



# Fanon's Vision of Embodied Racism for Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice

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This text is built around a clinical encounter illustrative of the challenge/struggle for recognizing and working in terms of race. The author employs perspectives and terms emerging from a vision developed by Frantz Fanon to represent issues of race for psychoanalytic practice that have begun to be recognized and discussed recently. These issues open up unprecedented challenges for theory and practice, particularly as they reveal the myopia of the terms and discourse with which we make meaning and practice clinically. The author examines the experience of his own need to perform in the role of rescuer, in tension with surrendering to the limits of an attempt at recognition within the discursive terms of a racist social order. In particular, the author points to the limitations of verbal re-presentational categories/models in currently accepted psychoanalytic discourse as well as in the capacities of both analyst and patient to re-present complex, emotionally difficult to bear, racialized experience. The author demonstrates the clinical value of expanding analytic attention to embodied registrations as one way of surrendering to this myopia of theory, and the effects of amnesia and/or erasure that racist discourse can have on re-presentations of traumatic histories for both patient and analyst.

“For sure, we need to speak to the Other. But do we need to speak quite so much about the Other? And maybe we should be ultra-careful when speaking for the Other?” (Samuels, 2020)

## THE STRUGGLE

I offer this paper with the trepidation and awareness Samuels calls us to with the above quote. Why would my attempt to speak about my clinical work (as a White person), with my patient Waverley, (a Black person), in terms introduced by Franz Fanon be of any value other than to assuage my own racist guilt and shame? This project ultimately reflects Straker's warning, that

as psychoanalysts and therapists ...What we intend consciously will usually have an unconscious underbelly ...in the very moment that we wish to assert our humanity and **rescue** the Other, we may paradoxically be at risk of undermining the Other and reinscribing power relations as we unconsciously require the Other to be in a victim state as a counterpoint to our rescuer state. (Straker, 2018, p. 297, my emphasis in bold)

With this text, I consider an encounter consisting of my phantasies as rescuer in interaction with my patient's victimization, located in a space constructed out of the oppressive economic

and political arrangements shaped in great part by racist assumptions and practices. But critically and additionally, I emphasize with this project, the “fire” of vitalization that was kindled with attention to my patient’s emotional truths and my responses, both registering initially, as embodied rather than verbalized. Critical to the value of this experience has been my considerations for how Fanon (as well as the contributions of several others who are currently reading Fanon in order to further elaborate the significance of his vision), can help me/us to harvest the clinical wisdom possible from such encounter. This project has facilitated a) reviewing the writing process with Waverley, b) the impact our interactions have had on his capacity to locate and vitalize himself, and c) how our conversations have contributed to this narrative attempt to re-present and reflect on our process.

### THE IMPACT OF PLACE FOR FANON, ME AND WAVERLEY

Fanon is difficult to read as his thinking weaves an array of perspectives most powerfully shaped by his experiences. He emphasizes three critical periods. He describes the significance of being a Black subject growing up in the colonial culture of Martinique. Upon this, he overlays his experience of education in Paris where he became socialized in European philosophical, political, and medical discourses and practices. Finally and most significant to his messages, he speaks/writes from his experiences of the Algerian revolution and other liberation struggles in Africa. He was able to reflect on his short life (dead of leukemia at the age of 36) from racialized dimensions of *crushing political violence*. This violence shaped his critical and unique clinical understanding of the *vitality of violence* in the face of annihilating oppression, lack, and desperation that hunger and torture invoke in a struggle to live as a human. I believe Fanon’s perspectives are relevant to formulations for the impact of traumatic experiences experienced by asylum seekers in our current era. But this is a conversation for a different text.

Fanon’s contributions have largely been heralded in terms of postcolonial studies, critical theory, and Marxism. His significant critique of European psychiatry and, in particular, psychoanalysis, somewhat considered in those professional communities, has not received recognition as central to theory and practice in the clinical psychoanalytic world. In fact, Franz Fanon is not a figure, previously exiled from the psychoanalytic world like some such as Adler, Jung, Reich, and Ferenczi, whose efforts are now being returned to the epicenter of our conversations. Fanon never existed for psychoanalysis.

Yet, Fanon introduced a concept of *sociotherapie* based in a vision of *sociogeny*. For Fanon, sociogeny was a theoretical perspective which built on, but eclipsed, the culturally myopic vision of Freud’s emphasis on sexuality and competitive aggression. (I return to this point subsequently in this text.) Rather, Fanon read Freud’s scope of inquiry as always contextualized in a cultural field valorizing and/or abjecting particular discourses and practices. He emphasized and critiqued the significance of racial prejudice expressed as a hierarchy of development based on comparisons of embodied characteristics, particularly skin color and fantasies of innate differences in physiological capacities. Such racially prejudiced assumptions for human development have ultimately been debunked in the anthropological field in which they first emerged (See Brickman, 2018, for an historical analysis). But they continue to seep into psychoanalytic thought and practice.

As correction and expansion to the racist European assumptions and perspectives he encountered, Fanon offered a theoretical view of suffering that emphasized the capacity of socially enforced oppression to shape clinical trauma emerging from powerlessness and lack. His view of treatment always encompassed the struggle for both oppressed and oppressor to revive a sense of control and power, to find the vitality, if possible, that had been suffocated within the assumptions and practices of oppressive violence. Often and ironically, Fanon understood the rescue of this vitality, similarly to Winnicott through forms of ruthless violence. While history has indulged in a characterization of Fanon's participation in collective revolutionary violence, little has been offered concerning his innovative understanding of the kind of violence, understood psychologically, that liberates vitality. Recently and toward this end, Swartz (2018) has offered a relevant psychoanalytically based recognition of this relation between Fanon's vision and Winnicott's concept of ruthlessness. This is a kind of violence shaped by and demanding the experience of recognition (Benjamin, 1988, 2004, 2009; Winnicott, 1958) as central to vitality.

