culture and Liberation struggles". In addition to arguing that Fanon was able to anticipate the postcolonial dangers lurking ahead because of his analysis of the relationship between race and culture, I will also show that it was particularly from his radical indictment of

the racialization of national culture that he was able to predict the inevitable failure of nationalist movement to accomplish their decolonizing tasks without dangerously replicating the colonial legacy. For, as Mbembe has rightly pointed at numerous times, Fanon understood race to be yet another symptom of the Western “logic of enclosure”. For him, decolonization could not occasion a genuine event so long as postcolonial politics remained trapped in the double bind of race and culture. In fact, it is because Fanon was profoundly suspicious of apolitical conceptions of culture, on the one hand, and race which he understood exclusively as a tool for domination on the other, that he perceived them as two sides of the same apparatus - two sides organically working together to sustain its operations. Ultimately, for Fanon, race and culture were used to demarcate zones of impenetrable borders and reinforce exclusionary difference to such a significant extent that even their most revolutionary deployments could only replicate their violent colonial legacy. This, I believe, is an aspect of Fanon’s intervention that was overlooked by past generations of readers and critics. If Gordon and his co-authors are indeed right in their description of the various stages in Fanon studies, it is clear that this oversight – perhaps one that was at times strategic – was compelled by the nature of the urgencies, which led them to return to Fanon in the first place. Since the current historical conditions in the African postcolony could be described as a context within which the failure of deracializing power and property have resulted in the mere reversal of relations of power, it is quite plausible that Mbembe has decided to return to Fanon in order to interrogate the political and moral bankruptcy of African nationalisms. Indeed, he has echoed in many ways Fanon’s anxieties in the years leading to formal decolonization, and has ascribed the failure of the anti-colonial project to nationalist

militants' inability to forego colonial politics of race and its concomitant logic of violence. Like Fanon, they contend that the African dream of emancipation must necessarily involve relinquishing mirroring the dangerous games of racial violence inherited from colonial practices as well as exiting archaic and corrupt nationalisms based primarily on the insidious pair of race and violence.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Mbembe's recent interventions in Fanon studies have undoubtedly been inspired with the following specific question: How do we claim the fruits of Fanon's legacy back and, especially, how should we use this legacy to attend to the questions of today? Mbembe rightly reminds us, "Fanon's thinking was born out of real, lived, unstable and changing experience".²⁵ The precise nature of this context within which Fanon's thinking develops here matters. For, we must admit that the fragile atmosphere of the anti-colonial period has not substantially been altered in postcolonial times. Acute political instabilities, abrupt social changes, and the law of the utterly contingent, continue to govern the postcolonial political landscape on the majority of the continent. The popularity of Mbembe's reading of the postcolony has certainly been the effect of his invitation to discursively approach the postcolony primarily as a complex territory constituted by spatio-temporal contingencies, the detection of which have significantly escaped the scrutinizing eyes of experts on Africa. Instead, Mbembe contends, so-called experts on Africa have uncritically been committed to the rigid categories of permanence and change. It is specifically in this regard that I intend to show how Fanon's understanding of race and culture anticipated – and hence the choice of opting for a type of messianic language in order to refer to his prophetic warnings – much

²⁵ See Mbembe, "Metaphoric Thought: The Work of Frantz Fanon", in *African Studies* 71 (1), 2012

of what Mbembe accused experts on Africa for having tragically missed. And to do so will require to some significant extent reviving the conceptual and existential anxieties that allowed Fanon to recognize the contingent nature of his own time. This attempt will also entail seriously attending to those aspects of Fanon's thinking that remain most obscure, often under-theorized, and even at times deemed incoherent.

Though I do not argue that Fanon's understanding of race has been among those aspects of his work (and life) that have suffered the most naïve disregard or have undergone the most simplistic readings, I wish to show nonetheless that approaching race through Fanon today will require working beyond his celebrated phenomenological account in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Therefore, in addition to Fanon's specific texts I mention above, I intend to show how Mbembe understood precisely just that in his own return to Fanon. More specifically, I will show that in his latest work Mbembe reignited the question of race in the Fanonian archive in a way not only compelled by the urgencies of his own time, but also in a manner that may counter prevailing claims that Fanon was, after all, a premature racial eliminativist. Beyond calling us to reconsider Fanon's dream of abolishing Western politics of enclosure for which race played a pivotal role, Mbembe's call to revisit Fanon's understanding of race is, of course, primarily fueled by the escalating problems of race and ethnicity in the postcolony. As he reminds us in *Sortir de la grande nuit*, Africa is increasingly witnessing the proliferation of ideologies promoting radically dangerous indigenous politics. At the kernel of wars and genocides which have plagued the postcolony, Mbembe demonstrates that race and ethnicity have undoubtedly become the measures by which who counts as a legitimate native is determined. Although Mbembe primarily gives hints more than he provides definite

formal structures by way of which one can return to the issue of race in Fanon, I here aim to follow his direction and attempt to restore grounds upon which one can recognize the acute contemporaneity of Fanon's discourse on race.

On Mbembe's Fanonian Reading of Race in the Postcolony

Considered to be perhaps the most controversial essay in Mbembe's work to date, the third chapter of *On the Postcolony* – which was published elsewhere under the title: “The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony” – has gathered various kind of reactions. Primarily perceived as an uncompromising pessimist, Mbembe's ruthless account of the role of race in the quasi-theatrical life of the postcolonial potentate seems, nevertheless, to have inaugurated a new discursive trajectory in Fanon studies. Although he gathered more criticism than praises from his African counterparts, the polemic character of this chapter is to be taken quite seriously for it will ultimately work to show that Fanon's most important contribution to our current experience of race was primarily in his own account of race and culture. I will thus first turn to Mbembe's intervention on the matter of race in the postcolony within the context of his larger theoretical work. Here, I will argue that beyond the explicit denunciation of postcolonial abuse of power, Mbembe sought primarily to expose its banality; a banality whose perceived arbitrariness nonetheless possesses a peculiar internal coherence capable of reproducing its abuses even in the absence of its sovereign representatives. I will show that it is after a close scrutiny of this chapter that one can ultimately appreciate not merely Mbembe's own challenges to Fanon's theory of violence, which I discuss at length in chapter 4. This preliminary analysis of Mbembe's

work on postcolonial sovereignty will show the significant ways in which Fanon's discourse on race and culture prefigured Mbembe's criticisms of postcolonial power and its reliance on racial discourse.

Nearly ten years after the publication of *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe pointed to the reasons behind what he called in his preface to *Frantz Fanon: Oeuvres* "the third age of Fanon's return" in *Sortir de la grande nuit*. He asserted that in an era within which the paradoxes of globalization are radically transforming the world, Fanon must first and foremost be called upon to re-think the political promises of post-decolonization and post-cold war politics. As global politics continues to decline into a time of counter-insurrection in which the logic of race and economic extractions are redeployed at the detriment of the non-Western world, new processes of racialization intended to categorize certain groups of people, and to control the limits within which their daily lives are barely justifiable are strangely reminding us of colonial regimes' old techniques of control. The insidious repetition of these old colonial techniques of control are both what Fanon feared and narrated in his intervention on race and culture, and it is also practically by using the exact same style of narrative that Mbembe will describe the politically and morally corrupt nature of postcolonial sovereignty. In the first of the two chapters leading to his infamous intervention, the author of *On the Postcolony* writes the following characterization of postcolonial governmentality and its relation to colonial rule that highlights the ways in which the notion of custom in ethnographic descriptions of African life has often been used as an implicit way to refer to Africa's alleged absence from the cultural scenes of modernity:

And since, in Africa both before and after colonization, state power enhanced its value by establishing specific relations of subjections something must be said

about the relationship between subjection, the distribution of wealth and tribute, and the more general problem of the constitution of the postcolonial subject. The second factor is that postcolonial African regimes have not invented what they know of government from scratch. Their knowledge is the product of several cultures, heritages, and traditions of which the features have become entangled over time, to the point where something has emerged that has the look of “custom” without being reducible to it, and partakes of “modernity” without being wholly included in it. One part of this knowledge or rationality is *colonial rationality* [...].²⁶

Mbembe is not only calling out the absurdity of erasing the continent’s global political and economic significance, but is also grouping several discursive terms that have been used to discredit Africa’s role in global matters in order to demonstrate their shared imperial genealogy. Indeed, in a move that resembles to many of Fanon theoretical gestures that are meant to force the Western world to think its history alongside that of its colonial territories, Mbembe attempts to show that postcolonial power fundamentally rests on the political imaginary of state sovereignty – a colonial political model to be sure – whose logic continues to dictate political global proceedings, regardless of the sovereign status of a given country. Though this logic may not be clearly identifiable in the Western polity, Mbembe argues that postcolonial power is the most overt exemplification of its inherent vulgarity. However, it is what Mbembe will often refer to as this logic’s right to dispose of human life based on colonial conception of race that has turned formerly independent countries, decades after emancipation from colonial rule, practically into murderous states. In his attempt to describe this logic of colonial governmentality, he writes in his famous essay “Necropolitics”, which I discuss in detail in chapter 4:

In sum, colonies are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other. As such,

²⁶ Mbembe (2001), p. 24-25

the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.”²⁷

Indeed, the internal coherence of this figure of sovereignty is its ability to suspend matters of judicial order in the name of civilization or, when it comes to postcolonial power, in the name of “development”. This is precisely part of what Mbembe refers to as the vulgarity of postcolonial sovereignty. This is also in part what brings him quite close to Fanon’s own observation of “postindependence” sovereignty – if one may use this term in order to differentiate the two different regimes. For, Fanon was also deeply frustrated by the violent abuse of power, which was gradually becoming decolonial authority’s default mode of ruling. Beyond these obvious affinities, however, it is the role of race, often couched in the language of ethnicity, customs, and xenophobic which will eventually transform the nation-states of the post- independence era into the postcolonial “murderous” states that Mbembe – in his most Fanonian hours – brutally attacked. Consider, for instance, Fanon voicing his frustration with the racial attitude of the post-independence’s ruling class:

The racism of the young national bourgeoisie is a defensive racism, a racism based on fear. Basically it does not differ from common tribalism or even rivalry between clans or confraternities. It is easy to understand why perspicacious international observers never really took the lofty speeches on African unity very seriously. The flagrant flaws are so numerous that one clearly senses that all these contradictions must first be solved before unity can be achieved.²⁸

It is clear that Fanon’s critical vision for a kind of openness to the universal could not allow him to fall prey to any forms of nativism. Sekyi-Otu is right to point out – even if he recognizes that rereading Fanon entails listening to the challenges put forward by

²⁷ Mbembe (2003), p. 24

²⁸ Fanon (2004), p. 110

poststructuralist readers – that we must indeed be “wary of those [...] who would recruit him for the fashionable war against humanism”.²⁹ Though I discuss this aspect of Fanon’s philosophy in chapter 3, it is worth noting it here because it is this openness to the universal that have opened him to various attacks such as being “anti-black” or a “racial eliminativist”. In fact, Sekyi-Otu further argues that we must “refrain from harnessing the terms of this ‘new humanism’ to some stainless metaphysical necessities and guarantees”, because, Sekyi continues, “Fanon says precisely this when he tells us that it is from the vortex of lived political experience that a novel idea of humanity would be refashioned”.³⁰ The terms of this new humanism, therefore, will inevitably be linked to concrete lives rather than fulfill the abstractly sanitized conditions of European normative philosophic standards. For, beyond matters of semantic history, Sekyi-Otu asks, how “do we tell apart an insurgent community of meaning forged by critical interlocutors of the world-system from the innocuous nihilism of composite cultural idioms promiscuously signifying everything and contesting nothing?”³¹ When it comes to the postcolony, Fanon and Mbembe answered to this question quite unequivocally. They both are indeed the most discerning observers – and permit me to use Sekyi-Otu’s eloquent proses here as well – “to the fact that an authentic relation to particulars and universals within the world-system requires narrative and political acts of dissent and affirmation more complex than what is registered by [...] the segregationist particularism of cultural nationalists, or the self-indulgent hybridism of certain ‘postcolonial critics’”.³² What is truly at stake in Fanon’s discourse on race and its relation to culture as well as Mbembe’s

²⁹ Sekyi-Otu (1999), p. 21

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 22

condemnation of postcolonial xenophobic politics based on its notion of “ethno-race” is neither a politics of the post-racial nor the promotion of some unthinking cultural pluralisms. In their respective critiques, which bear striking similarities, Mbembe and Fanon are concerned with the effects of the predatory nature of the concept of race in political contexts in which this concept has infiltrated society’s basic organizing structures.

In this chapter of *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe describes the postcolony as follows: “The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation.”³³ It is the multiplication, transformation, and circulation of identities informed by the racial logic of colonial rationality that Fanon, and Mbembe in particular, perceives to be the most detrimental cause behind the proliferation of dangerous indigenous cultural politics. It is because this kind of perilous cultural politics functions in popular imaginaries – through administrative and bureaucratic practices – as an alternative world of meaning supplanting the coerciveness of colonial modes of power that a relationship of conviviality, as Mbembe calls it, between state power and civil society will solidify the very racial logic that is responsible for much of the racial violence in the postcolony. This is why Mbembe ardently warns us to avoid falling prey to the binary logic that necessarily accompanies such dangerous politics. As with Fanon who vehemently attacked our inability to forego of the Manicheistic logic of colonial rule, Mbembe writes on the prevalent tendency to read the postcolony through the same rational lenses:

³³ Mbembe (2001), p. 102

[...] to account for both the mind-set and the effectiveness of postcolonial relations of power, we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretation of domination, such as resistance vs. passivity, autonomy vs. subjection, state vs. civil society, hegemony vs. counter-hegemony, totalization vs. detotalization. These oppositions are not helpful; rather, they cloud our understanding of postcolonial relations.³⁴

For, insofar as postcolonial totalitarianism has often managed to be deployed in the absence of an identifiable sovereign authority, to the extent that civil society has managed to carry on fully state officials' "dirty job" in most of the postcolonial tragedies of the last few decades, Mbembe argues that all logics of oppositionality – including the politics of revolution – cannot be adequate conceptual tools to make sense of contemporary postcoloniality. As with Fanon who remained concerned of ordinary people's lack of political agency in the decolonial movement and who, therefore, foresaw the dangers lurking ahead for a movement entirely governed by the national bourgeoisie, Mbembe similarly claims that it is in "its desire for majesty" that the "popular world borrows the ideological repertoire of officialdom, along with its idioms and forms; [and] conversely the official world mimics popular vulgarity; inserting it at the core of the procedures by which it takes on grandeur".³⁵ That is why, he continues, the conceptual emphasis should be put on the logic of conviviality. And these are the reasons why, he continues further, "what distinguishes the postcolony from other regimes of violence and domination, [...] is not only the luxuriousness of style and the down-to-earth realism that characterize its power, [...] peculiar to the postcolony is the way the relationship between rulers and ruled is forged through a specific practice: simulacrum [*le simulacre*]"³⁶ Even if, as Fanon asserted, "every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of

³⁴ Ibid., p. 103

³⁵ Ibid., p. 110

³⁶ Ibid., p. 110-111

time³⁷, that is to say then that every experience is irreducibly temporal and hence iterable, the problems undergirding the simulacrum, problematic forms of mimetism and repetition, have been nonetheless postcolonial power's Achilles heel. One could indeed ask, from a Derridean register, what kind of structure of iterability could free the postcolonial subject's singularity to the extent that the fundamental structure of repetition in all experience could no longer simultaneously represent, as it has, the death – physical or otherwise – of the postcolonial subject? This is a question that will remain in the background of each single chapter of my dissertation. But, Mbembe will go as far as to claim, and I believe rightly so, that the notion of custom in the postcolony is in fact nothing other than the sum of problematically repeated practices to such an extent that the idea of culture itself amounts to the regularity invested in these practices which, ultimately, aim solely at entrenching or quasi-naturalizing the authority and power of the postcolonial potentate. Culture in the postcolony, therefore, is always that which is determined by the whims of power and authority. Indeed, culture in the postcolony becomes synonymous with the autocrat's self-adulation. On the matter of power infiltrating all fibers of private, ritualistic, and cultural life, he describes for instance:

Power [...] colonize[s] – at least for the moment of official ceremonial – the dances previously linked to particular rituals and specific rules. Amid the cacophony accompanying such a show of strength could be found, scattered here and there, the debris of ritual acts of the past – here, elements from rites enlisting the help of spirits for the hunt; there bits of funerary or initiation ceremonies, of ceremonies to aid fertility or war. All these elements, juxtaposed, intertwined in a single web, form the postcolonial dramaturgy. [...] Ceremonies have become the privileged language through which power speaks, acts, coerces. [...] Their function is to preach before the fetish the fiction of its perfection. Thanks to them, the postcolony has become a world of narcissistic self-gratification.³⁸

³⁷ Fanon (1967), p. 12-13

³⁸ Mbembe (2001), p. 123

As with Fanon who perceived the national bourgeoisie's obsession with ancestral culture to be somewhat hedonistic, counterrevolutionary, and precisely that which weakened and stalled the efforts of decolonial movements, Mbembe also understood postcolonial power's cooptation of cultural discourses to be perhaps the fundamental source of postcolonial subjects' powerlessness. He thus concludes this chapter in the following way:

The real inversion takes place in their [the masses] desire for a certain majesty, the masses join in the madness and clothe themselves in cheap imitations of power to reproduce its epistemology and when power, in its own violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence. It is here, within the confines of this intimacy, that the forces of tyranny in Africa must be studied. Such research must go beyond institutions, beyond formal position of power, and beyond written rules, and examine how the implicit and explicit are interwoven, and how the practices of those who command and those who are assumed to obey are so entangled as to render both powerless. *For it is precisely the situations of powerlessness that are the situations of violence par excellence.*³⁹

A number of important claims are made in this last paragraph. First, we can see that Mbembe is problematizing repetition or "cheap imitation". Like Fanon, he recognizes a certain pattern of imitation of power – power as it functions in colonial rationality specifically – that only gives the masses the illusion of possessing control over their private and social surroundings whereas, in reality, practices and rituals in which their perceived meaningful agency is always already in the service of the postcolonial potentate. Secondly, and again as with Fanon, he argues that hardly anything about the written rule can genuinely assess reality. That is why analysis must reach beneath official narratives. And thirdly, perhaps even more of a Fanonian claim, Mbembe calls the situation of powerlessness occasioned by "sickening mimicry" [*mimétisme*

³⁹ Ibid., p. 133

nauséabonds]⁴⁰ the most taxing violence in the postcolony.

By beginning with an analysis of this important chapter of *On the Postcolony*, I have tried not only to set up the conceptual angle from which I return to the work of Fanon, I have also attempted to show how and why Fanon remains inexorably relevant for current generations of activists and theorists writing with and against the empire. Just as this chapter's epigraph suggests, contemporary work on Fanon is essentially always an invitation for creative appropriation. What I sought to show in this section is the ways in which studying the problem of racial discourse in the postcolony – in spite of both its paradoxes and explicitly brutal violence – requires alternative modes of conceptual practices or place of entry. As Mbembe eloquently shows, tackling the question of race in postcolonial Africa is dealing with multiple existential registers, which have been inexorably entangled. Such entanglements challenge the fashionable celebration of tropes of hybridity so prevalent in postcolonial theory. But even if I understand my own contribution to contemporary debates in Fanon studies to be an addition to the task Sekyi-Otu bestows upon what he calls the “post-independence reader” of Fanon's work, I also see points of convergences with what he describes in an accusatory manner as a return to Fanon “from the diasporic regions of refashioned empires” and thus remember him – like my “postmodern” counterparts – “in the context of life lived as postcolonial subject on the outskirts of the body politics' affections, life lived in the archetypal and auspicious estrangement of ‘minority discourse’”⁴¹. And because the experience of race from the standpoint of a postcolonial subject situated in both existential spaces escapes simple codifications insofar as race is irreducibly intertwined with issues of culture and, as I

⁴⁰ Fanon (2004), p. 235; Fanon (2002), p. 301

⁴¹ Sekyi-Otu (1999), p. 10-11

discuss in chapter 3, matters of territories (understood here in a rather anti-Deleuzian manner, i.e. as a principle of residence and geographic distribution), returning to Fanon as such demands that we take seriously those dimensions of his work in which he struggled to articulate something far more complicated than the simple frameworks of a dialectical historical overcoming. I thus agree with Gates Jr., when he writes:

Of course, discarding the imperial agenda of global theory also means not having to choose *between* Spivak and Said, [...] even Fanon and Memmi; or, rather, it means not representing the choice as simply one of epistemic hygiene. And it requires a recognition that we, too, just as much as Fanon, may be fated to rehearse the agonisms of a culture that may never earn the title of postcolonial.⁴²

The impossibility of this postcolonial not only drove Fanon to critical dimensions which were well ahead of his time, but it is also supply the condition for the possibility of current attempts at answering – to use Sekyi-Otu’s language – to reinvent conceptually our generation’s Fanon. It is in this spirit that I intend to conclude this chapter by revisiting the question of race in Fanon beyond the traditional readings that are primarily committed to representing racialized body, first and foremost, as an emblematic figure of dispossession. In its place, the central theme of my dissertation is postcolonial responsibility and political accountability.

Reading Race and Culture in Fanon from a Contemporary Viewpoint

In spite of the popularity of Fanon’s work, its capacity to appeal to multiple audiences across generations, reading Fanon also requires a concerted effort to remember the context in which he approached and produced his work. Against the temptation of all hagiographical account, Stuart Hall suggests that when reading Fanon, one perhaps must

⁴² Henri Lousi Gates Jr., “Critical Fanonism” in *Rethinking Fanon*, ed. Nigel Gibson (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 267

always asks oneself: “With what authority, but more significantly, with what effects, do we actively appropriate Fanon’s work against the textual grain?”⁴³ Though one could say that, ultimately, all scholars of Fanon’s texts have answered this question in their own manner, I would like to propose, by way of an answer that will situate my textual analysis in this section, another question posed by Sekyi-Otu. Responding specifically to Bhabha’s Fanon, he asks:

But this Fanon of the postmodernist imagination, is he *our* Fanon – the Fanon for those who have witness the desolation of the world after independence, observed the rights of humanity smothered by the heavy fists of the self-anointed founders, and seen the dream of community wrecked by class predation and ethnic violence?⁴⁴

My Fanon, the Fanon with which I respond to this question concerning race is the Fanon who conceived of liberation from racial and colonial rationality, as well as nativist nationalism and is thereby worthy of the title postcolonial.

The idea of “culture”, the existence of a given geographically specific set of customs or, to use Fanon’s phrase, “a constellation of institutions, established by particular men, in the framework of precise [...] areas” is directly questioned by the author of *Black Skin, White Masks*. In fact, for Fanon, the culture worthy of its name in colonized society is unambiguously political so that it can carry out the revolutionary work of decolonization. To understand Fanon’s understanding of culture and, additionally, the relationship between culture and race, we must turn to two specific chapters in the body of his work: (1) “Racism and Culture” in *Toward the African Revolution*, and (2) “On National Culture: Mutual Foundations for National Culture and

⁴³ Stuart Hall, “The After Life of Frantz Fanon”, in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1986), p. 25

⁴⁴ Sekyi-Otu (1999), p. 45

Liberation Struggles” in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this section, I will attempt to show that Fanon’s critique of culture is not only an unambiguous and simultaneous attack against race. I also intend to show how this critique of race is primarily based on the relationship between race and culture starting from the years leading to formal independence of most colonial territories in Africa. As I began this chapter with a discussion, via Mbembe, of contemporary postcolonial Africa, I hope to show how Fanon’s critique of culture retains vital significance in our current world because it echoes Mbembe’s frustrations, and puts equally into question contemporary racial sentiments – though the latter are often deployed in the form of xenophobic reprisals or ethno-race wars and conflicts – by exposing the ways in which we have yet to relinquish the very understand of culture which he was critical of in these early years of the anti-colonial movements.

It is clear that Fanon’s most vocal and explicit revolutionary manifesto is *The Wretched of the Earth*. Although not entirely removed thematically from the diagnostic character of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon sketched, in this revolutionary text, a project of decolonization marked by stringent analyses, frightening warnings, and even what some have deemed an irreversibly utopian humanism. It was in an era of nascent nations, however, that we must place Fanon’s understanding of culture. Based on the nationalistic nature around which decolonizing struggles were gradually being mobilized, it seemed imperative for Fanon to begin by questioning the legitimacy of anti-colonial claims to a nation. While political parties – the main organizing entities at the time – were not particularly concerned with matters of nation-state building more than they were with the urgencies of getting rid of the colonizers’ presence, another decolonizing project was

being deployed on the cultural front – a project primarily fought on the intellectual frontlines. For Fanon, political parties were exclusively concerned with the concrete lived “reality” and experience of the colonized. Thus, according to him, it was strictly in the “name of this reality, in the name of this immediacy, which influence[ed] the present and future of men and women, that they ma[de] their call to action”.⁴⁵ Those on the cultural front, on the other hand, situated their call for action in the context of a particular understanding of history, on an abstract contestation of ethical purism, and on a deep desire to rehabilitate indigenous African culture. But, for Fanon, the nonthreatening and easily dismissible intellectual discourse of the national bourgeoisie, however, could not have colonialism significantly react. I would like to take a slight detour here and discuss the affinities between Fanon’s commitment to the materiality of decolonial struggles may have some affinities with Deleuze and Guattari’s materialist leanings. If, indeed, Said is right when he claims that – when all is said and done – Fanon’s last dream was to write a universal history whereby the Western world could think its own history with its imperial territories, it seems to me that Fanon is not too far from Deleuze and Guattari’s discourse on the materiality of thought. In the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus* devoted to a discussion of the rhizome, they write for instance that thought “lags behind nature”.⁴⁶ Or, again in the pages discussing desire in *Anti-Oedipus*, they argue that thought is rendered possible through the materiality of territory, from which it abstract and subsequently return to.⁴⁷ Even their “principle of cartography” whereby the map is positively

⁴⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 146

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 5

⁴⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, & Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 22-35

distinguished from tracing, what Deleuze and Guattari are coding negatively is the inclination, it seems to me, of assuming a static, already present object in nature, which then thought labors to represent in its fixed “graspability”, so to speak. A “*map and not a tracing*”, they write, “[m]ake a map and not a tracing”.⁴⁸ For, they continue:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. [...] It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation.⁴⁹

By setting up an irreducible connection between thought and the materiality of experimentation – and in fact, thought and the earth or the territory – they will argue that insofar as this connection is real, the very notion of subjectivity must be rethought. In chapter 4 of *What is Philosophy*, they begin by claiming that the traditional conception of the relation “subject/object” cannot provide a genuine image of thought. They write at the beginning of the chapter entitled “Geophilosophy”: “Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth”.⁵⁰ Now, insofar as the earth is concerned, Deleuze and Guattari claim that it is always already “deterritorialization” and, in fact, “deterritorialized” because “it merges with the movement of those who leave their territory en masse”.⁵¹ As I prepare to discuss Fanon’s criticism of Négritude’s brand of historicism, let me elaborate on how the position of Deleuze and Guattari above establishes a distinct

⁴⁸ Deleuze & Guattari (1987), p. 12

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 85

⁵¹ Ibid.

approach to history. If thought's materiality requires, first and foremost, a primordial contact with the real, what kind of ramifications would that have on practices of historical writing? They write, for instance, in the chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, "Savages, Barbarians, Civilized Men", that "universal history is the history of contingencies, and not of the history of necessity".⁵² And in fact, they continue, "universal history is not only retrospective, it is also contingent, singular, ironic, and critical".⁵³ If the earth, the territory, or the real are the conditions for the possibility of thought, therefore of writing history, Fanon is right to be suspicious of any practice of writing history that relies on the necessity of a retrievable past. Both Fanon and Deleuze, and Guattari's account of with intellectual practices and their relation to the material world agree that the materiality of thought necessarily changes practices of historical writings into a narration of, first and foremost, the movement of bodies in the singularity of one's historical time, or present. From this perspective, subjective experience, including agency and matters of identity, can be said to emerge from real time and space. It is quite interesting to notice Deleuze and Guattari's valorization of what perhaps I may call here, postcolonial subjectivities and the postcolonial's subject's ability to resist falling into the traps of static and empty abstractions. In response to the somewhat conjectural character of Freud's Oedipus, they write:

When Frantz Fanon encounters a case of persecution psychosis linked to the death of the mother, he first asks himself if he has "to deal with an unconscious guilt complex following on the death of the mother, as Freud had described in *Mourning and Melancholia*. But he soon learns that the mother has been killed by a French soldier, and that the subject himself has murdered the wife of a colonist whose disemboweled ghost perpetually appears before him. [...] It could always be said that these extreme situation of war trauma, of colonization, [...] are

⁵² Deleuze & Guattari (1983), p. 140

⁵³ Ibid.

unfavorable to the construction of the Oedipal apparatus [...] but we have a strong feeling that the problem lies elsewhere. [...] The revolutionary is, the first to have the right to say: “Oedipus? Never heard of it”. For the disjointed fragment of Oedipus remain stuck to all the corners of the historical social field as a battlefield and not a scene from bourgeois theater.⁵⁴

This is not the only place where they valorize the materiality of thought, question ungrounded speculation by praising a certain experiential dimension of the postcolonial subject. In *Cinema 2: The Time and Image*, for instance, they also write on the absence, or the missing, of a “people” in Western cinema, and whereby also the masses cannot become subject but are subjected:

[I]f there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet ... *the people are missing*. [...] but very few authors discovered it, because it was hidden by the mechanisms of power and the systems of majority. On the other hand, it was absolutely clear in the third world, where oppressed and exploited nations remained in a state of perpetual minorities, in a collective identity crisis. Third world and minorities gave rise to authors who would be in a position, in relation to their nation and their personal situation in that nation, to say: the people are what is missing. [...] The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims ‘There have never been people here’, the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shantytowns and camps, or in ghettos, in the new condition of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute.⁵⁵

The reinvention of a people as opposed to the nostalgic desire to retrieve a past – distorted or otherwise – that is part of Fanon’s problem with the Négritude movement. Though I discuss this issue in chapter 3 from a thematically different point of view, my aim here is to show how, in addition to being critical of their practices of writing history, what Fanon understood to be a danger with potentially dramatic consequences was precisely Négritude’s commitment to claim a history based on the same racial colonial logic. That is why, Fanon pointed out, the colonizer felt no imminent threat in the

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 96

⁵⁵ Deleuze & Guattari, *Cinema 2: The Time and Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 217

vindications of the intellectual elites whose psyche, to use his words, were “conveniently safeguarded by a French or German culture whose worth has been proven and which has gone unchallenged”.⁵⁶ The colonizer’s war was mainly waged against the nationalist aspirations of emerging political parties. Indeed, their willingness to commit their revolutionary impulse to the political reinvention of a people. For, as I will discuss later, the very idea of culture and nationalism were primarily the result of the people’s will rather than the assertion of ancestral ties.

