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Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism

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Chapter

5

Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism

Derek Hook

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- ▷ Explain how Fanon adapts, in conditional ways, theoretical notions of psychoanalysis (such as those of neurosis, phobia, paranoia, the 'European collective unconscious', and so on) to illustrate the workings of colonial racism
- ▷ Elaborate and apply Fanon's psychoanalytic account of racism, with particular reference to the terms of projection, anxiety, sexuality, guilt, scapegoating, the racial stereotype, the idealising component of racism etc.

INTRODUCTION: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF POWER

The previous chapter advanced the argument that Fanon's work moves continually between the sociopolitical and the psychological, that for this reason his 'critical psychology' may rightly be called a 'psychopolitics'. One aspect of such a psychopolitics – that is, the explicit politicisation of the psychological – occurs through the placing of a series of ostensibly psychological concerns and concepts within the register of the political. In this way, as I suggested in the previous chapter, Fanon shows up *the extent to which human psychology is intimately linked to sociopolitical and historical forces*. A second route of a psychopolitics lies in *employing psychological concepts and explanations to describe and illustrate the workings of power*. It is the latter which forms the focus of the current chapter. The hope of this approach is that, by being able to analyse the political in such a psychological way, we might be able to think strategically about how we should intervene in 'the life of power'.

It is hence not only the case that Fanon brings politics into psychology; he also *brings psychology into politics* by analysing power through a series of psychoanalytic conceptualisations which help to dramatise the logic and working of such forms of power, and particularly that of colonial racism. This is what we may term Fanon's analysis of the 'psychic life of the colonial encounter'. The objective of such psychological descriptions is to subject such forms of power to critique, to understand them better so as more effectively to challenge them. These two approaches – the politics of psychology and the psychology of politics – should be seen as complementary and, more than that, as in fact *necessary* to one another. In fact, one might advance the argument that one has not sufficiently grasped Fanon if one is unable to see *both* the political within the psychological *and* the psychological within the political. In working through the psychic life of the colonial encounter we shall touch again – although in different analytical ways – on certain of the themes discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than being repetitive, the aim here is to provide, as Fanon does, a *layered* theoretical approach to the problems of black identity in racist/colonial contexts. The aim, in short, is to use complementary theoretical explanations to build a unique analytical framework able to critique aspects of colonial experience from a variety of perspectives.

THE 'PSYCHIC LIFE OF COLONIAL POWER'

The dream of turning white

At the beginning of *White skins, black masks*, Fanon (1986) declares that his book is a clinical study, and that it will, in a sense, psychoanalyse, not only race but various aspects of the colonial encounter as well (such as 'the black-white relation', (9)). The prime focus of his psychoanalytic attentions is *the juxtaposition of white and black races in the context of colonisation*. The white

Psychopolitics:

critical awareness of the role that political factors (ie relations of power) play *within* the domain of the psychological. An understanding of both how politics impacts upon the psychological, and how personal psychology may be the level at which politics is internalised, individually entrenched.

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coloniser and the black colonised exist within the grip of a 'massive psychoexistential complex' (1986, 12), he suggests, that has multiple detrimental psychological effects. Such effects are realized not only in the dreams of the colonised but also in the psychic life of the colonised, who, in many ways, thinks of himself (or herself) as *white*.

In accordance with psychoanalytic theory, Fanon looks to the underlying desire motivating the dreams, the actions and the personality of the colonised, and claims to find there a simple wish. 'What does the black man want?' he asks (8) mimicking Freud's famous 'What does a woman want?'. He answers that 'The black man wants to be white' (9). Now it is of vital importance here that we contextualise this wish within the colonial context, that is, within a context in which the white subject has – in relative terms – everything and where the black man or woman has nothing. Hence this desire to be white is not in any way **transhistorical** or universal; rather, it is an outcome of a specific configuration of power, of real material, economic, cultural and sociopolitical conditions that continually celebrate and empower the white subject and continually denigrate and dispossess the black man or woman.

Fanon tracks the implications of this answer – of wanting to be white – across the domains of language, sexuality, dreams and behaviour, finding in each instance the persistence of this wish – the taking on of the white's language and culture, the desire for a white spouse or sexual partner, the dream of turning white, actions of skin whitening, hair-straightening and so on. It is this fundamental wish and its affects, the kinds of identity, conflict and pathology it leads to, that form the focal points of Fanon's analysis, and indeed, that he is alluding to with the title of *Black skin, white masks*. Importantly, even in his use of a psychoanalytic interpretative approach, Fanon points out that such 'pathologies of affect', even once 'wired through' the sexual realms, through unconscious processes, are *ultimately derived from inequalities present in wider social structures* and cannot as such be reduced to the internal psychical workings of individual subjects.

Neuroses of blackness

For Fanon this dream of turning white is a neurotic condition or, as it is put somewhat more figuratively in the introduction to *The wretched of the earth*, the status of the native is a 'nervous condition' (1990, 17). What Fanon goes on to do is to analyse this pathological desire through Freud's explanation of the neuroses, making various changes to Freud's conceptualisation along the way. Here it is important that we briefly explain the psychoanalytic notion of neurosis. A **neurosis** is an emotional disorder, manifest at the level of personality, which stems from the conflict between a powerful (often instinctual) impulse or wish and the need to repress this instinct. Neuroses hence can lead to a whole series of irrational behaviours and beliefs that are the result of the

Trans-historical:
across all historical
settings.

Neurosis: emotional
disorder, manifest
at the level of
personality, which
stems from the
conflict between a
fundamental (often
instinctual) impulse
or wish and the
need to repress this
instinct.

conflict between powerful unconscious urges and the social/cultural need to keep these urges outside of the conscious mind. The '**neurosis of blackness**' Fanon has in mind is exactly the 'dream of turning white' (that is, the wish to attain the level of humanity accorded to whites in racist/colonial contexts) as it comes into conflict with one's being *in a black body*, and *within a racist society*, which make this wish impossible. Importantly, rather than framed *within the limits of individual psychology*, as was Freud's intention with the concept of neurosis, Fanon's use of the idea of neurosis makes of it an *explicitly social psychological phenomenon*, rooted in the specific historical and political contexts of colonisation.

Infantile trauma

If we are looking for the cause of neurotic disturbances, says Freud (and hence, a means to cure them), one must always look to the childhood history of the individual. The symptoms of neurosis are always linked to a kind of psychical trauma, which lends them their individual character. More than this, we are not always looking for a single event, for the cause of the symptom

Neurosis of blackness: 'dream of turning white' (that is, the wish to attain the level of humanity accorded to whites in racist/colonial contexts) as it comes into conflict with one's being in a black body, and in a racist society, which make this wish impossible.