While not embedded in a declared revolutionary struggle, I grew up in the 1950s/1960s context of American racism where oppression and resistance continuously collided in the streets and press. In the northeastern city I inhabited, avenues and streets marked ethnic and racial enclaves, easily recognized, but also easily crossed by the youth of which I was one, experiencing the opportunities and mostly, failures afforded by local and national desegregation policies. This multicultural mix of experience shaped my confusion and desire to connect with the Other, in this case, my childhood friends whose skin color and socio-economic status differed from mine. On the basketball court, in the classroom, social dances, and other activities, I/we engaged cross-racially. But, always, we returned to our respective, ethnically and economically very different neighborhoods. And yet, in Jersey City, our youthful zest for vitality drew us continuously to find increasingly creative ways to cross those "red" lines geographically as well as socially. We were refuseniks, renegades, adolescent oppositionally defiant (as the DMS would erroneously, have us categorized), who opposed and resisted the segregation that social, political, and economic structures into which we were being socialized would impose. As a sociologically categorized White, my experience of that time continuously haunts my struggle for vitality in tension with cognitive dissociation/emotional deadness as I continue to increase my awareness of this world of subtly and not so subtly reinforced institutionalized White privilege over people of color in which I/we are embedded and participate often in so many ways frequently without conscious awareness. My struggle to engage the kind of emotional violence such a power gradient produces for me and others, continues. This struggle is here reflected in the clinical encounter narrated with my patient, Waverley, which I am using to help illuminate the value of Fanon's thinking for psychoanalytic practice.

Waverley, like me, though sociologically Black, had similar experiences of crossing the invisible yet tangible lines of racial difference in his childhood/adolescence/early adulthood, occurring in a similar but different northeastern communities. As the clinical narrative to follow illustrates, Waverley physically crossed racial lines and emotionally suffered confusion similar to mine, but, critically, from the different perspective of an embodied person of color, catalyzing emotional trauma and episodes of depression and rage. My life experience, and particularly clinical work, has brought me to the limits of what a White person can only attempt to understand. In this text, I narrate my struggle to find emotional connection with the experiences

of a patient of color around this ongoing, and frequently, unconscious set of social normative beliefs and practices, as they impact our interactions. My struggle to achieve what Fanon means when he uses the term human for such an understanding and emotional connection, shapes both the narration to follow and my effort to create this text in the limited terms of a culturally shaped discursive practice with which we, as psychoanalysts, attempt to share our experiences for their clinical value.

### A MOMENT OF CLINICAL ENCOUNTER

Waverley enters my consultation space, shoulders slumped, gaze averted. He heads directly for the couch (where he sits). He is seated bending over, holding his head in his hands. He looks up. His facial muscles are tensed and his gaze reflects pain. His gaze is directed (at me). He does not speak. There is a pause. He waits, expecting me to take in his emotional state(s). This is a rhythm we are familiar with. Pauses and accents such as these in our interaction have often shaped moments of tension buildup and release. Waverley often seems to feel more comfortable with this embodied register than with verbal formulations, though he is, at times, quite eloquent, offering clear and cogent reflections. I have learned that when he does not choose to speak with words, he is struggling with the unbearability of his suffering and the rage it catalyzes for him. Waverley has learned that I too am often more comfortable with embodied registers of interaction. (I have learned, over my decades of practice the limits and pitfalls of verbal communication for psychoanalytic work [see Cornell, 2015; Levenson, 2003; Knoblauch, 2017; Saketopoulou, 2019; Sletvold, 2014; for relevant discussions and illustrations of such limits and difficulties]).

I feel an embodied rush as part of this emerging sequence. At times, Waverley will enter with a smile, but not this session. This unexpected difference triggers a shift to hypervigilance for me. I wonder what has happened/is happening. His piercing gaze emphasizes the strength of his distress. In recent sessions, he has addressed the strains of his current relationship with Evelyn as it has become increasingly intimate. He has also described the power arrangements of his work setting in which he is currently recognized and valued for his expertise, but also exploited economically. Such examples of exploitation occur particularly when his company faces crises with clients in which Waverley is called on for his expertise as the one who might best resolve the problem at hand. But his time and energy is never fairly recognized and compensated.

In which area of his life is his suffering resonating in this moment with me? The clash of his needs for paternalistic recognition at work, in intimate activity, in our space, historically and now currently with his father who is dying of old age and related medical conditions flashes into my reverie. My body is tense. My gaze takes him in as his is initially averted, and then rises to meet mine. This meeting of gazes is a signal that it is my turn. It is both a plea for holding and a competitive challenge. (From shared readings of an earlier draft of this text, and so, with both Waverley's and my reconstructions of what might be happening here, I reflect the following) ... His gaze speaks and I translate the meaning, "So? What? What are you going to be able to say and do? Everyone needs me to hold it together. Well, I am suffering and I'm not sure if I'm going to blow ... and blow it!" (The sense of impending explosion either as an

inner or outer violence was vivid in both of our recollections and confirmed in subsequent experiences for him at work as later reflected upon in our interactions.)

For me, this precious “it” that may be lost registers as opaque, complex. I say nothing. My pause is dissolved by Waverley’s calm but, nevertheless disturbing vocalization which comes now, after this micro-moment of tension buildup. He describes the pressure he feels to find a new apartment. The pressure comes both from the ending of his lease which he does not want to renew since an increase is being requested, and from his and Evelyn’s decision to share a living space. His pain seems to present in the form of his expectations for collision with Evelyn’s, which constitute an emotionally powerful, difficult to bear point in their developing relationship. While Waverley is anticipating the strain of their different uses of space, he being less organized and practical, she being fastidiously tidy and brilliant in her planning and use of space and its contents, ... this is not the issue! His eyebrows raise. His head tilts upward as if to announce/signal for me to prepare for a blow. He and Evelyn have been visiting possible rentals in different neighborhoods. They have found a space desirable in layout and price. Evelyn loves it. She loves the neighborhood. He likes the neighborhood. It feels comfortable socio-economically. But it does not feel culturally comfortable ... for him. As he walks the streets after visiting the space, he notes the rare appearance of a Black person like him. Rather the faces encountered on the street are mostly Latinx, White and Asian. Evelyn is pleased with this set of conditions. The community resonates as a good fit with her multi-cultural background. He does not want to express his discomfort to disappoint her. They need the apartment. He does not want to disrupt her pleasure with this choice. His forehead is deeply creased with the crunch of the tension that these conflicting conditions constitute.

