



Introduction to the Special Issue: In Dialogue with Fanonian and Southern Thought

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, which has deepened existing global struggles against coloniality and racist, heteropatriarchal, and capitalist social formations, this special issue focuses on *Fanon, Southern Theory, and Psychoanalysis: Dialogues on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. In dialogue with the work of Frantz Fanon—a key figure in thinking on colonialism and decolonization—and other critical thinkers from the Global South, the contributors raise important questions about the place and relevance of psychoanalysis in contemporary thought and practice. The special issue invites readers to consider the creative and liberatory possibilities for psychoanalysis within and without its epistemic and clinical norms and traditions. This article introduces the special issue and summarizes the nine contributions included here.

Toward the end of April 2020, in a world that has only begun to realize the widespread, devastating, and uneven effects of a global pandemic, Mohamed Seedat and Shahnaaz Suffla, two of the co-editors of this special issue, were invited by Lara Sheehi, who had recently been appointed as a co-editor of *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, to serve as editors of a special issue of the journal. Lara had received approval for her proposal for a special issue centering on Frantz Fanon. Mohamed and Shahnaaz asked Kopano Ratele, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Mireille Fanon Mendès France to join them as co-editors.

Given what had happened at around this time, namely, the public murder of George Floyd in May 2020, we would come to ask, how might Frantz Fanon and other psychoanalytically minded, politically conscious practitioners, scholars, and activists assist us to interpret antiblack racism after that event? With COVID-19 in mind, one might ask, how does antiblack racism intersect with health services within countries, morbidity and mortality, and global health inequities, including, as we came to know, apartheid-like vaccine distribution? How might such interpretations get taken up, elaborated, and reworked in specific situations such as Palestine and South Africa? How might such a specific event, or other defining moments in other places, be harnessed to think about coloniality?

It may be correct to contend that decolonial and critical scholarly focus on antiblack racism and the brutalizations that racist structures germinate—a topic that, simply stated, cannot be fully grasped without Fanon's help—has been rekindled by the murder of Floyd in Minneapolis. Floyd was killed by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin—subsequently found guilty—who knelt on his neck until he died. However, while the shameless, public nature of the killing of this African-American man roused many more people around the world to the fact of police brutality and systemic racism in the United States and other parts of the world, it should not be forgotten that the wave of protests witnessed across the world's media in 2020 following Floyd's death drew from a long history of antiracist and anticolonial intellectual and political thought from across the world. In South Africa, for example, the

struggles against racism and colonialism took more than 300 years, with Black freedom, although not yet freedom from coloniality, coming in 1994. Even after political freedom, the lives of many Black people in the country continue to be dehumanized.

It is against this history that the importance of demands for antiracist praxis and policy, decoloniality, and assertions that Black Lives Matter cannot be overstated. It is critical to underline that these demands and assertions are seen as applicable to the United States, where police brutality against Black people is commonly reported, but also in the former colonial European powers and former colonies. The persistence of coloniality and antiblack racism at the heart of ostensibly liberal democracies, alongside heteropatriarchy, gender oppression, and capitalist exploitation, is a challenge to the health, and protection from violence, of present and future generations. What then do areas that seek to cultivate and promote health and well-being, like psychoanalysis, have to contribute to the search for decoloniality today?

Around the middle of the 20th century, the Martinican psychiatrist and theorist Fanon had argued in eloquent and convincing terms that racism and the problem of alienation among Black people are not restricted to the individual. He added that systemic racism cannot be explained solely or even principally in relation to dynamics among the family or using the family as the main reference to understand alienating and dehumanizing structures and attitudes.

This special issue of *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, a leading peer-reviewed journal in the transdisciplinary field of gender and sexuality studies, situated at the interface of psychoanalysis and social/cultural theory, raises questions about the place and relevance of psychoanalysis as related to race and gender and/or sexuality. In dialogue with Fanon's work and the work of other critical authors from the Global South, we invited submissions that would consider questions such as: How are we to think about and do psychoanalytics of gender and/or sexuality in the age where explicit demands for decoloniality meet assertions that Black Lives Matter and vice versa? How are we to do so in the Global South, where systemic racism is rampant, even though Whites could be demographic minorities, or Mestizo/as take their place ruling? How do repression and the unconscious work in gender and sexuality in contexts dramatically marked and defined by coloniality? Should decolonial thought even consider the unconscious in analyses of gender and sexual phenomena? What is the contribution of Fanonian sociogeny to psychoanalysis and vice versa? What are the implications of conceptualizations of the coloniality of gender for psychoanalysis, and what are decolonizing possibilities for sexual desire in our historical moment? How may we bring nonnormative psychoanalysis into conversation with decolonial and liberatory enactments of community psychology on questions of race, gender, and sexuality? How may the conceptual resources of nonnormative psychoanalysis dialogue with Fanonian thought and Southern theory to support resistance to persistent patterns in the racialization, gendering, and sexualizing of space and the spatialization of race, gender, and sexuality?