Zapiro – Boet en Swaer cartoon

Traumatic examples of brutal racist violence are characteristic not only of the colonial setting, but also, regrettably, of recent South African history, as this Zapiro cartoon indicates.

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Register: particular vocabulary, or conceptual framework, stemming from a particular school of thought and/or criticism.

most often arises out of ‘multiple traumas, frequently analogous and repeated’ (Freud, cited in Fanon, 1986, 144). Such traumas are expelled from the conscious mind as means of saving the neurotic from great suffering. More importantly, this trauma need not have happened ‘in the real’. It need not have been an actual event, but may just as well have been fantasised. Importantly, this is the conceptual leap which means psychoanalysis can focus its curative efforts almost completely on elements of fantasy rather than on elements of reality. Hence, the neurosis of the black man or woman need not then have stemmed from actual experiences (the witnessing of the lynching of one’s father is the example Fanon gives (1986)), but rather from fantasised experiences or, more to the point, from indirect or cultural forms of oppression or trauma. Then again, one might argue, it would seem that real examples of traumatic racist violence or abuse would seem quite commonplace in the colonial environment.

BOX 1 Inventing a new language of critique

Many first time readers find *Black skin, white masks* a difficult text because it combines the **registers** (that is, the theoretical vocabularies) of numerous schools of European thought without ever relying on one particular form. Concepts from Marxism exist alongside concepts drawn from psychoanalysis and existentialism, each somewhat individualised by Fanon’s own voice. Furthermore, Fanon’s references are mixed and diverse. In addition to a set of rich philosophical resources, his argument is built up on personal, autobiographical anecdotes, and extended references to literary as well as scholarly works. As Scheff (1968) comments – Fanon’s first book is an unshapely mixture of personal reminiscence, philosophical analysis, literary criticism and psychiatric case history. Fanon’s writing, therefore, often reads like a patchwork of critical concepts and ideas that is still in the process of being brought together. As a result, one often gets the sense of Fanon formulating a new critical language where one had not previously existed, of Fanon generating a new – even if hybrid – set of concepts with which to critique relations of power in racist and colonial environments. Like Feminism and Marxism,

post-colonial critique ultimately aims to do just this, to formulate a unique register through which forms of discrimination and disempowerment that would have otherwise remained effectively invisible, indiscernible, ‘naturalised’ within a society, come to be brought into sharp relief.

One should note here that Fanon had an extremely ambivalent relationship with psychology and psychoanalysis, that he was extremely aware that both disciplines transmit, reinscribe or *reify* certain ideologically loaded Eurocentric notions that work to serve one dominant (oppressive, racist, colonial) social-political grouping over another. (I am speaking here of the power exercised by racial, ethnic, gender and sexual majorities over minorities). In other words, Fanon is aware of the strategic value of deploying certain psychological and psychoanalytic terms in his analysis – and does so to great political effect – without becoming too reliant on them. Indeed, he compounds his psychological and psychoanalytic terms of analysis with so many other forms of criticism that his critique never becomes dependent on psychological terms alone.

Hook image 2

Meaning to emphasise the extreme conditions of colonial racism, Fanon suggests that 'a normal black child ... will be made normal by the slightest contact with the white world' (1986, 117)

Neurosis and cultural trauma

If not necessarily real events – or necessarily *physically* real events – then what are the traumatising causes of neurosis? How can it be that black people who may not even have had direct contact with whites may still develop 'neuroses of race'? Here Fanon differs somewhat from Freud, as touched on above. While he agrees with Freud that the basis of neurosis must be that of some or other kind of infantile trauma, he will suggest that this original trauma can be *shared* and *cultural* rather than simply *intrapsychic* and *individualistic* in nature. The colonial environment, argues Fanon, is unlike any other. It is so characterised by racism, by violence and oppression, that these material and cultural forms of trauma may, as opposed to the internal fantasised bases posited by Freud, act as the causes of neurosis. In short, then, the basis of the racial neurosis of the black subject lies, for Fanon, *in the infantile trauma caused by the black child's exposure to the racist values of the oppressive colonial environment*. It is worth emphasising here again that Fanon takes *solid social and political inequalities* to be at the bottom of what might be seen to be the exclusively intra-psychic problem of psychological neuroses.

In Fanon's conceptualization, then, the early traumatic event to be found at the origin of neurosis appears to be cultural in form, its source hence being a type of *cultural trauma*. As he puts it, 'there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly ... with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio – work their way into one's mind' (152). Fanon demands more of an explanation than this, though, and attempts to understand something about the logic of racism in the kind of cultural victimisation he has been discussing. Each society, he claims, has a form of **collective catharsis** through which a certain amount of aggression can be 'channelled' outward and released. Cultural forms of expression are one way

Reify/reification: when concepts or ideas are spoken about as if they are really existing concrete objects. Psychological constructs, like 'mind' and 'personality' are good examples of this.

Catharsis: psychological process where distressing or damaging emotional material is 'purged', 'gotten rid of' via the means of some or other activity which externalises it. Collective catharsis simply refers to this process as it happens on a mass social level.

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Scapegoating: projection of blame onto another person or object, who then becomes blameworthy or punishable for something I am in fact guilty for. Scapegoating is a way of avoiding feelings of guilt and responsibility.

Projection: process by which specific aspects of self, or certain wishes or impulses, are imagined to be located in something or someone else. It means that the individual is able to avoid confronting certain truths about him- or herself, and hence functions as a means of avoiding guilt.

Symptom: irrational action which is a compromise between the need to express a repressed wish and need to keep this wish repressed.

in which this happens. Cultural forms in colonial contexts overwhelmingly take on a racist coloration, such that whether we are talking about the characters (or plots) of television, comics, films, popular jokes, stories ‘the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes’ (Fanon, 1986, 146).

Racial scapegoating

Importantly, there is an element of **scapegoating** at work here in that the victims of punishment and aggression in such narratives are typically not, in view of the full historical reality, really deserving of the violence meted out on them. Here Fanon refers briefly to the writing of Legman, who ponders why American popular media representations of the time (ie 1950s and 1960s), need to rely on the myth of the ‘bad Indian’. Legman’s answer to this quandary is that ‘the punishment that we deserve can be averted only by denying responsibility for wrong and throwing the blame on the victim’ (cited in Fanon, 1986, 146–147). What Legman has identified is the mechanism of **projection** as a means of avoiding guilt. (Projection, in psychoanalysis, is the process by which specific aspects of self, or certain wishes or impulses, are imagined to be located in something or someone else. The implication here is that the individual is able to avoid confronting discomfiting truths about him- or herself.) This is a mechanism that Fanon makes use of in his analysis of racism also, and he is fully aware of the bizarre (if unconscious) logic that is at work here: a hating of one’s victims proportionate to the guilt one feels for the injustices and violence one has subjected *them* to! This, then, is one psychoanalytic interpretation of racism: racial hatred arises from the need to deal with feelings of guilt that have emerged from the acts of violence, injustice or oppression that one has perpetuated on a particular racial grouping.