What is most striking about Fanon’s interventions on cultural struggles is the origin he ascribes to them and the experience within which he locates their main thrust. For the Martinican philosopher, the cultural plight of the elites, “this passionate quest for a national culture prior to the colonial era”, could only be justified by the colonized intellectuals’ deep desire to distance themselves from a Western culture within which they were gradually risking to be completely engulfed. Indeed, in “What is Négritude”, the Father of Négritude on the African continent, Léopold Sédar Senghor lamented: “Paradoxically, it was the French who first forced us to seek its essence, and who then showed us where it lay ... when they enforced their policy of assimilation and thus deepened our despair”.⁵⁷ In fact, for Senghor, Négritude remained a project of assimilation without assimilated! It did not seek mere confrontation with the colonial culture or the erection of a value system diametrically opposed to that of Europe, rather, Négritude attempted to re-inscribe a slumbering culture within the “Civilization of the Universal” understood as intrinsically humanistic – an understanding here, and only here,

⁵⁶ Fanon (2004), p. 146

⁵⁷ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “What is Négritude?”, in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi & Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), p. 136

in direct opposition to the “anti-humanistic” European concept of the world.⁵⁸ Hence, as Fanon points out, one finds at the heart of the fight for a national culture, men in the process of losing themselves, gradually realizing the need to “renew contact with their people’s oldest, inner essence, the farthest removed from colonial times”.⁵⁹ However, beyond the passion and desire to retrieve a lost history, or the rage against the colonial enterprise of deculturation, we must also recognize the unconscious secret hope of finding a shining history capable of rehabilitating – not only in the colonized’s eyes but the eyes of the world – the image of the ahistorical, perpetually victimized, savage. Indeed, as Fanon points out, a retrieved dignified past does not only “rehabilitate or justify the promise of a national culture [,] it triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized psycho-affective equilibrium”.⁶⁰

The national terrain of the cultural struggle will rapidly be transformed into a continental one. In a metamorphosis owing to colonial deculturation and its parallel endeavor of historical falsification, what counted as national culture will soon become an African culture. Thus Fanon writes:

This journey into the depths is not specifically national. The colonized intellectual who decides to combat these colonialist lies does so on a continental scale. The past is revered. The culture which has been retrieved from the past to be displayed in all its splendor is not his national culture. Colonialism, little troubled by nuances, has always claimed that the ‘nigger’ was a savage, not an Angolan or a Nigerian. [...] The culture proclaimed is African culture. When the black man [...] decides to prove his culture and act as a cultivated person, he realizes that history imposes on him a terrain already mapped out, that history sets him along a very precise path and that he is expected to demonstrate the existence of a ‘Negro’ culture.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 138

⁵⁹ Fanon (2004), p. 148

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 149-150

This pan-African cultural awakening, which appeared to be, more than anything else, a historical obligation, Fanon argues, was not only a racialization of culture but it curved for itself an inevitable dead end. Négritude, and the cultural drama unfolding on the continent by the intellectual bourgeoisie, was gradually disengaged with reality – people’s reality – and severely limited in the face of those “phenomena that take into account the historicizing of men”.⁶² Culture was in no way equipped to secure national liberation. The colonized intellectual, Fanon argued, had soon or later to come to the realization that culture did not prove the existence of a nation or help it acquire its independence. For no colonialism, according to Fanon, draws “its justification from the fact that the territories it occupies are culturally nonexistent”.⁶³ The responsibility of the colonized intellectual was not the vindication of a national culture; his or her responsibility was not demanding redress of a distorted cultural history but claiming the liberation of all aspects that form a nation: “One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation”.⁶⁴

What has often been overlooked in Fanon scholarship is a discussion of the racial dimension of Fanon’s understanding of culture. The extent to which one can admit that Fanon’s critical equation of culture and Négritude led him to reject the political character of this cultural movement and, in turn, its ability to transform the African colonial ordeal remains one among the main points of contention in Fanon studies. His relatively ambiguous lamentation, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, against Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Black Orpheus” mixed with the explicit critique of Négritude, which I have discussed above,

⁶² Ibid., p. 154

⁶³ Ibid., p. 159

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 168

has led Fanon scholars to overlook the role of race in his suspicions about this cultural movement. Fanon speaks out against the racialization of the revolutionary and anti-colonial project that in these gripping pages of *The Wretched of the Earth*. In response to Senghor's decision to incorporate the study of Négritude in the Senegalese school curriculum, Fanon retorts: *Si le souci exprimé par le président de la République Sénégalaise est d'ordre historique, on ne peut qu'être d'accord. Si, au contraire, il s'agit de fabriquer des consciences noires, c'est tout simplement tourner le dos à l'histoire qui a déjà pris acte de la disparition de la majorité des nègre.*⁶⁵ There cannot be any such phenomenon as black culture, Fanon continues, because "no politician imagines he has the vocation to create a black republic".⁶⁶ In fact, the organized liberation struggle undertaken by the colonized is, for Fanon, the most significant manifestation of culture. For, far from being a static human phenomenon, culture changes and the struggle for the liberation of national territories has only worked to expose this reality. By fundamentally redistributing the relations between people in the colony, liberation struggles "cannot leave intact either the form or the substance of the people's culture".⁶⁷

Another perhaps more direct treatment of the relationship between race and culture – racism and culture, to be exact – is found in a compilation of essays in *Toward*

⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002) p. 222. Due to what I judge to be a misleading translation, I have chosen to keep the original text and provide what I think is a better translation in this footnote: "If the worry expressed by the President of the Republic of Senegal is of historical importance, one can only be in agreement. If, to the contrary, it is a matter of producing *black* consciousnesses, it is simply turning one's back on history, which has already noted the fact that most *Negroes* have ceased to exist" [emphasis added].

⁶⁶ Fanon (2004), p. 169

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 178

the African Revolution. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon understood the cultural struggle to be of secondary importance. In fact, if culture had to be a significant component of liberation struggles, he argued, could be politicized and certainly not racialized. The question of culture was not necessarily subsumed under the vital combat of liberating national territories; the process of emancipation itself was the primary and most significant deployment of culture. To fight for one's freedom was the culture of the colonized. Hence, we must say that, for Fanon, culture is dictated by the historical circumstances of a given time. It is contemporaneous and that is why the Négritude of Senghor was unequipped to perform the historical task of its own time. Just as the decolonizing movements were cultural by nature, it is of no surprises that one reads in *Toward the African Revolution* that "racism is indeed a cultural element".⁶⁸ In fact, one can never speak of "a hardened" racism or vice-versa. For when it comes to racism or the idea of race, what we witness is a change of racial beliefs and attitude in accordance with a cultural current. As science discredited the biological basis of racism, Fanon argued, as many have, that racial attitudes were modified and therefore called for alternatives ways of approaching them. Racism, an element in the vaster machinery of systematized oppression, had for now cultural ramifications that obstructed the natural flow of both individual thinking and socio-political fertility. To be sure, and perhaps also unlike Négritude's narrative, Fanon emphasized that colonialism did not necessarily bring out the death of the colonized's culture. Rather than complete annihilation, Fanon argues, the aim sought by the colonial system was "continued agony [rather] than a total

⁶⁸ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 32

disappearance of the pre-existing culture”.⁶⁹ Because, for Fanon, culture is characterized by openness, contingent, and thus fertile lines of force, the simplification and the falsification of native culture could not be simply remedied by an attempted return to an irretrievable past. Furthermore, the consequences of cultural racism are also felt by the dominant culture. For Fanon, racism also “bloats and disfigures the face of the culture that practices it”.⁷⁰ From this early intervention on the relationship between race and culture to that found in *The Wretched of the Earth*, it is clear that both race and culture are fundamentally mere elements of a wider system of domination: Colonialism and European imperialism. In the same way that Fanon understands culture, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, to be the immediate concrete practices of a people effected by the demands of an immediate milieu and contemporary situations, Fanon argues that racism should not be viewed as an incidental “mental quirk” or “psychological flaw” but rather as the inevitable and necessary consequences of its own historical time.⁷¹ In fact, he continues, “race prejudice [...] obeys a flawless logic”.⁷² It is a “disposition fitting into a well-defined system”.⁷³ Insofar as race and culture are understood in rigid terms rather than in their unequivocally historical and environmental character, the type of universality Fanon envisages is unattainable. In addition to his conception of culture as essentially that which describes the contemporary concrete experiences of a people, we must remember that race was also for Fanon a coded tool for the division and the classification of multiplicities. As with Deleuze and Guattari’s position discussed above, Fanon’s

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 34

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 37

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 38

⁷² Ibid., p. 40

⁷³ Ibid., p. 41

conception of thought, and intellectual engagement, is profoundly rooted in the realities of the territory, indeed of the earth, that any abstract intellectualism aimed at providing a idealist investigation of experience is suspicious. For, what Fanon sought through his thinking, what he envisaged was a “*pensée-monde*”, the nature of which neither race nor even culture could confine. Fanon’s understanding of race and culture is one that seeks the elimination of rigid categories for the advent of a new man, a new people.

If, for Fanon, the era of the truly humane will require abandoning problematic politics of difference and endorse a politics of dis-enclosure and circulation of worlds as Mbembe often argues, it is evident that his critique of race and culture will continue to resonate for many today. Although the grounds on which the concept of race – and racism – is here condemned are clear, we must also recall that Fanon’s critique of culture was directed toward a certain understanding of it. Culture was neither anti-historical nor racial, nor even purely indigenous. Beyond the act of retrieving the past and proclaiming a “black culture”, what authentically counted as culture were concrete and contemporary practices of people, dictated by their immediate political and historical milieu. Perhaps more than any other generation, today’s Africans will be forced to answer to the true vision of the anti-colonial project, a vision that essentially envisaged the deracialization of power and property for the benefits of all Africans. Paradoxically, however, anti-colonial nationalisms failed to consider the insidious ways in which their political imaginary, as well as their decolonizing practices, had inherited from racist colonial ideology, and the culture revolutions was fought on bogus grounds. For both Fanon and Mbembe, history is not the confrontation of races and the enemy is not always, necessarily, of another race. In an atmosphere within which the failure of deracializing

power and property have resulted in the mere reversal of relations of power and property, Mbembe among others have returned to Fanon in order to interrogate the political and moral bankruptcy of African nationalisms – nationalism essentially informed by the various politics of “ethno-race”. Echoing Fanon’s anxieties in the years leading to formal decolonization, Mbembe ascribes the failure of the anti-colonial project to the nationalist militants’ inability to forego colonial politics of race and its concomitant logic of violence. The African dreams of emancipation will necessarily involve relinquishing mimicking the dangerous games of racial violence inherited from the colonial practices and exiting archaic and corrupt nationalisms in order to envisage a “postracial” conception of citizenship. Without this, Mbembe has concluded, non-black Africans have no viable future on the continent.

More than fifty years after Fanon’s work on race and culture, “thinking in a shared world” continues to be a quest for a number of postcolonial thinkers. The condition of possibility for this kind of thinking and of Glissant’s vital praxis of relationship which inevitably questions the pernicious institution of “border”, this is the theme of the next chapter.

I have argued that Fanon’s understanding of race and culture continues to be relevant in today’s world precisely because it seeks to expose the logic of enclosure from which they were deployed in the colonial world. Insofar as race and culture will be used to demarcate zones of impenetrable borders and exclusionary differences, even their use as revolutionary claims will only replicate their colonial violence. This new politics of disenclosure becomes then a social, ethical, and political enterprise whereby difference and foreignness are no longer Africa’s Achilles’ heal, but the very conditions for the

possibility of universality. As Mbembe points out, thinking for Fanon was always, first, a process of deracination, of rousing oneself from oneself.

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II.

Fanon's Cosmopolitanism and Politics of Hospitality: Derrida and Mbembe

Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst other –
Jacques Derrida⁷⁴

Our task here is [...] to sharpen a difference that matters today more than ever with regard to this right of refuge and all the most urgent matters of our time, everywhere that – in Israel, in Rwanda, in Europe, in America, in Asia, and in all the Churches of St. Bernard, in the world – millions of "undocumented immigrants" [...] call out for another international law, another border politics, another humanitarian politics, indeed a humanitarian commitment that effectively operates beyond the interests of Nation-States
Jacques Derrida⁷⁵

Since the publication of Mbembe's *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*⁷⁶ in 2010, the question of hospitality in Fanon studies, especially issues of solidarity, is increasingly gaining importance. A phrase inherited from Fanon in his own attempt to articulate life after the "deep night" of colonialism, Mbembe in *Sortir de la grande nuit* was written mainly with the intention of assessing the status of a continent that had now officially enjoyed half a century of independence from colonialism. In *Sortir*, Mbembe confronts head on not only a local assessment of the African postcolonial

⁷⁴ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 16

⁷⁵ Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 101

⁷⁶ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010)

lived experience but also the vital question of Africa's role in a world undergoing globalization. Whereas the theme of temporality was central to *On the Postcolony*, it is the question of space—geographically, politically, and philosophically construed—that dominates *Sortir*. From a critique of Europe's gloomy dream of a community without strangers and its nations' parallel efforts to build radically impenetrable borders, to portraying the picture of an exploding cosmopolitan African community, *Sortir* tackles the postcolonial subject's central question: the question of the relation of identity to geographical position. Africans today more than ever inhabit multiple worlds – at times simultaneously – and in the process are radically redefining cosmopolitanism. For Mbembe, the politics of tomorrow, that political imaginary which would ultimately propel us in a humane era—the question of, to borrow a concept from Derrida, “a democracy to come”—is a politics of “disenclosure” and of the circulations of worlds. This, Mbembe has affirmed numerous times, was Fanon's truest dream.

As I point out throughout the dissertation, Fanon's theories of decolonization escape easy descriptions. Just as in the case for violence, language, and race, the question of hospitality in Fanon appears far more complex – whenever analyzed – than it is usually portrayed. With the exception of Mbembe and Alessandrini (though around the question of solidarity)⁷⁷ hardly any other thinker has touched on the cosmopolitanism that permeates Fanon's revolutionary politics. Indeed, even if Fanon's vision of decolonization was based on the colonized's radical refusal to remain subjugated and existentially disempowered on his/her own land, his anticolonial politics did not solely

⁷⁷ See particularly the concluding chapter of his latest monograph, “Singularity and Solidarity”, in *Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014)

advocate land restitution in favor of the oppressed natives. Fanon's position on colonial occupation was primarily driven by a vision of hospitality radically antithetical to colonial modes of territoriality. In fact, one could say that the problematic of the spatial organization of colonial territories not only preceded his hyperbolic rhetoric in the opening chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (since this issue systematically appear in *Black Skin, White Masks* as well), but it is also precisely upon his explicit critique of colonial spatial occupation that his discourse on violence hinges. When, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he argues that "decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another" whereby this substitution would be "unconditional, absolute, total, and seamless", Fanon is not advocating for the physical annihilation and/or the forced exile of the European colonizer.⁷⁸ Rather, Fanon is radically going after the Manichaeism, the compartmentalization, and the existential dislocation inherent in colonial territoriality. In fact, I argue, it is because prevailing readings have missed Fanon's radical cosmopolitanism – what we could also call, from a Derridean register, absolute hospitality – which permeates his revolutionary politics that much of his sarcasm and irony is often tragically taken at face value. We cannot ignore the fact that Fanon's vision of the radically new always entailed radical metamorphosis, movement, and multiplicity. Let us, for instance, recall that his brand of nationalism – i.e. national culture or national consciousness – was not nationalism as we traditionally understand it; but a kind of nationalism crafted by the will of the people whose common praxis was to overturn imperialism. Indeed Fanon's biographer, David Macey, rightly described Fanon's particular conceptualization of nationalism in the following words:

⁷⁸ Fanon (2004), p. 1

“For Fanon the nation is a product of the will [...] and being Algerian was a matter of willing oneself to be rather than being born in a country called Algeria [...] Fanon’s nation is the dynamic creation of the action of the people, and his nationalism is a nationalism of the political will to be Algerian, not of ethnicity. And it is this nationalism of the will that allows him to speak of ‘we Algerians’”.⁷⁹

In spite of the alleged identity crisis critics like Albert Memmi and Françoise Vergès have ascribed to Fanon, his solidarity with the African anticolonial struggle at large – particularly the plight of Algerians – is precisely a direct outcome of his radical cosmopolitanism that I intend to analyze in this chapter.⁸⁰ In this regard, I will focus primarily on the *The Wretched of the Earth*. I hope to show that the majority of Fanon’s most important political positions – including his anxieties, the hesitations permeating his hyperbolic exhortations, his prophetic language, and the pessimism that constantly (and paradoxically) accompanies his profound enthusiasm – were effectively molded by a radical notion of hospitality. What Mbembe has called Fanon’s politics of dis-enclosure, I will argue, can in fact be named Fanon’s absolute hospitality. In other words, I will attempt to supplement Mbembe’s claims by showing the ways in which this precise aspect of Fanon’s work and life is one concrete example of the formal structures Derrida’s describes in his work on hospitality. I will first outline what Mbembe calls Fanon’s politics of dis-enclosure and the ways in which the Cameroonian philosopher understands it to be precisely what calls for thinking in the 21st century and the vital problematic of a future politics. I will then turn to Derrida more specifically. In addition to discussing the general frameworks of Derridean hospitality, I will attempt to show not only the discursive similarities between Fanon and Derrida’s work; I will also show how,

⁷⁹ David Macey, *Frantz Fanon* (New York: Picador, 2002), p. 377-78, 389

⁸⁰ See, for instance, Albert Memmi’s “The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon” in *Massachusetts Review* 14 (1971), p. 21. See also Françoise Vergès’ “Creole Skin, Black Masks: Fanon and Disavowal” in *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997), p. 578-595

on the question of hospitality, Fanon, Derrida, and Mbembe are thinkers fundamentally haunted by one and the same problematic: how can one think universality without abandoning the irreducible singularity of difference.

Fanon's Politics of Dis-enclosure: Mbembe's Fanonian Reflection on the Postcolony

For Mbembe, decolonization inaugurated an era of temporal bifurcations whereby multiple contingent futures opened up for each of the newly decolonized nations. In spite of this, Mbembe believes that terms like *nations-states* and *centralized polity* are still not adequate ways to describe postcolonial Africa. Fifty years after formal decolonization, we are faced with a continent plagued by deeply decentralized social frameworks. It is one Africa, he affirms, that runs in a temporal double sense whereby the past and the future are often met simultaneously. Yet it is also a place where cultural and linguistic references have become so profoundly creolized that images and practices of existence have become surprisingly postmodern.⁸¹ In *Sortir de la grande nuit*, Mbembe reminds us that for Fanon decolonization fundamentally meant “shak[ing] off the great mantle of night which [had] enveloped us, and reach[ing] for light”⁸² – it meant leaving this cruel night of “the-before- life” (*la grande nuit d’avant la vie*).⁸³ The new birth, this emergence into real existence, entailed for Fanon the “provincialization” of Europe. The attempt to leave Europe because its time had come to an end would allow us to return to the question of “the human”. In the wake of the fiftieth jubilee of African independences, Mbembe thus asked: What traces, what markers of meaning, what kind of revolutionary vestiges have we all inherited from this moment of utter change that decolonization

⁸¹ Mbembe (2010), p. 13

⁸² Fanon (2004), p. 235

⁸³ Mbembe (2010), p. 17

signaled? But above all, the crucial question became for Mbembe: What exactly from this history was there to repossess? If, as Fanon predicted, the task of the decolonized was to redefine themselves in relation to a radically new future with new forms of life and new conceptualizations of humanity, upon whom was the responsibility of redefining this new original content to fall, Mbembe asks? Who was to take on this work and, most importantly, what have we got now in our possession to accomplish this endeavor? Fifty years later, Mbembe argued, the postcolonial project continues to be that of restoring the meaning to an event which, since the 1980s, has appeared merely as an idle haunting figure.

Within those five decades that followed formal independence, immigration became both an African and a European problem. The desire of millions to live elsewhere than home, from choice or from having been displaced, transformed Africa into a place (*un lieu*) of passage, a location of transit akin to a halfway house. To this, Mbembe described, we must add poverty, mass murder and genocide, the unrestrained right to kill and to dispose of human lives, sanctioned and institutionalized corruption, endless riots, looting wars, and the like. This sort of “lumpen-radicalism”⁸⁴, as he puts it, is not only to be assigned to the evocative image of the child soldier or the ghettoized unemployed. For, this cruel and more than often bloody populism, is used as a tool for private enrichment by elite classes. It cannot be denied that the economical constraints of the last quarter of the twentieth century have been at the origin of social and political chaos. Among the casualties, Mbembe suggested, is the project of democracy. The perverse double bind—“to flee or to perish”—that engulfed the African continent must be left behind.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 21

Furthermore, he argued, we must escape the logic of humanitarianism that dominates debates about the continent. We must condemn the mass extraction of raw materials from Africa that has left African lives and territories bankrupt on several levels. These were the reasons behind Mbembe's attempts to force the writing of Africa into a hypocritical world that preaches the virtues of a global community while condemning African people and nations to exclusion.

Decolonization in France's colonial territories was a "farce", Mbembe ironically insisted as well in this book, a mirage that promised independence without freedom, and bestowed autonomy without relinquishing its tyranny over its former colonial subjects. France's politics on the continent had proven that formal decolonization was never enough when what was needed was a process of self-decolonization that was unable to be thought due to Europe's tragic inability to recognize its role in a global imperial history. As Fanon's politics implied, the project of liberation, for the victims of colonization did not simply amount to into the physical suppression of the colonizer. Liberation meant demanding justice, relinquishing hatred, and freeing oneself from the addiction of the "memory" of our past sufferings, which Mbembe argues in his most Fanonian spirit characterizes victimized consciousness. Thus, liberation in these terms became the very condition for the possibility of speaking anew, of creating Fanon's new world.⁸⁵

It is this absence of an event (*un non-événement*), according to Mbembe, which gave way to neocolonialism: a pernicious modality of power relations between Africa and the West whereby annuities, coercion, violence, destruction, and brutality created new forms of wealth accumulation by means of political and economical extortion. The

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 52-53

insidious politics of difference that starkly demarcated the realms of the colonizer and those of the natives was never relinquished; it was only upheld by an incoming ruling elite that will remain Fanon's principal cause of anxiety up until his untimely death. Throughout the 19th century, Mbembe contended, the forms of popular racism in France were primarily a result of social transformation such as colonization, industrialization, urbanization, or even a growing bourgeois class. These granted a degree of urgency to the problem of "difference" in general but, more specifically, Mbembe noted, to the problem of racial differences. By the middle of the last century, it was quite clear that the French project of assimilation had failed. Race stood between citizenship and "French identity proper" bequeathing a problem which, if left unresolved, could sink France (and possibly the rest of Europe) into an irreversible age of provincialism, racism, and xenophobia. As the author of *Sortir de la grande nuit* frequently reminds us, for Fanon the possibility of a humane future is utterly dependent on "escaping the enclosures of races," the dry and barren region of existence within which Europe sought to imprison the rest of the world.⁸⁶ To do so, Fanon argued, required us to destroy this space of clear distinctions, separations, borders and enclosures and, consequently, propel us toward the universal which, he affirmed, belonged inherently to the human condition. Thus, decolonization entailed the formulation of a new politics, one that hinged not only on a new conception of the human⁸⁷, but also on a politics of dis-enclosure, of circulations of worlds. This is exactly how Fanon envisaged a politics of the African future to resemble.

Disenclosure, *déclôre* in French, designates the act of lifting of a fence, of removing either a temporal or spatial barrier that initially surrounded an enclosure. It is

⁸⁶ Ibid. See also the other discussion of Fanon on p. 69

⁸⁷ I discuss Fanon's humanism particularly in chapter 4

unclear the extent to which Mbembe drew onto Jean-Luc Nancy's work in *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*.⁸⁸ However, there is a sense in which the emergence of postcolonial thought designates an intellectual moment in which the theoretical enclosure of the Western archive, even if not lifted completely, was radically put to task. Just as for Nancy Christianity challenged Western metaphysics—a metaphysics of “presence” to use the critique of Heidegger, Derrida, or Deleuze in their own manner—by confronting it with inaccessible alterity within its very own world, Mbembe bestowed postcolonial thinking capable of spelling out this politics of “dis- enclosure” with the power of opening the gates historically hedging what counts for legitimate thinking from the rest. Both the suspiciously reluctant and the philosophically informal readers of postcolonial theory are in danger not only of disregarding Mbembe's philosophical contribution, but is also at risk of missing the sophisticated nature of his critique and appeal to contest Western intellectual history. To be sure, like Fanon who never concealed his reliance on a range of Western theories, Mbembe neither denies, nor conceals, his heavy reliance on this tradition, especially deconstruction and contemporary French political philosophy.⁸⁹ In fact, Mbembe's theoretical gestures remind us of Derrida's characterization of Husserl's itinerary as the latter attempts to move beyond traditional metaphysics. Phenomenology, as the transgressing of metaphysics, “keeps in the field and in the language of metaphysics by the very gesture that carries it beyond

⁸⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

⁸⁹ I justify this characterization of Fanon in chapter 4 of this dissertation

metaphysical closure, beyond the limits of all that is in fact called metaphysics”.⁹⁰ Similarly, postcolonial thought has shown its ability to contravene the Western archive while simultaneously appealing to the concepts belonging to the very tradition it critiqued. This strange situation, that is, this “revival of the critique of Eurocentrism” significantly drawing from a European conceptual heritage, has paradoxically opened the path toward a renewal of its concepts even when the latter were historically employed to justify European imperialism.⁹¹ Just like phenomenology, as Derrida has argued, restored the language of metaphysics by rejecting it, Mbembe’s discursive gestures demonstrated, in *Sortir de la grande nuit*, that postcolonial theory is in the midst of discarding the blind, naïve, and often willfully ignorant, use of these foundational concepts. In a manner, as I argue later in this dissertation, Fanon’s idiosyncratic use of the European archives possesses the power to demonstrate the manners in which spelling out this politics of disenclosure may be a feasibility even if the practice itself – to use Derrida’s language – will constantly remain haunted by this radical perhaps of absolute hospitality. The question and dream of a shared world, of belonging to a global community, however, has always been central to black thought. Indeed, for black thinkers, the question of decolonization was always inseparable from the question of Europe. To think of a decolonized world was to think with and against Europe, the borders of which had already penetrated black lives both on native soil and in the Metropole. For instance,

⁹⁰ Derrida, “Phenomenology and the Closure of Metaphysics: An Introduction to the Thought of Husserl,” in *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* III (2003): 103–20

⁹¹ Achille Mbembe, “On the Postcolony: A Brief Response to Critics,” in *Qui Parle* 15, no. 2: 1–49; 3

Mbembe recalls, Edouard Glissant's emancipatory politics involved encountering the world in its entirety [*le tout-monde*], it was a praxis of relationship [*une praxis de la mise en relation*] whereby one consciously placed oneself in relation with a global world. Hence, practices of black freedom have inherently been intertwined with discourses of circulation, of multiplicity, whereby the world was not only home but also a method of thinking.

