1. Anki Deo and Misbah Malik, 'Fear and Hope 2024: The Case for Community Resilience', *Hope Not Hate*, 2024, p7. (Hereafter *Fear and Hope*.)

2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, 2008 (Hereafter *Black Skin, White Masks*); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Books, 2001. (Hereafter *The Wretched of the Earth*.); Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution: Political Essays*, Grove Press, 1964. (Hereafter *Towards the African Revolution*.); Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*, Jean Khalfa and Robert Young (eds), Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

3. Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Critical Theory and Social Pathology', in P. Gordon et al. (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, Routledge, 2018, pp620-640.

4. Charles W. Mills, 'Criticalizing Critical Theory,' in Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafront (eds), *Critical Theory in Critical Times*, Columbia University Press, 2017, pp233-250.

5. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Organized Abandonment and Organized Violence: Devolution and the Police,' Lecture, UC Santa Cruz, 9 November 2015, https://vimeo.com/146450686.

6. Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy

Frantz Fanon and the Diagnosis of Social Pathologies in Post-Imperial Britain

Sarah Bufkin

Abstract: In a moment in which anti-migrant rhetoric, exclusionary ethnic nationalisms and the authoritarian populisms they fuel are on the rise, it becomes increasingly important that political theorists do more than offer a moral indictment of racism and xenophobia. This is where this article contends that Frantz Fanon's sociogenic approach to the critique of 'race' and racialisation makes a valuable contribution, even in postcolonial conjunctures that have moved beyond colonialism's crude Manichean binaries. I read Fanon as a diagnostician of the social pathologies produced by colonialism and white supremacy, showing how he worked from the colonised subject's experiences of inferiorisation and the coloniser's experiences of racial superiority and self-mystification to advance a negative critique of racial hierarchies. Crucially, across his oeuvre, Fanon stresses that the fundamental driver of these alienated states that he analyses is the *social*, not the individual psyche. I conclude by gesturing towards why Fanon's objects of critique remain not only relevant but increasingly urgent in a postcolonial Britain where racialised ideas of Englishness and anti-migrant moral panics stand in for the more difficult work of building antiracist and social-democratic politics.

Keywords: racism, Frantz Fanon, social pathology, postcolonial Britain, nativism, authoritarian populism

INTRODUCTION

In a moment in which anti-migrant rhetoric, exclusionary ethnic nationalisms and authoritarian populisms are on the rise,[1] it becomes increasingly important that political theorists do more than offer a moral indictment of racism and xenophobia. Instead, they should focus on the political work that racisms make possible – the hegemonic projects they underwrite and the cross-class coalitions they consolidate; the legal, political and social hierarchies that they embed within a given capitalist regime of accumulation; the techniques of state population management they orient and legitimate; the psychic investments and affects that they mobilise, and the forms of (mis)recognition and belonging that they make possible. This is where this article contends that Frantz Fanon's sociogenic approach to the critique of 'race' makes a valuable contribution, even in postcolonial conjunctures that have moved beyond colonialism's crude Manichean binaries. The Martinican psychiatrist

and anticolonial revolutionary famously drew on both psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology to develop his own version of the alienation critique, one that began from the colonised subject's lived experience of racial domination, violence and expropriation and from the distorted forms of self-relation that such inhuman worlds inculcated.[2] As he put it, 'both the black man, slave to his inferiority, and the white man, slave to his superiority, behave along neurotic lines' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p42). And yet Fanon always linked these subjective experiences of dislocation and injury back up to the racial hierarchies that produced them.

This is why I contend that Fanon can be situated within a broader tradition of critical social theory that sees its work as the diagnosis of social pathologies.[3] The colonial world was, for Fanon, not merely a site and source of serious injustice, but also a pathological social formation – one whose systemic practices of racist dehumanisation and depersonalising violence fundamentally undermined the normative claim of Euromodern humanism and foreclosed the possibility of meaningful intersubjective recognition. I read Fanon into this critical social theory tradition for three reasons. First, I think there are notable parallels and similarities between the two projects. Like critical theorists from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer to Herbert Marcuse, Fanon argues that critique must grapple with both the objective and subjective dimensions of pathological social relations if it is to provide a suitable diagnosis or to gesture towards emancipatory possibilities. His work, in turn, provides a valuable sociological and political corrective to the Frankfurt School, where colonialism and racism have largely received marginal treatment, if they are mentioned at all.[4] Second, I contend that this sociodiagnostic approach aligns with a more expansive reading of Fanon's oeuvre. It brings his psychiatric work, his social theory and his political analysis together into a cogent and coherent project. For Fanon was interested in the long durée of colonial worlds and colonised selves, in the dialectical ways in which the dysfunctions of the former were interiorised in the latter and the practices of the latter reproduced the former through logics of disempowerment or disavowal. And third, I suggest that Fanon's objects of critique remain not only relevant but increasingly urgent in a postcolonial Europe where white ethnonationalisms are motivating new authoritarian-popular formations and the militarised policing and 'organised abandonment' of racially minoritised populations increasingly expose them to 'premature death'.[5]

There have, of course, been many Fanons – and many 'problems' explored within Fanon-inspired activism and scholarship, including those posed by Third World anticolonial thinkers,[6] postcolonial criticism and Cultural Studies,[7] Black existentialism and Africana Critical Theory,[8] Black feminist and queer theorists' reckonings with his work,[9] and more recent analyses of race, space and colonial power.[10] Within political theory, however, Fanon has historically been more likely to be invoked for his writings in *The Wretched of*

Esch, 'Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution', in F. Ho and B.V. Mullen (eds), *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, Duke University Press, 2008.

7. For an overview of postcolonial readings of Fanon, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Critical Fanonism', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:3, 1991, pp457-70. (Hereafter *Critical Fanonism*.)

8. Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Routledge, 1995; Reiland Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*, Lexington Books, 2009.

9. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*, Rowman and Littlefield, 1998; bell hooks, 'Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love Got to Do with It?', in A. Read (ed.), *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, Bay Press, 1996, pp76-85 (Hereafter *The Fact of Blackness*.); Kobena Mercer, 'Decolonization and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics', in *The Fact of Blackness*, pp114-131.

10. Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15:1, 2003, pp11-40; Stefan Kipfer, 'Fanon and Space: Colonization, Urbanization and Liberation from

the Colonial to the Global City', *Environment and Planning D, Society and Space*, 25:4, 2007, pp701-26; Camilla Hawthorne, 'Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century', *Geography Compass*, 13:11, 2019, pp1-13. (Herafter *Black Matters Are Spatial Matters*.)

11. See, for example, Elizabeth Frazer and Kimberly Hutchings, 'On Politics and Violence: Arendt Contra Fanon', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 7:1, 2008, pp90-108.

12. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition', in *Black Skin, White Masks*. (Hereafter *Remembering Fanon*.); Homi K. Bhabha, 'What Does the Black Man Want?', *New Formations*, 1 (1987).