This special issue contains nine contributions, including one from the guest editors, "Fanon's Decolonial Transcendence of Psychoanalysis." Through an intimate reading of Fanon, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Mireille Fanon Mendès France, Shahnaaz Suffla, Mohamed Seedat, and Kopano Ratele raise the salience of "two challenges: the decolonial transcendence of psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework, and a decolonial transcendence of psychoanalysis as a practice." These challenges "are part of more general decolonial transcendence of disciplines and healing practices that one encounters in Fanon's work." They are embedded within our thinking and practices for transcending the disciplines; for advancing multidimensionality in our explications of human conditions, sociability, and alterity; and for forging decolonizing healing practices. After succinctly describing how the Fanonian turn in psychoanalysis denotes a decolonial and Fanonian oath for healing, the authors "turn to an Azanian instantiation of liberatory praxis as a way of engaging situated enactments and possibilities toward the decolonial and Fanonian oath." They "offer an articulation that derives from the nexi of the psychological, political, and ethical, and forms of creative undisciplining to consider the work of healing in the context of the systemic wounding of Black life and attendant traumatic materialities, which remain immanently placed in the lived experience of being Black in an antiblack world."

In their article, Peace Kiguwa and Garth Stevens examine gender-based violence in the postapartheid South African context, asking what such violence's relation to racialization is, as well as what might be left out of frames employed to understand violence. Their main interest is in how violence is made visible and legible, but also in signaling how such legibility masks and covers, rendering violence illegible. In their contribution, "Troubling Apprehensions of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Fanon's Sociogeny as a Psycho-Social Lens?," they offer a rereading of the oeuvre of Frantz Fanon to provide alternative insights and renderings of our apprehension of gender-based violence in the context of contemporary South Africa. An important question they pose is, how might the "psychosocial and socially inflected emotional/affective psychoanalytic lenses of Fanon's psycho-political oeuvre offer" tools to engage "with the problematics of temporality/historicity, spatiality and subjectivity in relation to an alternative apprehension of contemporary gender-based violence"?

Drawing from the work of liberation psychiatrists and psychologists that exposes the complex dialectic of interpersonal and intrapersonal structural processes on the one hand, and racialized ideologies on the other, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Abeer Otman, and Rasmieyh Abdelnabi's article, "Secret Penetrabilities: Embodied Coloniality, Gendered Violence, and the Racialized Policing of Affects," presents a psychopolitical analysis on the politics and violence of secrecy in the lives of "the colonized living in Occupied East Jerusalem." The authors regard secrecy, when summoned by the state, as "a carceral psychic and political strategy to widen the scope of domination." The aim of the contribution is to "expand on critical scholarship examining the settler colonial state's construction and control of affects, intimacy, and violence against women, particularly its use of 'secret information' as violence against those living under racialized, occupied and settler colonial domination."

Centering the notion of rupture, Ursula Lau asks where psychoanalysis can "offer a mode of looking to make sense of intersubjective racialized enactments" and where it is able to "do so ethically when historically, it has been blind to its own Eurocentric gaze in inscribing the colonial script." In her contribution, "Between Fanon and Lacan: Rupturing Spaces for the Return of the Oppressed," Lau uses something of herself at a certain point in time, "a woman, heavily pregnant, a first-time mother-to-be, Asian-Chinese, South African, a student collecting data for my Ph.D.," as a subject of analysis in her contribution "to the various efforts to engage with a sociodiagnosis of the psyche, with particular reference to how the unconscious speaks intersubjectively and socially between racialized subjects." Surfacing what she refers to as "unconscious ruptures," when denied, racism "speaks through everyday enactments structured through our modes of looking." The article stages a kind of dialogue between Lacanian psychoanalytic "gaze" and Fanonian sociogenic "look" in order "to explore possibilities for decolonial engagement."