I inquire about their current location which he describes as much more clearly a “Black” neighborhood, though gentrification has begun to be a critical concern for him as part of a neighborhood group that has formed to discuss and respond to the problems that this change is bringing. If they should move, the vitalizing recognition, coming from the sense of community this organization provides, will be lost and he can anticipate “sticking out” as he comes and goes. I ask him to share more about the pros and cons of each neighborhood (I wonder, employing what I soon learn to be a myopic psychoanalytic theoretical perspective for this moment of encounter, is he in a paranoid/schizoid place, or can he think from a more depressive position reflecting nuances of advantage and disadvantage?) ... There is a pause ... He looks at me with piercing gaze, in part disbelief, in part concern, in part annoyance catalyzing a short circuit to the possibility of direction for reflection I suggest. “You don’t know what it is like to be Black and have to walk the streets of a neighborhood not identified with Blackness ... how others look at you, how their gait and body tension speak a recognition of your presence with looks of suspicion and fear.”

I pause. Internally, I erupt into confusion and shame. I should know this ... I do know about this ... But, do I? ... Really, can I ever ... really???? ... I have been working with Waverley for several years now. We have had open and frank explorations of his experience attending a predominantly White private high school which his middle-class professional class parents proudly financed, ... of his experiences dating White women, ... of their often disturbing ways of relating to him as a Black male, ... the reactions/responses from others offering gazes shot through with negative judgment, disgust, or even verbalized aggression to the mixed race couple he and his partners constituted, these coming mostly from Whites, but also Blacks. (Here, I use these racialized terms recognizing them as artifacts of a socially constructed imaginary landscape haunting both of our subjectivities, a normative

unconscious [Layton, 2006] constructing categories drawing lines of power, privilege, and abjection). But in this moment, my privilege of not ever having to suffer the experience of being targeted as a body so marked by color, my limits to empathic connecting, ... this privileged blindness, ...resonates a deep experience of distance, loneliness, embarrassment, and confusion for me. It is not that I can't understand/make sense in terms of theories of psychoanalytic conflict, colonial alienation, racial violence. Rather I am trying to balance at the cliff-like edge of an uncanny gap (socially constructed), that cannot be traversed, forever separating Waverley's and my experiences. Waverley stares through this silence directly into my eyes. He waits for me. He witnesses my uncomfortable struggle with my feelings of distance, loneliness, embarrassment, confusion and now yes, gathering rage and self-hate at my own vulnerability and limitation. We do not speak. But I do purse my lips and express a short, quick breath of acknowledgment. In that moment, I am hoping that Waverley is experiencing my struggle with my loneliness, embarrassment, and emotional storms in resonance with his. He seems to sense the limits of my attempts to offer recognition. His pause and gaze seem to acknowledge a confirmation of his expectation that I will not/cannot recognize his experience. (Waverley has confirmed this reading of his embodied registrations, emphasizing the discomfort and confusion his experience of my experience catalyzed for him.)

Now there is a shift. In a strange way outside of the theory and practice in which I have been trained, this *lack of recognition* (or mis-recognition) catalyzes an opening. This is confounding. This opening seems to emerge from my failure as a psychoanalyst in the context of this performance of power arrangements shaped by colonial assumptions for health, treatment, and acceptable conduct. I am the one who should know. Here I come up against the weak, or maybe better understood as, false, premises/understandings assembled for my performance as provider. On what basis am I empowered to offer provision? Are we assuming that as a psychoanalyst I am expected to wield the knowledge power socially constructed for me? Or, as a psychoanalyst am I not expected to frequently find myself at the place in clinical encounter where training fails as a refuge for mentalization and emotional balance, a point of urgency opening up into opportunity for interactive expansion and personal growth for both clinical interactants? Here, Waverley does not seem so upset. Rather now he seems calm. Is he feeling resignation or confirmation? We have arrived at this, for me, at least, painful gap, a lapse in my socially conferred professional power and privilege. Waverley's gaze, one that I experience as a disappointed understanding of my emotional limit, communicates in this way, a reassurance that he is not damaged or abject, that these moments of painfully attempted, failed recognition of his experience by me, are confirming of his sanity. Somehow this breakdown (in my understanding of his experience) seems to offer a form of hope for him. For me, this is a strange experience constituting a denseness of emotions confounding closeness/understanding and distance/difference. However temporarily brief, we seem to have fallen/broken into/transformed (?) a space of difference and vitality, constructed by shared vulnerability, rage, and humiliation.

I have subsequently reviewed this description of our interaction with Waverley. He has read and subsequently discussed this manuscript with me. What has been most difficult is achieving some sense of confidence with creating a verbal representation of the denseness of our respective emotional experiences. For now, we both feel settled with what and how it is narrated, But of additional importance is how this session seems to have been catalytic to

Waverley's emotionally violent explosion on the job some weeks later. The event shook Waverley and he feared it might lead to losing his job or some kind of retaliation. In fact, this event precipitated a series of conversations between he and his supervisor at work resulting in improved work distribution and previously unexpressed recognition of the value of his work. As of this writing, the place of racism in this event and subsequent discussion remains(ed) unaddressed at his workplace.