There seems to be a problem here, though – this ‘explanation’ sounds **tautological** – it, in a way, uses racism to explain racism. It might explain how racism escalates, how racism itself breeds more racial violence, but where does this all begin? This explanation does not offer an answer to what comes before racism, to the question of what brings the first racist action or sentiment into being? Fanon again looks to Freud here, who, of course, finds sexual content of sorts in the origin of virtually all neurotic **symptoms**. (In psychoanalytic discourse, a symptom is an irrational action which is a compromise between the need to express a repressed wish and need to keep this wish repressed.) Fanon in turn directs his attentions to the dynamics of sexuality present in racism. At first this may seem a less than fruitful line of enquiry, because, thinking intuitively, we might suggest that racism need have nothing at all to do with sexuality, or with sexual attraction. Sexual attraction would, in fact, seem to be the very opposite of the prejudicial hatred that characterises racism! In opposition to this position, Fanon asserts that ‘*no proper understanding of racism*

is possible without reference to the sexual sphere' (1986, 160; emphasis added).

Neurosis on the surface

Before we go on to discuss in more detail the sexual component of racism, it is important that we emphasise one further feature of Fanon's description of the 'cultural neuroses of race', namely the fact that such neuroses exist 'on the surface', so to speak, rather than in deep unconscious forms. The particular form of neurosis with which Fanon is concerned is *not* one that can be comfortably accommodated in the unconscious, or easily forgotten. Fanon's point here is again to reiterate that it is the multiple devaluing 'myths of blackness' that cause neurotic reactions in black subjects. More than just this, he insists that such cultural traumas cannot simply be repressed away into the unconscious – 'Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to 'make it unconscious' (Fanon, 1986, 150). Unlike the 'normal' development of neurotic symptoms, where the neurotic may temporarily forget the cause of his or her suffering, the black man or woman faces, on a daily basis, the oppressive colonial reality that emphasises his or her social and/or existential inferiority. This is a further divergence from Freud regarding the notion of neurosis – this difference is fundamental enough, in fact, to suggest that Fanon's concept is becoming something almost altogether separate from the Freudian notion.

Fanon develops two figurative terms to dramatise the strength of this two-way relationship between psyche and society: internalisation and epidermalisation. Internalisation refers to the process by which external, sociohistorical reality is assimilated into 'internal' and subjective reality. Epidermalisation is used 'to underscore the profound transformation of economic inferiority to subjective inferiority' (Bulhan, 1985, 96).

THE PHOBOGENIC OBJECT

Phobia and ambivalence

Here it becomes important to foreground two basic psychoanalytic notions – that of the **phobic object** and that of **ambivalence**. Ambivalence in psychoanalysis refers to the co-existence of contradictory affects and/or impulses. Hence, for psychoanalysis, powerful emotional reactions typically *contain* – even if at a predominantly unconscious level – what would seem to be *their emotional opposites*. Thus, powerful currents of love, for psychoanalysis, also contain elements of hate, just as responses of *fear* contain also within them elements of *attraction*. This is an example of psychoanalytic thinking at its most counter-intuitive – its assertion that contrary reactions of fear and attraction exist as component parts of one another. A similarly counter-intuitive suggestion is that unconscious elements of desire and or attraction are compo-

Phobic object:

thing or person that causes irrational feelings of dread, fear, and hate. The threat of the phobic object is irrationally exaggerated, and it is typically considered to possess evil or damaging intents. The phobic object often induces a sense of paranoid anxiety; it also acts as a source of unconscious attraction.

Ambivalence:

phenomenon in which powerful emotional reactions appear to coexist with *contrary* affective impulses (even if these contrary impulses exist at a predominantly unconscious level).

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Phobogenic: fear-causing person or object.

nent parts of racial hatred. We shall move on to explain these concepts in more detail shortly; at the moment it is important to explain why, for Fanon, the black person comes to act as what he calls a '**phobogenic**' (that is, fear-causing) object for whites.

BOX 2 The inadequacy of Eurocentric theory

Just as Fanon rejected the aggressive imposition of Western culture, values and norms on other cultures, so he was antagonistic towards an uncritical application of European theory in colonised contexts. This was particularly the case if such theory functioned to 'psychologise away' social inequality; the facts of racism and violence could not simply be reduced to minor terms of a theoretical analysis for Fanon. So, for example, he sets out to reinterpret a set of dreams – those of black subjects in the context of the violent Malagasy colonial struggle – already analysed by European psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni. Fanon sees there not the ever-present phallic symbol, nor a threatening pair of father-figures, as reported by Mannoni (1990), but takes the original objects of the dream, as reported by the dreamers, at relative face value. The rifle in one dream is not a penis but a genuine rifle – 'model Lebel 1916' as Fanon puts it – a real object of the Malagasy uprising. The supposed father figures in such dreams represent not a symbolised Oedipal fear but rather real colonial authorities that the dreamer feared, because they had in fact tortured him or his peers! Here psychoanalysis is working by projecting European cultural values or understandings onto the colonial context in such a way that real conditions of oppression are masked. In the same way Fanon denied Mannoni's contention that African natives had a peculiar psychology that gave them a need for subjection to others, that only races that had a deep unconscious need to be governed, controlled or parented could in fact be successfully colonised. In such forms of psychoanalysis Fanon saw nothing but a form of victim-blaming and colonisation's attempts at self-justifying forms of explanation.

Fanon (1986) similarly rejects the heavy-handed application of Hegel's famous slave-master dialectic, in which both parties are involved in a struggle for recognition from the other (the master receives his identity as master from the slave; the slave his identity from the master's withholding of his freedom). In the colonial context, the master sought not recognition from the slave, but *work*, claims Fanon (1986), whilst the slave wanted simply *to be* the master. Although Fanon does not reject Marxism out of hand, he also has concerns about how it might be applied in colonial contexts. Fanon's terms were post-Marxian, as Scheff (1968) notes, 'economic realities were determining, but they in turn derived from the racial structure of colonial society' (92). So although Fanon considered himself a socialist, he refused to equate the native struggle against colonialism with the fight between socialism and capitalism; the politics and struggle he wished to wage was not that of socialism against capitalism but that of poor against rich and, at some level, the derided racial category of 'blackness' against that of 'whiteness', African culture versus European.