13. For other key readings that break with Bhabha's poststructuralist Fanon, see Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, Harvard University Press, 1996; Nigel C. Gibson, 'Fanon and the Pitfalls of Cultural Studies', in A.C. Alessandrini (ed.), *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, 1999, pp101-126; Anthony C. Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics: Finding Something Different*, Lexington Books, 2014. (Hereafter *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics*.); Azzedine Haddour,

the Earth on violent resistance to colonial dominion than to be read closely for what he had to say about the 'psychic life' of racial power.[11] By contrast, key figures in Black British cultural studies and postcolonial studies began to turn to *Black Skin, White Masks* in the 1980s and 1990s as they sought to interrogate the ambivalences built into colonial discourse. Homi Bhabha, in particular, sought to produce a Lacanian Fanon – shed of his attachments to humanism and to a romanticised dialectic of revolutionary overcoming.[12] This psychoanalytic and poststructuralist embrace of Fanon, in turn, provoked a number of critiques and alternative readings,[13] perhaps none more forceful than Cedric Robinson's dismissal of such a project as a 'misappropriation' of Fanon's work that jettisoned his commitment to revolutionary praxis.[14] Like many interpreters of Fanon in Cultural Studies, my reading centres 'the convergence of the problem of colonialism' and its racialised afterlives with 'that of subject formation' (*Critical Fanonism*, p458). But unlike as in Bhabha's account, I also want to foreground the 'question of political oppression' (*Remembering Fanon*, pxii) that racial hierarchies pose and the serious ethical injuries that they can produce in both the dominant and the subordinated subject. Such a reading brings the existentialist and dialectical elements of Fanon's work back into view, but it does so with an eye to the racialised 'situation'[15] out of which problems of disordered and dislocated subjectivities arise. My 'appropriation' of Fanon for critical social theory (*Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics*, p40), therefore, shares more in common with other Black Atlantic interpreters like Paul Gilroy,[16] Stuart Hall,[17] Achille Mbembe,[18] and Sylvia Wynter,[19] who all stressed the sociogenic nature of his account of racialisation, than it does with narrower readings that focus either on Fanon's defence of revolutionary violence or his work on the psychology of the oppressed.[20]

Adopting a 'sociogenic' approach to Fanon, however, begs the question of what his work might have to say about the post-imperial situation of today's United Kingdom – a conjuncture quite different from the anticolonial moment in which he wrote and struggled. As Stuart Hall noted, 'racism is always historically specific. Though it may draw on the cultural traces deposited by previous historical phases, it always takes specific forms. It arises out of *present*, not past conditions.'[21] But there are several aspects of twenty-first-century United Kingdom that lend itself to a Fanonian sociodiagnostic critique. First, for all that racial formation in contemporary Britain is more plural and segmented than the crude Manichean binary that Fanon indicts, racial hierarchies and everyday forms of racism remain structuring features of many Black, Asian, Muslim and Roma people's lives in Britain today, as sociological studies and thinktank reports continue to document.[22] Second, the status devaluations and precaritisation that decades of neoliberalism have inflicted on workers in the UK are increasingly being made sense of on the radical right through racialised and nativist ideas of belonging and entitlement.[23] Rather than read racism as a historical legacy from an unenlightened imperial past,

social critics today must grapple with it as a rearticulated and emergent force that is helping to consolidate, however unstably, the coalitions between white working and lower middle classes in the provinces and the populist leaders who claim to represent their interests while cutting taxes for elites. And third, this resurgence of raciological reason – and the affects of anger, resentment and fear that it productively mobilises and inflames – has been accelerated and deterritorialised by social media platforms where racist stories and videos circulate as forms of viral mis/disinformation and which link viewers directly to global networks of white supremacy without the infrastructural mediation of far-right organisations.[24]

In the final section of the article, I gesture towards what a Fanonian sociodiagnostic approach has to say about the closures and contradictions of white reaction that is taking shape in the UK today. While many objectivist and institutionalist accounts of racism have productively shown how racisms (including Islamophobia) have become embedded and entrenched by neoliberalism's privations and the securitisation project that took shape after 9/11, they cannot capture 'the inner landscape and the unconscious mechanisms' of racisms' effects and therefore give us 'only half the story', as Hall notes (*Why Fanon?*, p342). By contrast, Fanonian sociodiagnostics problematises the psychic, affective and phenomenological dimensions of these racialised practices. Doing so, I argue, helps social critics to better understand the embodied burden that routine and regular experiences of racist inferiorisation and exclusion places on Black, Asian and Muslim British communities – to reckon with how racisms feel to those who carry 'our passports on our faces', as A. Sivanandan put it.[25] Such an approach speaks too to the psychic and libidinal resources that many British people racialised as white enjoy today and which have become central sites of their own accounts of respectability, deservingness and entitlement in the face of economic and social decline. And finally, a Fanonian sociodiagnostic critique – one that sees racisms' crude Manichean fantasies as 'pathological' rather than a mere politics borne of ignorance or error – can help to explain why the current government's attempts to pander to the nativist and racist preferences of the radical right will only serve to intensify these racialised and classed contradictions, rather than offering a solution to the overlapping crises that have left so many British people with the feeling that they live in a poor country – and that migrants and racially minoritised groups are the ones to blame.

CRITICAL THEORY AND THE DIAGNOSIS OF SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES

Several contemporary critical theorists have argued that what makes Frankfurt School critical theory and its project of immanent critique distinctive is that its practitioners engage in the practice of diagnosing social pathologies.[26] Rather than focus on the permissibility of either individual or state action,

Frantz Fanon, Postcolonialism and the Ethics of Difference, Manchester University Press, 2019.

14. Cedric Robinson, 'The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon,' *Race and Class*, 35:1, 1993, pp79-91. (Hereafter *The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon*.)

15. I borrow the concept of the 'situation' from Jean-Paul Sartre here.

16. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, 2001. (Hereafter *Against Race.*); Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, Routledge, 2004. (Hereafter *After Empire*.)

17. Stuart Hall, 'Why Fanon?' in P. Gilroy and R.W. Gilmore (eds), *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, Duke University Press, 2021, pp339-358. (Hereafter *Why Fanon?*)

18. Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, Duke University Press, 2017.

19. Sylvia Wynter, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience and What It Is Like to Be "Black"', in A. Gomez-Moriana and M. Duran-Cogan (eds), *National Identities and Socio-Political Changes in Latin America*, Routledge, 2001.

20. Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, Plenum, 1985. (Hereafter *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*.)

21. Stuart Hall, 'Race and "Moral Panics" in Postwar Britain', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, p59.

22. See, for example, Bridget Byrne et al., *Ethnicity and Race in the UK: State of the Nation*, Bristol University Press, 2020. (Hereafter *Ethnicity and Race in the UK*.); Stephen Walcott and Gwen Nightingale, *How Racism Affects Health*, The Runnymede Trust, 2025.

23. Wendy Brown, 'Neoliberalism's Frankenstein: Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century "Democracies"', *Critical Times*, 1:1, 2018, pp60-79. (Hereafter *Neoliberalism's Frankenstein*.)

24. Sophie Bjork-James, 'Fueled by Virtually Unrestricted Social Media Access, White Nationalism Is on the Rise and Attracting Violent Young White Men', *The Conversation*, 2 August 2022; Heidi Beirich, 'White Supremacy as a Worldwide Movement', in D. Snow et al. (eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, John Wiley and Sons, 2022.