Along with the last chapter, "Circulation des mondes: l'expérience africaine," where Mbembe describes the emerging rearrangement of social structures on the continent, the third chapter of *Sortir de la grande nuit*, which also mounts a vigorous attack against France's social and cultural self-induced recoil and isolation from postcolonial matters, identifies the terrain on which the formulation of a politics for an African future must take place. Insular and rigidly committed to building impenetrable walls around itself, Europe may perhaps never take part in the kind of cosmopolitanism, which increasingly describes the concrete experience of multiple communities world-wide. Indeed, Mbembe contends that the problematic of a "democracy to come" is linked to the future of the specific institution of "the border". For, the border poses questions of the relationship between the constitution of political power and the control of space, as well as general issues of knowing who is my fellow human being, how to treat my enemy, and what to make of the stranger, or the absolute foreigner. The inability of Europe to face these issues emanates from the failure to deal with the problem of race. At this juncture, Mbembe reminded us of how in contemporary France the plantation and colonies have now moved within the borders of the Republic. Urban ghettos, or the *banlieus*, have turned into peripheral colonial territories where rampant crime, poverty,

and police brutality form explosive cocktails laced with the frustration and anger of a disenchanted French generation constantly reminded of the illusory nature of its citizenship. This state of affairs has only complicated the definition of the limits of the border and, consequently, has blurred the lines between the inside and the outside. Europe, however, is not the only contemporary harbinger of xenophobic sentiments. In spite of its long history of migration and a progressively more cosmopolitan population, Africa is increasingly witnessing the proliferation of ideologies promoting radically dangerous indigenous politics. Indeed, from the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, to the current Congolese tragedy, to the crisis in southern Sudan, race and ethnicity have undoubtedly become the measures by which who counts (or not) as a legitimate citizen is determined. While this principle of ethno-race is gradually serving as a basis for citizenship, new modes of acquisition of the basic means of survival—mainly economic exile to Europe—have resulted in profound modifications of identities and traditional methods of membership. Thus, for Mbembe, it is certain that what calls for 21st century postcolonial thinking is the world: the world as a question and the world as method of thinking. For, if colonization exacerbated the initial nomadic character of African individuals and social practices, dislocation and displacement may be the blessings in disguise—albeit sometimes with tragic ramifications—that could make it possible to outline the principles of tomorrow’s politics of disenclosure that Fanon imagined and hoped for. The condition for the possibility of thinking in a shared world, of expression within a global community, or of Glissant’s vital praxis of relationship forcefully questions the pernicious institution of the “border”. For, just as the inheritance of colonial modes of violence and brutality – which I discuss in chapter 3 – has tragically resulted

across the continent in a generalized circulation of death, it appears that indigenous politics based on borders continue to sink part of the continent into endless successions of wars in which citizenship and cultural identity are insidiously conflated. This new politics of disenclosure thus becomes a social, ethical, and political enterprise whereby strangeness and foreignness are no longer Europe's ethical Achilles' heel, but the very conditions for the possibility of universality. Europe has always been an African question; that is why African postcolonial thought is perhaps better equipped to lead the way in thinking the question of the future. The event which decolonization failed to become still resides in the political imaginary envisaging the reconstitution of political power based on the rejection of fascist and xenophobic controls of national and cultural space. Thinking in the postcolony can no longer be about revealing the cruelty and blindness of Europe's big ideas, deconstructing colonial prose, or even explicitly naming Europe's history of intellectual insularity or theoretical exclusions. Rather, it seems that to Césaire, Fanon, Senghor, and the canonical precursors of postcoloniality, we must answer with the power of the radically new, which lies in the fragmentary nature of our African condition. While, in this section, I have primarily attempted to locate where and how the question of hospitality and cosmopolitanism unfolded as an urgent matter for contemporary readers of Fanon and postcolonial critics, I focus precisely on Fanon and Derrida's affinities on the question of hospitality and cosmopolitanism. In line with central argument of my dissertation, I intend to show not only how Fanon's work and life anticipated Derrida's deconstructive intervention on hospitality and cosmopolitanism. I will also argue that those concrete aspects of Fanon's activism – those specific dimensions of his revolutionary engagement which continue to compel multiple

generations to return to his work – profoundly and positively validate Derrida’s allegedly purely formalistic and, hence, impracticable ethics and politics.

Fanon and Derrida on Hospitality

As I briefly stated in the previous sections, the overwhelming global import of Fanon’s work may be an outcome of the radical cosmopolitanism that permeates both his life and his revolutionary work. Born in Martinique, Fanon fought the Second World War, studied medicine and psychiatry in France. He worked for the French government in colonial Algeria, only ultimately to defect and dedicate his work and his life to the plights of oppressed Africans. To this extent, Fanon is undoubtedly a peculiar prototype of a contemporary cosmopolitan. Mbembe has been one of the most perceptive readers of this aspect of Fanon’s work and life. My intention in this section is precisely to supplement Mbembe’s ability to have coined a term – i.e. “disenclosure” in the context of Fanon’s work – capable of identifying this character of Fanon’s work, by showing the ways in which this absolute cosmopolitanism informed and inspired Fanon’s struggles towards radically new forms of life. For, as I will be discussing in chapter 4, Fanon was not quite interested in the postcolony. In fact, his dreams and his revolutionary commitments were profoundly dedicated to a *post*-postcolonial world, the advent of which he was well aware may never occur. The structure of this absolute character of this *post*-postcoloniality – so to speak – are significantly similar to many aspect of Derrida’s conceptual messianism. These similarities are essentially the central theme of this section.

One could say that the later Derrida was significantly worried about the genealogy

of certain ethical and political concepts, such as forgiveness, cosmopolitanism, democracy, and hospitality. As with Fanon, I would say, Derrida never denied the Western heritage of these concepts, though he always ultimately sought to draw out the very dimension that formed their truly ethical and political character. In this regard, both Fanon (with humanism particularly⁹²) and Derrida possessed the ability to locate the contradiction within one term's history, while attempting simultaneously to restore its valuable dimension. However, for Derrida – and perhaps less in Fanon – the unconditional aspect of one terms, though contradictory, always remains “indissociable” with the discursive dimensions of its practical use – that is, with the economy or transactional character that condition its social operation. In *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Derrida ask the following question in the context of the emerging “cities of refuges” meant to harbor the stateless, the political pariahs who continue to attempt the suicidal voyage to the European (colonial) “promise land”:

In committing ourselves thus, in asking that metropolises and modest cities commit themselves in this way, in choosing for them the name of ‘cities of refuge’, we have doubtless meant more than one thing, [...]. In reviving the traditional meaning of an expression and in restoring a memorable heritage to its former dignity, we have been eager to propose simultaneously, beyond the old word, an original concept of hospitality, of the duty (*devoir*) of hospitality, and of the right (*droit*) to hospitality. What then would such a concept be? How might it be adapted to the pressing urgencies which summon and overwhelm us? How might it respond to unprecedented tragedies and injunctions which serve to constrain and hinder it?⁹³

Beyond the underlying distrust of the Nation-State that essentially continues to compel alternative practices of hospitality like the *villes-refuge*, what appears to be fundamentally at stake for Derrida here are the demands and urgencies for a new term

⁹² I discuss this aspect of Fanon's work in chapter 4

⁹³ Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 5

capable of responding to the pressing problems resulting from globalization's violence and (imperial) economic destitution. The ethics and *cosmopolitics* – to use Derrida's language – of refuge and hospitality will necessarily have to problematize our notion of cosmopolitanism inherited from the Enlightenment. For, even if Derrida recognizes that Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitan law included a notion of universal hospitality *without limit*, Derrida will remain deeply worried by the very fact that Kant restricted this hospitality without limit only to the right of visitation (*Besuchsrecht*). What called for thinking in an age controlled by global markets striving from an international large-scale economy of violence – and the running of which the racialized body is increasingly indispensable – was, for Derrida, precisely Kant's "limitation on the right of residence, as that which is to be made dependent on treaties between states".⁹⁴ He claims, in a seminar on hospitality from January 8th 1997:

Hospitality must wait *and* not wait. It is what must await *and still* [*et cependant*] not await, extend and stretch itself [*se tendre*] and still stand and hold itself [*se tenir*] in the awaiting and the non-awaiting. Intentionality *and* non-intentionality, attention *and* inattention. Tending and stretching itself between the tending [*le tendre*] *and* the not-tending or the not-tending-itself [*ne pas se tendre*], not to extend this or that, or oneself to the other. It must await and expect itself to receive the stranger.⁹⁵

Indeed, it appears that refusing to extend the cosmopolitan law to the "right of *residence*" (*Gastrecht*) as Kant does, would be to surround hospitality to the law (*le droit*) of the calculable whereby even the notion of "the guest" – precisely as the stranger – would lose that part of its semantic heritage that confers it its very ethical dimension. Recall that elsewhere, particularly in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason and Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority*, Derrida attempts to extricate an unconditional or

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 22

⁹⁵ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 360

absolute notion of justice and democracy, which would be the very condition of possibility for their being socially and politically applicable. In *Rogues* for instance, where the philosopher largely expounds on his late political concept of a “democracy to come”, we see that Derrida posits a concept of democracy whereby the “to come” – in fact, the experience of the impossibility of this “to come” – becomes the condition for the possibility of democracy. He appeals to an “absolute” or an “unconditioned” dimension of the word which, while not residing in the realm of the present or that of possible experience, not only exposes what he will call “the autoimmunity” inherent to the concept of democracy. This unconditionality will also prove to be the condition for the transformative potential of politics in general. In a way, there will have to be a certain preliminary renunciation, in fact an *a priori* renunciation for that matter, of a certain realm of the contingent or the “conditioned” form of the concept of democracy in order to envisage change or the transformative possibility of what is to come. In line with his overall uneasiness with normalcy (one can even say that what he calls normal sometimes is actually abnormal), Derrida begins by pointing out that the call for a thinking of a “democracy to come” – albeit hopeful – will always bear a hopelessness which, far from being identical to despair, will be opposed to the teleology of hopefulness or that of a certain economy of redemption while remaining opened to the unpredictable advent of the other. It is indeed on the side of the unforeseeable and the “incalculable”, as he puts it, that Derrida will investigate this concept of democracy. Privileging the indeterminate nature of this three words sentence, Derrida will show that, in spite of the familiar and ubiquitous character of “democracy” in modern politics, the democracy to come signals a meaning of the word democracy – although still neither empty, nor lost, nor even

nonexistent – that is yet to arrive. As with Fanon’s own “messianic” vision of that *after* postcolonialism, Derrida’s democracy to come will not necessarily function as a regulatory ideal but rather as that event upon which practices of perfectibility must necessarily envisage in order for transformation to occur. This event to arrive, however, will require that we relinquish the desire to return to an origin of the word. Although the fact that an attempted return to an origin could obstruct a future politics, one cannot deny or abandoned the word’s heritage.

Another problem that challenges Derrida is that of the place of the “other” in relation to a certain common understanding of democracy, at the center of which the notion of a self-governed sovereignty operates that also challenges Derrida. This “ipseity”, as he puts it, “of the One, the *autos* of autonomy” that “clashes with another truth of democracy, namely the truth of the other, heterogeneity, the heteronomic and the dissymmetric” will be a challenge difficult to ignore in relation to this event to come.⁹⁶ For one cannot deny, Derrida points out, that it is on the basis of a free self, of freedom understood as “liberty with license”, freedom of choice or of following one’s desire, that we have conceived and inherited our contemporary conception of democracy. There is indeed “no freedom without ipseity and, vice versa, no ipseity without freedom”.⁹⁷ However, even in the possession of such a heritage, the idea of equality has also been at work in our conventional understanding of democracy. This equality, nonetheless, involves a certain double movement of exchange, of a circular exchange, wherein power is transmitted, deployed each time “by turn”, or “in turn”, between the governed and the

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 14

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23

governing – freedom and equality are reconcilable in an “alternating fashion”, Derrida argues.⁹⁸ In what appears to be the beginning of an aporetic structure, Derrida insists on this ambiguity so often difficult to think in freedom in order to expose two problems at the heart of our conception of democracy. The first concerns what the philosopher called “a semantic vacancy or [an] indetermination at the very center of the concept of democracy that makes its history turn”.⁹⁹ Hence, coupled with the history of the concept of freedom – which is also the second problem here – that conditions this semantic vacancy, Derrida warns that both problems require us to return to the question of freedom itself. For, at the origin of this ambiguity that both problems signal, one finds a certain kind of freedom that opens up a radical indetermination, an undecidability at the heart of the very concept of democracy. This freedom in the concept, a freedom which Derrida is reluctant to name just yet “originary”, is that which confers the possibility of a future to the concept of democracy, that renders democratic transformation (its perfectibility) of the word democracy itself feasible. In a nutshell, one that realizes the “intrinsic plasticity” and the “interminable self-criticizability” of the concept.¹⁰⁰ To be sure, this open future, this radical plasticity, as it were, should not be considered lightly. In the same way Deleuze and Guattari warn us of the dangers of absolute deterritorialization in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Derrida cautions that democracy has always been suicidal”.¹⁰¹ However, whereas Deleuze and Guattari’s warning signals are rather more morbid occurrences, the suicidal in democracy – especially in this democracy to come – entails an inevitable departure from the constraining present which would result from the

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 24

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 25

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 33

demands of “thinking life otherwise”, of leaving as it were the realm of our inheritance. However, this suicide that democracy has entailed also possesses potential tragic ramifications. This autoimmune suicide – to use Derrida’s terminology – has been at the center of historical events in which incontestably democratic processes have resulted in undemocratic effects. Hence, he reminds us that “fascist and Nazi totalitarianism came into power or ascended to power through formally normal and formally democratic electoral processes.”¹⁰² Just in the same way, Mbembe or Fanon would argue, newly independent postcolonial democracies became inexorably murderous states have. This intrinsic autoimmunity at the heart of democracy, which in as much as it guarantees an open-ended future may also obliterate the positive effects of democratic procedures, echoes a certain kind of “autoimmunity” that one finds in the character of Deleuze and Guattari’s “lines of flight”. For, let us remember, in as much as lines of flight are the opening gates to the possibility of deterritorialization¹⁰³, these must always be cautiously navigated because the risk of their becoming lines of destruction is often at bay. Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari – and this is significantly similar to Derrida’s remark – the Nazi state was never a totalitarian state. Since, according to Deleuze and Guattari, what characterizes a totalitarian state is the surveillance apparatus that “seal all possible lines of flight”, the fascism of Nazi Germany was not totalitarian in nature because it was “constructed on an intense line of flight”.¹⁰⁴

Fascism was constructed on an intense line of flight, which it proceeded to

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Please refer to chapter 4 for a more engaged description of “deterritorialization”

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze & Guattari (1987), p. 230

transform into a “line of pure destruction and abolition”.¹⁰⁵ Hence, we can see that for Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari it is not only that emancipatory political concepts – concepts that orient us in their very nature to the possibility of change – such as the democracy to come or lines of flight possess an autoimmunity capable of leading us to the tragic, it is also this very autoimmunity responsible of the intrinsic vulnerability of these concepts that renders possible an open future within which changes can occur. In light of the problem of democracy’s freedom, this freedom at play in the concept, Derrida asks:

[M]ust a democracy leave free and in a position to exercise power those who risk mounting an assault on democratic freedoms and putting an end to democratic freedom in the name of democracy and of the majority that they might actually be able to rally round to their cause? Who, then, can take it upon him- or herself, and with what means, to speak from one side or another of this front, of democracy *itself*, of *authentic* democracy *properly speaking*, when it is precisely the concept of democracy *itself*, in its univocal and proper meaning, that is presently and forever lacking?¹⁰⁶

Derrida’s question here does not posit the absence of a concept. Rather, the lack of which he laments will work to open the possibility of re-thinking a concept which – a thinking otherwise that can reproduce a distinction between the conditioned or experienced form of the concept on the one hand and, on the other, the absolute or unconditioned form of the concept the nature of which is always either paradoxical or unattainable. Far from being a sentence to the possibility of change, the analysis of this “unattainability, of this aporetic structure, will lead us to a peculiar experience of this impossible moment, this event to come, and it is this very experience that is the condition of the possibility for change. The political in Derrida is always oriented toward the possibility of a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida (2005), p. 34

transformation that is primarily determined and conditioned by an absence – or perhaps, more precisely a “non-presence” – the function of which, beyond the mere impossibility of its presence or its being experience, announces not a limit or an unmovable obstacle on the level of the political, but the capacity of welcoming the other of or from a radical future. For Derrida, to expose the impossibility of this democracy to come does not mean to disqualify it. Rather, exposing this impossibility allows revealing what we acutely lack: “*the very idea of democracy, a certain true idea of democratic truth*”.¹⁰⁷ In fact, to this aporia, that freedom and equality inaugurate at the heart of the concept of democracy, and which also resides in the impossible materialization of the absolute idea of democracy, Derrida will ascribe the role of responsibility – it will be an aporia that is “the condition for the possibility and the impossibility of responsibility”.¹⁰⁸

It is indeed this aporia as the condition for both the possibility and the impossibility of responsibility that surrounds Derridean ethico-political philosophy. For, as he points still in *Rogues*, if such an idea as pure ethics must exist, the latter must begin with “the respectable dignity of the other as the absolute *unlike*, recognized as nonrecognizable, indeed as unrecognizable, beyond all knowledge, all cognition and all recognition”.¹⁰⁹ This “unrecognizable other”, this absolute *unlike*, as the origin of pure ethics points us in some ways to Emmanuel Lévinas for whom, in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, justice itself is inaugurated by the infinite Other, by “recognizing in the Other as my master”¹¹⁰, by recognizing the irreducible singularity of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 37

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 49

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 60

¹¹⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 72

the Other.¹¹¹ Far from being a limit or a barrier to transformative politics, the aporetic incommensurability of this unrecognizable other, of this democracy to come, and of this open future which harbors the impossible act that conditions progress and change, is the very beginning of ethics and politics.¹¹²

Recall that, as I briefly mention above, for Derrida the urgency in the question of hospitality is to be found precisely in a reversal of the Kantian cosmopolitan law. He concludes his essay on cosmopolitanism with the following words:

Experience and experimentation thus. Our cities of refuge then will not only be that which cannot wait, but something which calls for an urgent response, a just response, more just in any case than the existing law. An immediate response to crime, to violence, and to persecution. I also imagine the experience of cities of refuge as giving rise to an asylum and hospitality – and for a new order of law and a democracy to come to be put to the test (*expérimentation*). Being on the threshold of these cities, of these new cities that would be something other than ‘new cities’, a certain idea of cosmopolitanism, *an other*, has not yet arrived, *perhaps*.¹¹³

It is that “more just” – that justice, of which he speaks at length in *Force de loi* and which exceeds the existing law – that I believe Fanon’s own brand of cosmopolitanism and politics of disenclosure had anticipated. Before I properly dive into Fanon’s politics and ethics of hospitality, I would like to linger just a little more in what I believe will appear

¹¹¹ Ibid., see p. 246

¹¹² See also *The Other Heading: Reflection on Today’s Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), in which Derrida makes a similar claim by arguing that ethics, politics, and responsibility must begin, if these are to exist, from the experience of the impossible or, more specifically, the “experiment of the aporia”. Rules and the claims to a certain possession of fixed and already determined knowledge that precede the deciding moment necessarily abolish the responsibility that the moment of decision calls upon and annul the decision itself. He writes: “The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the aporia* from which one may invent only *possible invention, the impossible, the impossible invention* (p. 41)

¹¹³ Derrida (2001), p. 23

to be signs of crucial affinities between Derrida and Fanon.

The relationship between “an *ethics* of hospitality (an *ethics as* hospitality) and a *law* or a *politics* of hospitality” as, for instance, Kant’s cosmopolitan law or his condition of universal hospitality, was ultimately Derrida’s most urgent call for thinking in many of his explicitly political work. In *Cosmopolites de tous les pays encore un effort!*, for example, he faces and attacks head-on the problem of displacement in its multiple contemporary forms. As it is with his multiple calls for that political-to-come, so to speak, he also speaks of a solidarity-to-come – one yet to be invented and the creation of which falls upon our responsibility and is our most urgent “task”. Indeed, he writes: “*Cette invention est notre tâche; la réflexion théorique ou critique y est indissociable des initiatives pratiques que nous commençons et réussissons déjà à mettre en oeuvre dans l’urgence.*”¹¹⁴ Though the singularity of each cases of displacement call for and require singular practical solutions or means of executions, it appears that, for Derrida, the possibility and practical abilities to inflect the limits of the law and the political reside precisely in putting our political imaginaries to task. Insofar as its precarious and problematic character has made it increasingly unfit to remain the ultimate horizon of a cosmopolitanism or solidarity yet “to be invented”, yet to come, Derrida also questions the usefulness in reviving the ethical dignity of this concept which we inherit from a specific discursive historiography. In this regard, he asks: “*Que serait donc un tel concept? Comment pourrions-nous le plier aux terrifiantes urgences qui nous assaillent ou nous appellent?*” Like Fanon (in the case of Enlightenment’s ethics in particular), Derrida is not concerned here with the retroactive clarification of the meaning of a word,

¹¹⁴ Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), p. 13-14

in order then to return its original semantic character somewhat gradually lost in various moments of social signification. Beyond merely invoking specific historical events in their singularity – a practice he believes has simply worked to dismiss others in that tragic, equally violent, place of anonymity or invisibility – Derrida seems to be worried about the ways in which one concept, even in its dignified history, could be applied and be useful to contemporary tragedies. For insofar as we consider concrete progress on the level of the political – i.e. the granting of political asylum, the opening of borders, and general immigration policies – Derrida points out that hardly anything was ever ethically compelled or motivated.¹¹⁵ That said, however, he is certainly not here implying that ethics would in fact be the proper foundation of law or politics. Derrida is not saying that the tragic failure of the political to prevent the worst is in fact the result of an absence of a proper foundation – a proper hierarchy in which the law and the political would be founded on ethics. He is also not saying that ethics itself would be that which could found a transcendental cosmopolitan law, so to speak, that would indeed exceed and be the condition of possibility for a politics of hospitality outside traditional socio-political contexts in which hospitality has always functioned. To the contrary, it is precisely in this discursive trap that he somehow warns us against. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, Derrida proposes the following, which is worth quoting at length:

On the horizon of these preliminary questions, I will be guided by a question that I will in the end leave in suspense [...]. It would concern, on first view, the relationships between an *ethics* of hospitality (an ethics *as* hospitality) and a *law* or a *politics* of hospitality [...]. The classical form of this question would perhaps be found in the figure of a founding or legitimating foundation. It might be asked, for example, whether the ethics of hospitality that we will try to analyze [...] would be able to found a law and a politics, beyond the familial dwelling, within a society, nation, State, or Nation- State. This question is no doubt serious, difficult,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., see specifically discussion on p. 27

and necessary, but it is already canonical. We will try to subordinate it to another suspensive question, to what might be called a sort of *epoche*. Which one? Let us assume, *concesso non dato*, that there is no assured passage, following the order of a foundation, according to a hierarchy of founding and founded, of principal originarity and derivation, between an ethics or a first philosophy of hospitality, on the one hand, and a law or politics of hospitality, on the other. Let us assume that one cannot deduce from Lévinas's ethical discourse on hospitality a law and a politics, some particular law or politics in some determined situation today, whether close to us or far away [...]. How, then, are we to interpret this impossibility of founding, of deducing or deriving? Does this impossibility signal a failing? Perhaps we should say the contrary. Perhaps we would, in truth, be put to another kind of test by the apparent negativity of this lacuna, by this hiatus between ethics [...], on the one hand, and, on the other, law or politics.¹¹⁶

Opting neither for a kind retroactive clarification of, nor an invitation to supplement – perhaps even pluralize – the meaning of a word in order to give it back what it meant to say originally but pragmatically failed to accomplish, Derrida will rather force us to think the responsibility that this “hiatus” between ethics and politics really entails. What will first transpire, through his meticulous engagement with Lévinas, is that the topology of this relationship, of this distinction between ethics and politics, will never be solidly settled. He writes: “The border between the ethical and the political [...] loses for good the indivisible simplicity of a limit. No matter what Lévinas might have said, the determinability of this limit was never pure, and it never will be”.¹¹⁷ In spite of the canonical question delineated by Kant and Lévinas, a question that will continue to haunt Derrida to some significant degree in his other later work – that question between the purely unconditional and the necessity of conditional rules – Derrida’s urgency is in the possibility of sharpening another politics, indeed even another ethics capable of attending to the relentlessness of all crimes and offenses against hospitality. Hence, it appears that

¹¹⁶ Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 19-20

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99

even if he is profoundly concerned with the structure of the concept, its semantic history, and the possibility of salvaging its dignity, the dire historical contexts that called forth the urgency of returning to this word are the principle concerns for Derrida. Even if his hyperbolic notion of hospitality exceeds the exchange or the calculable economy of a debt, the relationship between an ethics of hospitality (which would be unconditional) and a politics of hospitality is, at the same time, one of mutual perversion and of mutual need. He writes in *Of Hospitality*: “But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, *the* unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it *requires* them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn’t be effectively unconditional, the law, if it didn’t *have to become* effective, concrete, determined, if that were not its being as having to be”.¹¹⁸ In fact, this capacity of pervertibility, this constant risk of being impoverished – so to speak – that the unconditional always incurs, remains irreducible and “seems more worthy of the absolute hospitality that offers the gift without reservations”.¹¹⁹ Because what calls for thinking profoundly remains a concrete politics, in fact an ethics, of hospitability, Derrida ultimately opts for the “decision”, which means responsibility of acting in the face of new historical injunctions, even if the act of deciding necessarily requires jeopardizing the unconditional, the absolute law of hospitality. This is why I will continue to resist, in my dissertation, the prevailing inclinations in philosophy of race of either condemning Derridean deconstruction for its inability effectively to attend to the so-called “real world”, on the one hand, and on the other, the perplexing reflex to read Fanon as if – to use David Scott’s words – one “were about to join him in the trenches of

¹¹⁸ Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 79

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135

the anticolonial liberation struggle”.¹²⁰ Hence, in the concluding pages of this chapter, I would like to illustrate the ways in which Fanon’s work and life are the concrete instantiations of the formal structures that Derrida describes above, while simultaneously displacing the proclivities of considering Fanon’s revolutionary practices at the expense of the seriousness of his theoretical and discursive legacy.

Although the word is neither used nor explicitly invoked in his general oeuvre, Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* bequeaths us a significant account of hospitality. To my knowledge, he has never used the words cosmopolitanism and hospitality explicitly. However, as Mbembe has eloquently argued for the past five years, Fanon’s politics is fundamentally a politics carved against multiple forms of enclosure, of isolation, and imprisonment. Beyond his alleged crisis of identity, which drove him to leave Martinique as Memmi has intimated, it is his profound (at times unconscious) sense of a universalist ethos that led him to fight for the “rights of man” in many corners of the world. Let us not forget that he left Martinique in 1943 to fight, along the French army, in World War II; that after a brief time spent back in Martinique campaigning for Aimé Césaire’s political career, Fanon begins to study Existential philosophy and shortly after moves to Lyon to study medicine; and that right upon receiving his degree he is deployed to colonial Algeria where he will be stationed during the war as a psychiatrist at Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital. By 1946, Fanon will ultimately defect and join the spreading anticolonial movements and unrest in northern and western Africa, starting with the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). The theoretical ramifications of this constant being on the move, one perhaps we could call “a militant self-exile”, is more

¹²⁰ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 199

than apparent in his work – especially in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Let us dare to start with the hospitality paradoxically present in the most infamous chapter of this book. From as early as the second paragraph of the chapter, Fanon has already characterized decolonization to be not simply a provincial political project that would ultimately change specifically localized territories – i.e. occupied colonial territories – but a global program – albeit chaotic – “set out to change *the order of the world*”.¹²¹ Indeed, it will necessarily be a historical process that will require, in addition to exposing its contemporary mechanics, a complete global historicization of its development. The transformative forces of decolonization are also not merely directed to the future of the colonized but to that of all beings. Because decolonization results in the transformation of all historical beings, it “never goes unnoticed”, Fanon argues, it is indeed “truly the creation of new men”.¹²²

The most cosmopolitan character of this chapter, however, is undoubtedly Fanon’s vehement attack against the quasi-criminal compartmentalization of colonial territorial organization. While readers have recently begun to point out and discuss his deep criticisms of politics of authenticity and national belongingness, a few have recognized that Fanon’s brand of cosmopolitanism preceded his explicit indictment of the national bourgeoisie’s xenophobic agenda. Having abruptly announced that decolonization can only be a violent process, Fanon stops equally abruptly in this prophetic élan to denounce: “The colonial world is a compartmentalized world. It is obviously as superfluous to recall the existence of ‘native’ towns and European towns, of schools for ‘natives’ and schools for European, as it is to recall apartheid in South Africa.