I offer this description of clinical encounter with Waverley, aware that it is different than Esprey's (2017) clinical narratives of her work with Denesh and Thabi where she judges her impact from the perspective of a theory valorizing containment. It is important to emphasize here that containment is not attempted nor assumed to be therapeutically desirable in my encounter with Waverley. This moment and what it represents is not offered as something to be "worked through" or contained. This moment occurs without conscious recognition initially. Empathy and/or recognition cannot occur in such a moment when the analyst is overpowered emotionally and cognitively frozen or disassembled as I was. (See Knoblauch, 2017, for a discussion of the conditions in which empathy or recognition can occur or not). Rather, this moment is offered to illustrate the impact of an unconscious and unintentional, but nevertheless, powerful, if not violent, reversal of a power gradient that might otherwise constrict clinical possibility. In my narration this power gradient is shaped by social positions defined within a social discourse mined with implicit and therefore unconsciously constructed racist phantasies. Neither Waverley nor I have put much trust in words, though we use them. Our sense of truth more often emerges, as in this narrative, on embodied registers of gaze, breath, rhythmic accents, or pauses where there is more fluidity than containment, nevertheless vitalizing.

The encounter is also different than Swartz's clinical narrative of her work with Alphas (Swartz, 2018). The breakdown of recognition here, is not an explosion blowing things into smithereens à la Swartz's reading of Winnicott through Fanon. The social categories Waverley and I encounter and perform do not fall apart, as may have been more possible in South Africa at the time of Swartz's text. These categories hold firmly, strangling possibility for *counter-recognition* within the socially constructed field in which our interaction is shaped and limited. Swartz explains how *counter-recognition* becomes possible when previous categories of alienation are destroyed leading "to a reconstitution, or in Winnicott's terms dissolution of a world made precarious by object-relating" (Swartz, 2018, p. 526). With Waverley, there is breakdown in recognition, but, there is also painfully registered emotional connection in shared response to the absence of reconstitution. Here we find (we found) ourselves in violent intersubjective process. This process carries and re-inscribes structures of imagination as well as unrepresentable trauma, the haunting phantomatic (Butler, 2019a) shaping power through racism, from which we would both wish/dream to be liberated.

And so, if one speaks of violence here, it seems to be a violence of *mis-recognition*. But I think what occurred was that the failure of recognition was mutative because it was a failure of a kind of recognition based on a racist order for cognizing, for organizing experience and one's place in it. Stephen Hartman suggests this as a kind of nonrecognition leading to an opening in the phantomatic register (Hartman, personal communication 8/15/19). I take up how this involves the phantomatic in my further discussion of our encounter below. But here, I want to emphasize how what occurred served to violate an expectation for a repetition of a power gradient. This violation then reversed the socially constructed power gradient of the patient/



clinician relation and vitalized the patient. So, this moment seemed more about violated norms than violence against norms ...but, maybe, both.

In such moments of unbearably painful emotional suffering, words (as culturally constructed) often ring hollow in their failure to represent and communicate a recognition of the other's experience. In such moments we are not able to be attentive to, or consciously aware of, how we read or are read by others on the registrations of our embodied communication through rhythms of breath, facial display, direction and form of gaze, vocal tone, and rhythm, or postural tensions, micro as well as full-bodied rhythms of movement. I would argue that this bias in attention is shaped by a set of culturally constructed rules/assumptions which are reinforcing the words and images constituting the normative unconscious (Layton, 2006) in which we are symbolically incarcerated. Simply stated our classical training valorizes words and thoughts, often disappearing the body (either behind the couch or straight-jacketed in a frozen position laid out in vulnerability more like a corpse than an embodied being alive with vitality). This approach was initially rationalized as facilitating neutrality of influence and optimization of contact with unconscious processes. Contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives recognize the limits, if not, impossibility of controlling mutual influence in this way. These perspectives demonstrate the potential for such strategies to have unintended retraumatizing effects (See Knoblauch, 2011). Additionally, such strategies fail to consider how embodied experience and the social surround shape unconscious imagery and power relations. The possible unconscious dynamics of this kind of violation or breakdown in socially normative power relations is taken up again in the discussion section to follow with considerations from recent contributions by Daniel Butler and Francisco Gonzalez. The discussion is built around contributions from Fanon, with a particular focus on how normative rules/assumptions concerning race emerge from and impact unconscious experience. Such unconscious experience can shape bias in psychoanalytic theory and practice. I offer these considerations to contribute to an understanding of the potentially damaging impact of such bias on experiences of recognition whether counter-, mis- or nonrecognition, which at times can explode, and at other times may simply, slowly and painfully, trigger open, vulnerable, and in this way critical, opportunities for therapeutic work. Central to my consideration of these limitations for recognition is the liberating potential of the clinician's surrender to their vulnerability as a form of violent breakthrough for the patient's experience of their own sense of vitality. As Swartz observed, this kind of breakthrough can only occur if previous categories of alienation are destroyed creating space for how relations can reconstitute as different experience of place, one's place in relation to another and to the social context in which one and the other are embedded.

## DISCUSSION

### Phantomization and Lactification in a Sociogenic Field

In this section I am using aspects of Fanon's vision to bring into focus, otherwise hidden/disguised registrations occurring in the narration of my encounter with Waverley. Reading our encounter through the lens of Fanon's perspective illuminates critical ways the interaction



between the unconscious and the social is/was catalytic to our experiences. Here I begin to unpack Fanon's conception of what he called the *sociogenic*. The sociogenic includes how the unconscious is structured with images that have been given categorization and hierarchical meaning within a particular social order. The significance of this relationship for reading my encounter with Waverley is the *racist* structuring of that order.

Daniel Butler (2019a) has contributed an important distinction for understanding the socio-genic process in psychoanalytic work that I find useful here. He distinguishes objects of phantasy from ghosts (see Harris et al., 2016). He explains how historical hauntings (ghosts) function as phantoms or the phantomatic (Butler, 2019a, p. 146). Rather than internal objects in the imaginative landscape, phantoms erase presence creating a kind of empty space in the capacity to re-present as memory. Something occurred but was traumatically erased. Gonzalez (2019, p. 160) in discussing this phenomenon likens it with a medical metaphor to the phantom limb effect. Something seems to be filling the space, but it is an absence of presence. In this way experiences of place, of placement, of displacement between/across imagination and social interaction are blurred if not, amputated. And in this way, historical experience essential to the structure of identity and agency is disappeared or disguised. This disguise can and does serve the needs of a hegemonic order with Whites in power.