This is not to say that Fanon rejects wholesale the critical potential of such theories – clearly he made critical use of both aspects of psychoanalysis and Marxism, particularly, in view of the latter, a reformulated conception of alienation (as seen above). Likewise the notion of the master-slave dialectic does inform his analysis, but in a highly adapted, one might even say *customised*, manner. Fanon's point is that these Eurocentric theories need to be adequately re-evaluated and reformulated if they are to be sufficiently critical in colonial contexts. Indeed, one of Fanon's most vital

BOX 2 The inadequacy of Eurocentric theory (continued)

critical contributions was to emphasise how race, and an awareness of the day-to-day reality of colonial violence, racism and exploitation, came to supersede traditional Eurocentric theoretical terms of analysis. This is also one of the reasons why he becomes so central a figure to the field of post-colonial theory: he offers up the rudiments of a new grid of analysis, a new set of analytical priorities, around exactly such questions as cultural dispossession, colonial violence, racism and racial identity. Pre-existing

theoretical structures, critical as they may be within 'First World' contexts – both Marxism and feminism are cases in point here – would not be adequate to properly address the forms of power particular to the colonial and post-colonial situations. The danger of these critical systems is that they risk homogenising the terms of particular importance to the colonial environment under broader rubrics: race or ethnicity, for example, come to fall under the rubrics of gender or class.

Phobia and paranoia

The phobic object, explains Fanon, is essentially that which arouses a sense of subjective insecurity within me, that is, it incurs feelings of fear or dread. Careful to qualify the emotional components of the phobic object, Fanon follows the work of Hesnard in specifying that both qualities of *revulsion* and *fear* feature within this sense of subjective insecurity. There is hate within the fear, in other words; not only does this object scare me, it also revolts me, I find it detestable. In addition, the phobic object also induces a powerful *irrational* reaction in me. After all, in technical terms, a phobic reaction is one that is, by definition, *irrational, excessive* in nature. As Fanon puts it (1986), 'In the phobic, affect has a priority that defies all rational thinking' (155). More than just this, in a proper phobic reaction, one endows the object 'evil intentions and ... the attributes of a malefic power' (Fanon, 1986, 155). In a phobic reaction, then, one exaggerates the potential danger of this object, one turns it into something with a thoroughly evil intent, with a range of threatening powers that promise to cause damage *to me*. The phobic object then is something that we respond to with reactions not only of fear and hatred but also of **paranoid anxiety**. (Paranoid anxieties, again in psychoanalytic terminology, are to do with the irrational, yet consistent belief that one is being systematically undermined, persecuted or attacked by a 'bad' object, that is, a person, group or thing which intends to do one damage.)

Phobia and unconscious attraction

There is still a further necessary feature of the phobic object. Following the logic of ambivalence, psychoanalysis understands the phobic object – that is, that type of thing or person that causes particular amounts of anxiety, dread or fear within me – as *also a source of unconscious attraction*. We have hence uncovered, potentially at least, an aspect of sexuality even in phobia – namely

Paranoid anxiety:
irrational, yet consistent belief that one is being systematically undermined, persecuted or attacked by a 'bad' object, that is, a person, group or thing which intends to do me damage.

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Collective unconscious: idea that all human beings share a supply of innate ideas or archetypes, that are genetically supplied, that are universal, and that can be seen spontaneously produced in the symbolism of different cultures and times.

Archetypes: universal motifs or patterns that form the collective unconsciousness. Archetypes make up the shared basic contents of religions, mythologies, legends and so. They also feature in individual dreams and fantasies.

Negro myth: racist system of representations and values in which the figure of the black man or woman comes to stand as a repository, a figure in whom whites come to symbolise all their lower emotions and baser inclinations. A dominant theme within what Fanon refers to as the 'European collective unconscious'.

that of sexual attraction – *even in the revulsion, hatred and paranoid anxiety of the phobic response*. We can therefore start to anticipate aspects of Fanon's psychoanalytic account of racism, an account built on the above understanding of the phobia in which irrational, paranoid, fearful and hateful impulses combine with elements of unconscious attraction. We shall return shortly to this element of attraction as a way of explaining further how elements of sexuality – in this case a particularly *anxious* sexuality – feature in instances of white colonial racism.

Negrophobia

Part of Fanon's analysis of the colonial encounter concerned an attempt to understand the scale of white or European racism, in particular, the depth and pervasiveness of the irrational fear and hatred that the white subject is thought to feel toward the black man or woman. Why is it the case, asks Fanon (1986), that 'In Europe, the black is the symbol of evil?' (188); Why is it the case that 'concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side character?' (198). So widespread, so pronounced and so irrational is this racist response that Fanon is tempted to use Jung's notion of the **collective unconscious** to explain it. (The collective unconscious is the idea that all human beings share a supply of innate ideas or **archetypes** that are genetically supplied, that are universal and that can be seen spontaneously produced in the symbolism of different cultures and times. Archetypes are thought to be the universal motifs or patterns that form the collective unconsciousness. Archetypes are therefore considered to make up the shared basic contents of religions, mythologies, legends and so on.)

The concept of the collective unconsciousness would seem to be able to explain how racism may work unconsciously, in a genetically inherited manner, shared by all Europeans or whites. However, just as was the case in his application of the Freudian concepts, Fanon again finds it necessary to modify certain of Jung's basic ideas. The need to do so in the case of Jung is even more pressing, because of the ways that the Jungian account may lend itself to a *naturalisation of racism*. It is for this reason, along with Jung's pronounced Eurocentricity, that Fanon finds much of Jungian theory distasteful. A particular concern of Fanon's here is Jung's suggestion that the baser desires of all racial groupings are associated – in a genetically predisposed way – with blackness.

The Negro myth

Importantly, while Fanon violently rejects the notion that there may be any innate, biologically predisposed devaluation of blackness – that blackness may be in any inherent way problematic, amoral, pathological or inferior –

he does acknowledge the massive scale of white racism. So, for Fanon, there *does* seem to be something to the derogatory ‘**Negro myth**’, as he calls it, at least in so far as it exists as a racist system of representations and values. Fanon even goes so far as to guardedly use the term of the ‘European collective unconscious’ to describe how pervasive and systematic this derogatory image of blackness is. In his own words, ‘... the archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro’ (Fanon, 1986, 198). (Here, though, Fanon uses the term ‘archetype’ as *a unit of social value and/or understanding*, rather than as an genetically inherited image.) However, the point is that this ‘Negro myth’ is just that – *a social and political system of representations and values* and not a series of genetically inherited ‘blueprints’, or archetypes of blackness as evil.

BOX 3 The African as without culture, civilisation

One of Fanon’s strengths as a critical theorist of race is his ability to play up the often subliminal double standards in how black and white subjects are understood or evaluated. One of the best cases of such a racist double standards occurs in connection with the devaluation of black language. When I meet a Russian or a German who speaks my language badly, says Fanon, speaking from the position of the white French-speaker,

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 [black man] ... nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilisation, no ‘long historical past’ (1986, 34).