¹²¹ Fanon (2004), p. 2

¹²² Ibid.

[...] The colonized world is a world divided in two. The dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations.”¹²³ Fanon will draw direct parallels between the “negrophobic” Manichaeism of racial historical taxonomy and the vicious racial organization of colonial territories. Indeed, as Alessandrini has also pointed out, half way through *Wretched of the Earth*, this Manichaeism will almost become the single and most important “explanatory tool to understand the colonial situation”.¹²⁴ This is decolonization aims to destroy, and that against which the project of creating new forms of life will be directed. For, more than being an insidious dividing apparatus, colonial Manichaeism was the tool which not only governed and sanctioned colonial violence, it was also a deeply rooted discursive mechanism with which the “native” will essentially be declared “impervious to ethics” – in other words, that quintessential being “representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values”.¹²⁵ Ultimately, Fanon argues, this Manichaeism reaches its “logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject”.¹²⁶ It is important to point out the ways in which Fanon perceives the relationship between ethics and the concept of the earth, or the territory. In fact, to respond to the criminal dehumanization of the native by the colonizer, Fanon will argue that the ethically hypocritical rhetoric of “values” cannot resonate with the people because what really matters for them – as opposed for the colonized bourgeoisie – is the concrete material value of the “earth” (*la terre*). Thus, in response to the dialogue on values that occurs between the bourgeois elites and the colonizers every time their power is jeopardize, Fanon writes:

¹²³ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁴ Alessandrini (2014), p. 146

¹²⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 6

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 7

But what we should never forget is that the immense majority of colonized peoples are impervious to such issues. For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost: the land which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with “human” dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and starved with impunity; and no sermonizer on morals, no priest has ever stepped in to bear the blows in his place or share his bread. For the colonizer, to be a moralist quite plainly means silencing the arrogance of the colonist, breaking his spiral of violence in a word ejecting him outright from the picture.¹²⁷

In addition to showing that while Fanon was always already critical of Europe’s abstract ethics, his claims above should remind us that, like Derrida, Fanon was not interested in rescuing the dignity of an ethics – though its imposed nomenclature demands from us a constant return to its historical heritage. As with Derrida, Fanon was concerned with finding a new ethico-political discourse capable of responding to the urgencies of colonial life. In his own quest to find this discourse, Fanon stumbled on, and advanced, multiple solutions some of which – like violence – have cost him acerbic criticisms. But because his most persistent conviction remained, up until the moment of his untimely death, that “humanness”, as we had inherited it from Europe, even as a kind of membership in politically sanctioned and territorialized inequality, Fanon’s vision of new forms of life stayed inexorably rooted in a materialist ethics which, I contend, was unthinkable without his own unconditional conception of hospitality. Indeed, Alessandrini is right to claim the following:

[Fanon’s] thought is at all times the enemy of stasis. This is one thing that links his entire oeuvre. The two forces against which he constantly takes aim – racism and colonialism – have in common the sense of cutting off any openings toward movement and transformation, and imposing a sense of stasis that then can all too easily be mistaken for an unchanging reality.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 9

¹²⁸ Alessandrini (2014), p. 191

We thus cannot indulge in reading *The Wretched of the Earth* without recognizing its politics of hope which, I contend, profoundly relies on Fanon's radical cosmopolitanism. In fact, in this infamous chapter on violence, Fanon will claim that the quintessential character of colonialism is its relentless ability to inflict its dichotomous modes of life on the world. It is only decolonization, therefore, that "unifies this world by a radical decision to remove its heterogeneity".¹²⁹ The mistakes of the colonized bourgeoisie in revolutionary struggles will be precisely their inability to think the global, to think the world, because of their intellectual commitment to abstract European ethics. Here again, it is important to recognize how Fanon understands genuine ethics materially, in a revolutionary ethics capable of discarding criminal conceptions of difference and heterogeneity. He writes:

But at the start of his cohabitation with the people the colonized intellectual gives priority to detail and tends to forget the very purpose of the struggle – the defeat of colonialism. Swept along by the many facets of the struggle, he tends to concentrate on local tasks, undertaken zealously but almost always too pedantically. He does not always see the overall picture. He introduces the notion of discipline, specialized areas and fields into that awesome mixer and grinder called a people's revolution.¹³⁰

And just a few lines later, he adds:

The people, on the other hand, take a global stance from the very start. "Bread and land: how do we go about getting bread and land?" And this stubborn, apparently limited, narrow-minded aspect of the people is finally the most rewarding and effective working model.¹³¹

Recall that Derrida never fails to remind us that insofar as hospitality "has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling [...] *ethics is*

¹²⁹ Fanon (2004), p. 10

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 13

¹³¹ Ibid.

hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality”.¹³² The affinity between Derrida’s claim and Fanon’s own conception of genuine ethics is apparent, I think. While one can assert that Derrida’s ethico-political interventions have always been compelled by his attempt to link a concrete decision (an ethical and/or a political one) with the impossible, or what he calls a “radical experience of the *perhaps*”¹³³, Fanon’s distinction between abstract and concrete ethics also reveals that, in spite of his profound reservation about the feasibility of a radically liberated postcolonial world – a post-postcolonial, as I discuss in chapter 4 – he found the possibility of a decision to be essentially rooted in the concreteness of one’s dwelling, one’s land. Traditional readings of Fanon’s work, specifically readings of *The Wretched of the Earth*, tend to emphasize the character of the unalterable enmity that Fanon’s use to describe colonization. But, Fanon’s sarcastic exhortation on the radical elimination of the colonizer should not be taken literally. Though he begins his chapter on violence with hyperbolic claims such as “decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another [and] the substitution is unconditional, absolute, total and seamless”, by the middle of this chapter, Fanon has drastically changed the argumentative tone of his prose to the extent that this condition of radical antagonism is no longer revolutionary but the cause of the colonized’s existential petrification and the source of deep anxieties for a foreseeable postcolonial future. He writes:

We have seen therefore [*on voit donc*] that the Manichaeism that first governed colonial society is maintained intact during the period of decolonization. In fact the colonist never ceases to be the enemy, the antagonist, in plain words public enemy number 1 [*très précisément l’homme à abattre*]. The oppressor, ensconced in his sector [*dans sa zone*], creates the spiral, the spiral of domination,

¹³² Derrida (2001), p. 17

¹³³ Derrida (1994), p. 35

exploitation and looting. In the other sector [*dans l'autre zone*], the colonized subject [*la chose colonisée*] lies coiled and robbed [...]. In this petrified zone, not a ripple on the surface, [...] the raw materials come and go, legitimating the colonist's presence, while more dead than alive the colonized subject [*le colonisé*] crouches forever in the same old dream.¹³⁴

Colonialism's brutality is reflected also in the petrification of daily life. In addition to his vehement critique of colonial types of territorialization, Fanon's most cosmopolitan politics is perhaps to be found in the fourth chapter of *Wretched of the Earth*: "On National Culture". In the final pages of this chapter, therefore, I would like to advance a reading of this chapter that will attempt to show how Fanon's nationalism not only problematized the political limits of Pan-African movements of the time. I also intend to show that, as with Derrida, Fanon understood hospitality to be precisely culture, and thus ethics itself.

Hospitality and Fanon's Politics of Culture

The element of Fanon's work and life that remained arguably invisible to early critics is perhaps that prophetic Fanon who grew increasingly anguished of the imminent horrors and tragedies of the postcolonial. This deep anxiety was mostly recorded in the chapters that followed his infamous intervention on violence. While the third chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The Trials and Tribulation of National Consciousness", is a call for more vigilance against problematic cooptation of colonial politics in anticolonial endeavors, the fourth chapter is where Fanon's directly confronts the shortsightedness of nativism and xenophobia. "On National Culture", I argue, is Fanon's cosmopolitan quasi-manifesto. From the very first paragraph, it is clear that Fanon is concerned with the issue of personal accountability on the part of the oppressed – a question which many readings

¹³⁴ Fanon (2004), p. 14, Fanon (2002), p. 52. I have inserted the original French wherever I deemed the translation decisions inadequate.

privileging Fanon's politics of revolution have been unable to account for. In this regard, he claims from the start that the time has indeed arrived for the oppressed not merely to be celebrating past triumphs, but to also be taking responsibility for their silences and passivity. The silences and passivity, Fanon will argue, concern first and foremost the most fundamental question of liberation struggles: the legitimacy of anticolonial claims to a nation. In most political parties, Fanon will contend, one finds both "men" of culture (i.e. men with a Western notion of culture) and those who are primarily "men" of the concrete, that is people for whom abstract values such as dignity cannot overturn the vital importance of material conditions. For the former, Fanon will continue, the struggle occurs on the abstract level of futile intellectualism, while the latter operates on the level of the real. He will claim, in fact, that one's passionate search for a national culture is fundamentally a desperately misguided yearning to claim equal status on the Western historical scale. In the anticolonial context, culture is essentially predestined to create nativist false sense of historical worth, which function merely as a temporary remedy for the colonized's feelings of inferiority. Insofar as the colonized's notion of culture remains primarily the search for lost origins, culture will remain this incapacitating vain attempt to rectify history while, simultaneously, refusing to face one's own present. Fanon thus writes:

I concede the fact that the actual existence of an Aztec civilization has done little to change the diet [*régime alimentaire*] of today's Mexican peasant. [...] this passionate quest for a national culture prior to the colonial era can be justified by the colonized intellectual's shared interest in stepping back and taking a hard look at the Western culture in which they risk becoming ensnared. [...] perhaps this passion and this rage are nurtured or at least guided by the secret hope of discovering beyond the present wretchedness, beyond this self-hatred, this abdication and denial, some magnificent and shining era that redeems us in our

own eyes and those of others. *I say that I have decided to delve deeper.*¹³⁵

The intellectual lack of historical sobriety is precisely, for Fanon, his/her inability to cope with the unfolding history before his/her own eyes – his/her inability to “come to loving terms with the present history of their oppressed people [and] its current state of barbarity”.¹³⁶ Perhaps it is important to pause here for a translation brief remark. In the French, the above sentence reads as follow: *Inconsciemment peut-être les intellectuels colonisés, ne pouvant faire l’amour avec l’histoire présente de leur peuple opprimé, ne pouvant s’émerveiller de leur barbaries actuelles [...]*.¹³⁷ It seems that Fanon is not referring to the barbarism of history, but potentially to the barbarism of the colonized people. It is significant to note this mistake because what follows in this chapter on “national culture” is precisely what Fanon will at times consider to be, with much contempt, the barbarity of misguided anticolonial practices. This quote above begins, I believe, what will at times read like an unforgiving diatribe against the mistakes of the party leaders and their depoliticized partisans.

However, even if Fanon harshly and repeatedly criticized bourgeois intellectuals, he was not a gratuitous anti-intellectual. Shortly after the passage I have cited above, not only does he immediately turn to rationalize this generalized desire for such sterile historical revisionism. Fanon will also attempt to describe what meaningful historical work could look like. In this regard, he will recognize the colonized’s profound cultural alienation and will contend that colonization had indeed managed “to hammer into the heads of the indigenous population that if the colonist were to leave they would regress

¹³⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 148; Fanon (2002), p. 200. My emphasis

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ Fanon (2002), p. 200

into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality”.¹³⁸ He will therefore explain (a sentence that is omitted in the English translation): “*Dans cette situation la revendication de l’intellectuel colonisé n’est pas un luxe mais exigence de programme cohérent*”.¹³⁹ Thus, even if part of the anticolonial project requires a certain level of historical excavation in order to expose the historical misrepresentation and mis-education of the colonized, Fanon will nonetheless contend that this work must remain a non-nationalistic project. He will therefore argue that the intellectual who wishes to correct European historical discourses will have to do it on both the global and the African continental scale. But because what Fanon wanted, ultimately, was the world to think its shared global imperial history, he indeed sought to “delve deeper”. Consider, for instance, the following concluding lines of the paragraph cited above, in which he recognizes the legitimacy of a certain type of historical excavation:

The culture proclaimed is African culture. When the black man, who has never felt as much a “Negro” as he has under white domination, decides to prove his culture and act as a cultivated person, he realizes that history imposes on him a terrain already mapped out, that history sets him along a very precise path and that he is expected to demonstrate the existence of a “Negro” culture.¹⁴⁰

Soon after, Fanon will indeed invoke Sartre’s “Black Orpheus” who he had ironically, though strategically, criticized in *Black Skin, White Masks* for taking away his last cultural optimism. Whereas Sartre unequivocally co-signed Négritude’s efforts (by applauding its solidarity with the oppressed globally) while simultaneously calling it a necessary but yet a temporary moment in the dialectical, Fanon was more incisively critical of the movement. He will write, for instance:

¹³⁸ Fanon (2004), p. 149

¹³⁹ Fanon (2002), p. 201

¹⁴⁰ Fanon (2004), p. 150

Following the unconditional affirmation of European culture came the unconditional affirmation of African culture. Generally speaking the bards of Négritude would contrast old Europe versus young Africa, dull reason versus poetry, and stifling logic versus exuberant Nature; on the one side there stood rigidity, ceremony, protocol, and skepticism, and on the other, naïveté, petulance, freedom, and indeed, luxuriance. *But also irresponsibility.*¹⁴¹

More than just the explicit critique of a premature and anachronistic essentialism, it seems to me that Fanon was also attacking the binary logic of this specific type of Manichaeism. As with his deep apprehension of Manichaestic organization of social space, he was clearly profoundly troubled by its discursive instantiation. In fact, Fanon forcefully affirms just a page later that “this historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture leads the African into a dead end”.¹⁴² His own conception of a national culture was far more cosmopolitan than critics are willing to recognize. Indeed, both Alessandrini and Macey are right to point out that Fanon championed a form of national culture that neither sanctioned nor co-signed any type of “volkish nationalism” – to use Alessandrini’s language – or any aspect of “oppositional Third World nationalism”.¹⁴³ As I have briefly mentioned before, Fanon’s idea of “nation” was primarily a product of the people’s political will – a collective will beyond the restrictions of race and borders. In his most cosmopolitan rendition of culture, Fanon will in fact write: “The colonized intellectual is responsible not to his national culture, but to the nation as whole, whose culture is, after all, but one aspect [*La responsabilité de l’homme de culture colonisé n’est pas une responsabilité en face de la culture nationale mais une responsabilité globale à l’égard de la nation*”

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 151. My emphasis

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 152

¹⁴³ Alessandrini (2014), p. 194

globale dont la culture n'est qu'un aspect]".¹⁴⁴ While it is not clear in the English translation, it is nonetheless apparent in the French that Fanon's vision of culture – national culture in particular – was one unrestricted by modern politics of the Nation-State, which I mentioned in the previous section Derrida precisely perceived as an undeniable obstacle to a new ethic or new “*cosmopolitics*” of emerging cities of refuge.

Sekyi-Otu is right to point out that “[f]rom the moment the author of *Black Skin, White Masks* screamed that he ‘was walled in’ and insisted that to be colonized is to be made the prisoner of a ‘fixed position’, the trope of space and spatial delimitation would become the characteristic idiom of Fanon’s description of the colonial world”.¹⁴⁵ What needs to be considered in addition to Sekyi-Otu point, however, is that Fanon understood this characteristic idiom to be central to his overall ethico-political undertakings. For, as I outlined above, ethics begins for Fanon with the spatial – indeed with the materiality of the earth itself. He rejects abstract intellectualism for its inability to deliver ethical standards capable of responding to the dire urgencies of the time and condemns intellectuals’ historical naivety. However, as Sekyi-Otu so rightly affirms once again, “it is not the irreducible necessity of our spatiality which is the object’s of Fanon’s protest but the transformation of this all-too-human circumstance into an extraordinary state of *coercion*”.¹⁴⁶ In fact, Sekyi-Otu will go as far as to claim that “the trope of space is the device by means of which Fanon’s texts turn away from a literal allegiance to the Marxist tradition for which indeed *time*, rather than space, is the existential category that

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 168; Fanon (2002), p. 221

¹⁴⁵ Sekyi-Otu (1999), p. 72

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 77

functions as the principal index of domination, alienation, and injustice".¹⁴⁷ Indeed, as my argument has attempted to show, I would add to Skeyi-Otu's observation that Fanon's emphasis on spatiality, and precisely its centrality in his ethics, not only anticipates by decades Derrida's own efforts to radicalize the question of hospitality in light of its modern history. Fanon's ethico-political emphasis on space, I contend, is also a concrete example of Derrida's formal characterization of the irreducible interplay between absolute and conditional structures. Because Derrida's efforts, though maintaining the crucial significance of decisive political actions in the face of crimes against hospitality [*délit d'hospitalité*], fell seemingly short to provide a decisive answer to the problem of exile and statelessness, many will continue to argue of the impracticability of deconstruction as the fundamental limitation of its politics. But, though Fanon's work and engaged revolutionary life seemed to accomplish exactly what deconstruction politics allegedly cannot do, it seems to me that it is quite clear that the formal structure of Derridean politics are inextricably at work at the heart of Fanon's concrete political engagements. Insofar as Fanon always resisted – while never denying their inevitable ramifications – historical determinations in all the hyperbolic moments of his political vision, Fanon was concretely and existentially wrestling with Derrida's structures of unconditionality, which are condition for the possibility of all politics perfectability. This is why Fanon ignited – and continues to – political imaginaries across the world and beyond national borders. From his critique of *Négritude*, to his appeal for solidarity beyond race for the oppressed, and his relentless harsh indictment of postcolonial xenophobia, Fanon's vision remained intricately informed by this absolute notion of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 73

future politics, the formal structures of which Derrida after all championed.

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III

Revisiting Fanon on Language: Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari

*To read Fanon is to experience the sense division that prefigures- and fissures the emergence of a truly radical thought that never dawns without casting an uncertain dark*¹⁴⁸

Homi K. Bhabha

In the opening sentences of “West Indians and Africans”, Fanon writes: “Two years ago I was finishing a work on the problem of the colored man in the white world. I knew that I must absolutely not amputate reality”.¹⁴⁹ He was referring to *Black Skin, White Masks* and, indeed, the most appealing and celebrated characteristics of this work were that hardly any problems of our racialized social reality fell into the cracks of his acute analysis. Beyond his exposition of Europe’s blatant racism and colonial hegemony, it was also the case that his treatment of internalized racism inspired immeasurable cultural criticism and inflamed political imaginations. Years before his indictment of bourgeois politics of decolonization for its own cooptation of colonial modes of governing, Fanon had attended to the problems of intra-racial enmity that Europe’s imposition of multiple racial orders had stirred and globally nurtured. He was praised for unapologetically uncovering the devastations of inferiority complexes, for admonishing politically and socially reactionary upheavals and, as his ultimate solution, calling for a radical revision of Europe’s hypocritical conception of the human. Fanon’s dream, like that of others who attempted to create a world in which freedom and self-determination

¹⁴⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 40

¹⁴⁹ Fanon (1967b), p. 17

were given a social reality, was not simply the successful realization of Europe's failed project of universal humanism. It was not merely an attempt to reconfigure the foundational ethico-political structures that informed and fostered Europe's willful hypocrisy inherent in its humanist tradition, and the accompanying blindness to its own crimes against humanity. Ultimately, the heart of Fanon's dream was, at bottom, the eradication of Western logics of containment and, as Mbembe numerous pointed out, the "disenclosure" and the circulation of worlds.

However, many readers of Fanon have often attended primarily to the explicit dimensions of his anti-colonial political discourse at the expense of his, equally important and perhaps even more lucid, efforts to carve a revolutionary politics unrestricted by binary logics and oppositions that anticolonial intellectual practices have traditionally been unwilling to think through and ultimately escape. Indeed, one may even assert that the prevailing trend in Fanon studies has mostly been an imposition of oppositional politics of resistance to his entire corpus that, in turn, resulted in an inability to exploit the fertile grounds of the prevailing ambiguities, contradictions, conceptual vagueness, and repetitions in his work. In this chapter, I attempt precisely to do that. That is, I seek to engage with these imprecisions in the hope that they will lead us to uncover those dimension of Fanon's work which do not neatly abide to anti-colonial oppositional politics – in the hope ultimately to show that the relevance of contemporary Fanon scholarship resides beyond the mere description and/or critique of previous stages in Fanon studies. More specifically, I will focus on Fanon's analysis of the colonized's relationship to the master language. Rather than opting to read the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* as one containing a self-enclosed counter-theory of colonial language,

I would like to show that Fanon's devastating critique of the French language was far less interested in advocating for the rejection of the master's language. Unlike thinkers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who placed the importance of indigenous languages at the center of all projects of decolonization, I argue that in spite of some apparent points of convergence Fanon's interests were ultimately committed to forging a *language* for the radical transformation of a world shaped by colonialism regardless of this language cultural origins. In a manner, therefore, I am also attempting to revive that Fanon – to claim him back in sorts – who belongs to a specific postcolonial philosophic tradition less devoted to the rhetoric of finding a coherent, self-defined, and collective postcolonial subjectivity as the preferred counter-narrative against colonialism's "thingification", to use Aimé Césaire term, of the lost authentic African subject. This is to say, therefore, that I am less interested in engaging in the prevailing conceptual antagonism that has, in the last decades, unfolded between Marxist and existentialist readers of Fanon on the one hand, and allegedly "postmodern" scholars on the other. Rather, I am more interested in probing the contemporary urgency that appears to mark this return to Fanon's work – that of finding and articulating why Fanon remains acutely relevant today. In *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Ghandi argues that postcolonial philosophy has historically been "caught between the politics of structure and totality, on the one hand, and the politics of the fragment on the other".¹⁵⁰ The point of contention between two seemingly opposed camps, in other words, revolves around one group's need to found an anti-colonial politics based on the creation of a unified identity in addition to revealing its own teleological conception of history and, the other's commitment to dismantle colonial

¹⁵⁰ Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 167

subjectivity albeit away from both a strictly progressivist vision of historical development as well as the need to reassemble the coherent lost subject of pre-coloniality. I intend to demonstrate, in this chapter, that perhaps the major reason Fanon remains relevant to postcolonial thinkers – regardless of their particular theoretical allegiances – is precisely because his work escapes facile codifications to such an extent that pinning him down as either a postmodernist *avant la lettre* or an existential humanist, or Marxist, is simply reducing the complexity and prophetic power of his words to some limiting intellectualism. Though ultimately the aim of this dissertation is not to debate whether or not Fanon’s work remains inevitably steeped in the emancipatory language of existential humanism, I have chosen nonetheless to respond to the call for reading Fanon with imagination (and clarity) – that is, to think the contemporary – by relying on a different discursive register: that of deconstruction and Deleuzian thought. The current generation of Fanon’s reader – and arguably more than any other previous one – has deemed the concern of creative appropriation crucial to this resurging interest in his work. Anthony Alessandrini, for instance, argues that though this invitation to think creatively with Fanon’s work is certainly not a call for some simple and “unthinking pluralism”, Fanon’s legacy will have meaning for us today “only insofar as we are able to appropriate his work in order to apply it – with all of its insights and all of its limitations – to the pressing issues of contemporary cultural politics”.¹⁵¹ In an interview on his recent preface to the publication of a volume containing Fanon’s most famous essays, Mbembe also cautions that there is a crucial distinction between Fanon’s word and that of the Gospel [*Entre la*

¹⁵¹ Anthony C. Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics* (New York: Lexington, 2014), p. 23

parole de Fanon et celle de l'Évangile il y a une grande différence].¹⁵² Hence, rather than dwelling on the theoretical debt he owes to existentialism, Marxism, or psychoanalysis, I would like to respond to the invitation to think Fanon in today's world by venturing in those dimensions of his work that did not necessarily abide to the politics of dialectical opposition. In other words, in the attempt to discover how (and why) some aspects of his work (and life) remain relevant to our current world, I intend to probe those areas which suggest that Fanon – much closer to postcolonial thinkers using deconstructive critical practices than he is predominantly portrayed – was also interested and committed to radically disrupt the methodological and epistemological underpinnings of Western discourse while, at the same time, he remained theoretically and pragmatically aware of the ways in which revolutionary praxis remained intricately complicit and determined by a certain dimension of the so-called “master's discourse”.

The Master's Tool Will Dismantle the Master's House: Language in Black Skin White Masks

It is quite clear how one may be inclined to read *Black Skin, White Masks*' opening chapter by asserting that Fanon only reveals and condemns the colonized's inferiority complex in his/her quest to master the colonial language. Indeed, right from the opening paragraph of this chapter, Fanon claims that to speak – and not in the sense of merely possessing a langue – is to assume a culture, a given civilization. Speaking is therefore not only an idiom for communication but, more importantly, it is to take on a

¹⁵² The interview, “Achille Mbembe: ‘L'oeuvre de Fanon fut pour tous les opprimés une arme de silex’”, can be found here: <http://www.telaroma.fr/idees/achille-mbembe-l-oeuvre-de-frantz-fanon-fut-pour-tous-les-opprimes-une-arme-de-silex,75754.php>

certain heritage, to undertake a certain history. For all colonized people, however, mastery of the colonial language becomes also a mean to elevate oneself to the status of a civilized person, a human being in fact. When forced to consider the colonial language as a potential promise of salvation, Fanon writes, the colonized believes that through the mastery of this language he will be “elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his mother country’s cultural standards”.¹⁵³ French thus is a problem not by virtue of being a language per se. It is a problem because, as a cultural signifier, French is yet another tool for cultural self-mutilation.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, one may say, this chapter’s point of contention is not language but culture. Beyond the colonized’s inferiority complex, it is the implication of language in his/her struggle to claim his/her status as a cultural being, whereby culture is perceived as the possession of the properly human, that renders the problematic of speaking French altogether a fraught experience and, in turn, centers and solidifies the issue of linguistic indigeneity for anti-colonial politics and struggles. Consider, for instance, the following observation Fanon articulates in this chapter:

I meet a Russian or a German who speaks French badly. With gestures I try to give him the information that he requests, but at the same time I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case, he is foreign to my group, and his standards must be different. When it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilization, no “long historical past”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Fanon (1967a), p. 18

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 23: It is interesting to note that, at the precise moment Fanon decides to take on the issue of language as a tool of oppression, he condemns philosophy in a rather sarcastic manner to be unable to conceptually open up to this problematic and consequently opts for psychoanalysis. He writes: “Having reflected on that, I grasp my narcissism with both hands and I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism. If there can be no discussion on a philosophical level – that is, the plane of the basic needs of human reality – I am willing to work on the psychoanalytical level – in other words, the level of ‘failures’, in the sense in which one speaks of engine failures”.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 34

More than merely speaking the colonizer's language, what appears to be the central issue in this passage is the colonized's inherent lack of a culture, that is a historical past which could legitimize his status as a human being. When one reads this chapter, therefore, one must abandon the easy temptation to ascribe to Fanon the kind of politics of authenticity according to which the process of decolonization, in the sense of the successful renunciation of persistent colonial ties, hinges on repudiating the use of one's colonial language as a legitimate mean of expression. For, it is not speaking French but "what speaking French" symbolically represents for the colonized that essentially matters for Fanon. My intention, however, is not to invalidate traditional phenomenological readings of this chapter on language. Rather, my aim is an attempt to pay heed to the relation of this chapter to Fanon's peculiar brand of political nationalism, which I have already discussed in relation to the role of violence in his writings. As I have discussed in chapter 3, Fanon's political nationalism abided neither to simplistic ideas of cultural boundaries nor to Panafricanism's nativist politics of African solidarity. On the contrary, his politics of self-determination was indissociable from his humanism which, as Anthony C. Alessandrini pointed out, shares postmodernism's critiques of the sovereign subject of humanism.¹⁵⁶ To this end, therefore, I propose "a double reading" of this chapter – a reading whose effectiveness will become more apparent when considered in light of the general spirit of his work after *Black Skin, White Masks*. Departing from the general spirit of Fanon scholarship, this will be a reading uninterested in the hermeneutical demands of erecting a coherent Fanonian discourse or of painstakingly

¹⁵⁶ Alessandrini, "The Humanism Effect: Fanon, Foucault, and Ethics without Subjects, in *Foucault Studies*, 7, p. 64-80, September 2009

trying to unify his inconsistent claims into a non-contradictory emancipatory narrative. Rather, I will attempt to consider Fanon's politics of language in light of his own relationship with the colonial discursive archive. I intend to show that the genuinely radical aspect of this chapter lies not in his obvious rebuke of French as the master's language, but in the radical transformation of its discursive history which Fanon envisaged. This, I argue, can only be approached by considering his politics of language in light of his complex relationship to European discourse.