Lewis Gordon (1996) addressed the unconscious dynamics to which Butler and Gonzalez give greater focus. I find Gordon's use of Fanon's ideas about how the Black body is represented within discourses shaped by racist beliefs and practices helpful in building my understanding of my encounter with Waverley. Gordon uses Fanon's vision to explain unconscious processes nested in a whitened hierarchy of racist beliefs and practices shaping assumptions for the inferiority of the Black body. To develop this perspective Fanon introduced the terms *phobogenic object* and *lactification*. Here I want to focus on the significance of these terms and the processes they represent for the encounter between Waverley and me.

In Gordon's words, Fanon demonstrates the failure of psychoanalysis to "explain the black" (Gordon, 1996, p. 76). He emphasizes Fanon's vision of a sociogenic context consisting of "the subjective and the intersubjective, lived-experience of social-historical reality" (p. 76). In my use of Fanon's ideas, I distinguish intersubjective experience as mutual influence registering symbolically as image/imagination in contrast to embodied lived registrations that do not register symbolically, at least in the moment of their emotional impact. For our purposes here it is important to note that embodied registrations are frequently shaped by traumatic socio-historical events emotionally experienced as too unbearable for re-presentation/re-membering as symbol/image in intersubjective space. So intersubjectivity depends on the capacity to re-present symbolically and to share an understanding/recognition of symbolic significance. When the emotional impact of experience is unbearable, symbolization does not occur. Rather, as Butler and Gonzalez point out, experience is dissociated/amputated and/or disguised to reduce emotional unacceptability. The challenge for understanding my encounter with Waverley concerns how social discourses based on racist beliefs and practices contribute to such a process of blurring or erasure.

Gordon points to Fanon's description of "blackness as 'phobogenic,' 'anxiogenic'" (Gordon, 1996, p. 79) to demonstrate how the humanity of the black subject is erased. Thus, the black is internalized, stereotypically as a dangerous object and projected as impulsive, embodying uncontrollable, *primitive*, dys- or unregulated emotional experience shaping fear and desire. "What this means is that the black body does not live on the symbolic level in an anti-black

world” ... and that “their (Blacks’) alienation is not neurotic” (Gordon, 1996, p. 80, my addition in parentheses).

If the alienation of the Black subject is not neurotic, then how might it be understood? Gordon emphasizes that, “the context and content of psychoanalytical emergence (what Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Gonzalez, 2019, are calling place), are conditioned fundamentally by the lived-experience of the white” (Gordon, 1996, p. 81, my addition in parentheses). Fanon ascribes this Whitening to a haunting phantasy of *lactification*, (Fanon, 1952/2008a, p. 80), the incontestable privilege of being White, a dream/ideal with which all, White and non-White are unconsciously haunted within a Manichean arrangement of power established to sustain the conscious fantasies and unconscious phantasies of this difference as essential. Richard Wilcox uses this term in place of the term, *hallucinatory Whitening* offered in the 1967 translation of the text, *Black Skin, White Masks* by Charles Lam Markmann (1952/1967, p. 100). Ta-Nehisi Coates repeatedly refers to this phantasy/hallucination shared by both Whites and non-Whites as a **dream** of being White in his text *Between The World and Me* (Coates, 2015, pp. 130–132). Waverley and I struggle to unpack the impact of this socializing process on our unconscious and intersubjective processes.

My reading of the elaborations of Fanon’s vision by Gordon, Butler and Gonzalez takes me to how the Freudian model of psychoanalysis fails to include the impact of the social-historical on the unconscious. Setting the scope of focus for clinical exploration as consisting of triangular and dyadic dynamics, psychoanalysis leaves out the socially constructed field of relations in which intersubjective experience and familial relations are embedded and therefore given shape and category. The implications of this gap concern both the where and the what constituting how the frame of treatment is experienced by both patient and practitioner. I am here interrogating *the impact of re-presentations emerging from discursive possibilities shaped and delimited by the particular political implications of a theoretical ordering based on racist distinctions*. With Waverley, my attention to embodied registrations helped me to navigate such stereotyping and scapegoating categories that can incarcerate our sense of place, placement, or displacement in relation to each other and in the contexts of treatment and the social order in which treatment is embedded/implicated. I engaged this process with attention to how my experience, and Waverley’s experience of me, embedded in such a field of racist discourse, might contribute to his experience of himself.

And so, returning to my encounter with Waverley, we might consider how the scapegoating categorization of the Black as a nightmare of *primitive* desire driving a dream of lactification would have us reading Waverley’s frequent pauses and/or silences as passive aggressive rage in oppositional defiance. Waverley and I have discussed this stereotypical response to people of color that he has often observed and experienced. These discussions have occurred both previous and subsequent to the encounter narrated for this text. Carrying, and acting from, such assumptions requires jettisoning attention to, and abjecting the significance of, complex and sophisticated polyrhythmic embodied communication/experience. Critical to this point, clinicians report reading emotional confusion and potential for retraumatization in the silence of a patient. At times this silence is described as containment and at other times as dissociation. But could such silence have a significant and central meaning to a sense of place or displacement for the patient communicated through patterning of accent and pause? If the patient’s silence does not signal dissociation or an attempt at containment, what is the patient experiencing/communicating? Could the patient be struggling consciously with how to express

emotional experience for which racist social discourse offers no opportunity? Could this experience be about feeling out of place, not being in the right place (with the right person), having no place, not having the right to a place? Or could the patient's silence be an embodied action creative of an emotional place, a space for reflection? *Could such a move by Waverley, (or other persons of color so understood/misunderstood in this way), be both for their own need to find expression for what the social order would not give opportunity for expression, and also for me/an Other to experience my struggle for recognition of their struggle, which is otherwise, locked out of discursive possibilities between us?* Such phenomena seem more about a struggle to find emotional expression than containment. This is an important distinction. A linear model of development valorizing the one-dimensional flow of speech accompanied by emotional containment, still dominates an understanding of capacities indicative of developmental competence in psychoanalysis. (This linear way of theorizing is currently eclipsed by nonlinear developmental systems modeling which understands language as a potential elaboration of embodied emotional registration [not always realized], at times, facilitative of, but at critical points in treatment not adequately substitutive for, such emotional communication.)