25. A Sivanandan, 'Our Passports

this tradition of critique seeks to understand how forms of social life can become distorted, dysfunctional, maladjusted, or otherwise pathological. As Frederick Neuhouser points out, there is often something self-reinforcing about social pathologies. The dysfunctional dynamics have a tendency not only to reproduce themselves, but to intensify (*Diagnosing Social Pathology*, p24). A pathological society degenerates; its problems become more entrenched and harder to dislodge. For example, the pathological investments in fossil fuel extraction continue to build up the systemic demand for increased production, even as it feeds a decades-long carbon pipeline that is already disrupting the planetary climate and poses an existential threat to nonhuman life and human societies.[27]

Methodologically speaking, then, this approach to critique involves the social theorist in the work of diagnosis. The diagnostician seeks not only to identify 'symptoms', but to trace them back to their root causes or sources in the social and to gesture towards practices that might ameliorate those harms. As Christopher Zurn notes, identifying social pathologies tends to involve four distinctive steps – a symptomology that identifies the relevant signs of societal dysfunction; an epidemiology that indexes them to particular social groups or populations; an etiology that links those symptoms back to their root causes in the socius; and a prognosis directed at resolving these deficiencies and returning a social formation to flourishing.[28] For instance, Erich Fromm argued that individuals living under mid-century American capitalism displayed a kind of 'pathological normalcy' whereby they had collectively come to view the alienated state of social relations available to them as 'normal' rather than deeply inhuman and distorted. Instead of experiencing these highly individualist and egocentric norms as constraints on their freedom, they accepted the disordered terms of social organisation because everyone else appeared to. For Fromm, then, this alienated form of social integration explained why individuals did not join the struggle against late capitalism.[29]

For all the talk about the importance of social pathology critique to critical theory, however, there is less agreement over what exactly constitutes a social pathology. Émile Durkheim, famously, attempted to read the social as structurally analogous to a complex organism, whose internal organs have distinctive functions but work together in a harmonious whole to reproduce life. One could describe a society as pathological, he argued, when its institutions, norms, or laws fail to fulfil their socially reproductive function.[30] Today, many critical social theorists disagree over just how far one can take the naturalist analogy (or whether it is best understood as an analogy at all). Arto Laitinen and Arvi Sarkela have argued that most scholars committed to social pathology critique today tend to approach this metaethical knot in one of two ways. Either they jettison the naturalist underpinnings or metaphysical implications of the 'pathology' concept and use it metaphorically to identify a specific set of social 'evils'. Or they contend that what makes social pathology

critique distinctive *is* its naturalist foundation in the functional demands of life itself, but they reject the organicist conception of society and substitute instead a richer materialist account of life processes.[31]

I follow Neal Harris and Frederick Neuhouser in preferring a more explicitly ethical account of social pathology, rather than a naturalist one, after Sarkela and Laitinen's model.[32] By embracing a 'big-tent' approach[33] to social pathology, I contend that critical social theory retains a crucial degree of analytical and diagnostic flexibility in the disclosure and interrogation of contemporary forms of social suffering. To prescribe too narrowly what counts as 'pathological' is to decide the matter for investigation in advance. It could mean that key forms of societal dysfunction – from the reifying force of instrumental reason under commodity exchange to the anomic conditions that proliferate on social media platforms – go unidentified. By contrast, the naturalist account retains what is diagnostically specific about the concept of a social pathology – i.e., it is the pathology that invites the social criticism, not the social criticism that applies the label of pathology – but it also requires a broader metaphysical 'cosmology' that explains what 'normal' life-processes require for flourishing. The worry here is that critical social theorists will conflate the regulative force of an organic norm with that of a moral norm, thereby accomplishing a sort of ideological sleight of hand.

These theoretical questions are not merely of scholarly interest, but they pose serious political risks, given the ways in which the concept of 'pathology' has been historically used and abused to denigrate oppressed communities or alternative and transgressive forms of life. One need only think of the conservative attempts to blame the 'pathological' breakdown of Black families for ongoing racial inequality, or to remember the medicalised condemnation of homosexuality as 'deviant' and gender dysmorphia as a 'disorder', to realise how easily the rhetorical force of abnormality and 'pathology' can be turned to suspect and politically repressive ends. There is a legitimate worry that by adopting the language of 'pathology', the theorist can end up blaming the oppressed for their own oppression, rather than the social and political conditions which have created disordered social relations in the first place. This slippage, however, can be minimised if social theorists retain their firm grasp on the *social* as the first-order site and source of the ethical harm.

Recently, scholars like Fabian Freyenhagen, Neuhouser and Harris have argued for revitalising critical theory's diagnostic aspects by returning to a more critical concept of 'social pathologies'. And they have looked to a range of thinkers for models of how to do so, from Erich Fromm to Rousseau. By contrast, I go to Fanon.

FRANTZ FANON'S SOCIODIAGNOSTICS AND RACISM

Fanon's work on disordered and pathological forms of racialised self-relation, of course, has proven a touchstone for radical Black political thought and

on Our Faces', *Campaign Against Racism and Fascism*, 6 February 1992, pp8-9. (Hereafter *Our Passports on Our Faces*.)

26. Axel Honneth, 'Critical Theory', in D. Moran (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, Routledge, 2008, pp784-813; Frederick Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology: Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim*, Cambridge University Press, 2022. (Hereafter *Diagnosing Social Pathology*.)

27. Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright, *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*, Verso, 2018.

28. Christopher Zurn, 'Social Pathologies as Second-Order Disorders', in D. Petherbridge (ed.), *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays*, Brill, 2011, pp345-70.

29. For a discussion of Fromm's use of social pathology critique, see Neal Harris, 'Reconstructing Erich Fromm's Pathology of Normalcy,' *Social Science Information*, 58:10, 2019, pp714-733.

30. Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, Free Press, 2014, p277.

31. Arto Laitinen and Arvi Särkelä, 'Four Conceptions of Social Pathology', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22:1, 2019, pp80-102, p93. (Hereafter *Four*

Conceptions of Social Pathology.)

32. *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, p11; Neal Harris, 'Recovering the Critical Potential of Social Pathology Diagnosis', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22:1, 2019, pp45-62.

33. Alternatively, this is what Laitinen and Särkelä call the 'anti-theoretical' approach, because it refuses the notion of an underlying or unifying structure to all social pathologies (*Four Conceptions of Social Pathology*, p83).

34. Camilla Hawthorne has argued for moving away from an analytic trained on the body to one focused on 'space and place', to avoid ontologising Blackness and reducing Black life to racist violence (*Black Matters Are Spatial Matters*, p5).

35. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, Grove Press, 1965, p46.

postcolonial studies for decades. As Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan notes, Fanon saw that 'when the black person is cut off from his community and thrown into the white world … structural, institutional, and personal violence intensifies and the psycho-existential crisis unfolds with poignancy' (*Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, p192). But some critics, including notably Cedric Robinson, have worried that Fanon's existentialist early writings are both a theoretical and political dead-end. In Robinson's reading, Fanon's preoccupations in *Black Skin, White Masks* in fact reveal more about the Martinican's own bourgeois desire to be included in white French society than they do about the structuring relations of force which reproduce racial hierarchies – namely, that of racial capitalism (*The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon*, pp82-84). I contend that these concerns about misguided 'subjectivism', however, can be avoided if one adopts a materialist reading of Fanon's alienation critique. By materialist, I don't mean that he offers a well-articulated analysis of colonial capitalism but that his account of racialisation remained tied to the material practices, discourses, imaginaries, affects and structures that made 'race' into a seemingly natural division in the human in specific contexts. I therefore argue for foregrounding the social and historical aspects of Fanon's analysis, rather than using his existentialist writings to make world-historical or quasi-ontological claims about the nature of the Other or the anti-Black conditions of Euromodernity.[34] This materialist and conjunctural approach, in turn, resituates Fanon's critiques of Black and white alienation within the deeply inhumane and inhuman colonial worlds that produced them. 'If there is a flaw, it lies not in the 'soul' of the individual, but in his environment,' he writes (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p188). The dysfunction is a social one, not an individual one, even as it manifests in individuals' lived experience and psychological profiles. This is why, as I'll explore in this section, Fanon should be seen as a diagnostician of the social pathologies produced by racial colonialism rather than as simply a psychiatrist who documented the trauma inflicted by racial domination and colonial violence.