The ‘European collective unconscious’

The ‘Negro myth’ is not ahistorical, universal, or natural; rather, it has a precise political function, Fanon claims, and that is to act as a repository – *a figure in whom whites symbolise all their lower emotions and baser inclinations*. Here again we can identify the mechanism of scapegoating, along with that of projection. One account of racism, then, is that it involves an attempt to externalise, to ‘project out’ those qualities of one’s self that one finds reprehensible, ‘to ascribe [their] origins to someone else’ (Fanon, 1986, 190). One thus avoids having to confront certain qualities of the self. It is in this way that the ‘black man stands for the bad side of character’ (189). What we are able to perceive in white racism, then, is ‘an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man’ (187).

We may then conditionally employ the notion of a ‘European collective unconscious’ *in this particular way*, to understand something about the workings of racism, but, crucially for Fanon (1986), the collective unconscious

European collective unconscious: Fanon adapts the Jungian notion of the collective unconscious such that it is *not* dependent on ‘cerebral heredity’, but is rather the result of the imposition of a culture, is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths and collective attitudes of a given group.

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'is not dependent on cerebral heredity – it is the result of ... the unreflected imposition of a culture' (191). Thus, Fanon's version of the 'European collective unconscious' 'is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group' (1986, 188). Fanon's attempt, as McCulloch (1983) puts it, is to transform this concept of the collective unconscious 'from an ahistorical mechanism located in inherited cerebral matter to a historically specific psychic structure that is open to continuous social reinforcement' (71).

The 'racial distribution of guilt'

These racist cultural practices of scapegoating the racial other, of attempting to achieve a sense of superiority through the inferiorisation of another, are commonplace. There are few groups of people – ethnic, racial, religious or class-based – who do not attempt to gain some kind of compensation for their own inferiorisation in this way, says Fanon (1986). So, in his later work (1990), he will suggest that even the oppressed working classes in Europe – who should, in principle, seem willing and enthusiastic to embrace the oppressed colonised masses – do just the opposite. Rather than recognise what they have in common, rather than identifying what their shared burden of oppression is, the European working classes instead look down upon this other oppressed grouping and scapegoat them, in the ways described above. Fanon refers to this process as the 'racial distribution of guilt', the assertion of a 'hierarchy of prejudices', as McCulloch (1983) phrases it, as a way of attempting to compensate for one's own experiences of oppression.

There is, of course, one set of historical circumstances and one particular grouping that makes for an exception to this process. Fanon has in mind here the oppressed people of a colonial regime. Ordinarily it may have been the case that such an oppressed group would have found another race or ethnic grouping upon whom they could project their own undesirable sexual and aggressive impulses. The colonial condition, however, prevents this possibility. The systematic racism, dehumanisation and inferiorisation of this group means that, within the colonial environment, there is no other group to whom they might turn to scapegoat.

'White souls'

I have, in the previous chapter, discussed the internalisation of racism with reference to how racist cultural values and prejudices become a potential mode of self-understanding, according to Fanon, for black men and women in colonial contexts. In complementing this foregoing understanding of *racial alienation* with that of *racial neurosis* Fanon extends his analysis of the psychological effects of racism. Now we know from what has gone above that the 'racial neurosis of blackness' is a neurosis 'on the surface' so to speak, that is

not driven deep into the unconscious mind. However, Fanon's suggestion is that there is, at times, a level of unawareness here, or willful delusion. So, it may be the case that the black subject is often forced into the recognition of their own blackness – this particularly so in contexts where racism is omnipresent. However, it is also the case that there are frequent occasions when the black subject thinks of him- or herself as white, that, after adopting the cultural trappings and language of white culture, they come to conduct themselves, subjectively and intellectually, as white. As odd as this may sound, one should bear in mind the fundamental irrationality of the neurotic condition that Fanon is describing. Furthermore, one should be well aware of the force of the racist social values, understandings and discourse in colonial settings which come to equate blackness with 'ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality' (Fanon, 1986, 192).

If it is the case that all that is repugnant and undesirable is black, and that I, as a black man or woman, order my life like that of a moral person, then 'I am simply not a Negro ... I know only one thing, which is the purity of my conscience and the whiteness of my soul' (Fanon, 1986, 193). What Fanon is speaking of here is *whiteness as a moral category*, as a metaphysics of all that is positive. This provides one way of explaining how I can be black and still divorce myself from blackness; once the above logic is in place (of whiteness as a kind of moral category), I may be someone who is black yet who has detached him- or herself from all the derogatory values that have been associated with being black. I can perhaps even provisionally recognise my *physical blackness* without admitting my *psychological blackness*, so to speak, and avoid my blackness because of the *whiteness of my soul*. Fanon describes this logic as follows: 'I am a Negro – but of course I do not know it simply because I am one' (191). Further yet:

As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro ... this [is a] neurotic situation in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual situation fed on fantasies [that are] hostile and inhuman (Fanon, 1986, 197).

Hence the black subject may assume the structure of racism – via embracing whiteness as a moral category of sorts – and *unconsciously* transposing it onto himself. This is where the explanation of racial neurosis may be seen slightly to exceed that of racial alienation: it is not just that I have been distanced from my own blackness, that my own blackness has been objectified for me or that I understand blackness only through white values – it is also the case that at some very deep level I, the black subject, experience myself to be white. I have taken on *the subjectivity of whiteness*. This process will always be a jarring one, because race, unlike religion, and in some ways ethnicity, or even gender, cannot be hidden or disguised – it is very patently visible. This means that even

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if I do have the soul or mind of whiteness, my blackness will be continually reaffirmed; I will be repeatedly confronted with this painful, and pathological juxtaposition. It is for this reason that Fanon (1986) says that 'the Negro lives an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic' (192).

Manichean thinking

In his discussions of 'white souls' and the 'Negro myth', Fanon directs our attention to the ways in which racist systems of value systematically separate and divide all that is white from all that is black. This happens physically and spatially, in terms of segregated living areas, in the splitting up of what would otherwise be shared public amenities (as in the apartheid era), but also – and this is of great importance – this occurs at *moral and psychological levels also*. This division into black and white not only as a basis of racial distinction but as a basis of cultural, moral and almost spiritual evaluation is what Fanon (1968) refers to as a **Manichean thinking**. Manichean thinking is that approach to culture in which all values and concepts are split into binary opposites, one that is positive (which is white) and one that is negative (black).

Manichean thinking: approach to culture in which all values and concepts are split into binary opposites, one that is positive (which is white) and one that is negative (black).