How might we struggle with the question; are we dealing with the absence of verbal representation of emotions as, 1) containment or, 2) dissociation? I have learned to expand my analytic attention to embodied cues available to be read as communication of emotions, often reflecting conflict because of their socially normative meanings and/or lack of civil acceptability (see Knoblauch, 2008, 2011, 2017, for illustrations and discussion). These expressions, sometimes aggressive, sometimes bidding for comfort and understanding, too often, are not given verbalization/symbolic re-presentation within an intersubjective space of mutually shared avoidance/fear of misunderstanding, breakdown or emotional eruption. So my critical concern here is not with containment or dissociation. This is also more than an issue of empathy, recognition, transference and/or countertransference. Rather, my regnant concern is place, or focus, of attention, a problem with theory unconsciously shaped by cultural beliefs and practices which can amplify or amputate. And so, nonverbal embodied interaction, often shaped by socio-historical (versus dyadic or triadic) context, is too often overlooked within a scope of attention myopically shaped by classical psychoanalytic visions.

Both Swartz (2018) and I (Knoblauch, 2017) have challenged this myopia of attention and its consequent misreadings of heightened emotional expression, often categorized as "anti-social" when such expression is, actually, socially critical to meanings concerning agency and identity (Winnicott, 1958). I return to Swartz subsequently in this discussion for further elaboration of this critical understanding. But first I consider contributions from Stephens and Marriott which help to develop the significance of the kind of aggression that Swartz and I would understand as a heightened emotional bid for recognition.

### Epidermalization and Petrification in My Encounter with Waverley

In this section, I use observations from Stephens, Swartz, and Marriott to further unpack the interactional effects of the unconscious and the social. Stephens discusses how the significance of skin color or *epidermalization* emerging in the discourse of a racist social structure shapes sense of place and its hierarchical social value. Marriott focuses on the phantomatic effects of Fanon's concept of *petrification*, the way that the social order amputates the historical

significance of trauma from conscious memory and replaces it with frozen images of racialized possibilities/impossibilities for identity and agency. Swartz describes the violence of shattering unconscious phantasy (what Gonzalez describes as the tearing and fraying of the phantasmic fabric ....necessary for “the forces trapped in the phantomatic (to) start to be released” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 163). These elaborations of Fanon’s vision help to add depth and complexity to fathoming my encounter with Waverley.

Stephens’ Lacanian read of another critical moment of encounter, this one offered by Fanon, is most helpful here (Stephens, 2018). This is a moment described by Fanon when he is interpellated in the speech of a White child during a chance public encounter. The famous words, “Look a Negro!” are examined in terms of how the gaze of the child translates into words and behavior emerging from the impact of an emotional destabilization catalyzed by skin color. This destabilization registers as affect carried in the child’s speech acts and gaze, as well as the resonance/dissonance from and by Fanon’s self gaze and silent rage as revealed in his text. I use Stephens’ close reading of this social encounter adding to the visible, an understanding of the invisible or unconscious layer of experience that seems to have been at work in my encounter with Waverley.

Stephens uses Lacan’s conception to distinguish “between seeing blackness as *other* and (as) *otherwise*” (Stephens, 2018, p. 311). She writes,

In this distinction lies the gap between seeing blackness as the source of an essential difference, and experiencing another’s racial location as somehow “*off*,” awry-uncannily different enough from the self as to produce a fracture in one’s own sense of coherence, *but not yet irrevocably and essentially different*. The former phenomenon represents not the fact of difference but rather the *desire for difference*, and has become an inter-cultural condition of possibility for determining the psyches of modern subjects on multiple sides of the color line. ... By contrast, the latter phenomenon, perceiving the other as *otherwise* than the self, emerges in and from the traumatic, interpersonal encounters of racialized subjects with each other, and with an uncanny real. (Stephens, 2018, p. 311)

Stephens’ explanation helps to elaborate Fanon’s concept of *lactification*, (Fanon, 1952/2008a, p. 80). I harness this observation and broaden the significance of the term citing further discussion of this significance below. As stated above, I believe that with the term *lactification*, Fanon is highlighting the incontestable privilege of being White, a dream/ideal with which all, colonizer/occupier and colonized are unconsciously haunted within an arrangement of power established to sustain the (conscious) fantasy of this difference as essential. And so, this (unconscious) phantasy/dream in coordination with the phantasy of primitivism, is sustained as uncontested, foundational, essential, serving to preserve and protect the assumptions upon which colonial occupation and socialization is justified and sustained. Fanon offers a psychoanalytic read of this phantasy in the following quote,

At the level of the unconscious ...colonialism was not seeking to be perceived by the indigenous population as a sweet, kindhearted mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather a mother who constantly prevents her basically perverse child from committing suicide or given free rein to its malevolent instincts. The colonial mother is protecting the child from itself, from its ego, its physiology, its biology, and its ontological misfortune. (Fanon, 1961/2008b, p. 149)

Fanon characterized the effects of this phantasy on the embodied experience of the Black subject in the following observation:

In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties elaborating his body schema ... the data ... (he uses) are provided not by "remnants of feelings, and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature" ... but by the Other, the white man, who ... (weaves) me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories. (Fanon, 1961/2008b, pp. 90–91, my addition in parentheses)

Lactification is thus a mystification continuously "coloring" experiences of identity and agency. For experience not to be *otherwise*, the dream of lactification as an ideal based on color of skin, must be shattered. This reading seems consistent with my and Swartz's emphasis on the importance of recognizing embodied expressions of extreme emotion as central to, either accompanying, but often more essential and direct than, verbal re-presentation of emotion, in constituting a sense of connection and shared understanding. I believe this attention to embodied registrations can contribute to "the dismantling of an internal relation of abjection" (Swartz, 2019, p. 167). Swartz emphasizes, "To escape from 'drowning in contingency' means throwing off the shackles of being apprehended only in terms set out by a persecutory other; to achieve this, an 'invincible dissolution' is needed" (Swartz, 2019, p. 167).