The symptoms that Fanon identified across his oeuvre are numerous and well-known: the colonised subject whose 'psyche shrinks back, obliterates itself, and finds outlet in muscular' releases of energy (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p44); the 'creole' woman who dreams of approximating whiteness through partnering with a white man (*Black Skin, White Masks*, pp25-30); the Black Martinican man who works hard to perfect the 'Frenchman's French' and to lose his island accent (*Black Skin, White Masks*, pp4-5); the French doctors who 'thingify' their patients by calling them all 'Mohammed' (*Toward the African Revolution*, p14); the French policeman who beats his wife and children after coming home from torturing Algerians (*The Wretched of the Earth*, pp215-7); the French settler who dreams of 'a group of [Algerian] women … suggestive of the gynaeceum, the harem'.[35] Crucially, Fanon approaches these socially produced neuroses, paranoias, anxieties and psychic deformations in relational terms. He links the individual case to the broader group or population of racialised

and colonised/coloniser subjects, a group ontology which is predicated not on some shared essence but instead on sharing a similar positionality with respect to the colonial and racialising apparatuses at work. This is the root of his sociogenic commitment – to understanding the production of racialised subjectivities not as a problem of biological or cultural essence, but of an existence structured in racial dominance. In this respect, Fanon's diagnoses are functioning at the level of the existential archetype, rather than attempting to account for any and all racialised or colonised subjects and their experiences. As he puts it in the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks,* not all Black subjects will recognise themselves in these symptomatic pictures, nor will all whites (*Black Skin, White Masks,* pxvi).

How, then, does Fanon diagnose these disordered forms of racialised subjectivity? To which social 'roots' does he trace back this catalogue of individual symptoms? He explains these psychopathologies by linking them to their experiential basis in an oppressive social formation. This is where the alienation critique becomes pivotal for Fanon. Unlike Marx who saw alienation in terms of an individual's separation from their labour, Fanon argues that white supremacy and colonial dominion can separate racialised individuals from a right relation to their being-in-the-world and to their own agency (*Against Race*, p46). Most of his writings here focus on the lived experience of the colonised. This is a multifaceted process, one in which many racially subordinated and epidermalised individuals, in turn, lose control not only of the terms by which they are made visible and intelligible to others but also over their own self-understanding, their desires and their affective being. Fanon begins by appropriating the reification critique from the existentialists to theorise the intersubjective injury that racisms inflict on oppressed subjects – the phenomenology of being misrecognised for an inferior or otherwise stereotypically devalued Other, for being treated as if one were an animal or an object. Under Fanon's paradigm, it is anti-Black racism which reifies the Black subject into little more than an always-already known inferior type, whose possibilities of subjectivity are denied and silenced. Racism makes even the straightforward tasks of living, from shopping at the store to applying for a bank loan to speaking with a colleague to driving down the street, into difficult and potentially dangerous outings. Constantly navigating projections of Black inferiority, then, displaces Black subjects from their own corporeal existence. 'The worst injury is feeling that you do not belong so much / to you –' as the poet Claudia Rankine writes.[36]

Fanon argues that, when persistent and routine, conditions of racialised (mis)recognition can distort individuals' subject formation in ways that displace them from a healthy relationship to their embodied selves and hinder their capacity for creative self-realisation. Racist imaginaries can be taken into the body, shaping its habitus and its reflexes, its anxieties and its desires. Fanon explores these processes of interiorisation most directly in psychoanalytic terms, arguing that an exposure to white supremacy can produce problematic

36. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric,* Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2014, p146.

or unhealthy coping strategies in the Black or colonised subjects whose selves are regularly dehumanised. As he put it in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we must ask 'what are their defensive mechanisms?' (*Toward the African Revolution*, p38). Individuals exposed to racial domination can develop what he calls 'neurotic' investments in raciological reason that inhibit their flourishing and undermine their capacity for self-directed agency. One of the primary pathological symptoms that Fanon diagnosed in Black Martinican subjects in the 1950s, for example, was the tendency to develop an all-consuming desire for equal recognition from the white coloniser – an affective investment that he argued betrayed a kind of self-negation, an acceptance of the terms by which Blackness is devalued, stigmatised, read as inferior. All this whiteness burns me to a crisp, protests Fanon's narrator in *Black Skin, White Masks* (p94).

By contrast, he argued that many white subjects were likely to be both mystifiers of and mystified by the racial worlds they benefited from, but whose injustices they actively worked to disavow (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p12).[37] In colonial orders, white individuals worked hard to justify their projects of expropriation, dispossession and violence by putting forward theories of essential racial difference. Such theories operated both at the level of scientific knowledge about human types and at the level of the popular common sense. As Fanon puts it, the French imperial metropole constructed an idea of the Black man out of 'a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p91). In doing so, Fanon argues, white subjects imaginatively projected that which was unwanted, repulsive, abject in themselves onto this idea of the racial Other, whose presumed inferiority legitimated their subjection to white rule. These 'historical-racial schemas' say more about white knowers, their fears and anxieties, their ignorance and their empathetic failures, than they do about Black or Arab people. Such a racialised imaginary, in turn, orients white subjects' own sense of self, gives them the security of being 'white' and therefore superior, civilised, rational, manly, entitled to the abundance of the natural world and the fruits of one's labour (and often, too, to the labour of others). By taking up the position of the white subject, individuals benefited both from the forms of material advantage that capitalist formations structured in racial dominance afford them – and from the psychic 'wage' of belonging to the superior 'in-group'.[38] As W.E.B. Du Bois reminds us, there are pleasures to be found in white dominion, even when one is a subordinate partner.[39]

Fanon's grounding in both psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology helps him to map the ambivalences, tensions and libidinal drives that shape the 'neurotic orientations' that many subjects racialised as white develop. As he puts it, the white subject too can become 'locked in his whiteness', much as the Black subject can become 'locked in his blackness' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, ppxiii-xiv). Investments in white superiority may bring both material and psychic benefits, but they also are existentially unstable, Fanon notes. They require adopting postures of denial and disavowal, of cultivating forms

37. Mbembe builds on this discussion of the blindness involved in racist constructions of the Other in his *Critique of Black Reason*.

38. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp573-4.

39. See, for example, Ella Myers, *The Gratifications of Whiteness: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Enduring Rewards of Anti-Blackness*, Oxford University Press, 2022.

of 'active ignorance' or 'forgetting' about the violences committed in one's name.[40] Fanon describes this existential-affective incapacity to value Black life in *Black Skin, White Masks* as 'affective ankylosis' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p101), referring to a medical condition that fuses the spine in place and prevents the body from flexible and regular movement. Alienated white subjects have ossified. They have lost their analytical flexibility, their ability to bend towards and react to others. As Kelly Oliver argues, 'subjectivity and humanity are the result of response-ability. That which precludes a response destroys subjectivity and thereby humanity.'[41] In racial hierarchies, then, many white subjects cannot stand in a responsive and responsible relation to their own individual agency and to the people whose equal humanity they deny. 'Unable to confront all these demands, the white man shirks his responsibility,' Fanon writes, 'I have a phrase for this: the racial allocation of guilt' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p83).