In his recent book, *What Fanon Said* (2015), Lewis Gordon speaks of this linguistic adversity in the language of failure. He describes the dimension of this failure by showing that the escape allegedly promised by a mastery of the colonial language is never accomplished. When it comes to the black person's perfecting his/her French, his/her mastery of it becomes instead a suspicious endeavor. Gordon writes:

The black's efforts at transformative linguistic performance is a comedy of error; instead of being a transformer of words, the black is considered to be a "predator" of words; and even where the black has "mastered" the language, the black discovers in those cases that he or she becomes linguistically dangerous.¹⁵⁷

This fundamental failure, Gordon argues, is indeed a type of masquerade whereby the colonized speaking proper French is merely "wearing a white linguistic mask".¹⁵⁸ Given the conceptual tone of this chapter, the temptation of reducing Fanon's analysis to the obvious corollary, namely the repudiation of colonial language in favor of authentically regional modes of linguistic expression, is rather warranted. However, I find this temptation to be a simplistic approach to Fanon's work and one, I would like to show, that is an outcome of doing precisely what Gates calls for in his influential essay,

¹⁵⁷ Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 26

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27

“Critical Fanonism”: namely, to avoid the theoretical conflation between the “early” and the “late” Fanon.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, I also believe, the prioritization of *Black Skin, White Mask* – one that unfolds seemingly exclusively in the Anglophone academic environment in which Fanon’s work is distinctively compartmentalized – is equally responsible for this oversimplification.

The distinction between the “early” and “late” Fanon notwithstanding, many of the motifs in *Black Skin, White Masks* anticipated his more explicitly political expositions in *Wretched of the Earth* and other later essays. Indeed, the main discursive invitation in this dissertation is to engage in a strategically deliberate omission of this distinction not simply with the aim of rendering yet another symptomatic reading of Fanon’s texts. Beyond exposing either a prematurely poststructuralist Fanon – to use Benita Parry’s language when she describes Homi Bhabha’s Fanon¹⁶⁰ – or a staunchly revolutionary Fanon preferred by most Marxist and more pious readers, it is the Fanon not easily captured by either discourses, who I would like ultimately to emerge in this project. This Fanon, I contend, escapes simple codifications precisely because of the character of the communities’ circumstances, which have recently occasioned this new return to his work.

Sekyi-Ato asks the following question by way of introduction to his influential book, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*: “But what if your return to Fanon is solicited by a somewhat different situation in the world, a somewhat different geopolitical affiliation?”¹⁶¹ In fact, as I am pointing out throughout the dissertation, current

¹⁵⁹ Gates, “Critical Fanonism”, in *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (Spring, 1991), p. 457-470

¹⁶⁰ Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony C. Alessandrini (New York: Routledge, 1999)

¹⁶¹ Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 11

generations of Fanon readers are faced with a task of creative appropriation prompted by the demand of finding and understanding the ways in which Fanon's legacy still holds value to the pressing issues of our time. While returns to Fanon will remain profoundly political in nature, it is also accurate to assert that circumstances of this return will not only dictate the nature of the questions asked, they will also carve their idiosyncratic discursive parameters. That is to say that a number of questions privileged by previous "stages" in Fanon studies will be pushed into the background while others will no longer be relevant. Reading Fanon from the specificities of the determinate postcolonial location that I have claimed to be the central precursor of this "return" will, therefore, disrupt the discursive authority of previously privileged languages. Central to my argument, indeed, is the claim that "the Fanon of those who have witnessed the desolation of the world after independence, observed the rights of humanity smothered by the heavy fists of the self-anointed founders, and seen the dream of community wrecked by class predation and ethnic violence"¹⁶² ordains an agnostic reading of some sorts that exceeds the reductive concerns of textual accuracy and hagiographic loyalties. The work of translation prompted by this specific kind of postcoloniality – a translation which Mbembe has called for – will necessarily shift the centrality of many of the organizing tropes used by previous generations of Fanon scholars, and opt for a process of creative appropriation unbounded by the demands of disciplinary and political purity. In a manner, I am attempting to show in this chapter that a responsibly original reading of Fanon necessarily requires what Spivak, in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, called "a

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 45

productive acknowledgment of complicity”¹⁶³ between properly “post-independence” – to use Sekyi-Otu’s own rendering of “postcolonial” – hermeneutical practices and a specific part of the Western archive which many critics have deemed too abstract and obscure to be capable of providing anything informative to decipher the mechanics of colonial and postcolonial domination. In this text, Spivak writes:

We have no choice [...] but to allow the literary imagination its promiscuities. But if, as critics, [...] we wish to reopen the epistemic fracture of imperialism without succumbing to the nostalgia for lost origins, we must turn to the archives of imperialist governance.¹⁶⁴

Fanon was no stranger to such critical practice; his own idiosyncratic appropriations of his chosen figures in the Western archive testify to this end. Indeed, the efforts of contextualizing Fanon cannot be inaugurated without the willingness of daring to expand the already highly porous parameters of his critical writing. As Gates intimated in his own particular return to Fanon’s work, “Frantz Fanon, not to put too fine a point on it, is a Rorschach blot with legs”.¹⁶⁵ Whether Fanon’s writings, Gates continues, “are rife with contradiction or richly dialectical, polyvocal, and multivalent: they are in any event [...] wide open to interpretation and the reading they elicit are, as a result, of unflagging symptomatic interest”.¹⁶⁶ Such readings of Fanon may not only accomplish the overcoming of limiting binary oppositions, such as the division between colonizer and colonized, colonialism and decolonization, freedom and oppression, postcolonial territories and the Metropole, and so on. The “hyper-contextualization” – so to speak – that such refusal to abide to simplistic binaries can accomplish will also prove Fanon’s

¹⁶³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Critical of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. xii

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146

¹⁶⁵ Gates, “Critical Fanonism”, *Critical Inquiry* (17), 3, p. 458

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

work to be irrevocably among the founding texts of the truly postcolonial. That is, as Sekyi-Otu hoped for, they could finally be read as texts primarily charged with “anguished premonitions of congenital errors and imminent tragedies, but also as testimonies to the fledging promises and prospects of independence”.¹⁶⁷ This is, as Alessandrini eloquently points out, “the strand of Fanon’s work that remained invisible to his early critics (and some of his early admirers as well), who saw only a messianic prophet of violence naively imagining that independence would be followed by the inevitable reign of a utopian ‘peasant democracy’”.¹⁶⁸ Practices of appropriation – that is, understood as strategic exercises of bringing Fanon’s work to bear on the specificities of post-independence contexts – must proceed from decolonization’s “congenital errors”, dislocate orthodox readings of this event as the inevitable dialectical overcoming of colonial Manichaeisms, and properly expand Bhabha’s insights on Fanon’s everyday politics when the former argues that the process of decolonization must rather be understood as a “struggle of articulating an *unrecognizable becomingness* in the being of historical emancipation”.¹⁶⁹

Fanon, Derrida, and the language of the other

With the attempt of avoiding the reductive pitfalls of “epistemic hygiene”, to use Gates’s language, let me now return to the question of this section, namely that of language in Fanon. The language of failure, which I briefly introduced above, does not in my opinion capture the more complex dimension at stakes in Fanon’s analysis of the

¹⁶⁷ Sekyi-Out (1999), p. 11

¹⁶⁸ Alessandrini (2014), p. 29

¹⁶⁹ Bhabha, “Day by Day ... with Fanon”, in *The Fact of Blackness*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), p. 200

colonized's linguistic alienation. Beyond the comedy of errors that Gordon describes, the crucial problem at the heart of the colonial subject's relationship to his/her colonial language is, I would like to argue, the difficult effects of an imposed "monolingualism". By invoking this term, I would like to draw some potentially useful parallels between Derrida's linguistic practice and Fanon's analyses in this chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*. In *Le monlinguisme de l'autre*, Derrida frequently claims that "[a]ll culture is originally colonial".¹⁷⁰ In particular, it is Derrida's depiction of colonialism that is at stake here. Unlike Gordon's analysis, and beyond the tendency of extracting nativist politics of language from Fanon's chapter, it seems that the crucial matter here is rather the complex relationship between cultural destitution, political marginality, and geographical displacement. For, what Derrida really struggles to express is the phenomenon – and one necessarily colonial in nature – of having no other choice than to forcibly inhabit the outskirts of an imperial language in the aftermath of irretrievable cultural destitution. When Derrida claims, indeed in a deliberately counterintuitive manner, that "*Yes, I only have one language, yet it is not mine*"¹⁷¹, he positions from the outset his own articulation of postcolonial subjectivity beyond the pervasive motif of hybridity in postcolonial theory. Rather than valorizing and promoting hybridity as his interlocutor, Franco-*Maghrébin* counterpart Abdelkebir Khatibi, does through the language of "bilingual" identity politics, Derrida advances a type of deconstructive singularity able to capture simultaneously both the contextual singularity of coloniality and its imposed linguistic failure, not solely on the side of the colonial subject as Gordon

¹⁷⁰ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), see for instance p. 39

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2

emphasizes above, but on the side of the oppressor as well. This one can also find in Fanon, but many of his commentators and critics have not recognized because they have generally omitted to juxtapose this chapter with Fanon's own relationship to the master's language that transpires in his work. I will show, later in this chapter, that it is precisely the linguistic alienation that Derrida describes above, one necessarily ingrained in oppressive practices of colonial rule, that allows Fanon to call for a radical reconfiguration of a particular ethico-political vocabulary, which paradoxically remains grounded in a colonial European archive. Before turning to a discussion of the character of this "singularity", the following passage from *Monolinguisism* is perhaps worth quoting in full:

In spite of appearances, this exceptional situation is, at the same time, certainly exemplary of a universal structure; it represents or reflects a type of originary "alienation" that institutes every language as a language of the other: the impossible property of a language. But that must not lead to a kind of neutralization of differences, to the misrecognition of determinate expropriations against which a war can be waged on quite different fronts. On the contrary, that is what allows the stakes to be repoliticized. Where neither natural property nor the law of property in general exist, where this de-proprietation is recognized, it is possible and it becomes more necessary than ever occasionally to identify, in order to combat them, impulses, phantasms, "ideologies," "fetishizations", and symbolics of appropriation. Such a reminder permits one at once to analyze the historical phenomena of appropriation and to treat them *politically* by avoiding, above all, the reconstitution of what these phantasms managed to motivate: "nationalist" aggressions (which are always more or less "naturalist") or monoculturalist homo-hegemony.¹⁷²

The language of exceptionality, which comes to describe the singularity of both the colonial situation and the (im)possibility of a pure counter-hegemonic and emancipatory language could also be compared to Fanon's "anti-nationalist nationalism", so to speak, which frequently accompanies his descriptions of the singularity of anti-colonial

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 63-64

revolutionary struggles and has also always functioned as a cautionary tale. Indeed, in Fanon, the revolution is always already an event that cannot be purely appropriated by the nascent nation-state. More central to the tragic narrative that permeates his work since *Black Skin, White Masks*, anti-colonial revolutions are perhaps even bound to fail. As Alessandrini rightly points out, Fanon's language "informs us, not that everything may go wrong, but that everything will go wrong in the quest of what he [Fanon] describes repeatedly [...] as 'true liberation'".¹⁷³ By virtue of the colonial character permeating revolutionary impulses, postcoloniality cannot be a politics propitious to nationalist xenophobia. In spite of Fanon's obvious rebuke of the colonized's linguistic complex of inferiority, it would nonetheless be erroneous to imagine that the criticism corroborates any type of rigid politics of insularity. Even if it is true that Fanon was mostly a thinker of the radically new, both his vision of radical change and his use of hyperbolic language to critique colonial regimes was never in the service of a future politics regulated and restricted by ethnic, tribal, or visionless patriotisms. Because Fanon's main targets of criticism – i.e. racism and colonialism – were for him the principal causes behind the obstruction of revolutionary movements and, therefore, political transformation, reading any of *Black Skin, White Masks'* chapters requires from us to keep in mind what Mbembe has called "Fanon's politics of dis-enclosure" precisely because the rejection of logics of isolation permeated unequivocally all dimensions of his work and his life. Some may object to the reading I am here proposing on the grounds that the late Fanon had drastically changed politically and intellectually by the period approaching his untimely death and that, therefore, significant parallels cannot be necessarily drawn between the

¹⁷³ Alessandrini (1914), p. 164

Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* and that of his late, explicitly politicized, interventions. But, if the task of this new return to Fanon is to uncover the important ways in which he remains relevant to our current political climate, failing to transfer his politics of dis-enclosure to our contemporary readings would simply be to reify his work – a practice which would be perhaps the most anti-Fanonian in essence.

Toward the closing pages of *Wretched of the Earth*, it is apparent that the problematic of rehabilitation has substituted that of struggle and resistance. One could even say that it is here that Fanon's postcolonial discourse explicitly emerges. In these final pages, Fanon attends to the inevitability of postcolonial psychic wounds, to the tasks occasioned by the "post-" in the postcolony; that is, in the aftermath of liberation struggles and formal independence. Combined with his language of rehabilitation, which is the colossal task of healing colonial traumas, one finds Fanon's own postcolonial manifesto – so to speak – rendered in the form of a call to re-politicize the very language that Europe, though the latter being historically its own architect, had betrayed and miserably failed to realize. He writes:

Now, comrades, now is the time to decide to change sides [*changer de bord*]. We must shake off the great mantle of night [*la grande nuit dans laquelle nous fîmes plongés*] which has enveloped us, and reach for the light. The new day which is dawning must find us determined, enlightened and resolute. [...] We must abandon our dreams and say farewell to our old beliefs and former friendships [*nos vieilles croyances et nos amitiés d'avant la vie*]. Let us not lose time in useless laments and sickening mimicry [*en stériles litanies ou en mimétismes nauséabonds*]. Let us leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Fanon, (2002) p. 301; (2004) p. 235. Due to what I perceived to be potentially misleading translation choices, I have incorporated the original French where I found the translation unable to capture the idiomaticity underlying Fanon's prose.

It is by way of joining this exhortation with the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* on language that I would like to show how conventional readings of this first book have often worked to limit Fanon's intellectual and political horizons. Indeed, Fanon neither advocated nor suggested, as a viable political tool, any kind of linguistic nativism. The question of hybridity was also outside the scope of his post-independence political vision. On the contrary, just as Derrida also argues in the quote cited at length above, Fanon knew that the politics of natural properties – or the law of property beyond the legitimate restitution of land and national resources to the formerly colonized – that primarily undergirded all colonial affirmations and, subsequently, governed the rhetoric of liberation struggles could not ensure sustainable political prosperity in the emerging postcolonial period. Leaving Europe, for Fanon, meant discarding criminal double standards with which Europe had strived culturally and economically while maintaining its imperial agenda unscathed. But beyond a project of retroactive clarification whereby the colonized, through determinate liberation strategies, would reveal Europe's hypocrisy in the language it used to describe "man", Fanon called for the radical reconfiguration of the foundational structures that regulated European political practices in the colonial world. Hence, more than simply re-declaring what Europe had said about the "human" in order to insert the previously dehumanized within the category "human", Fanon's call was to create a new world in which freedom and human equality was to be given social and political reality rather than merely being paid lip service. In this regard, the scope of Fanon's "humanistic" politics was not sheer linguistic re-appropriation more than it was an attempt at creating a new language from the lucid awareness that, though the language with which he labored to think and create the new was not his, it nonetheless was not

foreign to him. This is to say that Fanon did not perceive the alleged “affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism”¹⁷⁵ – to use Spivak’s language in “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” – as an insurmountable obstacle to his vision of a new world, a new “man”. Rather, he showed how, even as his commitment was the radical reconfiguration of politics, the world, and the human, these terms, and particularly that of the human, could not function in isolation from the specific history of their discursive articulations.

While Glissant’s project was easily conceived as one of soiling (*salir*) French, of deliberately perverting the master’s language, Fanon’s own practice of discursive interruption, has often been criticized for being merely a simple case of appropriation whereby the abject is humanized by conferring him/her the humanity that the ethical language itself had historically denied them. As Alessandrini shows, “the figure of Fanon [...] has often been used to bolster that [...] because colonialism is an inherently dehumanizing process, those who have suffered from the violence of colonialism must be granted access to the form of subjectivity offered by traditional humanism”.¹⁷⁶ Rather than recognizing that Fanon’s new humanism was fundamentally predicated on the rejection of Europe’s corrupted version, postcolonial critics charged Fanon of opting for perhaps the most deplorable mimetic choice. However, I contend, this line of argument is only possible insofar as the critics omitted to acknowledge Fanon’s withering attack against European humanism and those who abided to its oppressive criteria. In fact, it was precisely because it easily fell prey to the seduction of traditional Eurocentric

¹⁷⁵ Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1987), p. 202

¹⁷⁶ Alessandrini (1994), p. 76

humanistic rhetoric that Fanon chastised the Negritude movement. His allegedly “anti-Sartrean” diatribe in *Black Skin, White Masks*, whereby Fanon famously bemoans that the “generation of the younger black poets has just suffered a blow that can never be forgiven [...] [h]elp had been sought from a friend of the colored people, and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what they were doing”¹⁷⁷, is often tragically taken at face value¹⁷⁸. The oversimplified reading of this famous passage has worked to conceal Fanon’s own critique of the sovereign subject of humanism and, simultaneously, his own reservations about Négritude. Setting up his more explicit criticism of Négritude’s nostalgia for lost origins, the devout anti-essentialist Fanon writes:

Since the time when someone first mourned the fact that he had arrived too late and everything had been said, a nostalgia for the past has seemed to persist. [...] It is tradition to which the anti-Semites turn in order to ground the validity of their “point of view”. It is tradition, it is that long historical past, it is that blood relation between Pascal and Descartes, that is invoked when the Jew is told, “There is no possibility of your finding a place in society”.¹⁷⁹

Here, Fanon moves from a critique of nostalgic yearnings for a lost past to an attack against the very idea of a fixed, pure, and retrievable tradition that modernity nurtured. In fact just a few sentences later, Fanon posits the existential predicament of modern colonial subjects: that is, the inescapable and irreducible absence before one’s “own” history. He writes: “You come too late, much too late. There will always be a world – a white world – between you and us. ... The other’s total inability to liquidate the past once and for all”.¹⁸⁰ In other words: There will always be a world, a history, this history will

¹⁷⁷ Fanon (1967), p. 133

¹⁷⁸ With the exception of a few critics like Robert Bernasconi and Achille Mbembe.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 121

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.120

never belong to you, the oppressed, the marginalized, the historical pariah! Indeed, Alessandrini is right to suggest the controversial point that “there is not an essential subject of history in Fanon”.¹⁸¹ In fact, when pushed to characterize the possibility of a Fanonian subject of history, one is led to recognize its necessarily and irreducibly fragmented character. Fanon’s subject is fundamentally heterogeneous, disjointed and, hence, in itself already opposed to the homogenous and inherently continuous sovereign subject of humanism. It is quite easy, even at times compelling, to fall prey – so to speak – to Fanon’s clever irony. Reading Fanon, however, will always require the eye of a cautious reader capable of extrapolating his political affirmation and theoretical commitments from his ubiquitous sarcasm. Thus in this regard, I would even suggest that Fanon’s criticism of Négritude predates his explicit disapproval voiced in the third chapter of *Wretched of the Earth*, “Mésaventure de la conscience nationale”. Near the concluding proeses of the famous chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*, “The Lived Experience of the Black”, he writes still in response to Sartre’s intervention: “In all truth, in all truth I tell you, my shoulders slipped out of the framework of the world, my feet could no longer feel the ground. Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned”.¹⁸² However, now consider the following sentences from the conclusion:

In no way should I derive my basic purpose from the past of the people of color. In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future. It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because “quite simply” it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible to breathe.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Alessandrini (2014), p. 83

¹⁸² Fanon (1967a), p. 138

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 226

Or yet again:

If the question of practical solidarity with a given past ever arose for me, it did so only to the extent to which I was committed to myself and to my neighbor to fight for all my life and with all my strength so that never again would a people on the earth be subjugated. It was not the black world that laid down my course of conduct. [...] I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny.¹⁸⁴

Well before the articulation of an unequivocally anti-xenophobic politics in *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon perceived essentialism – “strategic”¹⁸⁵ or otherwise – part of the lurking obstacles facing anti-racist projects. In fact, it is safe to claim that Fanon never indulged in Negritude’s obsession with origins and ancestry. These were for him fundamental hurdles that would necessarily obstruct the fight against the problems racism posed. It is solely by opting for the pervasive inclination, which became fashionable for a while and has yet truly to be overcome, of splitting his work into the “early” and the “late” Fanon that one can fail not only to recognize the self-reflexive critique that permeates his work. This theoretical inclination will also inevitably impede the kind of critical renewal of his work, which our generation is desperately in need for. After all, as Mbembe points out in a recent interview for *Rue Descartes*, “Fanon says that we are called to become our own work [*oeuvre*]. We must find in ourselves the model for our own making outside of every constraint inherited from the past or from our origins, or still from every law imposed on

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 228-29

¹⁸⁵ For an extended discussion of “strategic essentialism” see Spivak’s “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiographies”, in which she writes: Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain, I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and “situate” the effects of the subject as subaltern. I would read it, then, as a *strategic* use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest”, in *Other World* (1987), p. 205

us by another will”.¹⁸⁶ This is, perhaps, where I find Fanon’s discursive relationship to the Western archive remarkably close to some of Derrida’s deconstructive motifs.

Indeed it is hard to overlook, for instance, that Fanon’s repudiation of discourses of origin and ancestry echoes, though in a slightly displaced manner, Derrida’s thought of the trace, or even the language of “spectrality” toward the later part of his work. In the most concrete manner, Derrida’s formal critique of a certain conception of time is already present in Fanon’s work and political engagements. Let us consider, for instance, the following quote from *Specters of Marx*:

If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself. Before knowing if one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other.¹⁸⁷

In this passage, Derrida questions the logic of strict oppositions that has predominantly determined traditional conceptions of time. But it is, perhaps more importantly to our discussion, the relationship between this “spectrality” and Derrida’s idea of “the event” that appears intricately connected to Fanon’s own logic of time and his perception of the postcolonial event. If – as it is for Derrida – the very “place of spectrality” is that always and always already vacant space that awaits the absolute event, that is the coming of a radical temporal manifestation which can never be “recognized in advance”, we may also recognize Fanon’s understanding of the postcolonial event to be that “messianic opening”

¹⁸⁶ Mbembe, “Thinking in Lightning and Thunder: Interview with Seloua Luste Boulbina and Achille Mbembe”, in *Critical Philosophy of Race* (Forthcoming).

¹⁸⁷ Derrida (1994), p. 48

itself opened to “what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited as such, [...] to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope – and this is the very place of spectrality”.¹⁸⁸ Notwithstanding the familiar deconstructive concept of hospitality present in this quote, one may see how the particular objective of Fanon’s work concretely characterizes Derrida’s claim above. Alessandrini rightly points out that the work of Fanon “should be understood as aimed, not necessarily at the moment of postcoloniality, but rather towards the moment *after* postcolonialism, a moment that has not yet arrived (and, as he also warned, may not arrive).¹⁸⁹ Indeed, what has often been merely considered as Fanon’s pessimism, I would suggest, is more complicated than it appears for some. It is the moment after postcolonialism – the impossible experience of a “post-postcolonialism to come”, so to speak – that not only renders liberation struggle possible but, more importantly for Fanon, must also dictate the condition for a truly transformative political imaginary. As with Deleuze and Derrida, Fanon’s idea of a future politics is fundamentally conditioned by a vision of a political *à-venir* predicated on a radically unforeseeable or “incalculable” advent of a world in which perceived differences would no longer dictate global political proceedings. This incalculable, indeed I suggest in this chapter, is Fanon’s “humanism”. For, while recognizing the heritage of this normative term, Fanon does not hesitate to call for its profound reconfiguration by raising the ante, so to speak, on the social semiology of a normative term hijacked by the limited ethical standards of Western socio-political imperialism. Just as Derrida argued, in *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe* and elsewhere, that ethics, politics, and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 82

¹⁸⁹ Alessandrini (2014), p. 194

responsibility must begin, if these are to exist, from the experience of the impossible or, more specifically, the “experiment of the aporia”, Fanon’s plea to reinvent a new humanism relied profoundly on a hyperbolic and unconditioned understanding of the value of the human. In this text, Derrida also writes: “The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the aporia* from which one may invent only *possible invention, the impossible, the impossible invention*”.¹⁹⁰

Even if orthodox interpretations would have it otherwise, and have preferred to read Fanon’s reservations, radical criticisms, and explicit rejections as typical oppositional gestures characteristic of all politics of contestation, Fanon’s life and overall narrative tell a different story. When it comes to the general character of his multiple forms of engagements against colonialism, Fanon’s story defies simple descriptions. Since, the question is no longer “whether Fanon is relevant at all” but, rather, “why is Fanon still relevant today”, the possibility of gaining the benefits from his true prophetic genius, particularly in *Wretched of the Earth*, will only result from concerted efforts to remain attune to the many ways in which he has never settled into the fixed unity of revolutionary narratives. I would like to suggest that, in his work, his life, and his intellectual legacy, Fanon knew quite well that “the politics of culture and the colonial

¹⁹⁰ Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 41

consist[ed] in the type of repeatedly *insecure act of invention* [...] which invents in the affirmed risk of compromise with a new language of mastery or of the master”.¹⁹¹

Analyzing Derrida’s *Monolinguisism* text, Geoffrey Bennington describes quite well the peculiar and yet inescapable condition of complicity, which necessarily accompanies all acts of contestation. There are explicit theoretical affinities between Fanon’s and deconstructive politics. One can clearly recognized these similarities in Derrida’s autobiographical confessions in *Monolinguisism* and the structures of repeatability or “iterability” which Derrida describes here as constituting the conditions of possibility for a politics of resistance. In fact, it is precisely from the resemblance between the language of the master and the new language in the process of being retrieved, and therefore of being invented as well, that the very possibility of “re-politicizing the stakes” emerges. Rather than perceiving Fanon’s commitment to humanistic language and his simultaneous call for a radical invention of new forms of life as a simple contradiction, and therefore a limitation, we must in fact attempt to approach such paradoxes in his work as opportunity for creative interventions. This is why I suggest that the hopes of expanding his work necessarily require more than traditional philosophical practices of hermeneutical interpretation. It is in light of such attempt that I propose that rather than condemning Fanon’s humanistic discourse for its perceived anachronism, it would be more useful to investigate the conditions for the formulation of such discourse. As with Fanon’s criticism of Négritude’s obsession with the retrieval of a

¹⁹¹ Geoffrey Bennington, Geoffrey, “Double Tonguing: Derrida’s Monolingualism”, *Tympanum*, 4, 2000. Available at www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympanum/4/bennington.html (my emphasis)

historical – consequently cultural and linguistic – “pure” past, Derrida writes with regards to the possibility of excavating any lost language of origin:

“Unsettling”, for this ambiguity will never be removed: in the eschatological or messianic horizon that this promise cannot deny – or that it can merely deny – the prior-to-the-first-language can always run the risk of becoming or wanting to be another language of the master, sometimes that of new masters. It is at each instant of writing or reading, [...] that the decision must arise against a background of the undecidable. It is often a political decision – and often a decision regarding the political side of things. As a condition of the decision as well as that of responsibility, the undecidable inscribes threat in chance, and terror in the ipseity of the host.¹⁹²

The similarity between Derrida’s argument in this passage and Fanon’s anti-colonial politics are more than striking. Let us first consider the fact that, in spite of his multiple warnings against the foreseeable tragedies of postcolonial nationalism, Fanon never hesitated to “decide” and promote a philosophy of liberation in the face of the possible “threat” which the “undecidable inscribed” right into the crucible of a postcolonial future. As I suggested in my previous chapter, the deplorable idiocy parading for leadership that have come to describe the majority of postcolonial forms of governmentality on most of the African continent, would never had surprised Fanon. Fanon’s “humanism-to-come” is deeply entrenched in particular sets double gestures of appropriation and repudiation. It is the peculiar structure of these gestures that I have found echoing a number of Derridean motifs – particularly as they appear perhaps in the most postcolonial of his philosophical renderings, that is in *Monolinguisms of the Other*. For Fanon, indeed, the colonial subject’s responsibility to reconfigure the discursive and socio-political parameters of Enlightenment’s brand of humanism was to be found in another equally urgent exercise of reconceptualization. He writes, in *Wretched of the Earth*: “If nationalism is not

¹⁹² Derrida (1998), p. 62

explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into *humanism*, then it leads to a dead-end.”¹⁹³ Understood as the inevitable outcome of an explicit politicization of the masses, Fanon’s humanism is both the rejection of a naturalized conceptual framework while, at the same time, it aims at radically re-structuring an intellectual legacy that deliberately failed to abide to its universalist assertions. “Let us leave this Europe which never stops talking about man yet massacres him at every one of its street corner, at every corner of the world”, such is how Fanon concludes the *Wretched of the Earth!*¹⁹⁴ Far beyond a simple exercise of literalizing the language of the master and of demanding to be included in a specific history within which racialized bodies were previously excluded, Fanon radically condemned the very structures that regulate Western political imaginary by resituating and re-contextualizing the same language into a determinate field of emancipatory struggle. It is in this way that these practices of uprooting and reinvesting a given language – in this case, the discursive heritage of a specific socio-political European history – in the name of novelty that Fanon’s multiple acts of “re-appropriation” resemble the formal structures of the originary linguistic alienation that Derrida describes in *Monolingualism*. Indeed, one may even argue that Fanon’s work (and life to some interesting degree) are the concrete exemplifications of the formal structures of resistance and contestation that Derrida formally describes in this text. In the end, this affinity between both figures shows not only that Derrida’s thought is certainly not so tragically abstract as to be unable to tell us anything valuable about the mechanisms of colonial oppression. This shows us also how remarkably well Fanon was aware that the radical

¹⁹³ Fanon (2004), p. 144, my emphasis

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235

politicization of a postcolonial ethos always – and perhaps even necessarily – ran the risk of turning the promise of liberation into a new threat, a new catastrophe with its own new masters.