My encounter with Waverley required an "invincible dissolution," a shattering of the myth of lactification haunting each of us. In our clinical encounter, Waverley was able to precipitate this experience for both of us, at least momentarily. *Otherness* could not be confined/defined within an order of cultural prescriptions for how to appear and what to understand. These socially constructed expectations, unstated, infected our emotional responsiveness to the psychoanalytic performance in which we were engaged as well as the experiences to which the analytic process brought us for examination. Waverley had to shatter my trust in the psychoanalytic practice of recognition, both my ability to recognize and his to be recognized in his experiences of suffering and vitality. His presentation (both at work, in private life, and in treatment) in challenge to *otherwise-ness*, expressing emotional control, violating the stereotypical expectations for emotional outburst from persons of color, nevertheless, also created a bind for him concerning how to express the authenticity of his emotional experience, i.e., rage and indignation. I had to be witness to this embodied struggle. In certain ways, I was able to embody such witnessing, but of critical significance, as next discussed, is how I was not able to embody this needed witnessing. And so, a second shattering occurred that was as much intersubjective and culturally contextualized between us, as it was an intra-psychoanalytic event for me. This was a shattering of the power tilt between us which paradoxically made possible a retrieving and re-contextualizing of, what, might be *a kind of recognition of a misrecognition*. This occurred as *his recognition of my suffering the limitations of my power to understand*, my professional hubris, if you will (which provided an emotionally vitalizing, rather than deadening experience for him).

I use further observations from Marriott and Butler to illuminate this shattering of recognition and its unfreezing impact on emotional experience, a reworking of what is cognized and its impact on the place of relations. To begin, Marriott develops implications for psychoanalytic practice, introducing the process of *petrification* first elaborated by Fanon. He points out that in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon uses the term "to refer to a kind of hardening, or of being turned into stone; since the whole effect of colonialism is to mortify the 'culture' ... of black embodied life ... the sense of wanting to flee or speak but remaining frozen ..." (Marriott, 2018, p. 68) Here I read Marriott as connecting the processes of epidermalization and petrification. How does he make this connection? Characterizing petrification as "how motor

capacity is literally inhibited in the colony” (p. xv), Marriott emphasizes that “Fanon ... links the violence of colonialism to language, visibility and sexuality” (p. 5) suggesting “ ...two kinds of psychic violence: the violence that brings fantasy, or dreaming to a halt ... and the violence that allows fantasy to get going, or be discharged, via the vengeful sadistic fantasy, that maintains, confirms, insures the permanence of the racist status quo ...” (p. 52). (Here Marriott uses the term fantasy rather than phantasy. I believe his distinction between socially constructed beliefs [fantasies] and unconscious imagery [phantasies] is critical to understanding my encounter with Waverley and Fanon’s concerns with the myopia of psychoanalytic practice concerning issues of race).

I use Marriott’s observation to further unpack Butler’s use of the term “phantomatic.” Marriott explains that the effect of this violence is “ ...at the level of the phantasm, ... (where) the *real unreality* of life in the colony could be understood ...a group phantasm ... never fully experienced as illusion ...a kind of imaginary evasion ...” (p. 47). Here, I read Marriott connecting the embodied experience of deadness (dissociation?) to the social experience of a violence carried as an unconscious phantasy (the real unreality of life in the colony) functioning as an uncontested cultural truth (carried in language, gaze, and desire), deadening hopes and dreams and unleashing sadism, otherwise unimaginable, were its objects simply human. In this way, we can understand how processes of *epidermalization* and *pretrification* become the foundational assumptions undergirding the fantasy of the truth of *lactification*, repeatedly reinforced with sadistic enactments. Each enactment repeats and reinforces the fantasy that Blacks are sub-human and thus need to be feared and overpowered. These social expectations and rituals of interpellation then occur outside of the scope of traditional psychoanalytic vision and practice. Traditionally, such expectations might be understood myopically, in terms of developmental trajectories of behavior and emotional control shaped by dyadic and triadic relational experience, too often amputated from attention to the unconscious racist social beliefs and practices shaping such behavior and emotional experience. But Fanon contextualizes developmental trauma, grounding it in a matrix where the unconscious is shaped by the social and vice versa, a process that becomes a vertiginous reciprocity of bi-directional influence.

Marriott characterizes this matrix or field as constituted by, “words ... trapped in the corporeal images that captivate the subject ...the petrification of speech and language, dream and desire ...” (2018, p. 62). Here I use his characterization of Fanon’s clinical focus as “not simply to make the subject see what is hidden or repressed, but to ...recognize the imaginary dimensions of its history and language” (p. 62). This is a vision wrought from Fanon’s experiences of attempting to understand and practice psychoanalytically within the social field of effects constituted by the racist structuralization of power on the unconscious processes of his clinical subjects. I and Waverley are inevitably constituted within such a racist structure and struggle with both conscious (fantasy) and unconscious (phantasy) processes.