Fanon's critique was therefore meant not only to describe the specific psychological traumas suffered by the racially oppressed, but to indict and diagnose the broader 'pathologies of freedom' produced by colonialism and white supremacy. As he pointed out, just as psychoanalysts would describe those patients suffering from delusions as 'unfree' and incapable of self-determination, so we can describe those individuals alienated and impeded by racist worlds as unfree (*Alienation and Freedom*, pp497-8). The Black subject who denies and attempts to negate their Blackness is alienated from their embodied self and trapped in a zone of hyper/invisibility where their agency is overdetermined from the outside. In turn, the white subject who has interiorised white supremacist norms stands in a relation of irresponsible denial to that brutal world which they have co-produced and from which they benefit. Both alienated and alienating, the white self becomes trapped in cycles of disavowal, caught between white guilt and the reactionary pleasures of white superiority. Fanon's diagnoses therefore foreground the problem of individual and collective agency; they show how the 'defects' of a world structured in racial dominance can produce 'pathologies within the self'[42] that ultimately undermine the possibility of either ethical self-realisation or broader emancipatory struggle.

READING FANON IN THE AFTERLIFE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Fanon, of course, was writing in a different historical conjuncture – in the heart of anticolonial struggle and in the twilight of Europe's formal empires in Africa and Asia. The Manichean delirium that he did so much to indict has since been recomposed and remade by shifting economic, political and social relations, not least of which has been the formal moment of political decolonisation across the Global South.[43] The postwar moment, in particular, saw the recomposition of the British political relation from that of an imperial state to its multiracial subjects, differentiated spatially but not legally, into that

40. Catherine Hall incisively analyses these practices of disavowal in the case of the Jamaican planter, Edward Long. See Catherine Hall, *Lucky Valley: Edward Long and the History of Racial Capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2024. (Hereafter *Lucky Valley*.)

41. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p90.

42. Michael J. Thompson, 'Hierarchy, Social Pathology and the Failure of Recognition Theory', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22:1, 2019, p10.

43. Nicholas De Genova, 'The "Migrant Crisis" As Racial Crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:10, 2017, pp1765-1782.

44. Nadine El-Enany, *Bordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*, Manchester University Press, 2020.

45. Bill Schwarz, '"The Only White Man in There": The Re-Racialisation of England, 1956-1968', *Race and Class*, 38:1, 1996, pp65-78, p66.

46. Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, Macmillan, 1978.

47. Stuart Hall, 'The Neoliberal Revolution', in Sally Davison et al. (eds), *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, Lawrence and Wishart, 2017, pp325-30.

48. For a careful theorisation of the reconstitution of neoliberal subjectivity, see Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, The MIT Press, 2015.

49. Jeremy Gilbert and Alex Williams, *Hegemony Now: How Big Tech and Wall Street Won the World (And How We Win It Back)*, Verso Books, 2022, ebook, pp213-16. (Hereafter *Hegemony Now*.)

50. Lisa Adkins et al., *The Asset Economy*, Polity Press, 2020.

51. The privatisation of the UK's water infrastructure provides a particularly devastating example of this. George Monbiot, 'High

of a nation state to its citizens, whose rights to settle in Britain were tied to a racialised logic of genealogical descent.[44] This was the historical moment, as Bill Schwarz notes, in which Britain became re-racialised as white.[45] Yet neither this postwar Britain – nor that of Thatcher's Britain, with its moral panic over the racialised figure of the 'mugger'[46] – are any longer our own. While this article has neither the time nor space to offer a comprehensive diagnosis of the contemporary UK conjuncture, I do want to gesture briefly towards a few historical developments that make a Fanonian sociodiagnostic appropriate today.

Many of the crises that the contemporary UK faces today stem from the neoliberalisation that was birthed by Thatcher and intensified by Blair's New Labour.[47] As many scholars have noted, this post-Fordist regime of accumulation was characterised by increasing globalisation, the shipping of manufacturing to cheaper sites of production, the deregulation of finance, the privatisation of state assets, the undermining of social-democratic welfare settlements and the 'responsibilisation' of the individual – now understood not as a rights-bearing citizen but as an entrepreneur tasked with maximising their own human capital.[48] Recent decades, however, have seen the crumbling of this neoliberal settlement and the emergence of a new 'regime of accumulation', which Jeremy Gilbert and Alex Williams theorise as 'platform capitalism'. They use the concept to capture both the ascendency of 'big tech' within the capitalist class and the shift towards forms of accumulation based increasingly on assets, including renting access to communication infrastructure on the cloud and income from interest and dividends, rather than waged labour.[49] Such an 'asset economy,'[50] in turn, has devastated many British people's standard of living and felt sense of security. It has produced staggering wealth inequalities, stagnated wages, moved people from stable to insecure jobs, transformed public infrastructure into 'free money' for shareholders,[51] and trapped increasing numbers in unsafe, overpriced rental flats built by unscrupulous developers and managed by predatory landlords.[52]

After more than a decade of Tory-led austerity – which accelerated the neglect of state-owned infrastructure, starved social welfare programs, trapped the NHS in managed decline and stripped support from local councils responsible for frontline services[53] – it is unsurprising that increasing numbers of British people do not feel they live in a rich country, despite the UK having the world's sixth largest economy.[54] The bone-deep cuts to local councils have been particularly impactful, as the shuttering of community centres, libraries, playgrounds and youth clubs has contributed to the privatisation of the social that neoliberalism ideologically promotes and naturalises[55] – an individuating process further complicated by the 'platformisation' of our social lives and the digital spaces now mediating our relations to both others and to ourselves.[56] In recent years, the radical right has begun to fill the gaps left by previous social democratic forces, stirring up an antipolitics of outrage and resentment by framing migration as a threat to social

cohesion and a 'legitimate' source of (white) working class grievance.[57] Such an affective politics of nativist resentment has, in turn, become articulated to and ventriloquises global circuits of networked online white supremacy, where influencer entrepreneurs peddle race thinking through suggestion and the plausible deniability of humour and meme culture.[58] To many, the pluralist vision of 'state multiculturalism'[59] that took shape in the 1990s now appears naïve, if not dangerous, in the wake of the so-called 'war on terror'. Little England is once more under threat – but this time from both racialised asylum seekers 'on the small boats' and from Muslim Others who don't share 'British' values.

All of this begs the question: What might Fanonian sociodiagnostics have to contribute to our understanding of this 'unfinished politics of race'?[60] As I'll now sketch, Fanon's insistence that racism must be analysed and dismantled at both the objective and subjective level remains a useful methodological imperative through which to grasp today's resurgent white ethno-nationalism and the violent practices of enclosure that it both fetishises and inflicts.