It is important that we grasp what Fanon is saying here, because racism is not simply a question of distinctions made on the basis of different colours, different physical features (although this is the 'grounding distinction' of racism, and one which is never completely transcended). Racism, very importantly, is also a set of separations that come to be implemented at higher levels – those of culture, morality, psychology – and it is this ability of racism to motivate difference (and superiority/inferiority) *at a variety of different levels* which makes it so durable, so resistant to change. So if a racist explanation of difference fails at the level of the body – that is, in terms of concrete physical or material 'defects', it can be pitched again at the level of psychology, or of culture, at levels which are less tangible and hence harder to disprove.

The point here is simply that racism as a system of values uses both racism of the body and racism of the mind, 'racisms' of physical *and moral* qualities, each to motivate and justify the other. Each sustains and legitimates the other and we are left with a self-perpetuating cycle of racist values. Importantly, what happens in Manichean thinking is that the continual splitting and separation of racial groups (and all the associations that have come to characterise them) reaches the point where one is confronted with not only mutually exclusive groupings, but also mutually exclusive sets of values and cultures. The logic presented by this kind of logic sustains racism, because it suggests that two such groups are effectively unbridgeable, so radically different to one another, so mutually opposed, that no reconciliation, or mutual understanding would ever be possible.

BOX 4 Manichean divisions in space

Fanon's explanation of Manichean thinking suggests that the implementation of racism at a number of different levels comes to further rationalise and justify notions of difference, notions of superiority/inferiority, originally made on the level of the body. Particularly interesting in this respect is his description of the colonial division of space, and how this comes to reify constructed notions of psychological, cultural, moral difference. Edward Said (1983) describes this as geography re-enacting discourse, and discourse re-enacting geography:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments ... The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and soldier who are the official, instituted

go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression ... The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The settler's town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel ... is brightly lit ... the garbage cans swallow all the leavings ... The settler's town is a town of white people and foreigners. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village ... is a place of ill fame, populated by men of evil repute ... (Fanon, 1990, 29-30).

An image of a township
juxtaposed alongside

pic to come from Solani

'The separate worlds
of white and black
South Africa.'

FANON'S PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATION OF RACISM

We are now in a position to bring together the different strands of Fanon's psychoanalytic account of racism. In a diverse set of references to personal experience, popular culture, to theory and literature across *Black skin, white masks*, Fanon is able to isolate two basic types of racist reaction. In relation to blackness, as discussed above, he finds a whole series of derogatory values relating to inferiority, baseness, sinfulness, lack of civilisation etc. These are

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the typical responses of hatred that he understands as working within the scapegoating mechanism. In other words, all that is considered undesirable about the self, all that one does not want to admit, or feels guilty for, one projects onto the Other, as a way of attaining one's own 'emotional equilibrium'. The black man is hence for white culture the 'object capable of carrying the burden of original sin' (Fanon, 1986, 192). Racism in this way is essentially a kind of defence reaction, 'projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves 'as if' the Negro really had them' (1986, 165). This, in a way, explains why racism so powerfully enforces and reaffirms relations of separation and distance – the racist wants as much distance from the object of racism as possible given that he has projected all that is worst about *him or herself* onto this racial other.

This explanation would seem to cover one set of racist reactions – but there is another type of reaction – no doubt intermingled with the first – which seems to require a somewhat different account. What Fanon has in mind here, again as anticipated above, is the *phobic reaction* of the white racist to the black. Here again we find in the racist a whole series of hateful or derisive values. Somewhat unexpectedly however, there seems also to be a set of positive, *even idealising* associations that are also to be found in the racist response. There is, in short, just as in the phobic response, *something quite alluring, something quite compelling or attractive* about the hated object of racism.

The idealising component of racism

Such idealising associations may strike us as odd, particularly given that we are used to understanding racism predominantly within the terms of prejudice and hate. In contrast to this – or rather *in addition to* this understanding – Fanon's line of argument suggests that in every instance of racism there is also a kind of idealising activity. Each form of racism *contains within it the identification of highly valued social trait*. And here again we detect a kind of ambivalence – this trait is desired, and the racist subject covets this particular quality, is jealous of it, wants to have it, and comes to fear and hate it or, more directly, *the racial other*, for possessing it.

Take, for example, the case of anti-Semitism. 'The Jew,' says Fanon (1986), 'is feared because of his [or her] potential for acquisitiveness' (157). This – despite what we may have expected – is an almost omnipresent theme in this and all other forms of racism: the unexpected acknowledgement, even if irrationally exaggerated, of an isolated positive quality taken to be specific to this particular group of people. Importantly, this is not only a positive quality, it is also one which is highly prized, even valorised within that given society. More often than not it is a kind of essential quality or virtue that the racist would dearly like to make his or her own. In fact, we may go so far as to say that it is

a quality that the racist would like to see represented within their most valued personal attributes. Not a quality that can be manufactured; this quality is taken to be an inherent trait, something that cannot simply be duplicated; this is part of why it is so powerfully desired.

'Racial jealousy'

Fanon (1990) provides another example of this idealising component of racism in *The wretched of the earth*. In the case of European anti-Muslim sentiment in Algeria at the time of the war of independence, Fanon claimed that the European's belief in the Muslim's apparent liking for violence revealed a deep, hidden *admiration*. In the case of white racism, the *perceived* attribute of blacks that represents so much anxiety for whites is that of a *massive sexual potency*. We need bear in mind here that the idealised component in racism – the key stereotype around which its logic turns – is itself irrational, unjustified, exaggerated. And Fanon (1986) is at pains to emphasise that this assumption of white colonialists is unrealistic, that there is no evidence to suggest that the sexual powers of blacks are in any way superior to that of whites.

Fanon (1986) provides empirical evidence in support of his suggestion that a chief stereotype of blackness is that of unrestrained sexual appetites and/or abilities. He conducted 500 association tests with white Europeans; when his subjects came to associate to ideas of 'the Negro' he was confronted with a series of images of sexuality, natural vitality, strength and athleticism. A particular anxiety came to the forefront in the fear of 'the raping Negro': 'The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast ... if it is not the length of his penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him' (Fanon, 1986, 170). There is a certain concealed respect and/or jealousy at work here for Fanon, a 'rapturous admiration of black ... prowess' (1986, 174). We should be aware here how, in the logic of racism, even the apparent 'racial virtue' can be twisted into a vice – an 'ideal gone wrong' as it were. Hence not only is the black man (in particular) reduced to his virulent sexuality, but his sexuality calls all his other qualities into question, problematises him, makes him morally questionable, savage, animalistic etc. Sexuality, of course, represents a particularly powerful set of instinctual impulses, and is the chief cause of neuroses, particularly in classical Freudian psychoanalysis. Fanon has hence identified a particularly strong underlying current in the perpetuation of colonial racism, although, as discussed above, *this psychical process is not to be reduced to psychological mechanisms alone*.