What I have tried to show in the sections above is that Fanon’s critique of French, as the oppressive language of the master, cannot be divorced from his own intricate relation to the Western archive. If what occasions today’s return to Fanon is primarily the desire to assess the conditions of the historical failure of an entire continent to “keep an appointment with its destiny” – to use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s language – and to evaluate “the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as the working class to lead [their nations] into a decisive victory over colonialism”, failing to recognize the conditions that made possible Fanon’s reconfiguration of precisely that discursive heritage he criticized as unjust may ultimately lead us into a dead-end. Indeed, Edward Said is right to point out that, after all is said and done, “the whole point of Fanon’s work is to force the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of imperial dominion”¹⁹⁵. Hence, thinking Fanon in our postcolonial era will necessarily require intensifying – upping the ante in some sort – his radical historicist aspirations, and thereby pursue his work by relentlessly investigating the ways in which “thinking the postcolony” is always already thinking *with and against* Europe.

¹⁹⁵ Edward Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 314

Deleuze, Guattari, and Fanon on language

To conclude this chapter, I would like to return to the language of linguistic failure and domination though from another philosophical register. As I have suggested in the preceding sections, many readers of *Black Skin, White Masks*' chapter on language have mainly focused on the linguistic predicaments of colonized subjects. Though my intentions in this concluding section are not to deny the singularity of such a deplorable situation, I would like to show that what Fanon described in this chapter may indeed be “exemplary of a universal structure” of alienation – to use Derrida’s language – that founds all linguistic experiences or, in other words, our ontological relationship to language. As I argue in the sections above, we cannot read Fanon’s chapter on language without taking into account his specific relationship to the Western archive, which he relies on for the purposes of his own project of liberation. In other words, I have attempted to show that one cannot read Fanon’s intervention on the problem of French as a colonial language in isolation from his own idiosyncratic maneuvers of discursive appropriation. In this regard, I have tried to show that Fanon’s philosophy of (colonial) language – so to speak – does not abide to simple semiotics of opposition. Even if Fanon’s paradigm of imperialism is inscribed, in significant ways, into the language of implacable enmity between the colonizer and the colonized, I attempted to show that his revolutionary politics, which essentially aimed at dissolving colonial Manichaeism, evinced the more complex dimension of imperialism and postcoloniality. More precisely, I argued that it is by recognizing the strategic position of this chapter in relation to the development of the larger body of his work that one may come to understand that Fanon’s politics of linguistic and intellectual property concretized the formal structures of

irreducible iterability and foundational alienation at the heart of all linguistic experience that Derrida describes in *Monolingualism of the Other*. Indeed, Fanon's reflections on language showed that although French remained the language of the oppressor, it had paradoxically also engendered various communities of resistance which, though inescapably bearing French history (including its colonial history), were also faced with the more difficult tasks of carrying a revolution to its "inevitably utopian" end. For, Fanon's criticisms of the national bourgeoisie were evidence of his own skepticism of orthodox Marxist accounts of revolution. One may even contend that Fanon's prophetic tale about the postcolony was ultimately conditioned by his own reluctance to abide to the idea of "revolution as an objective act"; that is to say, to a notion of revolution the event of which one could decipher in "objective conditions" immanent both in history and the revolution itself.¹⁹⁶ In the remainder of this chapter, I will seek to add and use another philosophical register from which we could potentially further recognize the ways in which Fanon's politics of language – or, as I have called it above, his philosophy of (colonial) language – does not strictly abide to the too-simple form of conventional anti-colonial ethos of strict oppositions.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari presents the three main characteristics of minor literature. In minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, language is first and foremost always "affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialization".¹⁹⁷ By drawing a rapid comparison between what Kafka

¹⁹⁶ For an extended discussion on revolution in Merleau-Ponty, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), particularly pp. 203-233

¹⁹⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 16

accomplished with “Prague German” and Ebonics (or the linguistic and semantic transformation of the Queens English by African-American), Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate that the first effect of minor language is the transgression of the major language’s imposed restrictions. Indeed, as they argue in this Kafka book, and later in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a minor language always emerges from a major language – “it is that which a minority constructs in a major language”.¹⁹⁸ What appear to be both compelling and interesting here are the ways in which this specific criteria of minor language challenges conventional readings of Fanon’s politics of language and, even, the prevailing versions of pious revolutionary thinking that have accompanied such readings. We may recall for instance, as I have discussed above, Gordon’s language of failure (i.e. the colonized’s attempt to speak French is always already a “comedy of error). One could also point out to Ngùgì wa Thiong’o’s linguistic nativism whereby, he insists, decolonization necessarily requires forsaking the master’s language in all means of expression¹⁹⁹. Both the defeatist approach of Gordon and the nativism of wa Thiong’o do not only omit to recognize the subversive community that a minor language assembles. Perhaps even more dangerously, both views appear to sanction the kind of ahistoricity that exempts Europe from thinking its history with that of the colonies – for thinking the history of its own imperialism.

In “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors”, Said eloquently states:

I do not think that the anti-imperialist challenges represented by Fanon [...] has by any means been met; neither have we taken them seriously as models or

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ See Ngùgì wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Curry Ltd., 1986)

representations of human effort in the contemporary world. In fact, Fanon [...] jab[s] directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on “otherness” and “difference”. What Fanon [...] required of [his] own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition.²⁰⁰

It precisely in light of the various implications of his “anti-imperialist challenges” that transpire in his politics of language, and which permeates his work in general, that I find the idea of drawing connections between Deleuze and Guattari’s own politics of language and Fanon’s a rather interesting and important endeavor. Like Kafka who, according to Deleuze and Guattari, laid bare the repressive conditions prohibiting Jews of Prague’s access to writing, Fanon similarly exposed the colonized subject’s linguistic quandary. Consider, for instance, the following implications of Kafka’s work that Deleuze and Guattari describe: “Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible – the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise.”²⁰¹ Let us attempt to approach Fanon’s politics of language from the same vantage point. Similarly to Kafka, indeed, Fanon’s work and revolutionary commitments displayed both the impossibility and the obligation to write in one’s oppressor’s language. Perhaps, Gordon’s language of failure could be better articulated by invoking the triple impossibility that Deleuze and Guattari describe above. When the colonized’s ability to verbally express himself and write in French is concerned, Gordon is right to emphasize the failure, “the comedy of error” – to use his language – that is deeply inscribed in such experience. When it comes to the most important – and paradoxically

²⁰⁰ Edward Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropological Interlocutors”, *Critical Inquiry*, winter 1989, p. 223

²⁰¹ Deleuze & Guattari (1986), p. 16

more productive – dimensions of this triple impossibility, however, Gordon and traditional readers of Fanon fail to provide an account of the remaining couple of impossibilities. Indeed, the impossibility of writing in French does not necessarily entail that one must either return to one’s native language or that one is doomed to an inescapable, colonially induced, muteness. To the contrary, it is because Fanon showed how colonialism forces us to write (the impossibility of not writing), because he demonstrated how writing under imperial circumstances is always already one linguistically fraught experience (the impossibility of writing in French), while maintaining nevertheless that under such political conditions one cannot write otherwise, that his work was and remains a testament to the difficulty of thinking the process of decolonization and the postcolonial.

The second characteristic of minor language, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is its essential political nature. In contrast to major literatures wherein dispensable individual narratives form a seemingly Oedipal whole against the background of a given social milieu, minor literature’s “cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it”.²⁰² Here, one may recall Said’s claim above –that Fanon’s work was primarily driven by an attempt to force the Western world to think its history with that of its colonies. Fanon always envisaged genuine decolonization to be a global process. By insisting – as Mbembe has now emphasized²⁰³ – that decolonization will require practices of self-

²⁰² Ibid., p. 17

²⁰³ Mbembe writes in *Sortir de la grande nuit: Cette face nocturne de la France*, j’en avais conscience avant même d’arriver dans ce pays. La France n’avait-elle pas joué un

decolonization from the part of the colonial Metropole itself and global processes of geographical and political “dis-enclosure”, Fanon indeed revealed how “necessary, indispensable, and magnified” each single part of the colonial historical equation was to an authentic dismantling of the colonial drama. The story vibrating within the tense colonial relations – to use Deleuze and Guattari’s language – that drove Fanon to write in the first place was unequivocally political and Fanon was acutely aware that facing this story and “determining its value”²⁰⁴ would require unveiling the ways in which individual concerns and stories connected to one another to form precisely the matrix of colonial narratives that held politically and socially captive a significant portion of the world.

The third criterion that qualifies the category of minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is that “in it everything takes on a collective value”.²⁰⁵ Though Deleuze and Guattari do not clearly explain the ways in which, what they call “the scarcity of talent”, renders the existence of “individuated enunciation” in minor literature impossible, they do show nonetheless how the circumstances under which a minor literature emerges are bound to transform minor literature itself into “the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature”.²⁰⁶ As I have argued above, Fanon’s politics of language cannot be read in isolation from his multiple techniques of theoretical appropriations. Even if Fanon

rôle eminent dans cette affaire de crâne de mort – et donc de refus de sépulture et de banissement des morts tombés lors des luttes pour l’indépendance et l’autodétermination dans mon pays? Sa politique africaine ne montrait-elle pas suffisamment qu’il ne suffit pas de “décoloniser”; encore faut-il s’autodécoloniser? Sa tradition d’universalisme abstrait ne contredisait-elle pas, paradoxalement, sa foi dans le dogme républicain d’égalité universelle?

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 18

criticized the colonial capture of colonized subjects' means of self-expression, the ways in which he endeavored to re-appropriate certain dimensions of the European philosophical edifice reveal that Fanon was not interested in merely inserting marginalized voices into the conceptual frameworks of the European archive. What he remained committed to, up until his untimely death, was to continue forcing Europe to question the normative foundations of its philosophical history and ultimately re-evaluate the oppressive effects of its concrete deployments. Addressing French leftist allies in the struggle for decolonization, Fanon writes:

Thus can be understood the constant oscillation of the French democrats between a manifest or latent hostility and the wholly unreal aspiration to militate "actively to the end". Such a confusion indicates a lack of preparation for the facing of concrete problems and a failure on the part of French democrats to immerse themselves in the political life of their own country.²⁰⁷

A few pages later, he continues:

Unable to adopt this attitude, through lack of courage or failure of analysis, the French democrat is constantly resorting to abstraction as points of reference: colonialism in general is dying, colonialism is inhuman, France must remain faithful to its history, thus pointedly forgetting that colonialism constitutes an important part of French history.²⁰⁸

Though it may appear that Deleuze and Guattari favor the deterritorializing effects of minor literature on all major literatures, they also never fail to alert us to potential danger, and perhaps even impossibility, of radical deterritorialization. Just in the same manner that their positive descriptions of lines of flight, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is accompanied by a cautionary tale about the dangerous possibility of transforming these lines into lines of absolute destruction, they seem to suggest also that in spite of minor literature's deterritorializing capabilities, language always already "compensates for its

²⁰⁷ Fanon (1967b), p. 80

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83

deterritorialization by reterritorialization in sense”²⁰⁹. Deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari involves an opening toward the future and the possibility of political transformation. It is, simply defined, a process through which something leaves or escapes a territory. This territory may be of a linguistic, conceptual, social, or political kind and is, usually, characterized as a system of traditionally acceptable modes of thinking or ways of life. In the same manner in which one often finds Derrida arguing that traditional ways of understanding concepts are always inhabited by an unconditioned, yet inexperienced, character of the concept, territories are comprised of deterritorializing vectors which may provide the assurance of an open future. Territories, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, are “inseparable from vectors of deterritorialization”²¹⁰ just as the latter are in turn always inseparable from movements of reterritorializations. We can thus see that, though territories consist of the grounds or the experiential canvases upon which movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are effectuated, these territories are somewhat abandoned as soon as the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are initiated. Even if the latter may often involve an obstruction of the deterritorializing line of flight, “reterritorialization as an original operation does not express a return to the territory, but rather [the] differential relations internal to [deterritorialization] itself, [the] multiplicity internal to the line of flight”²¹¹. This multiplicity internal to the deterritorialization and its lines of flight is important in the distinction between absolute and relative forms of deterritorialization. However, in the case of language more specifically, the movement of reterritorialization

²⁰⁹ Deleuze & Guattari (1986), p. 20

²¹⁰ Deleuze & Guattari (1987), p. 509

²¹¹ Ibid.

occurs at the moment language ceases “to be the organ of one of the senses, [and] becomes an instrument of Sense” both literally and figuratively²¹². It is also through both the complementarity and the difference made between subjects of enunciation and subjects of statement that language is further reterritorialized. Though my intention here is not to engage with the Lacanian register of the latter statement, it is important to notice that what Deleuze and Guattari are referring to are the ways in which ordinary language is reterritorialized when it is used primarily in according to a certain linguistic orthodoxy. The subversive of Kafka’s literary gestures thus becomes more apparent at the moment when his language becomes increasingly “torn from sense”, when his act of “conquering sense” neutralizes the linguistic valorization of sense.²¹³ This is not to opt, of course, for an unintelligible linguistic pluralism. Far more to the contrary, it is thanks to this active practice of neutralizing sense that the inescapable reterritorializing aspect of ordinary language does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of invention. In fact, it appears that this is when another moment of deterritorialization occurs.

To conclude, I would like to return to Fanon with this in mind in order to draw some final remarks. Perhaps, here would be the time to attempt at elucidating the ways in which Fanon’s revolutionary humanism may be another concrete example of Deleuze and Guattari formulations above. If, as I have argued, Fanon’s version of humanism – or what I have referred to as his “humanism-to-come” – radically challenge the traditional conceptions of both the human (as a descriptive term) and humanism (as a normative notion), it may be that what we are faced with here is a peculiar form of Fanonian becoming! Could we say that, by re-appropriating the colonial master’s discursive

²¹² Deleuze & Guattari (1986), p. 20

²¹³ Ibid., p. 21

heritage, Fanon forces a “becoming-minor” onto the major language that French is? Far from being characterized by overload and poverty in relation to the major language, for Deleuze and Guattari minor languages reveal a level of sobriety and variation that bestows upon them the powers (*puissances* as opposed to *Pouvoir* of power and domination) of becoming. There is indeed no “becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian”.²¹⁴ This becoming of everybody (as opposed to the majority that is never anybody, that is always a nobody), this universal figure of minoritarian consciousness is, in and of itself, the experience of freedom and autonomy. They write:

Becoming-minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness is called autonomy. It is certainly not by using a minor language as dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming.²¹⁵

Unless we are committed to shortsighted politics of purity, to the ahistorical idea that the Western world and its “others” do not share one and the same imperial genealogy, and finally to the notion that radical invention necessarily entail a utopian fabrication of a new order made of up of entities that magically appear as if from nowhere, our multiple returns to Fanon will continue to face the various cul-de-sacs it has in the past.

²¹⁴ Deleuze & Guattari (1987), p. 106

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107

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IV

Fanon's Challenge: Violence in the Postcolony

Reading "On Violence" Today!

For Frantz Fanon, what called for thinking and acting were the unbearable conditions of dehumanized existences. Decolonization, Fanon explained, was "quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another", the need of which existed in a "raw, repressed, and reckless state in the lives and consciousness of colonized men and women".²¹⁶ Decolonization was to be, as Fanon infamously proclaimed, necessarily a violent phenomenon. The claim that violence is inevitably always at the core of radical political change is the topic of this chapter. More precisely, I revisit Fanon's politics of decolonization not to engage in the polemic that surrounded his alleged glorification of violence but to attend to a more pressing question in Fanon studies today: How do we translate Fanon into the language of our time? For, it is fair to claim that in these years now deemed "postcolonial", years wherein the formation and maintenance of power is particularly fueled by the proliferation of death in an endless cycle of violence, Fanon's "apocalyptic aphorisms have not aged well".²¹⁷ However, the strength of Fanon's philosophy undeniably remains. This is apparent in the ways in which his work has been re-appropriated by activists and theorists for nearly five decades. In fact, even if our current "postcolonial context" has put Fanon's concept of violence into

²¹⁶Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 1

²¹⁷ Adam Shatz, "Frantz Fanon: The Doctor Prescribes Violence", *New York Times*: September 02, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/02/books/review/02SHATZTW.html>

question, we continue to witness the force of his theoretical legacy through the more recent return to his work – a return not only marked by a rising shift in the nationality of his interlocutors, but also in the distinctive changes of the problematic that compelled this return.

Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe is arguably the most prominent recent theorist to have indicated both the emergence of this new era in Fanon studies and the crucial challenge of translation it engendered. To read Fanon today, as Mbembe rightly points out, means translating into the language of our time the major questions that forced him to write in the first place. We must remember that it has always been the particularity of our present world, its distinctive marks, and what exactly has conferred on it its character of urgency that always led those of us who seek to address global inequality back to Fanon. It is for that reason that engaged readers of Fanon cannot ignore the acute difficulties of reading him today and the complex prospect of a meaningful re-appropriation of his work in our current postcolonial times.²¹⁸ Indeed, returning to Fanon will undoubtedly pose challenges in an atmosphere marked by the exercise of power outside the boundaries of the law, by the widespread arbitrary suspension of justice for “othered” bodies. It is a context in which “new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the ‘massacre,’²¹⁹ and in which the widespread deployment of weapons for the maximum destruction of persons have rendered the postcolony an unlivable space governed by the

²¹⁸ Like Mbembe, my use of the word “postcolony” throughout this chapter indicates both a specific historical period and, most importantly, a particular formation of power more than it evokes its more traditional use in “postcolonial studies”.

²¹⁹ Mbembe (2003), “Necropolitics”, *Public Culture* (15), 1:11-40, p. 24.

generalized necessity to defect. Indeed, reading Fanon today will require from us thinking with and against him. Our most contemporary urgent task will consist – to use Jacques Derrida’s words in another register – “in trying to analyze that which today no longer depends on the same condition or on the same axiomatic”.²²⁰ It is with this challenge in mind that I propose to return to the most read – and yet, arguably, most misinterpreted – chapter of the *Wretched of the Earth*. In this chapter, I respond to Mbembe’s call to translate and reassess Fanon’s most fundamental outcry. For it is clear that reading “On Violence” today will demand a different hermeneutical approach because violence in our postcolonial context possesses no name. It is an unnamable violence that fails to project itself onto a future and does not serve the perfectibility of the present. It is, therefore, a violence that lacks justice altogether.

Fanon and Anti-colonial Violence

Fanon’s messianic discourse on violence, nonetheless, was never naïve. For, as Mbembe reminds us, he surveyed the future of the postcolony with deep anxiety. He indeed foresaw the coming nightmare of “an indigenous ruling class luxuriating in the delicious depravity of a Western bourgeoisie” and, Mbembe continues, was sickened by the growing “spectacle of Africans representing themselves to the world as the archetypes of stupidity, brutality, and profligacy.”²²¹ From the unrestrained proliferation of death since the early 1980s on a large portion of the continent, the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the extermination of “indigenous settlers” in the Democratic Republic of Congo,

²²⁰ Jacques Derrida in *Philosophy in Times of Terror*, Ed. Giovanna Borradori, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.

²²¹ Mbembe, “Fanon’s nightmare, our reality”, in *Mail&Guardian* (December 23, 2011)

the massacres in South Sudan, the current violent spread of religious fundamentalisms in northern Mali and the Central African Republic, the privatization of public prerogative and the socialization of arbitrariness which Mbembe has deemed “the cement of postcolonial Africa’s authoritarian regimes”, we undoubtedly belong to the generation that have witnessed most clearly the unfolding of Fanon’s nightmare. How do we then rethink Fanon on violence in these times? What markers of meaning or what kind of hermeneutical vestiges has this first chapter of the *Wretched* left us with to approach both his philosophical legacy and the challenges of our current times? More importantly, however, what exactly – if anything – is there to repossess?

Contrary to traditional approaches to Fanon’s discourse on violence, I propose that we abandon the habits of the prevailing readings of the first chapter of *Wretched of the Earth* that proceed from either a condemnation or a defense of Fanon’s position and attempt instead to contextualize his thought, by taking seriously Fanon’s anxiety and the cautionary tale that accompanied it. Fanon never failed to recognize the limits of a decolonizing strategy based on violence; he never ignored the perpetual danger of this violence that haunted the years of independence. The primary source of Fanon’s apprehension in the years leading to independence, however, was the irreducible spontaneity of an immature, and thus often misguided, violence the re-direction of which became difficult insofar as colonialism always blurred the moment of decision to resist. Throughout the colonial period, Fanon emphasized, violence always “ran on empty” [*tourne à vide*] – to evoke his terminology – it was “channeled through the emotional

release of dance or possession” and it “exhaust[ed] itself in fratricidal struggles.”²²² But what made this violence even more dangerous was the instability and fragility of the political, the fact that, as Jean-Paul Sartre also remarks in his preface, organizing politically in the colonial period was a necessary road paved with multiple dangers.²²³

Fanon posed the following questions:

From the point of view of political tactics and History, the liberation of the colonies poses a theoretical problem of crucial importance at the current time: when can it be said that the situation is ripe for a national liberation movement? What should be the first line of action? Because decolonization comes in many shapes, reason wavers and abstains from declaring what is a true decolonization and what is not. [...] What are the forces in the colonial period which offer new channels, new agents of empowerment for the violence of the colonized?²²⁴

Decolonization was a conundrum of epistemological importance, so much so that the violence that colonialism had generated within the deepest, most intimate, part of the colonized’s existence inevitably became a ticking time bomb at the center of liberation movements. This “aggressiveness sedimented in [the colonized’s] muscles”²²⁵ haunted decolonization precisely because the efforts of political parties – the new agents of empowerment who were to be first capable of providing adequate channels for the violence of the colonized – invested merely on the level of ideology and “abstain[ed] from issuing marching orders.”²²⁶ As he remarks: “The national political parties never insist on the need for confrontation precisely because their aim is not the radical

²²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 21

Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), p. 59

²²³ See Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to the *Wretched of the Earth* (2004), p. lvi

²²⁴ Fanon (2004), p. 21

²²⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 15

²²⁶ Fanon (2004), p. 21

overthrow of the system. [...] On the specific issue of violence, the elite are ambiguous. They are violent in their words and reformist in their attitude.”²²⁷

The misguided investment in this embryonic violence was thus only one source of Fanon’s unease. The mismanagement of the ruling elite was another reason to be alarmed. In spite of representing the ruling element, ultimately the organizing kernel of the revolution, national parties were incapable of engaging with the colonized masses which were, for Fanon, the revolutionary class. Failing to rehabilitate the internalization of violence, which had resulted from what Mbembe has called the colonial “miniaturization of violence,”²²⁸ would become the plague of independence. What the disengaged readers of Fanon have often overlooked was that Fanon’s analysis – and prescriptive recommendations for that matter – never ascribed to the traditional rigidity of discourse of singularity that we often find in revolutionary narratives. Indeed, while emancipatory violence was redemptive, while it was the creation of political subjects and the production of life, Fanon knew that this violence originated from great psychic wounds. As Mbembe rightly points out in his recent monograph *Critique de la raison nègre*, Fanon was also acutely aware that even if the adequate sublimation of violence in the years of emancipatory struggle were the keys to liberation, this same violence was

²²⁷ Fanon (2004), p. 22

²²⁸ In on the postcolony, Mbembe remarks to this effect: “what marked violence in the colony was, as it were, its miniaturization; it occurred in what might be called the details. It tended to erupt at any time, on whatever pretext and anywhere. It was deployed in segmentary fashion, in the form of micro-actions which, becoming ever smaller were the source of a host of petty fears”.

capable of tragically affecting language, hence life itself, of producing certain forms of mutism, obsessive fears, and trauma for those who would survive this war.²²⁹

Fanon's brand of revolutionary discourse and his political criticisms eluded simplistic purisms, binaries and oppositions. Violence as an emancipatory tool always retained its reactionary potentialities while even post-independence national sovereignty remained a victim of lurking forms of natalisms. The co-optation of colonial forms of sovereignty by the colonized elites and the post-independence xenophobia emerging from a misguided cultivated suspicion of foreigners – in this case oppressive colonial settlers – were intricately connected to the status of violence in colonial times and, ultimately, were inevitable in the postcolony. This is what compels Fanon's condemnation of the killing of a settler child by a young Algerian when he writes in *A Dying Colonialism*:

Because we want a democratic and renovated Algeria, because we believe one cannot rise and liberate oneself in one area and sink in another, we condemn with pain in our hearts, those brothers who have flung themselves into revolutionary action with almost physiological brutality that centuries of oppression give rise to and feed.²³⁰

To begin with Fanon's personal unease with the use of violence is, indeed, to refuse crude syntheses imposed on his multifaceted discourse on violence. Even the sympathetic readers of Fanon tended to ignore the cautionary tale that permeates his work. Violence for Fanon is primarily a strategic term in his lexicon, as Mbembe has rightly pointed out.²³¹ In addition, Mbembe reminds us that, for Fanon, violence was both a political and a clinical concept. It was as much the clinical manifestation of a political

²²⁹ Mbembe (2013), *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), p. 236

²³⁰ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, Trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 7

²³¹ See Mbembe (2013), p. 234

“sickness” in nature [*une maladie de nature politique*] as it was a praxis of “re-symbolization”.²³²

Many readers of Fanon have chosen to locate this characterization of violence within a strict binary opposition. They ascribed the pathology of violence to the colonial treatment of colonized bodies and at the same time mistakenly hyperbolized the redemptive nature of violence in Fanon. These readings ignore Fanon’s warnings. Although we must take the “re-symbolizing” character of violence quite seriously, we cannot overlook that when Fanon advocates the radical replacement of one kind of man (the colonizer) by another (the free man) through violence in the service of the ascension of “man” into humanity, the conditions that lead to this substitution are not as simple as some interpretations have made them appear. Sartre writes in his preface: “[I]n the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity[;] killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed; for the first time the survivor feels a *national* soil under his feet.”²³³ Decades later, Homi K. Bhabha who was, like Mbembe, concerned with the necessity of contextualizing Fanon and of finding ways to re-appropriate his ethics and politics of decolonization, adds the following in his foreword to Richard Philcox’s translation:

As we catch the religiosity in Fanon’s language of revolutionary wrath – ‘the last shall be the first’, ‘the almighty body of violence rearing up ...’ – and run it together with his description of the widening circle of national unity as reaching the ‘boiling point’ in a way that ‘is reminiscent of a religious brotherhood, a church or a mystical doctrine’ we find ourselves both forewarned and wary of the ethnonationist religious conflicts of our own times. When we hear Fanon say that ‘for the people only fellow nationals are ever owed the truth’, we furiously object to such a narrow and dangerous definition of the ‘people’ and the ‘truth’. To have Fanon uphold the view that the building of national consciousness demands

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Sartre (2004), p. lv.

cultural homogeneity and the disappearance or dissolution of differences is deeply troubling.²³⁴

These quotes from two of the most distinguished commentators on Fanon's work – commentators who belong to two distinct eras in Fanon studies – illustrate quite well the dominant popular approaches within Fanon scholarships.