THE STRESS OF ROUTINE EXPOSURE TO RACISM AND STATE VIOLENCE

At first glance, Fanon's critique of Black alienation might not seem to have much purchase on contemporary UK, given the antiracist struggles that organised under the banner of 'political blackness' from the 1960s to the mid-1980s.[61] In the decades since Fanon first worried about the colonised subject's pathological drive to mimic the coloniser's culture and values, the symbolic topography has shifted. Blackness is no longer a sign of pure negation but has been reclaimed as a sign of positive identification.[62] (It has also increasingly circulated as an 'exotic' commodity and status marker in global consumer culture (*Against Race*, pp269-70).) Yet racial hierarchies remain a structuring feature of twenty-first-century Britain, as studies of institutional and structural racism in the UK have shown (*Ethnicity and Race in the UK*). For all that (post)imperial Britain differs from the colonial 'world cut in two' that Fanon indicts in settler Algeria (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p29), there are parts of Tottenham and Toxteth, Brixton and Birmingham, where the police remain the primary face of state power, where stop and search, intimidation, harassment and violence against young Black men has continued, even after periodic institutional reckonings.[63] In turn, Prevent and the hostile environment have increasingly drafted the public into the daily work of state surveillance, turning everyday acts of racial profiling into a central technology of population control.[64] Hate crimes against racialised minorities, especially those visibly Muslim and non-white, increased year on year between 2011 and 2021 and remain at historical highs.[65] Everyday microaggressions – especially in white-dominated institutions and spaces where whiteness remains normal and normative – continue to communicate

Water Bills, Filthy Rivers – and Now Drought. This Is England's Great Artificial Water Crisis of 2025', Opinion, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2025.

52. Miguel Coelho et al., 'The Political Economy of Housing in England', *New Political Economy*, 22:1, 2017, pp42-44.

53. Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Oxford University Press, 2015.

54. I am grateful to John Clarke for framing the problem in this way.

55. Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, Columbia University Press, 2019, p26. (Hereafter *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*.)

56. Jeremy Gilbert, 'Techno-Feudalism or Platform Capitalism? Conceptualising the Digital Society', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 27:4, 2024, pp561-578, p573.

57. Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, Polity, 2019; *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*.

58. Alan Finlayson, 'YouTube and Political Ideologies: Technology, Populism and Rhetorical Form', *Political Studies*, 70:1, 2022, pp62-80.

59. Paul Gilroy, '"My Britain Is Fuck All" Zombie Multiculturalism and the Race Politics of Citizenship',

Identities, 19:4, 2012, pp380-397, p392. (Hereafter *My Britain Is Fuck All*.)

60. Les Back et al., *The Unfinished Politics of Race,* Cambridge University Press, 2022.

61. For a historical reconstruction of political Blackness in the UK, see Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985,* University of California Press, 2018.

62. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities,' in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference,* pp246-256.

63. For the latest, see Baroness Casey, *Casey Review: An Independent Review into the Standards of Behaviour and Internal Culture of the Metropolitan Police Service,* The Metropolitan Police Service, 2023.

64. Therese O'Toole et al., 'Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State-Muslim Engagement', *Sociology*, 50:1, 2016, pp160-77; Melanie Griffiths and Colin Yeo, 'The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising Immigration Control', *Critical Social Policy*, 41:4, 2021, pp521-44.

65. 'Hate Crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2024,' Home Office, 10 October 2024.

66. Quoted in Tania Stein and William Shankley, '"Paperwork or

to racially minoritised groups that 'you should stay where you are' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p17). As one Black British woman of Caribbean descent put it, 'paperwork or no paperwork, [the Windrush scandal] made me realise, we are guests in this country. It doesn't matter what roots we've got here.'[66]

Rather than indict the sort of alienated desires to become white that Fanon criticised in *Black Skin, White Masks,* it might instead be more productive to consider the toll that the routine exposure to racist discrimination, dehumanisation and violence (both physical and symbolic) takes on Black, Muslim and other racially minoritised people. Racisms force members of minoritised communities to inculcate new practices and habits of attention to keep themselves and their families safe, from avoiding certain spaces, to self-silencing, to masking their emotions, to demanding equitable treatment. Today, for example, many British Muslim women reported being afraid of taking their children to the playground.[67] Such work is taxing. Navigating a white environment demands energy, produces anxiety and outrage, generates worry and forces the body into prolonged states of stress. As Fanon put it, 'in the colonial world, the emotional sensitivity of the colonised is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent' (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p44). New medical data suggests that these persistent experiences of racism wear a body down.[68] Most of this research on 'social weathering' has focused on the health of Black women in the United States, but increased maternal mortality rates and worse birth outcomes for Black and Asian women in the UK signal that this racialised, gendered and classed maldistribution of heightened stress is not solely an American phenomenon.[69] As Shatema Threadcraft and Naa Oyo A. Kwate remind us, racisms can kill fast – in spectacular acts of police or vigilante violence or in moments of medical neglect – and they can kill slow, over a longer durée of repeat exposure and the accelerated ageing such exposure brings.[70] In this sense, racial inferiorisation works like a pathogen; it disrupts the body's normal functioning.

Fanonian sociodiagnostics, then, stands better placed than objectivist or narrowly institutionalist accounts of racism to grapple with and disclose these embodied, subjective and agentic aspects. It returns social critique to the phenomenological and the psychosocial not to depoliticise racial hierarchies and their violences, but to open up space for an analysis of dislocation and disempowerment. Fanonian critique acknowledges that racisms hurt, that the harms they cause are distressful and enraging. Rather than presume a sort of unflinching resilience and capacity for resistance in racially minoritised communities, it takes practices of antiracist solidarity and empowerment as a problem space. For instance, Fanon's warnings about how the nationalist bourgeois in the postcolony might prioritise its own class interests (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p115) resonates with Gilroy's more recent concern that many antiracist activists have 'domesticated' their struggle by joining the professional DEI consulting industry, where they attempt to make corporate

and government bureaucracies more inclusive, one workshop at a time (*My Britain Is Fuck All*, p388). More recent studies of Muslim resistance and political activism in the UK have stressed that 'Prevent, and the surrounding climate of Islamophobia, has made it less likely for Muslims to mobilise due to a feeling of being under siege' and that there may be 'a gap between recognising discrimination experienced personally and having the networks, confidence, opportunities and political education to feel that activism against Islamophobia is actually possible'.[71] Fanon therefore reminds us that not all responses to a deeply inhuman and inhumane world will lead to the development of effective antiracist politics.

DOUBLE DEVALUATIONS AND THE AGGRIEVED POLITICS OF WHITE ENGLISH VICTIMHOOD

Fanon's critique of racism as a kind of social pathology speaks to why so many white and white-identified British subjects explain and experience the material losses inflicted by the neoliberalism – a predatory housing market, stagnant wages, austerity cuts and crumbling infrastructure[72] – through an ethno-nationalist 'common sense' that blames immigrants and racialised minorities who refuse to 'integrate' (*Fear and Hope*, pp14-17). 'The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing,' Fanon notes (*Toward the African Revolution*, p32). Today's images and ideas of the 'migrant' and the 'asylum seeker' build on racialised ideas of essential, unbridgeable cultural difference,[73] drawing on Islamophobic discourses of civilisational antagonism fomented during the War on Terror.[74] As Tory Leader Kemi Badenoch recently warned, some migrants 'bring behaviours, cultures, and practices that will undermine the West and the values that helped make us great'.[75] While this moral panic over migration has been fuelled by the media and politicians – including by figures like Badenoch from racially minoritised backgrounds themselves – the main opponents of immigration among the general UK populace are racialised as white. In a 2024 study on British attitudes towards ethnic diversity, Hope Not Hate distinguished between 'traditionalists' who oppose immigration and hold negative views of Muslims and multiculturalism; 'Islamosceptics' who have very negative beliefs about immigration and think that Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation; and 'nativists' who think immigration has hurt their communities and have negative views about Muslim and non-Muslim minorities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 88 per cent, 96 per cent, and 96 per cent of these groups identified as white. Those from wealthier backgrounds who owned homes disproportionately fell into the 'traditionalist' category, whereas those with greater experiences of financial precarity and lower educational attainment disproportionately made up the Islamosceptic and nativist categories. Opposing immigration and holding racist views of minorities, perhaps unsurprisingly, often goes hand in hand.
But crucially, as Wendy Brown has pointed out in the US context,

No Paperwork, We Are Guests in This Country": Mothering and Belonging in the Wake of the Windrush Scandal', *Identities*, 31:2, 2024, pp141-160, p149.