The sexual anxiety of the colonialist

There are two ways in which the perceived sexuality of the black man or woman causes anxiety in the white colonial. First, we know already that in

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colonial racism blackness becomes the 'catch-all' category for all negative values and/or instincts. So, in a very broad way, the black subject comes to represent all unadmitted and troubling sexual perversities. Hence, the black subject comes to assume the burden of the European's sense of sexual anxiety (McCulloch, 1983). It is through the projection of sexual anxiety and/or guilt onto the figure of the black – who is, after all, uncivilised, barbaric, uncultured – that the European avoids a neurotic sense of their own sexuality, or so Fanon claims (1986). Secondly however, and perhaps more importantly, the perceived sexual potency of the black man is enough to create a sense of inadequacy and insecurity in the white man, *regarding his own sexual abilities*. There is a form of envy underlying this racism, reiterates Fanon, the white man wishes he possessed what he considers to be the black man's primitivism, his joy for life, his unrivalled sexual capacities.

The colonial condition is characterised by extremely high levels of sexual anxiety for Fanon, and particularly so in white men, who are unusually preoccupied with the threat posed by black men to white women. In this regard Fanon makes historical reference to the US-American phenomenon of lynching, that is, group acts of racially motivated mutilation and murder carried out by white men chiefly on black men, *Ku Klux Klan* hangings being the most obvious example. These acts were almost unflinching justified on the basis of some or other apparent sexual misconduct of the black man, on the contention that he had made inappropriate sexual advances to a white woman. This, for Fanon, is an example of how white men have projected their own sexual anxiety, in the form of exaggerated claims of the sexual powers, abilities and *intentions*, onto black men. The fear of the Negrophobe stems from the fact, as McCulloch (1983) puts it, that they feel a sense of diminution relative to the fantasy of the black man's incredible sexual powers. As Fanon puts it:

The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast ... Face to face with this man who is 'different from himself', he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify The Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and desires (1986, 120).

The racial stereotype

It is worth reiterating here that the 'positive' or idealised trait that the racial other is thought to possess, also comes to be twisted into an object of scorn and derision. Revulsion and attraction, as in the case of the phobic response, co-exist here; indeed this particular quality, be it that of the perceived industriousness of the Jew, for example, is a basis *both* for hate and for unadmitted jealousy. The logic of racism at this level therefore seems to be something like: 'I blame you for something I do not have, that I imagine you to have, that I place a huge amount of importance on, and that would make me better than what I am.' The element of jealousy is clearly very strong here, and

one way of rationalising away both this jealousy and the hatred of the racial other who possesses this desired attribute is through a kind of stereotyping or caricaturing. The tactic here is to exaggerate this quality hopelessly – a process we are familiar with from the working of the phobia – ridiculously amplifying it, ‘blowing it out of all proportion’, so as to make it seem hopelessly extreme, unbalanced, unhealthy.

It would seem often to be the case in racism that the racial other possessing the desired attribute, be it the Jew or the Muslim, is *reduced* to this particular quality, as if it exhausted all there was to know about them. Hence even this valued quality is, in a sense, *corrupted* because it is framed as excessive, as the *only* feature that this particular racial group possesses. So unbalanced, so extreme, so, in a sense, *pathological* becomes this attribute that it is made out to be *undesirable*. This form of prejudicial thinking works in two ways, not only does it now *pretend* that the desirable attribute is no longer desirable; it also objectifies the racial grouping thought to possess it, by virtue of the idea that there is nothing else worth knowing about them. The Jew, to pursue the above example, is nothing more than the acquisitive drive, the love of money. What we detect here, in the unrealistic and racist reduction of a person or category to one or more basic qualities, is the racial **stereotype**.

The paranoia of racism

The desired object is not only exaggerated, it is also now broadened and twisted into a threat to my well-being, made both omnipresent, and powerfully dangerous. Here, then, we confront the paranoid element in racism, *the sense of personal threat*, the danger of my ‘coming undone’ that the racial other is always thought to possess. This is what would seem to be at the bottom of the true hatred of racism: the sense that the racial other is taking something away from me, that they are somehow stealing my livelihood, my vitality, something of immense value to my identity and/or my existence. *That is why I hate you: because you imperil my life and all the things I hold dear and stand for.*

This logic seems paranoid because it hugely amplifies a perceived threat, makes the racial other out to be a potentially controlling force who has malicious intents, or evil designs, that target me. Hence the racial other inevitably poses the threat of moral corruption, the degeneration of values, the violation of law and order, of ‘the ways things are meant to be’. As Fanon puts it, ‘The Negro destroys, brings to nothing, ruins, damages ... [is] the detriment of what we have of our civilisation’ (1986, 180). Put differently, we might say that this threat starts to approximate something like a delusion of persecution. It fashions a plot that makes the Other (and the Other’s desired attributes) responsible for my downfall. This logic is likewise paranoid in nature by virtue of the fact of its sheer repetitiveness. Indeed, there is something paranoid about the repetitiveness of racism. Why, one is tempted to ask the racist, is it

Stereotype/stereotyping: reduction of a person or a category of person to one or more basic quality that is taken to be particular to them. The stereotype is itself irrational, an exaggerated or unrealistic attribution which is hence an example of prejudice.

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necessary continually to reaffirm, to reiterate and act out one's own racial superiority – to continually point out the Other's supposed inferiority – if this is simply a known fact? Why does one continually need to reassert this 'fact' of one's own superiority and the Other's inferiority if you are so confident of it?

Paranoia as defence

The only way to make sense of this emotional reaction is via the logic of paranoia. That is, the threat of the other needs to be hopelessly exaggerated, the racist response needs to be continually repeated. Why? Well, because each of these operations provides a means of defending against my own lack, my own insecurity. Put differently, there is a bizarre kind of emotional logic at work here, which twists itself into irrational forms precisely so I can prevent myself from confronting two basic facts: (1) the perception that I am lacking something that you have, that I badly want; (2) a deep and lingering sense of inadequacy which stems from this perception. I don't want to admit to either of these facts. The best way to 'short-circuit' these realisations, to maintain my own emotional equilibrium, is to represent them instead as *threats* coming from *the other*. So, *my* anxieties are not at basis my own *personal inadequacies*; rather they are a realistic reaction to the *dangerous threat* that *you* pose. It is not that *I lack a particular quality*, it is rather than *you have this quality in an excessive and hence dangerous quantity*. In this twisted emotional logic of racism I, the racist, hence become *the victim* of you, the 'racial other' who undermines and threatens my existence. You, on the other hand, become *my persecutor*, that which represents all that is threatening to me. Hence, I deserve protection *against you*, and *you*, on the other hand, *deserve punishment*.

In this twisted emotional logic of racism, I deserve protection *against you*, and *you*, on the other hand *deserve punishment*.