First, one is struck by the way in which each commentator's analysis reflects the concerns of his own time. Sartre warns his European counterparts of the colonies' immanent revolt, and Bhabha voices the turn of the twentieth century's anxiety over globalization and the renewed balkanization of the world order. Both Sartre's defense of Fanon and Bhabha's rhetorical quasi-criticism illustrate nonetheless a common trend in Fanon scholarship: The question of violence in Fanon has been approached along analytically rigid lines. When Fanon is not being vehemently criticized or approached with suspicion, his conception of violence is being ahistorically celebrated. This is to say it is approached from within a naïve vacuum that fails to contextualize Fanon's work. In reality Fanon never glorified political violence, let alone "biologized" it – to invoke Hannah Arendt who condemned him not only for trivializing violence but for confounding the biological with the political. When Fanon reconciles the colonized's violent battle for life and the general political struggle for the people's ascension into humanity, he does not naively collapse both realms together. Consider, for instance, his chastising the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. He writes:

[W]herever the petty-mindedness of the national bourgeoisie and the haziness of its ideological positions have been incapable of enlightening the people as a whole or have been unable to put the people first, wherever this national bourgeoisie has proven to be incapable of expanding its vision of the world, there

²³⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, "Framing Fanon", foreword to *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. ix-x

is a return to tribalism, and we watch with a raging heart as ethnic tensions triumph. Since the only slogan of the bourgeoisie is “Replace the foreigners”, and they rush into every sector to take the law into their hands and fill the vacancies, the petty traders [...] follow suit and call for the expulsion of the Dahomeans or, taking tribalism to a new level, demand that the Fulani go back to their bush or back up their mountains.²³⁵

It was Sartre who associated sheer violence with the politics of decolonization. He oversimplified the moment of decolonization not only by depicting it as the mere replacement of one “species of men” for another when he exhorts, for instance, “[o]ffspring of violence, he draws every moment of his humanity from it: we were men at his expense, he becomes a man at ours[;] [a]nother man: a man of higher quality”!²³⁶ When Sartre rhetorically asks “will we recover” and immediately answers by a resounding “Yes” because “[v]iolence like Achilles’ spear, can heal the wounds it has inflicted”, he also obscures the fact that Fanon’s theory of decolonization rested primarily on a notion of property, self-ownership, and creation and not on violence as its sole condition of possibility. The struggle for freedom was, for Fanon, a struggle for self-ownership. As Mbembe has often pointed out, it was a theory committed to the creation of new forms of life whereby the colonized emerged as a craftsman who creates brand new forms of existence outside of imposed European paradigms. That is why, in the long quote above, Fanon condemns the national bourgeoisie’s mimicry of colonial power. For Fanon, decolonization was not simply to “replace the foreigners”. It was a political praxis of transformation for which violence was an inevitable, though always a hazardous, founding matrix. Insofar as decolonization was never, for Fanon, an event but a process

²³⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 105

²³⁶ Sartre (2004), p. lvii

unfolding within the violent atmosphere of global politics, it tragically exceeded the limits of its initial reason and aim.

Fanon's account of violence must be read on his terms, following him even in the most elliptical moments of his exposition. The value of the Fanonian archive is most apparent when he is read according to the double movement of "resituating Fanon in his time and place while simultaneously evading these coordinates by moving into our time and place."²³⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. already argued that the possibility of productive interpretations will necessarily occur beyond the opposition between the "historical Fanon" and the Fanon we have come to read posthumously. Similarly, Mathieu Renault claims that the way forward for Fanon's readers lies in approaching him beyond and at the intersection of historicization and strategic appropriation.²³⁸

Readings of Fanon's response to violence should occur at the intersection between his hyperbolic endorsements of violence and his abrupt and episodic retractions that emerge most clearly in his criticism of postcolonial politics as in the following passage:

The atmosphere of violence, after having penetrated the colonial phase, continues to dominate national politics [*la vie nationale*]. As we have said, the Third World is not excluded. On the contrary, it is at the very center of the convulsion. This is why in their speeches the statesmen of the underdeveloped countries maintain indefinitely a tone of aggressiveness and exasperation which normally should have disappeared.²³⁹

²³⁷ Nigel D. Gibson, "Living Fanon?" in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*, Ed. Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 7-8

²³⁸ Mathieu Renault, "Ruptures and New Beginning in Fanon: Elements for a Genealogy of Postcolonial Critique" in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*, ed. Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 107

²³⁹ Fanon (2004), p. 36; Fanon (2002), p. 75

This passage shows that Arendt's accusations are misinformed. Even if violence is an inevitable part of the process of liberation, Fanon never reduced politics to it. Violence was only productive insofar as it awakened the colonized from the acute slumber into which the *violence of colonization* had thrown him or her. If the course of reclaiming oneself, one's own life, went hand in hand with the inescapable duty of violence, it is because violence was colonialism's most basic constitutive element. It is not Fanon who should be indicted for the trivialization of violence but colonialism because of the violence that permeated it. It was the colonial regime that understood and defined politics in terms of torture, murder, and the right to dispose of human life physically with complete impunity. Fanon never failed to criticize the violent exercise of sovereign power, even if he understood that death and violence were not only constitutive of European colonial power, but also held an essential role in the process of liberation. Colonialism supplied the context of exterminating violence which, as Mbembe points out in *Critique de la raison nègre*, it needed in order to reproduce and perpetuate itself. This is why Fanon argued that the neutralization of such violence necessarily entailed an "absolute praxis" – i.e. violence. This is the basis from which Fanon developed his reflection on the three kinds of violence: colonial violence, the emancipatory violence of the oppressed, and violence in international relations. In Fanon's eyes, colonial violence was an insidious founding violence. To use Mbembe's language, colonial violence was "empirical" (what we consider real, "blood-shedding" violence) and it was phenomenological in the sense that it affected the psychic realm and the domains of meaning. The pervasive nature of its operation turned the colonial world into a continuous state of war where violence "recurred again and again in the most banal and

ordinary situations” and thus “played so important of a role in everyday life that it ended up constituting the central cultural *imaginary* that the state shared with society.”²⁴⁰ There is a clear distinction between colonial violence and the emancipatory violence of the oppressed. Indeed, emancipatory violence is diametrically opposed to settlers’ violence. The fundamental objective of emancipatory violence is the creation of life rather than the arbitrary infliction of death. Decolonizing violence is aimed at destroying that which itself destroyed, dismembered and amputated.²⁴¹ As Mbembe argues, the violence of the oppressed was an ethical violence; and what bestowed it its ethical character was its intimate relation with the thematic of care and catharsis.

By the time the *Wretched of the Earth* was published, violence was everywhere in the colonial world. It had seeped into the deepest structures of society so that even the most vulnerable dreamed of violence; and in the most tragic cases, reverted to the final solution:

We were not angry with him. Every Thursday we used to go and hunt together with a slingshot up on the hill behind the village. He was our best friend. He had left school because he wanted to become a mason like his father. One day we decided to kill him because the Europeans want to kill all the Arabs.²⁴²

These were the words of a thirteen-year-old Algerian boy who had murdered his European playmate. The inability to discern Fanon’s problematization of violence has been an effect of the tendency to read “On Violence” in isolation from its relationship to the remainder of the book. As Nigel Gibson rightly points out, “it is often forgotten that *The Wretched* is structured so that its final chapter, “‘Colonial War and Mental Disorder’,

²⁴⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 24

²⁴¹ See also Achille Mbembe, “De la scène coloniale chez Frantz Fanon”, in *Rue Descartes* 58 (4), 2007

²⁴² Fanon (2004), p. 199

problematizes the violence that seemed originally absolute and indicates, for the future, the huge psychological costs of colonial brutality on the individual as well as on the social.”²⁴³

On Violence and War in the Postcolony: Achille Mbembe’s Intervention

Fanon studies have recently seen a growing number of sensitive commentators on the misinterpretation that this infamous chapter of the *Wretched* suffered for a number of decades. In this section I trace the intervention of Achille Mbembe. In his Fanonian critique of Fanon, Mbembe showed that “any fidelity to Fanon can neither focus on his concepts as conclusions, nor simply apply his ideas to the contemporary world.”²⁴⁴

Fanonian questions, as Gibson affirms, “also means confronting limitations in Fanon’s thought.”²⁴⁵ What Mbembe has accomplished in recent years is the capacity to recuperate Fanon’s early attempts to theorize contemporary postcolonial wars and African politics’ precariousness beyond discourses centered on hegemonic, or counter-hegemonic, struggles. The fate of Fanon’s work in contemporary, post-independence, Africa is markedly different from the innumerable ways critics outside of the continent have used him in the service of their political commitments. Even if concerns of contextualizing Fanon’s work have also resonated with non-Africans, it is nonetheless African thinkers who have articulated the demands of reclaiming the “African” Fanon, so to speak. In this regard, Ghanaian philosopher, Ato Sekyi-Otu writes:

²⁴³ Nigel D. Gibson, “Living Fanon?” in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*, Ed. Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 8

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

I have been chastised for distinguishing “our Fanon”, the Fanon of the postcolony, from the Fanon who informs the preoccupations of critics in these other places, the Fanon of “postcolonialism”. It is as if I meant by that distinction to espouse a kind of possessive individualism with respect to the intellectual artifacts of the African world. Or even more crudely, to lay down a residential-determinist criterion of validity in the interpretation of these artifacts. What I meant to signal was not indeed an unbridgeable chasm in geographies of understanding, still less an ethnoracial proprietorship of African works, but simply demonstrable differences in situations of reading, alternative hermeneutic circumstances, always the province of finite histories and particular spaces of political existence.²⁴⁶

This is not to deny the existence of a range of interpretations on the African continent.

However, it is undeniable that there are “situated differences, whatever their provenance may be, in the contemporary reception of Fanon’s work.”²⁴⁷ Central to these differences, we find the need to mark theoretical distinctions between “postcolonialism” (exemplified in the theoretical current of postcolonial studies) and the “postcolony”. Though, to my knowledge, Mbembe never claimed to have coined the term, philosophers like Seloua Luste Boulbina have credited Mbembe for its invention. Although, in her article “Ce que postcolonie veut dire: Une pensée de la dissidence”²⁴⁸, Boulbina appears at times to be using the terms “postcolony” and “postcolonial studies” interchangeably, she nevertheless echoes Sekyi-Otu and Mbembe in their mutual designation of the postcolony as both the space and thought of the present. The term “postcolony”, she maintains, pronounces the search for a past both permanent and lost; a search yet characterized by

²⁴⁶ Ato Sekyi-Otu, “Fanon and the Possibility of Postcolonial Critical Imagination”, in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*, ed. Nigel Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 45-46

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Strangely enough, both this sentence and the passage I quoted above are followed by criticisms of Mbembe’s work on African modes of self-writing on the grounds that Mbembe’s own indictment of the tradition for the disavowal of “responsibility for the catastrophes befalling Africa”, though compelling, is itself problematic. See p. 47

²⁴⁸ Seloua Luste Boulbina, “Ce que postcolonie veut dire: une pensée de la dissidence”, *Rue Descartes* (2007), 4 (54), p. 8-25

the act of thinking the singularity of the present, in the present. Indeed, the need to make this distinction has left postcolonial thinkers²⁴⁹ of the African postcolony able to theorize the predicaments of war and violence in the postcolony beyond the “reductive” tropes of Panafrican politics’ commitment to discourses centered around struggles against the “empire”. This has, consequently, also led them to probe the more contentious questions of national responsibility for the catastrophes befalling the continent since the early years of independence. In “A propos des écriture de soi” (2000), Mbembe argues that post-independence identity politics has been engulfed in a culture of deep disavowal which, limited by the incessant iterations of a “narrative of loss”²⁵⁰, attributed to the “founding” events of the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and apartheid such a pivotal role in the economy of meaning that, in turn, foreclosed the “possibility of a properly philosophical reflection on the African condition”.²⁵¹ According to post-independence dominant narratives, Mbembe explains, the African subject’s quest for self-determination became practically impossible because of these three historical events. Mbembe argues that the disavowal of responsibility results from four specific characteristics of Marxist and nationalist politics. These are: (1) “the lack of self-reflexivity and an instrumental conception of knowledge and science; (2) a “mechanistic and reified vision of history”; (3) the desire to abolish tradition in the hope of taking part in the formation of a universal class of the proletariat; and (4) a Marxist-nationalist rhetoric relying on an “essential *polemical* relation to the world” whereby the radical rejection of the West is conceived as the fundamental key to emancipation. It is in terms of the second characteristic that I find

²⁴⁹ Boulbina is French-Algerian, Mbembe is Cameroonian, while Sekyi-Out is Ghanaian

²⁵⁰ Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing”, *Public Culture* (2002), 14 (1), p. 239

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 251

Mbembe's critique most pertinent.²⁵² Mbembe writes the following about the mechanistic and reified vision of history:

Causality is attributed to entities that are fictive and wholly invisible, but are nevertheless said to determine, ultimately, the subject's life and work. According to this point of view, the history of Africa can be reduced to a series of subjugations, narrativized in a seamless continuity. African experience of the world is supposed to be determined, a priori, by a set of force [...] whose function is to prevent the blooming of African uniqueness [...].²⁵³

I choose to focus on this specific problematic both because it permeates Mbembe's theoretical commitment to write "Africa into the world, and writing the world from Africa" since *On the Postcolony*, because it is through his critique of the obscurities that the mechanical vision of history has engendered that he opened a space for a new kind of Fanonian thought, one more concerned with the means of strategic appropriation than with issues of hermeneutical fidelity.

Mbembe indicts both the politics of "*African-radicalism*" and nativist discourses for an insidious game of obscurantism responsible for trapping the destiny of the continent into a cycle governed by operations far beyond the political and economical reach of all Africans. This construction of history, he argues, led to:

a naïve and uncritical attitude with regards to so called struggles for national liberation and to social movement; an emphasize on violence as the privileged avenue for self-determination; the fetishization of state power; the disqualification of the model of liberal democracy; and the populist and authoritarian dream of a mass society.²⁵⁴

This is not to say that Mbembe ignores the historical constraints imposed on Africans' modes of being, knowing, and acting. On the contrary, in a response to critics of *On the Postcolony*, he argues that "any discourse on Africa has to take into account the existence

²⁵² Ibid., p. 242-244

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 243

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 243-244

of an ‘arche-writing’, a first nomination that, insofar as it operates as a primordial or constitutive violence, the role of which is to inscribe Africa into a system of differentiation and classification, is in-and-of-itself already an expropriation.”²⁵⁵ Writing Africa, hence, can neither be an act of recovering an authentic African past, nor can it be mere historical revisionism. Such attempts at correcting history have been unable to capture contemporary contradictory phenomena. Instead, Mbembe writes:

we are told that African history is essentially governed by force beyond Africans’ control. The diversity and the disorder of the world, as well as the open character of historical possibilities, are reduced to spasmodic, unchanging cycle, infinitely repeated in accord with conspiracy always fomented by forces beyond Africans’ reach.²⁵⁶

What is at stake, and in a way that bestows a Fanonian character on Mbembe’s intervention here, is the refusal to circumscribe the importance of crucial historical contingencies within the limits of any dominant discourse. For, if we take seriously Fanon’s ongoing critique of the enclosure of the world that the racialization of life accomplished, we must recognize that central to this critique was the rejection of restricted forms of knowledge based on racism, xenophobia, nativism, all of which are major historical blind spots. Fanon was critical of discourses of purity and, hence, of discourses on origins as well. He was suspicious of any politics that fell prey to what Derrida referred to as “ontopology” when the latter described the ten plagues of the “new world order” in *Specters of Marx*. The lurking danger of inter-ethnic wars “driven by an *archaic* phantasm and concept, by a *primitive conceptual phantasm* of community, the

²⁵⁵ Mbembe, “On the Postcolony: A Brief Response to Critics”, *Qui Parle* (2005), 15(2), p. 7

²⁵⁶ Mbembe (2002), p. 251-252

nation-state, sovereignty, borders, native soil and blood”²⁵⁷ was at the heart of Fanon’s criticism of the nationalist bourgeoisie and their co-optation of Manichaestic forms of spatial organization. What is even more alarming in a politics – to use Derrida’s language – “linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [...] to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of territory, native soil, city, body in general”²⁵⁸ – is the inevitable tragic outcome of what Mbembe calls “territorialized identity” and “racialization of geography”²⁵⁹: i.e. intra-community massacres and fratricides.

I disagree, however, with Mbembe when he claims, in an essay entitled “De la scène postcoloniale chez Frantz Fanon” (2007), that Fanon was unable to anticipate the postcolony because he could not account for the “hidden secret” [*le petit secret*] of colonialism.²⁶⁰ On the contrary, Fanon did anticipate the postcolony in ways that earn him the reputation of thinking well ahead of his time. He did so not so much in his well-known criticism of nationalisms and nativism, as in his prediction of the postcolonial nightmare that can be heard in his condemnation of failures to politicize the masses. This is the Fanon that postcolonial theory failed to capture; and this is the Fanon, I believe, Mbembe points to when he argues, in his response to critics of *On the Postcolony*, that postcolonial theory though it posited radically new way of thinking alterity, “lost sight of the weight of the fellow human [*le semblable*] without whom it is impossible to

²⁵⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 102

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 103

²⁵⁹ Mbembe (2002), p. 257

²⁶⁰ Mbembe describes this hidden secret of colonialism as the repressed fact that colonial subjects were enslaved by an insidious colonial regime of desire as much as they were physically subjugated. See “De la scène coloniale chez Frantz Fanon”, *Rue Descartes* (2007), 58 (4), p. 55.

imagine an *ethics of the neighbor*, still less to envisage the possibility of a common world, of a common humanity.”²⁶¹ Mbembe explicitly recognizes this eight years later in *Critique de la raison nègre* when he shows how even violence, the most controversial concept in Fanon, is most intelligible when understood within the context of Fanon’s larger theory of people’s “ascension in humanity”.²⁶² Though Fanon, as Mbembe often explained, was part of an “African tradition of critical reflection on the politics of life”²⁶³, it is also a fact that death represented in his corpus “the extreme and paradoxical figure of politics”.²⁶⁴ Indeed, death, in the ethical dimension of violence in Fanon, was a political and ethical imperative. It gave birth to life itself through the death of the colonized. In Fanon’s words: “The arrival of the colonist signified syncretically the death of the indigenous society, cultural lethargy, and petrification of the individual. For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver [*cadavre en décomposition*] of the colonist”.²⁶⁵

Though I disagree with Mbembe’s claim that Fanon did not anticipate the postcolony, I believe his fundamental concern since *On the Postcolony* has been to make sense of the proliferation of violence beyond “the postcolonial paradigm of victimization”.²⁶⁶ Indeed, he has sought not only to forge a new language, but also to provide a political philosophy capable of naming and capturing postcolonial urgencies while accounting for emerging sites of subversion without omitting, nonetheless, to celebrate those locations of resistance which have never vanished. It is through this

²⁶¹ Mbembe (2005), p. 15

²⁶² See Mbembe (2013), p. 241

²⁶³ Mbembe (2005), p. 15

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18

²⁶⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 50; Fanon (2002), p. 89

²⁶⁶ Mbembe (2002), p. 251

optimistic realism that Mbembe thus asks, when he contends that we belong to that generation that must think “with and against Fanon”: “Can we seriously consider the history of human freedom as fundamentally governed by the unique, compulsory, and unavoidable law – that of the generalized circulation of death?”²⁶⁷ For Mbembe, the postcolonial imperative is primarily “to exist the Fanonian cul-de-sac” and commit to create – against the precariousness of postcolonial life – a politics of freedom based on “disposing-of-death-itself.”²⁶⁸ This will first require abandoning the pursuit of purity in all of their political and cultural forms. It will insist on recognizing – indeed re-appropriating – “arche-writing” as an internal contamination of our practices of writing Africa that at the same time promotes novelty. This “arche-writing” – which is an “overcoding” in Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term when they describe the totalizing, homogenizing, and centralizing axiomatic of capitalism²⁶⁹ – must also be interrogated, perhaps even rejected, if we are to accomplish our work of historical criticism while ultimately aiming at transcending historicism itself.

Mbembe echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s own criticism of the ways in which philosophy has unfolded in the West. Deleuze and Guattari point the finger at the historicity of Western philosophers and accuse them of having imprisoned philosophy in a historicist quest for an origin which, in turn, eradicated the power of the unforeseeable or contingent. Philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is fundamentally “geophilosophy” in the same manner history itself is a “geohistory”. Attesting to the power of geography,

²⁶⁷ Mbembe (2005), p. 19

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

they write: “Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a ‘milieu’.”²⁷⁰

A distinctively African philosophy independent from, yet never radically heterogeneous to, narratives of loss will have to acknowledge that decolonization inaugurated an era of temporal bifurcation whereby multiple contingent futures opened up for each of the newly decolonized nations. Africa, Mbembe affirmed in *Sortir de la grande nuit* runs in a temporal double sense whereby the past and future are often met simultaneously. He describes neocolonialism as a pernicious modality of power relations between Africa and the West whereby annuities, coercion, violence, destruction, and brutality have created new forms of wealth accumulation by both political and economic means. Insofar as the moment of decolonization remains the absence of the event (*le non-événement*), the philosophical inquiry must continue to interrogate the political and pseudo-normative frameworks of sovereignty inherited from the colonial past. They have given the problematic of power a monopoly over thought and action at the expense of important philosophical questions such as “how to renegotiate a social bond corrupted by commercial relationships [*la pénétration des rapports marchand*] (the sale of human cargoes), the violence of endless wars, and the catastrophic consequences of the way in which power was exercised.”²⁷¹ This philosophy will have to continue to question the complicity or, to use Mbembe’s language, the “conviviality” between the *Commandement* (i.e. the postcolony’s peculiar model of political sovereignty) and the

²⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 96

²⁷¹ Mbembe (2002), p. 250; see also the original “À propos des écritures africaines de soi”, *Politique Africaine*, March 2000, 77, 16-43, p. 24

formation of subjectivities in order to disrupt the mutually constitutive relation between war and African practices of the self.

The formulation of a politics for an African future must take place outside the false question: what comes after the colony? According to Mbembe, questioning the particular nature of our present time will require that we place ourselves in this alternative space that he calls the “space of raw life”: “A place and a time of half-death – or if one prefers of half-life, [...] where life and death are so entangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish them.”²⁷² Indeed, it appears that the defining question to contemporary endeavors of thinking with and against Fanon in our quest for a politics of freedom not predicated on a radically violent expenditure of life is truly: “What death does one die after the colony?”²⁷³ The culmination of civil and political unrest of the nineties has certainly demonstrated that emancipatory politics continues to use the general infliction of arbitrary violence as the only viable means to liberation. Securing political sovereignty still significantly relies on a peculiar normalization of the state of exception, which causes the ongoing silencing of dissenting voices (through raids, kidnapping, or murder) to go absolutely unnoticed or uncontested. In the postcolony, violence has been the answer to the globalized fragility of nation-state-sovereignty. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, after all, was planned over several decades because of the failed “social revolution” of 1959. Massacres, particularly of Tutsi women, were orchestrated each time state power was jeopardized. Tutsi women became for years “guinea-pigs” in a genocidal laboratory directed by colonialist racial ideologies which not

²⁷² Mbembe (2001), p. 197

²⁷³ Ibid.

only orchestrated the 1959 “social revolution,” but were also subsequently reconfigured for the benefit of each regime in turn when it claimed state power.

Though Mbembe showed that the postcolony is “chaotically pluralistic,”²⁷⁴ the use of violence as a tool to maintain and secure sovereign power has bestowed upon its multiple political constellations a dangerous internal coherence. As Mbembe notes in “The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony”, the postcolony is “made up of a series of corporate institutions, and apparatuses which, once they are deployed, constitute a distinctive regime of violence.”²⁷⁵ The governmental rationality of African postcolonial societies turned violence into a “primary central code” of meaning to such an extent that violence has become the logic underlying all other sources of meanings in society. Postcolonial sovereignty lost sight of the fact that the fundamental impetus of anti-colonial struggles was the destructions of the insidious ties between violence and the exercise of power, which characterized colonial rule. This is where Arendt’s interventions on the questions of violence are perhaps the most salient. Arendt was right to point out that violence always emerged whenever political power was vulnerable. Indeed violence in the postcolony showed us that “[p]ower and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance”.²⁷⁶ The resignation of the political turned the most private dimensions of postcolonial relations into transactions governed by a certain regime of the “fake”, the “simulacrum”, in such a manner that the predictability of intimate relationships was completely obliterated. This is

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 102

²⁷⁵ Mbembe, “The Banality of Power and the Aesthetic of Vulgarly in the Postcolony”, *Public Culture* (Spring 1992), 4 (2), p. 2

²⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1970), p. 56

why during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, for example, violence reached far into the realms of friendship, romantic love, brotherhood, sisterhood, and parenthood, to such an extent that filicide and uxoricide were perceived as the most exemplary heroic act which Hutu men with Tutsi wives or concubines could perform.

Violence and the “necropolitics” of postcoloniality

It is tempting to look to Michel Foucault’s account of biopower to account for the Rwandan genocide because this concept has proved so illuminating in other contexts and because Foucault himself seems to have understood, albeit the acknowledgement comes only in a passing mention, the link between biopower, genocide, and colonialism.²⁷⁷ It is tempting, following Foucault, Arendt and even Giorgio Agamben in their descriptions of politics in Modernity, to argue that the realm of the political in postcolonial Africa has always only been concerned with the management of biological life. One cannot help but be struck by how the vocabulary of political freedom, even in Fanon, is so often marked by recourse to the language of natural and biological existence. But when it comes to political violence, as it exists in all its shocking proliferations in the African postcolony, Foucauldian biopower, Agamben’s bare life, and all the other philosophical constructs with which we are familiar are insufficient. Natural life, or more precisely its politicized version that is *death*, was never excluded from the realm of the political in postcolonial Africa. In fact, the appeal to biological existence was the condition for the possibility of emancipatory politics and co-existed with the fact that the state of emergency was the *sui generis* milieu for conducting politics altogether. The founding violence of the

²⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société* (Paris: Gallimard-Seuil, 1997), p. 229

postcolonial moment was not only intensified to reproduce forms of “necropower” similar to those of the colonial state, it was also transformed and redistributed to citizens and functioned as a sign of legitimate citizenship in post-independence nation-states. The power to kill the Tutsi, the power of disposing of the body of any person deemed a foreigner or an illegitimate citizen, conferred on the perpetrators a robust sense of finally occupying a space of self-determination. When citizens’ rights to political participation were transformed into – or equated to – their ability to murder whomever threatened the new nation, sovereign states were replaced by armed groups acting allegedly on their and, ultimately, war became the central character of postcolonial governmentality.

The techniques of killings and the quasi-ritualized performances around rotting bodies that became the daily sight in Kigali from April to July 1994 were not merely the symptoms of a nation gone “mad”. This new economy of the massacre as a specific character of government in most postcolonial authoritarian regimes is the culmination of the transformation of violence as an exceptional political measure in anti-colonial movement into a permanent technique of nation building and governmentality. The distribution of the power to kill by emerging post-independence regimes not only worked to mask the fact that these regimes perceived their newly acquired power to be fragile and vulnerable in relation to their ex-colonizers. Killing as a “citizen-right” nurtured the relation of “conviviality” – to use Mbembe’s language – between citizens and their postcolonial potentate in ways that obliterated democratic procedures necessary to prevent abuses of sovereign power. It is in this manner that postcolonial sovereignty destroyed the ambiguity surrounding anti-colonial violence that we find in Fanon.