67. Aamna Mohdin and Chris Osuh, 'UK Islamophobic Assaults Surged by 73% in 2024, Anti-Hate Crime Charity Reports', *The Guardian*, 19 February 2025.

68. Lisa Rosenthal and Marci Lobel, 'Explaining Racial Disparities in Adverse Birth Outcomes: Unique Sources of Stress for Black American Women', *Social Science and Medicine*, 72:6, 2011, pp977-83. The risk of maternal mortality is significantly higher for women who are not from a white British background. (Marian Knight, Kathryn Bunch, Derek Tuffnell et al., 'Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care – Lessons Learned to Inform Maternity Care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2014-16', MBRRACE-UK, 2018.

69. Nicola Vousden et al., 'Impact of Maternal Risk Factors on Ethnic Disparities in Maternal Mortality: A National Population-Based Cohort Study', *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*, 40, May 2024.

70. Naa Oyo A. Kwate and Shatema Threadcraft, 'Dying

Fast and Dying Slow in Black Space', *Du Bois Review*, 14:2, 2017, pp535-56.

71. Hélène Balazard and Timothy Peace, 'Confronting Islamophobia and Its Consequences in East London in a Context of Increased Surveillance and Stigmatisation', *Ethnicities*, 23:1, 2023, pp88-109.

72. Liz Fekete, *Europe's Fault Lines: Racism and the Rise of the Right*, Verso, 2018.

73. See, for example, Nigel Farage's recent remarks at the right-wing Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference (Eleni Courea, 'Nigel Farage Calls for Reindustrialisation of Britain and Higher Birthrates', *The Guardian*, 18 February 2025).

74. Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, Haymarket Books, 2012. See also, Madeline-Sophie Abbas, 'Conflating the Muslim Refugee and the Terror Suspect: Responses to the Syrian Refugee 'Crisis' in Brexit Britain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42:14, 2019, pp2450-2469.

75. Kemi Badenoch, 'We Need to Fight for Our Values Now or Western Civilisation Will Be Lost', *Daily Mail Online*, 17 February 2025.

76. *Ethnicity and Race in the UK*. See also, Kathleen Henehan and Helena Rose, *Opportunities Knocked? Exploring Pay Penalties*

neoliberalism has inflicted its worst material losses not on those white working class and lower middle-class segments that receive the most attention in the media – or are the most vocal about their sense of 'national decline' – but on racialised minorities and migrants (*Neoliberalism's Frankenstein*, pp60-61). The same has been true in the UK, where the ethnic pay gap remains stubborn and racially minoritised workers are more likely to face labour-market discrimination; be forced into 'low-status and low-reward' roles or into precarious self-employment; be trapped in overcrowded, substandard rental housing; receive worse medical care; and be stopped by the police or incarcerated.[76] This is where neoliberal deindustrialisation's 'double devaluation'[77] becomes important. It isn't just that many British communities racialised as white feel poorer and less secure today, but that increasing numbers make sense of those losses against racialised expectations of superiority and security. As Catherine Hall notes, racialised narratives of superiority and inferiority, deservingness and danger, remain part of a deep 'reservoir of stereotypes' about self and Other that shape the British collective unconscious, ready to be mobilised in new political moments (*Lucky Valley*, p434). The problem is that deprivation, poverty and mould-infested housing were not supposed to happen to British people like them. '[Migrants] are wiping us out and taking our jobs and that's one of the reasons why none of us can get a job,' concludes a white working-class woman in North Bristol. 'I think they should employ British people first.'[78] We can also see this sort of racist logic of expectation operating in recent allegations of 'two-tier policing' that claim the criminal justice system is harsher towards white British people, when decades of evidence suggest the opposite. This narrative of police bias against white communities works partly because it taps into a broader genealogy of working-class opposition to police harassment. But it also recycles a more recent story in British racial commonsense in which the liberal state weaponises antiracism against 'innocent' white people.

Fanon's work on the psychic and affective investments in white superiority also tells us something important about the pleasures to be had, the succour to be taken, from forms of white dominion – even among members of the former metropolitan working classes who no longer reap the material benefits of the imperial settlement. The re-emergent racism of fear over the migrant has also been supplemented by a racism of contempt, which finds consolation in the presumed superiority of Englishness, understood as a blood inheritance marking out those who belong from those who intrude.[79] Notably, many white communities in England have re-articulated their nationalist commitments in relation to Englishness, perhaps in response to the increasingly civic account of Britishness that multicultural rhetoric made available. As Steve Garner remarks, 'it is the more exclusive [ethnic] lure of Englishness that appears to offer more ontological security to white UK people living in provincial England' (*A Moral Economy of Whiteness*, p461). Such feelings of racial and national superiority might become even more tightly

held and actively mobilised in communities whose previous mechanisms of securing recognition and self-esteem (steady employment, affordable housing, debt-fuelled conspicuous consumption) are no longer guaranteed (*Hegemony Now*, pp189-93). These nativist attachments reflect, as Gilroy puts it, 'the increasing fears of those who feel themselves to be superior but find that the postcolonial world withholds automatic assent to their historic demand for power and recognition' (*After Empire*, p45).

This politics of reactionary Englishness, of course, is both classed *and* gendered, with performative rituals of masculine aggression stepping in to shore up traditional forms of working-class male status. The moral panics over 'grooming gangs' of Muslim men and over asylum seekers and foreigners accused of sexual assault have played a central role in the psychosocial drama that is unleashing racist hatred both online and in British streets[80] – drawing on the erotic doubling of both attraction and disgust that Fanon identified in the sexualisation of racisms (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p142). From Southport to Sunderland, Blackpool to Hull, Epping to Ballymena, thousands of men and women – most of whom were racialised as white – have participated in riots and pogroms against asylum seekers and migrants. Many claim to be defending 'our women and children', mobilising affectively-charged images of vulnerable white womanhood to legitimate their cruelty and their violence. Over the past year, rioters have set fire to hotels and houses, burned effigies depicting migrants in boats, thrown bricks, yelled racial slurs, attacked mosques, all in the name of taking back Britain. Fanon reminds us not to underestimate the libidinal pleasures that people might take from participating in these sorts of cruel outbursts, the infectious 'joy' of a crowd that confirms and valorises your hate, the sense of accomplishment that comes from having finally 'done something about it'.

STOP THE BOATS AND THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMATION OF RACIST AND NATIVIST RESENTMENT

Finally, Fanon's critique of white disavowal discloses important facets of the political centre's unwillingness to engage in a substantive project of antiracism, even when confronted with the ascendence of far-right activity online and in the streets. Rather than directly address racism, xenophobia and exclusionary visions of the 'nation', the new Labour government framed violent riots targeting asylum seekers as a problem of 'far-right thuggery' from a few bad actors and called for a strong law-and-order response.[81] The Labour leadership has increasingly sought to ward off growing support for Reform by showing its own authoritarian commitments on migration and crime. As the former Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper was pleased to share, the Home Office 'smashe[d] its targets' by deporting over 19,000 migrants in the first seven months after taking office, bringing deportations to their highest number since 2017.[82] A recent white paper made clear Labour

among the UK's Ethnic Minorities, Resolution Foundation, 2018.