Given Fanon’s vision, how might Waverley and I engage a process of recognition? Fanon challenges us to account for more than just the dynamics constituting the vulnerabilities of ourselves and our patients in terms of dyadic and triadic developmental history or a hierarchy of stages for emotional mastery. His vision has implications that go beyond the intersubjective construction of doer-done to (Benjamin, 2009), the binary trap from which intersubjectivity theory would liberate us. Recognition becomes problematized by the discursive terms the social



order illuminates/disappears/disguises/distorts for possibility, and how these definitions catalyze racial myopia for both analysts and patients. The scope of Fanon's vision includes a historically repeating process of lactification whereby words are empowered to oppress through a hierarchy of categorization for civility/primitivity. Such words, images, and gestures shape sadistic fantasies of racially organized power designed to annihilate self-love and feed an impossible dream of lactification for both the disempowered and the empowered.

Waverley's piercing, yet compassionately sad gaze in the micro-moment when I invite cognitive reflection concerning the pros and cons of the neighborhoods where he and Evelyn might choose to live, communicates to me an embodied effort to struggle with a kind of emotional freezing (petrification). Is this petrification a response to my lack of understanding, to an absence of emotional responsiveness from me, to a social context shaped by unconscious as well as conscious racist beliefs and practices in which our work and his daily activities are embedded, or all of the above? I do not immediately experience struggle with petrification in his emotional experience. In fact, I am "petrified," frozen emotionally in a micro-moment before the effect of his gaze begins to be absorbed. How does he experience my frozenness? Does my freezing constitute for him a colonizing gaze accompanying my inquiry? Has my inquiry repeated the possibility for the psychoanalytic project to serve a colonial imperative to "work it through" and "get along" in which I can experience gratification in the role of rescuer? Does this "working through" represent a racist phantasy which Gonzalez has described as "what so easily gets disappeared in relation to racialized experience—especially in the well-intentioned but short-sighted and self-serving work done under the banner of whiteness" ... ? (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 160). Or can we achieve the mutative goal, to "recognize the imaginary dimensions of" Waverley's "history and language," to bear the pain of trauma and rage, to harvest its significance for each of us?

Waverley's gaze merging rage, sadness and compassion begins to initiate me into an awareness, catalyzing my fear, shame, and loneliness. He needs/wants me to recognize *his struggle* and in a certain sense, he recognizes *my struggle* with my limits to recognize him outside of the social discourse that forms the context of our encounter. How can I see/experience him as continuously annihilated because he is Black ... .because of his skin color and the fantasies associated with, and phantasies categorizing, that embodiment, without reducing this image by repeating racializing processes of epidermalization and petrification that are carried and reinforced within the emotionally anesthetizing sociological categories of "male" and "Black?" How can I see him, as Fanon would offer hope for, as a human suffering within this racist sociogenic context? How can I understand his pain coming from his recognizing my failing him, ... as I fail to recognize the complexity of his suffering and my colonizing gaze within the terms and limits of our imaginary capacities, myopically structured by the power arrangements that brought us together? While my writing this may help me to some extent with my struggle, how can such a reflective exercise contribute to helping Waverley in his struggle to be experienced beyond stereotype and scapegoat, beyond victimhood to vitality?

In the moment I narrate for you, the reader, there is only struggle, uncertainty, and attempts at sensitive navigation of emotional suffering on the part of each of us. Retrospectively, I understand this as a moment of relational tension not to be worked through with "empathy" or "recognition" but rather for *surrender* to vulnerability, a surrender to be born within the social context traumatically impacting our attempt at emotional connection. There are no victories ... .some glimmers of vitality for each of us ... .but still, continued victimhood for



both of us, incarcerated by the language and customs of oppression, the sociogenic field for the registration of our experiences.

Butler asks, “if the clinic can bring national phantoms into existence by the analyst surrendering to some destruction of the clinical setting to which they adhere” (Butler, 2019b, p. 175). In my encounter with Waverley, I found myself surrendering to Waverley’s destruction of the power gradient that constructs the clinical “place” phantomatically as safe and recuperative. This previously unacknowledged power gradient disguised the way the clinical space could serve as a place for retraumatization. The shattering of this phantastically driven phantomization for clinical structure/place made space for an embodied experience of a power shift for Waverley and for me. We have continued to revisit and pursue this unbinding in our work subsequent to this encounter. Our considerations have reshaped fee structure and opportunities for communication between sessions among other dimensions of power in the clinical frame. So one can wonder if place as phantom shattered in this moment. Our encounter could not/should not have been contained (by me or by the socially constructed discourse of psychoanalysis). Something needed to break through and did emerge, initially, registering in the embodied rhythms between us.

Butler goes on to “ask how ‘breaking the frame’ is a psychopolitical act, and how coincident with such acts, the analyst’s Ferenczian ‘elasticity’ or Fanonian ‘tension of opening’ might have psychopolitical effects that exceed the clinical setting alone. Such questions are less about the analyst’s survival of a destructive tension than the willingness *not to survive* as a vitalization of that tension itself” (Butler, 2019b, p. 175). I think Butler’s question sharpens the call to political awareness Samuels puts out to clinicians with his notion of the *inner politician* (Samuels, 2004, p. 829). Waverley and I have continued to explore the implications of our encounter. These efforts seem to have contributed to his increasing vitalization, whereby he has successfully challenged unfair work arrangements/practices and opened up conversations of tension liberating relational possibilities between he and Evelyn as well as he and me, that were previously unavailable, invisible.

My surrender to the embodied impact on me of Waverley’s embodied registrations, my failure, or rather willingness not, to survive in terms of the socially racist options for power that the psychoanalytic place structured, but to surrender to the shattering moment of our encounter, seemed to assist us in our struggle to recognize the imaginary dimensions of the history and language in which we both were phantomatically incarcerated. This observation can serve to reinforce fantasies and phantasies of myself as rescuer. It could also suggest how my violation of my and Waverley’s expectations for this psychoanalytic stereotype, my surrender to the power of Waverley’s embodied emotional communication in this encounter, contributed to a degree of liberation for both me and Waverley from the psychopolitical stereotypes that can, and have held us apart in racist alienation. I think it important to hold in tension the ways that both observations are true.

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