The “aporia” of violence that always delayed and complicated the revolutionary decision was substituted for abrupt, and yet always expected, inflictions of arbitrary violence. The ethical dimension of violence for Fanon – violence as justice – was always an aporetic experience. Violence was both medicine and poison – both a mean of purification and lethal contamination. Strangely, when it comes to violence, Fanon is close to Derrida. In fact, he anticipates Derrida’s discourse on justice. The colonial situation compelled the revolutionary decision. Fanon, however, was acutely aware that the character of the decision – more precisely, its violent nature – would always contradict itself. As his attitude toward anti-colonial violence illustrates, Fanon knew that “there is no justice [...] without the experience of aporia.²⁷⁸” He was aware that, fundamentally, “justice is an experience of the impossible.²⁷⁹” As Derrida attempted to show the non-passive nature of undecidability, the fact that undecidability always included an injunction to “act”, he explained that the decision was always performative in such a way that the action itself remained “haunted” by this undecidability. Most importantly, this meant that the decision, though never taken from good conscience, was always guilt ridden. This is why a decision must always be revisited. When it comes to violence, Fanon’s unease, his numerous self-reflexive retractions, showed that justice – that which compelled revolutionary violence in the first place – as Derrida argued decades later was also always the experience of an aporia. Though unlike Derrida for whom the idea of emancipation was rather naïve, justice for Fanon was necessarily a matter of freedom. To free oneself from the colonial predicament is justice itself. Fanon

²⁷⁸ Derrida, “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority” in *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 244

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

and Derrida, however, appear to converge again on the question of urgency for an act compelled by injustice. For Derrida, injustice demands that one acts immediately, one cannot delay the action in the name of knowledge or calculation. Unlike law that is the element of calculation, Derrida writes, “justice is incalculable, it demands that one calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the *decision* between just and unjust is never insured by a rule²⁸⁰,” Fanon had already drawn attention to this in *Wretched of the Earth* when he considered the paradoxical difficulty of action in liberation struggles. He had observed in *Peau noire, masques blancs* that the fundamental hardship of the man of action in revolutionary struggle is his need to abandon his inevitable resentment toward his oppressor.²⁸¹ In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon echoed this observation when he writes:

Antiracist racism and the determination to defend one’s skin which is characteristic of the colonized’s response to colonial oppression, clearly represent sufficient reasons to join the struggle. But one does not sustain a war, one does not endure massive repression or witness the disappearance of one’s entire family in order for hatred or racism to triumph. Racism, hatred, resentment, and the “legitimate desire for revenge” alone cannot nurture a war of liberation.²⁸²

Fanon knew that prescribing violence as a revolutionary tool involved a “calculation with the incalculable”. It involved a “murderous” act – so to speak – in the name of a future no longer governed by death. Securing this future involved inflicting death, committing “real” violence, not as vengeance or hatred but as a cathartic and purifying act committed to a future without hatred, resentment, and above all racism. Thought it haunted Fanon, the experience of this political “impossibility” was the only way to assess his present and

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), p. 180

²⁸² Fanon (2004), p. 89; Fanon (2002), p. 133

envisage a future politics. Fanonian politics was driven by a particular desire to lucidly portray his present time while having a strong conceptual hold in what had not yet happened or, perhaps, would never happen. The political entailed, for Fanon, a practice of creation whereby what exceeded the limits of possible experience, or what could be represented as such, not only determined the possible but, also, represented the condition for the possibility of change and progress. The transformative power of anti-colonial practices in general, though troubled by the breaking of foundational moral injunctions such as “you should not kill” – an injunction that Fanon took deeply seriously – relied on, and was guided by, a vision of a future radically free from violence and racism. In the Fanonian lexicon, this is what corresponded to what may be called “the humanity-to-come”. The paths leading to this unconditional version of the humane always carried, for Fanon, a hopelessness that, far from being a kind of despair, is opposed to the teleology of hopefulness or a certain economy of redemption. One did not hope for a decolonized order, one demanded it and ultimately took it. Decolonization for Fanon was neither a saving moment nor the recovery of a lost order of things. It was creation in its univocal and absolute character. As he concludes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I am not a prisoner of history, I should not seek there the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into my existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.”²⁸³

Decolonization could neither be committed to any politics of progress, nor could it be “the fruit of an objective dialectic which more or less rapidly assumes the

²⁸³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986) p. 179; *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952) p. 186

appearance of an absolutely inevitable mechanism.²⁸⁴ It is in Fanon's refusal to be subject to any type of historical determinism that one finds the root of his rejection of arbitrary killings and, more importantly, postcolonial violence. Fanon knew the dangers of advocating violence as a legitimate mean to liberation; he knew that the danger of violence naturally exceeded the pragmatic calculations between means and ends. This is reason why he renounces the language of violence in favor of the language of absolute creation and radical reinvention beyond the bounds of historical determinations. As is clearly shown by status of violence in postcolonial Africa for the last fifty years, nothing can be reinvented unless we are capable of embracing Fanon's conception of history or vision of a future. Or as Mbembe puts it:

What began in blood ends in blood the chances of a new beginning are lessened by the haunting presence of the horrors of the past. Put another way, it is difficult to reinvent anything if one simply repeats against others the violence once inflicted on oneself. There is no "good violence" that can follow on automatically from "bad violence" and be legitimized by it. All violence, "good" or "bad", always sanctions a disjunction. The reinvention of politics in postcolonial conditions first requires people to depart from the logic of vengeance, above all when vengeance wears the shabby garb of the law.²⁸⁵

If the state of war continues to be "conceived as a general cultural experience that shapes identities, just as the family, the school, and other social institutions do,"²⁸⁶ events akin to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are more than forgotten specters; they continue to represent an imminent real threat. Perhaps more than any other generation, today's Africans will be forced to answer to the true vision of the anti-colonial project, a vision that envisaged the deracialization of power and property for the benefits of all Africans. This will require, in

²⁸⁴ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 170

²⁸⁵ Mbembe, "What is Postcolonial Thinking: An interview with Achille Mbembe", *Esprit* (2006), 12, p. 8

²⁸⁶ Mbembe (2002), p. 267

addition to renouncing the instrumentalization of our calamity and histories of destitution, committing to disrupting the hold that race and violence has had on our *practices of the self*.

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CONCLUSION

On April 19 2015, a major operation was underway to rescue approximately more than seven hundred migrants who had potentially all drowned just outside the Libyan coast in yet another massive smuggling *tour de force*, which carried thousands of African refugees and migrants in search for decent life standards. By Sunday of that same week, the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR confirmed that this last shipwreck had escalated the body count to one thousand and five hundred victims under the same circumstances, just in the year of 2015. It is quite difficult, even for those among us who have somehow lived a similar slog, to wrap our mind around the circumstance that may lead anyone to commit the ultimate sacrifice. One is reminded here of Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, according to which sovereignty, in the age of globalization, is primarily exercised through the power of deciding who and who cannot live. To be sure, this is neither a facile reiteration of Foucault sovereign right to kill (*droit de glaive*) nor an alternative rendition of his concept of biopower. The probability of their affinities notwithstanding, Mbembe's crucial claim is that sovereignty, in a so-called age of globalization – the formal principles of which have been hijacked by an implicitly sanctioned re-balkanization of the world – is exercised in the “interest of maximum

destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*²⁸⁷. Sovereignty, thus, investing its necropower has created “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*.”²⁸⁸ In a necropolitical system, indeed, race functions as both an ideological apparatus of security and technology for governing difference and multiplicity. According to Mbembe, race in this context is therefore the most efficacious tool to legally abolish the law with the very act responsible for establishing and implementing a justice system. Necropower, however, is not an isolated system but the only one, perhaps, that has succeeded in its global spread to such an extent that it has attained the capacity to morph according to the geopolitical context within which it finds itself. One could even argue that the failure of democracy is diametrically parallel to the global triumph of necropower. As I mentioned in chapter 2, Fanon, as with Deleuze in some ways, was interested in writing history as primarily an engagement with the universal. For him, writing universal history meant primarily being in profound relation with the materiality of the world. That is why he remained deeply troubled by all forms of abstract thought. As with Deleuze and Guattari, Fanon’s rather radical conviction in the priority of the world, in the priority of the outside, indeed in thought’s materiality, led him principally to attempt to force Europe to think its history with its colonies’. I tried to show in these four chapters that Fanon, indeed, prefigured much of contemporary western critical theories in their shared contestation of a certain grand narrative of intellectual history. Fanon undoubtedly shares significant intellectual ties with Marxism, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and existentialism, but it is not until recently that scholars have

²⁸⁷ Mbembe (2003), p. 40

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

endeavored to take seriously those dimension of his work that do not ascribe to the coherence of an identifiable theoretical tradition. As much as Gordon and others have lamented of the prevalent inclination to name Fanon a Marxist, a Sartrean, or a Lacanian, hardly any efforts have been allocated to narrating legitimate grounds for such contestation. Though, I do have my own inclination to hesitate doing the opposite – i.e. calling Derrida, Deleuze, or Mbembe, Fanonian – I prefer however to point out their theoretical affinities. For it is in only in this manner that one can combat practices of philosophical insularities, which have only worked to sanctioned various types of historical amnesia.

Derrida has often remarked that deconstruction can never really be consolidated into something we may strictly call a theory. However, as my approach to the work of Fanon has shown throughout this dissertation, it is much of Derrida's conceptual structures that conditioned and constituted the terms with which I could think of (and was able to) outlining an alternative Fanonian discourse or, even, a theory. In their chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, "Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine", in which they essentially seek to locate thought in flight from capitalism's appropriation, Deleuze and Derrida have interesting things to say. On thought and its cooptation by the State, they write, and the insightful and equally poetic quality of the prose makes it worth quoting at length:

Because the less people take thought seriously, the more they think in conformity with what the State wants. Truly what man of the State has not dreamed of that paltry impossible thing – to be a thinker? [...] "Private thinker", however, is not a satisfactory expression, because it exaggerates interiority, when it is a question of *outside thought*. To place thought in an immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside, in short to make thought a war machine, is a strange undertaking whose precise procedures can be studied in Nietzsche. [...] There is another reason why "private thinker" is not a good expression. Although it is true

that this counterthought attests to an absolute solitude, it is an extremely populous solitude, like the desert itself, a solitude already intertwined with a people to come, one that invokes and awaits that people [...]. Every thought is already a tribe, the opposite of a State.²⁸⁹

If, as they argue, the power of minority language, minority thought, is indeed its ability to think the people, indeed to be inexorably linked to the materiality of an outside, as opposed to the domesticated and disciplined interiority nurtured by the State, there are reason to maintain the discursive connections I have made in this dissertation between their philosophy and that of Fanon's. When it is all said and done, Derrida, Deleuze, and Fanon share a similar – at times seemingly identical – future politics. Mbembe, to some significant extent, recognized this. Even if Fanon's work still holds onto certain politically singular aspirations, I have tried to show that the very nature of his discourse, in fact of his politics, could not function in isolation from a network of current discursive articulations.

Perhaps, Dipesh Chakrabarty is right to advance his “perverse proposition” when he argues, in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, that insofar as academic discourse are concerned (History in his case), the Western world will remain “the sovereign theoretical subject” of all academic discourse.²⁹⁰ This is an important issue to ponder upon because Fanon's theoretical fame was undoubtedly inaugurated within the academy. Hence, so long as reading Fanon will remain a practice unequivocally confined within the walls the academy, contemporary Fanon scholars cannot ignore the role Europe has played as a “silent referent” – to borrow Chakrabarty's language – in our own philosophical knowledge production, even when the philosopher

²⁸⁹ Deleuze & Derrida (1987), p. 376-377

²⁹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 27

was/is a critical philosopher of race from a historically marginalized group. In fact, in the background of my dissertation remains the following theoretical conviction, one which essentially led me, as well as Mbembe I believe, to take Derrida and Deleuze seriously in this emerging quest to re-theorized Fanon. Thus, the implicit argument of my dissertation is that the subversive potential of our field and the capacity of producing meaningful work hinge upon our ability to take heed of our inescapable complicity with the procedures of institutionalized knowledge production. In this regard, I therefore contend that the critical philosophy of race must reject simplistic, moralist, and pious indictment of the Western archive and, rather, opt for a kind of intellectual lucidity capable of establishing fruitful lines of conceptual exchange whereby no philosophical discourse can be easily dismissed for its “non-philosophical” nature. Derrida also invokes disciplinary matters in *Du droit à la philosophie*. Beyond the complex dimension of such phrase – i.e. the right to philosophy – whereby matters of legality, discursive authority, and methodology converge, it is Derrida’s inquiry into philosophy’s relation to discursive authority that I find pertinent to my claims in this conclusion. Elucidating the other semantic side of “*du droit à*”, Derrida points out that “one says ‘to have the right to [*avoir droit à*] to indicate the access guaranteed by the law, the right of way, the pass [...], the authorized entry”.²⁹¹ Hence, interrogating the “right to philosophy” necessarily engenders another set of crucial questions. Derrida therefore proceeds to ask: “Who has the right to philosophy today, in our society? To which philosophy? Under what condition? In which private or public space?”²⁹²

²⁹¹ Derrida, *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy I*, trans. Jan Plug (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 3

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Fanon never lost touch with the reality of his shared discursive genealogy with the Western archive. This is precisely why he vehemently attacked the classist abuse of power, the racism, the cultural nativism, and xenophobia of the emerging “self-anointed founders”, to use Sekyi-Otu language. Indeed, what Fanon saw was their inability to recognize their insidious complicity with precisely the practices, principles and institutions they criticized as unjust. However there is, what Spivak calls in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, “a productive acknowledgment of complicity”.²⁹³ This is a radically inescapable complicity. It is not the mere appropriation of a discipline or tradition’s organizing tropes. It is rather a structure akin to Derrida’s exposition of the originary alienation in all linguistic experiences - that is the inevitable, though disquieting resemblance between the master’s language and the language to be invented. My dissertation was, in important ways, a testament to such inevitability.

I started, in chapter 1, with an exposition on the role of race in the postcolonial world. I attempted to show the ways in which a certain logic of race informed by a specific colonial rationality continues to dictate everyday politics in most of the continent. By following Mbembe’s argument in his chapter on postcolonial “vulgar” power in *On the Postcolony*, I then attempted to show how Fanon’s critique of bourgeois politics prefigured the forms of power Mbembe strongly attacked in his book and elsewhere. Though much has been written on the question of race in Fanon’s early text, I agreed with Alessandrini when he argues that the Fanon that remained invisible for most early critics was essentially the Fanon profoundly tormented with what he perceived to be serious imminent threats to the promises and dreams of an independent postcolonial

²⁹³ Spivak (1999), xii

continent. I began with this chapter because, well, Fanon was right! And it is perhaps partly because of his prophetic genius that he has never left the horizons of critical thinking. I used Mbembe to show how Fanon's tragic premonitions are, unfortunately, not even close to be a thing of the past. More importantly, however, it is their joint commentary on the status of race that I find quite compelling, with regard specifically the future of critical philosophy of race. Insofar as the global significance of race is undeniable; and the spread of its morbidly tragic consequences even more salient to a global market striving from an international large-scale economy of violence the running of which the racialized body is indispensable, it seems to me that the question of race cannot be approached through parochial practices of any kind. Because race and racism will always escape insular codification by their very political nature, history, and cartography, provincial endeavors of confining the study of race within specific discursive limits cannot certainly amount to anything philosophically relevant.

The question of discursive insularity brought me to very urgent issue of hospitality and cosmopolitanism. From the drowning bodies on the Lampedusa Island, to the radical control of our southern borders that have practically militarized a portion of civil society, which is now lawfully entitled to perform its "patriotic" duties in the form of paramilitary expeditions, I take Derrida's unconditional politics quite seriously. In this second chapter, therefore, I first return to the work of Mbembe who is undoubtedly the first to explicitly point to Fanon's aversion with *la logique de l'enclos* (the logic of enclosure). In this regard, I trace not only his more explicit intervention on the work of Fanon, but I also attempt to show how his ability to ascribe a terminology to a specific aspect of Fanon's work resulted in our subsequent ability to tease out a conceptual

dimension in Fanon's work that had gone significantly unnoticed. In this chapter, I therefore argue that not only did Fanon's cosmopolitan politics prefigure his more explicit anti-nativist interventions in the years leading to his untimely death, I also show that the same rhetoric of unconditional hospitality was also apparent in his early text, *Black Skin, White Masks*. The Fanon who radically refuses to be determined by any forms of confinement, the one who ruthlessly chastised the national bourgeoisie for depoliticizing anti-decolonial movements by subjecting them to various forms of parochialism, is the same young Fanon who writes in *Peau noir, masques blancs*: “*Je ne veux pas être la victime de la Ruse d'un monde noir. [...] Je ne suis pas prisonnier de l'Histoire. Je ne dois pas y chercher le sens de ma destinée. Je dois me rappeler à tout instant que le véritable saut consiste à introduire l'invention dans l'existence.*”²⁹⁴ Hence, the Fanon who refused to be prisoner of any racial discourses, of history insofar as history is irreducibly racial, and one who never shied away from the unconditional structures of all forms of radical invention, prefigured the more explicitly vocal enemy of all logic of enclosure who we find in his later texts. He writes, in the *Wretched of the Earth*: “Man's condition, his projects and collaboration with others on tasks that strengthen man's totality, are new issues which require genuine inspiration”, and a few paragraphs down he continues, “Yes, the European spirit is built on strange foundations [*de singuliers fondements*], the whole of European thought developed in places that were increasingly arid and increasingly inaccessible [;] consequently, it was natural that the chances of encountering man became less and less frequent”.²⁹⁵ As I attempted to show the ways in which Fanon's concrete politics validated Derrida's formal conceptual

²⁹⁴ Fanon (1952), p. 186

²⁹⁵ Fanon (2004), p. 236-237; Fanon (2002), p.302-303

structures, it is quite clear in this passage above that, as with Derrida, Fanon believed that hospitality itself is ethics. Because the whole of Europe's thought developed within isolated space and time, it is unsurprising then that the same Europe could "never stop talking of man and yet massacre him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world".²⁹⁶ Fanon always resisted – while never denying their inevitable ramifications – historical determinations even in all the hyperbolic moments of his political vision, he always was concretely and existentially wrestling with Derrida's structures of unconditionality, which are as Derrida intimated many times, the condition for the possibility of all politics perfectability. This is perhaps why Fanon will never cease to inspire political imaginaries across the world. From his critique of Négritude's racialism, to his appeal for solidarity beyond race for the oppressed, and his relentless harsh indictment of postcolonial xenophobia, Fanon's vision remained intricately informed by this absolute idea of a future politics – even if, as Alessandrini pointed out, he knew that the postcolonial he dreamed of (what I have called Fanon's post-postcolonial) will never be a reality. As I open my conclusion with various examples of crimes against hospitality [*délit d'hospitalité*] – crimes as recent as three months old – perhaps it is high time that our theoretical efforts be turned to the hypocrisy surrounding juridical discourses of globalization, which officially claims that so-called politics of a shared world. Derrida writes in *On Cosmopolitanism*:

There is a considerable gap separating the great and generous principles of the right to asylum inherited from the Enlightenment thinkers and from the French Revolution and, on the other hand, the historical reality or the effective implementation (*mise en oeuvre*) of these principles. It is controlled, curbed, and monitored by implacable juridical restrictions; it is overseen by what the preface of a book [...] refers to as a 'mean-minded' [*mesquine*] and restrictive, it is

²⁹⁶ Fanon (2004), p. 235

because it is under the control of the demographico-economic interest – that is the interest of the nation-state that regulate asylum [*En vérité, si la tradition juridique reste “mesquine” et restrictive, c’est qu’elle commandée par l’intérêt demographico-économique, en un mot par l’intérêt de l’Etat-nation qui accueille et donne asile*]. Refugee status ought not to be conflated with the status of an immigrant, not even of a political immigrant.²⁹⁷

Ultimately, it is the frustration of juridical systems’ prevalent practices of merely paying lip service to formalized ethical principle that joins Fanon and Derrida’s ethics of hospitality. Even the order of the unconditional and the conditional, as Derrida has argued, are both irreducible to one another and yet always indissociable, it seems to me that the “*mesquinerie*” Derrida is pointing out cannot even be accounted for in this complex relation between unconditionality and conditionality, which has been ultimately the equation that calls for thinking in Derridean future politics. If that were the case, the question of reversing Kant’s cosmopolitic equation would have to be of a second degree. Perhaps, we must think of third term in this intricate yet necessary relationship – a term that can account for the inevitable deception, or fraudulence, in all conditional exchanges.

It is the debate around cultural appropriation that inspired me to return to the chapter on language in *Black Skin, White Masks*. I argued in this portion of the dissertation, that Fanon never advocated abandoning the master’s language and opting for African indigenous languages. I relied extensively on his own appropriation of the Western archive, and more specifically his relationship to Enlightenment’s ethics. Sekyi-Ato and others are right to point to the absurdity of the tendency to attack or dismiss Fanon for his, deemed archaic, humanism. More than other tradition, postcolonial studies has been the very site of these accusation. In the midst of their postmodern endeavor to unravel the discursive architecture undergirding humanist politics, Fanon became a target

²⁹⁷ Derrida (2001), p. 11-12; Derrida (1997), p. 30-31

of criticism. The figure of Fanon was indeed often used to characterize the very opposite position from anti-humanist discourse of postcoloniality. Notwithstanding my discussion on the inevitability of our theoretical complicity with the Western archive, I contended in this chapter that just as Derrida's argued for an "originary alienation that institutes every language as a language of the other"²⁹⁸, Fanon was convinced that the politics of natural property that primarily undergirded all colonial affirmations and, subsequently, governed the rhetoric of liberation struggles could not ensure sustainable political prosperity in the emerging postcolonial period. The parallel may not be clear. However, it is because of Fanon's aversion to all forms of politics of natural property that he could envisage – in spite of his scathing criticism of the colonized's linguistic alienation – the possibility of reclaiming the master's language (a specific ethical language) in the benefit of the global oppressed. I tried to show that, beyond a project of retroactive clarification whereby the colonized would reveal Europe's hypocrisy in the language it used to describe "man", Fanon called for the radical reconfiguration of the foundational structure that regulated European normative and ethical practices in the colonial world. Hence, more than simply re-declaring what Europe had said about the human in order to insert the previously dehumanized other, Fanon's call was to leave that Europe which endless spoke about the human while exterminating human lives around the globe, and create a new world in which freedom would be given social and political reality. Some could ask, indeed, what exactly prompts this anti-pious reading or, to use Hall's language, what authority do I have here to read this chapter against the textual grain? Let me, by way to an answer, invoke an interesting passage from Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other*. He writes:

²⁹⁸ Derrida (1998), p. 64

The language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable. *To inhabit*: this is a value that is quite *disconcerting* and equivocal; one never inhabits what one is in the habit of calling inhabiting. There is no possible habitat of calling inhabiting. There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia. Most certainly. That is all too well known. But it does not follow that all exiles are equivalent. From this shore, yes, *from this shore* or this common drift, all expatriations remain singular.²⁹⁹

Quite similarly to the structure of unconditional hospitality, whereby the host must ultimately be the guest in his or her own house, Derrida is describing the very conditions for the possibility of inhabiting, even of claiming one's own abode. The originary absence of origins, this universal expropriation that inaugurates linguistic experiences (perhaps even all experiences) that make possible claiming something one's own. I argued that Fanon's concrete life was the testament of precisely this universal structure. This is not to cancel, however, the irreducible singularity of all experience. In fact, as Bennington rightly points out, whenever Derrida will refer in this text to the singular singularity of monolingualism, it was always within the explicitly colonial context of his argument.³⁰⁰ Fanon articulated the singularity of this experience in this first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, the character of a very determinate kind of "expropriations against which a war can be waged".³⁰¹ But the recognition of such singularity does not invalidate the recognition of these originary structures of alienation. In fact, Derrida will go on to say that "where neither natural property nor the law of property in general exist, where this de-propiation is recognized" is where the possibility of contestation can be real. Hence, in this chapter, I tried to show how Fanon's acute recognition of the colonized's inescapable linguistic alienation made possible his own idiosyncratic

²⁹⁹ Derrida (1998), p. 58

³⁰⁰ See Bennington, "Double Tonguing: Derrida's Monolingualism", *Tympanum*, 4, 2000

³⁰¹ Derrida (1998), p. 63

appropriation of certain dimension of Western's ethical language. I concluded the chapter by arguing that perhaps, more than focusing on conventional reading of this chapter that are mainly concerned about narrating the tragic conundrum of the colonized's inability to speak, we should be concerned by the conditions, and the effects, of perverting the master's language or – in a Deleuzian register – the major language. This chapter is quite important mainly for a couple of reasons. (1) It brings us up back to the questions of discursive complicity that I discussed above; and forces us to think not only about the limitations of a discipline's rules of theoretical and thematic purity. In our case, the questions will most likely run along the same lines of inquiry that Derrida articulates above – namely, who has the right to philosophy and to “what” philosophy. But this also forces us, as critical philosophers of race especially, to think of the extent to which our discourses, essentially since they are predominantly minor discourses, can cause certain kind of deterritorial effects, not only at the level of the academy but also outside the walls of academic ivory towers.

Finally, I concluded the dissertation in somehow the same way I began it. Recall that my main concern in chapter 1 was to return to the question of race in Fanon's work and demonstrate the ways in which his late interventions predicted the brutal tragedies that would come practically to define the character of postcolonial power. I contended that postcolonial sovereignty coopted the logic of race, which had marked the quintessential nature of colonial rationality. I then argued that Fanon had already called out the conflation between race and culture in his later work and foresaw to be the main threat to future of the postcolony. I believe, indeed, that more than other postcolonial generation, we have witnessed in the past couple of decades the unfolding and the

culmination of Fanon's worst nightmare. In chapter 4, I confront these very tragedies and discuss indeed the inner workings of sovereignty in murderous states whereby the insidious couple of race and violence has changed the very basic structures of civil society. I took seriously and contextualized the claim that violence is always inevitable to all radical political changes. Insofar as violence in postcoloniality has primarily involved mass exterminations and the maximum destructions of people and civil infrastructures, I ask what it means to return to Fanon's infamous treatment of violence, especially when the following chapters betrayed his deep anxieties about violence that were less apparent in "On Violence". I asked, to begin with, what thinking about violence would entail when violence in our postcolonial context possesses no name. It is an unnamable violence that fails to project itself onto a future and does not serve the perfectibility of the present. It is, therefore, a violence that lacks justice altogether. I proceeded to demonstrate that, in spite of its hyperbolic nature, Fanon's discourse on violence was never naïve. I tried to show the aporetic structures within his approach to violence and in fact argued that violence was, for Fanon, the *pharmakon* par excellence. Though we will never know how Fanon's ideas on race would have eventually developed, but it is fair to say that by the time of his untimely death, his position on violence had considerably changed, and this was quite apparent both in the second half of *The Wretched of the Earth* and the collections of essays published posthumously. It is nevertheless sure that, by the early sixties he became increasingly concerned with issues of postcolonial responsibility and self-accountability. In "A propos des écriture de soi" (2000), Mbembe argues that post-independence identity politics has been engulfed in a culture of deep disavowal which, limited by the incessant

iterations of a “narrative of loss”³⁰², attributed to the “founding” events of the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and apartheid such a pivotal role in the economy of meaning that, in turn, foreclosed the “possibility of a properly philosophical reflection on the African condition”.³⁰³ According to post-independence dominant narratives, Mbembe explains, the African subject’s quest for self-determination became practically impossible because of these three historical events. Framing and confronting the disavowal of responsibility, I believe, would have probably become Fanon’s next political project.

I tried to outline, through the thematic approach I used in this dissertation, what I consider to be some of the most urgent issues in contemporary postcolonial life. By invoking concrete examples, I have attempted to show not only the ways in which Fanon’s discourse continue to be acutely relevant. I have also try to show that, in spite of the alleged abstract nature of Derridean and Deleuzian philosophies, the formal structures they describe possess their concrete exemplification in the work and life of Frantz Fanon. For the future of this research, I am mainly interested in two possible outcomes. First, I hope maintain this conceptual exchange between seemingly opposed tradition. Since I made the case at various times – some moments more explicitly than others – that the conditions of intellectual life necessarily institute forms of conceptual complicity which are fundamentally unavoidable, I would like to take this claim to the farthest limits within the theoretical boundaries that are afforded to me. That is, I hope to continue to probe the intellectual affinities between Fanon, Derrida, and Deleuze in the hope that these affinities can eventually inform us on contemporary modes of life. And secondly, insofar as these affinities seem to revolve around their ethico-political theories and commitments,

³⁰² Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing”, *Public Culture* (2002), 14 (1), p. 239

³⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 251

I am interested to see what kind of theoretical effects this kind of discursive entanglements could bring about for not only critical philosophy of race, but also to the field of continental philosophy in general. In other word, such philosophical promiscuity – to invoke Spivak language – produce at the level of the disciple.

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Philosophy, BA, *summa cum laude* with double major in Psychology

AREA OF SPECIALIZATION

20th Century Continental Philosophy, Critical Philosophy of Race, Africana Philosophy,
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AREA OF COMPETENCE

Feminist Philosophy, Ethics, Environmental Ethics

AWARDS

2014 The Joseph J. Kockelmans Award in Philosophy (awarded to a doctoral candidate
for exemplary academic achievement), Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2014.

2009-to present Graduate Student Fellow, Pennsylvania State University. The Rock
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2012 Institute Research Fellow, Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2012

2010 Philosophy Travel Funding Award, (Summer, 2010)

2008 Iris Marion Young Diversity Scholar, Pennsylvania State University,
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PUBLICATIONS:

2015 “Enemy Within: Tutsi Women before the Genocide” – under review

2014 “Insiders-Outsiders: Reflections on the Roots of the Citizenship Crisis in
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