77. Don Kalb, 'Double Devaluations: Class, Value and the Rise of the Right in the Global North', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 23:1, 2023, pp204-19.

78. Quoted in Steve Garner, 'A Moral Economy of Whiteness: Behaviours, Belonging and Britishness,' *Ethnicities*, 12:4, 2012, pp465-483, p453. (Hereafter *A Moral Economy of Whiteness*.)

79. Suman Gupta and Satnam Virdee, 'European Crises: Contemporary Nationalisms and the Language of "Race,"' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:10, 2018, pp1754-1760.

80. Tahir Abbas, 'The Grooming Gang Debate: Navigating Race, Politics, and Justice in the UK,' LSE Blogs, 8 January 2025.

81. BBC News, 'Starmer Condemns "Far-Right Thuggery" As Unrest Continues', BBC, 4 August 2024.

82. Home Office, 'Home Office Smashes Targets with Mass Surge in Migrant Removals', *GOV.UK*, 10 February 2025.

83. *Restoring Control over the Immigration System*, White Paper, Home Office, 12 May 2025.

84. Joshua Nevett, 'UK in Talks to Send Failed Asylum Seekers Abroad', Politics, *BBC News*, 15 May 2025.

85. Keir Starmer, 'PM Remarks at Immigration White Paper Press Conference', 10 Downing Street, 12 May 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025.

86. Patrick English, 'First YouGov MRP since 2024 Election Shows a Hung Parliament with Reform UK as Largest Party', YouGov UK, 26 June 2025.

87. For an incisive discussion of the 'white working class' in UK political discourse today, see Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor*, Cambridge University Press, 2023, Chapter 7.

plans to dramatically limit legal avenues to immigrate by tightening skilled worker visas, enforcing English language requirements for dependents, and making it harder for temporary migrants to stay long term.[83]

Perhaps nothing has been a clearer symbolic marker of Labour's authoritarian centrism than its adoption of the 'stop the boats' project inherited from the Tories. Rather than challenge the racialised preoccupation with asylum seekers as 'foreign invaders' – or admit that the majority of the asylum seekers who arrive in small boats have legitimate claims and only take this path due to the lack of safe, legal routes – the Labour government has ramped up enforcement measures targeting 'people-smuggling gangs' and pursued agreements with countries like Iraq and France to deter migrants by facilitating more deportations and returns. While Starmer did cancel the cruel Rwanda plan upon taking office, Labour is exploring offshoring agreements with eastern European countries to serve as 'return hubs' for the detention and processing of unsuccessful asylum seekers.[84] In outlining his government's approach to immigration, Starmer even made veiled references to Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech, warning Britain risked 'becoming an island of strangers' unless it could 'take back control' of its borders and reduce migration.[85] He has since apologised for the speech's echoes of Powellian racism, but the broader ideological framing speaks to longstanding racist tropes that frame the UK's religious and ethnic minorities as 'not truly' British.

Stoking racism and anti-migrant sentiment may appeal to focus group data, but it doesn't bode well for social democracy. It is difficult to outflank a party like Reform to the right. It has only been a year since Labour swept to power in its 'loveless landslide', and Reform soon surpassed it in a YouGov poll in June 2025, when they were forecasted to secure 271 seats to Labour's 178.[86] By treating the 'white working class' as a coherent voting bloc with legitimate grievances, Labour fails to challenge the complex articulation of racialised ideas of Englishness, anti-migrant discourses and calls for strong state responses to threats.[87] Instead, it accepts the ludicrous premise A. Sivanandan outlined in a 1992 speech – that if there are fewer refugees, there will be fewer fascists (*Our Passports on Our Faces*, p8). Like other centre right and radical right parties in Europe, Labour has sought to ward off right populists by linking anti-immigration policies to a slimmed down version of welfare nationalism, which reserves state resources for the deserving 'indigenous' population. This nativist politics of white enclosure, however, offers more in terms of psychic succour than in material benefits. It is meant to reassure the white working and lower middle classes that even if they are worse off and face decrepit public services, at least migrants aren't getting your social housing, your council tax dollars, your job, your kid's school placement, or your GP appointment.

Most worrying is that these racialised and nationalist feelings of white entitlement and resentment stand in the way of a deeper reckoning with

rampant economic inequality, state capture, environmental catastrophe and social anomie. As Fanon reminds us, one of the most damaging effects of the colonial world's 'Manichean delirium' is the politics that it forecloses. Racisms mystify more than they reveal. They substitute easy answers and affects for the difficult, taxing work of contesting extractive regimes of accumulation or the hierarchical modes of citizenship that regulate which populations are needed for production and which can be made surplus. In this respect, a Fanonian diagnosis might see the ascendency of white authoritarian-populisms today as a pathological response to overlapping crises that the ready 'solidarity' of racial belonging responds to and yet to which it offers no real answers.

CONCLUSION

Such a critique, of course, is by no means new to those on the Left who have been watching with trepidation the rising tide of far-right discourse and political activity. What is it, then, that a Fanonian sociodiagnostic approach adds to this analysis? I argue two things. First, by treating racisms as a social pathology that emerges out of colonial hierarchies and their dreams of 'racial order', Fanon offers a more robust ethical critique. In particular, he shows how regular experiences of racist exclusion and violence can disempower Black and brown communities by exposing them to premature death (and discouraging them from organising with white working classes against the carceral state or financial predation). And he argues that individuals invested in white superiority stand in an alienated and irresponsible relationship to their own agency – and to the people whose equal humanity they deny. Last summer's riots certainly displayed a blithe unconcern for racialised migrants' lives, as the rioters smashed windows, threw petrol bombs, started fires outside the hotels and chanted 'we want our country back' and 'England 'til I die'.[88] Second, and importantly, a Fanonian project embraces social critique. While Fanon certainly rejects racisms as 'inhuman and inhumane', his analyses seek to denaturalise and disinter the pathological social conditions out of which racisms emerge and which they help to reproduce. By diagnosing the ascendence of far-right ethnonationalism as a kind of social pathology, we can see how these moral panics over 'alien' Others function as a kind of explanatory trump card in the British commonsense. They substitute easy narratives of racial threat and familiar affects of fear and resentment for a nuanced and difficult reckoning with the sources of social suffering amid the UK's managed decline. Get out and stay out. Take Britain back. Why smash windows? Because we're British (and therefore we can). This island is ours, not yours, even if your labour and resources built up 'our' wealth.

The long dureé of raciological reason in the UK does not necessarily mean that popular responses to stagnant wages, depleted state resources, dilapidated public infrastructure and unaffordable housing will invoke authoritarian populisms and their racialised explanations of demographic

88. Freddie Clayton, 'Far-Right Riots Erupt in UK in the Wake of Child Murders', NBC News, 4 August 2022.

threat. Other political responses and ideological framings were and are possible. Yet Fanon's writings remind us too that combatting racisms and the 'Manichean delirium' they project upon the world will involve collective political work. The problem, as he continually stressed throughout his oeuvre, lies not with the alienated subject but with the alienating and alienated social world which they are forced to negotiate. As such, disalienation cannot be pursued as an individualist project of moral re-retraining or antiracist education alone. Instead, it will take struggling with others to challenge the racialised commonsense that makes these distinctions between human beings seem both natural and normal – and working to explode the old relations of hierarchical dominance that make the white racial contract[89] a more appealing form of solidarity for many British people than one oriented towards the realisation of a multiracial social democracy.

89. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, 1997.

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