Zapiro cartoon – man watching TV broadcast of racist violence 'serves them right'

How the psychological repeats the political

In Fanon's references above to Freud and Jung, we see how he borrows concepts from psychoanalysis but *puts them to use within the frame of a very precise historical and political context*. As I suggested above in relation to Freud, it would seem that Fanon's use of Jungian ideas departs so strongly from their original conceptualisation that they become *totally different concepts*. While this is in part true, Fanon's analyses of the colonial situation are original, and do not simply duplicate any foregoing analytical frameworks, it is important to remember that, despite his powerful focus on social and political contextual issues, Fanon does not want to lose sight of psychological concepts, nor, indeed, a *psychological level of analysis*. This we see quite plainly in his psychoanalysis of racism – although, even here, the specific context of the colonial situation remains paramount.

This is the particular complexity of Fanon's 'psychopolitics' and hence his 'critical psychology' – an awareness that psychology does feature in politics, and that if we are to be able to confront racism properly, for example, we will need to have a sophisticated understanding of how it works. Fanon is aware that derogatory images of blackness can and do infiltrate the unconscious mind, that such images and myths do feature in and motivate dreams, phobias, symptoms and neuroses, *even though this is not their primary level of existence, nor their point of origin*. This is the challenge of Fanon's approach: not just an ability to conceptualise how *politics impacts on psychology* but an awareness also of *how the psychological repeats, reiterates and reinforces the political*. So, racism, like denigrating images of blackness, are in no way natural, ahistorical, predisposed 'qualities of cerebral matter', although they do, in racist or colonial environments, feature powerfully in the unconscious minds of individuals and of the society, just as they do circulate within its psychical phenomena. The conclusion we may draw from this state of affairs is that we need strong psychological accounts of racism if such forms of prejudice are to be adequately confronted and redressed. Such an account of racism finds its place as one component part of an awareness and contestation of forms of racism and prejudice, even if it alone is not sufficient. Racism no doubt exists at levels of social structure, of social meaning and discourse, as well as at the level of individual psychology. All such dimensions of racism need to be confronted. We should take an important lesson from Fanon's late work, where he focuses his attentions on the revolutionary attempt to destroy the material conditions of a racist, colonial social structure. That is to say, as important as a psychological level of awareness and critique is here, it itself will never be enough.

A point of criticism

This chapter has attempted to illustrate how Fanon has drawn on aspects of Western psychoanalysis to dramatise both the workings of racism and the

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deep psychological impact of the colonial encounter. Particularly important here, as in the previous chapter, is Fanon's description of that in-between position, the condition of a 'white mask psychology', of the black man or woman who wants to be white, who often experiences him- or herself as white, but none the less runs up against the force of white racism which imprisons him or her in a derogatory form of blackness.

There is an important point of specification that needs to be made here. We can understand how Fanon himself experienced such an in-between position. He was a well-educated doctor, with a middle-class background in Martinique, from a family of reasonable economic means, whole-heartedly initiated into the traditions of Western philosophy and psychiatry. The 'white mask psychology' of which he writes should perhaps be tied to this particular context rather than be understood as the universal conflict or circumstances of the response of all black people to racism or colonialism. Why do I say this? Because, as McCulloch (1983) emphasises, Fanon has perhaps neglected somewhat the dimension of class in his analysis. Not all black subjects find themselves caught in this in-between state, simply because they may well not have the economic or cultural, or even the historical, means to move beyond the basest level of racist objectification. Taking an example from Fanon (1986) himself, the Senegalese, he claims, were considered by many Martiniquians, to be 'more black', so to speak, less civilised, a social and cultural level *below* such Martiniquians themselves. Less socially mobile than the majority of Martiniquians (at least relative to the norms and values of French culture), it would seem that the Senegalese were perhaps less subject to being caught in such a midway state between cultures. It is in this respect that McCulloch (1983) argues that a greater awareness of class and class differences would have sharpened Fanon's analysis of colonial racism.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented one aspect of what we might loosely term Fanon's 'critical psychology', namely a direction of 'psychopolitics' that politicises psychology by approaching issues of social power and politics via the critical use of a psychological (or psychoanalytic) vocabulary. Importantly, though, even when Fanon revisits the domain of psychoanalysis so as to provide us with an interpretation of the psychodynamics of racism, he is wary not to reduce racism to the intrapsychic, to in any way naturalise, or 'psychologise it away'. Fanon's analysis ties his psychological analyses at each point to very real sociopolitical and historical circumstances of colonial domination.

By adapting the theoretical notion of neurosis into that of *racial neurosis*, Fanon has succeeded in providing a powerful account of the damaging impact of a 'white mask psychology'. That is, he has dramatised, in a critical and

analytical manner, the severity of the impact upon the identity and psyche of racist politics on the black subject. In so doing, one of Fanon's major theoretical contributions, historically speaking, has been to put race 'on the map', as a central term in any critical analysis of power or psychology.

Critical thinking tasks

1. Fanon's accounts of racial neurosis and of the 'European Collective Unconsciousness' are heavily indebted to Freud and Jung respectively. Importantly, Fanon differs fundamentally from certain of the basic underlying principles of each of these underlying theories. Carefully list these differences, reflecting on how Fanon prefers a sociogenetic account of neurosis and racism.
2. Fanon provides a complex interpretation of racism. Detail an instance of racism that you have witnessed, applying, where possible, the conceptual terms Fanon has used to illustrate the workings of racism.
3. Why is racism so resistant to change, even when it is fundamentally irrational in form? Fanon provides a number of reasons why this might be so. Elaborate.

Recommended readings

- ▶ Fanon's key texts are *Black skin, white masks* (1986) (London: Pluto Press) and *The wretched of the earth* (1990) (London: Penguin). While they can be difficult and opaque at first, there is no substitute for attempting to master the concepts as Fanon himself presents them.
- ▶ David Macey's recent (2000) biography *Frantz Fanon: A life* (London: Granta) is perhaps the most extensive account yet of Fanon's life and politics. Not particularly psychological in nature, and perhaps overdetailed in its preoccupation with the politics of the Algerian war of independence, it none the less makes for a superb introduction to the life, writings and revolutionary activities of Frantz Fanon.
- ▶ McCulloch's (1983) *Black soul white artifact: Fanon's clinical psychology and social theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) seems under-represented in the literature on Fanon, which is a pity because it is an excellent book. It provides a very incisive, yet critical overview of Fanon's thought, usefully linking the theoretical components of *Black skin, white masks* both to the later *The wretched of the earth* and to a series of Fanon's clinical papers. McCulloch is not afraid to critique Fanon, and points out apparent inconsistencies and contradictions when he finds them. The way he rephrases and explains some of Fanon's denser theoretical postulates is of great value to anyone attempting to gain a basic grasp of the material.