"The Empire of Denial" by Sophie Mendelsohn is a reconsideration of "the supposed failed encounter" between Frantz Fanon and Octave Mannoni in order to "readdress the Freudian concept of denial and the way it can be used as a powerful analyzer of the persistence of racism." Cognizant of the curious delay in investigating the unconscious determination of race in psychoanalysis as a whole, in contrast to the topic of sex and sexuality, her interest is in psychoanalysis in France. She contends that "the specificity of the French situation allows us to consider . . . how the imperialist policy that was at the foundation of the European colonial enterprise, contemporary with Freud's development as a rising psychoanalytic theorist, extends itself in unconscious procedures, both collective and individual. By focusing on a Freudian defense process, the denial, we will try to show what 'counter-empire' it exerts to prevent political decolonizations from being translated into subjective decolonizations." Her contribution also draws on "Jacques Lacan's later proposals for thinking about postcolonial racism with a conceptual tool of psychoanalysis, namely, that of *jouissance* (enjoyment)."

The article "Black Flesh Matters! The Human Stakes of BLM and Rethinking the Psychoanalytic Subject," by Michelle Stephens, reflects on the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement in relation to the psychoanalytic movement in the United States. Stephens traces "a discursive and aesthetic history of racialized skin in order to reflect on how we think about human life itself, recognizing our inheritance of modern Western epistemologies steeped in imperialist and colonialist, racializing, European discourses." One of her two goals is to show how a certain notion of a body-

without-skin, which is to say the subject as incorporeal, “becomes the precondition for excluding certain raced, sexed, and gendered subjects from the category of human life itself.” The other is to “make visible how, in their own political and personal commitments, the three women credited with being the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement modeled a black feminist stance in which words remain tethered to fleshy bodies. In so doing they reanimated our relationship to our own somatic experience, to libido as living being, and to the black body as flesh.” 145

Drawing a line from Black men dehumanized by racism to radical political love, in his contribution, “Biko’s Black Conscious Thought Is Useful for Extirpating the Fear of Whites Deposited in Black Masculinity,” Kopano Ratele opens up about his experience of racism-induced fear of White people, that is, “a fear of horrible bodily death as much as social nonexistence.” He interprets this as a fear of Black death. Revolving around Steve Biko, a leader in the Black Consciousness Movement that flourished in South Africa during the late 1960s and 1970s, and who is regarded as an eminent psychopolitical activist, the article is an effort to work out how the fear of White people deposited by racism inside of Black people might be extirpated. Black Conscious thought, it is contended, carries the possibility of (politically and psychologically) loving masculinity, enabling individuals to stamp out racism-induced fear. Ratele writes that “I see the process that Biko speaks of regarding outgrowing the imprisoning Black identity permitted under segregationist ideology as a process that involves becoming more loving of Blackness.” 150 155 160

Beginning with the assertion that vulnerability to oppression is increased as a result of “intersecting colonialities,” Lillian Comas-Díaz’s contribution “AfroLatinx Females: Coloniality, Gender, and Transformation” contends that AfroLatinx females, whom she contrasts with other Latinx females, struggle with postcolonization traumas, as well as with a colonial mentality. At the same time, Comas-Díaz’s observes that “currently, numerous AfroLatinx females are rejecting their colonial racial appellations,” such as *negras*, *morenas*, *prietas*, *cholas*, *mulatas*, *trigueñas*, *jabás*, and *grifas*, “in order to name themselves, fight gendered racism, and develop a new consciousness.” In the article, she presents “an analysis of the AfroLatinx females’ realities from a coloniality of power, knowledge, and gender perspectives.” She also introduces “a decolonial integrative healing approach” geared toward “enhancing AfroLatinx females’ psychological wellness and buen vivir, the Aymara worldview of living a life of fullness.” The approach “involves an integration of liberation psychology, womanism and *mujerismo* (psychospiritual female of color liberation), and indigenous healing into a cultural competence informed psychoanalytic theory and practice.” 165 170

Maricruz Rivera Clemente’s “Memories From Piñones: Unapologetically Blackly Beautiful Women” tells a multilayered story “of being a Black person in the historically black-majority town of Piñones in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico through the eyes of the author and other Black women.” Growing up within a family and town largely composed of Black people while she was perceived as White, the author notes that she would doubt her identity. She established an organization, Corporación Piñones se Integra, through which she would find, following a needs assessment, that “a significant number of respondents did not identify as Black. They believed that Black people belonged to other ethno-racial groups such as the Dominicans, Haitians, and even other neighboring communities.” She suggests that “this seeming acquiescing to coloniality’s racialized, hierarchical subjectivities is an expression perhaps of the unconscious desire that these subjectivities might deliver us from the deep alienation that is characteristically engendered in and by racialized social systems.” Her aim is “to interrupt and counter predominant perceptions of Black women and their roles in the community.” 175 180 185

Acknowledgments

As an editorial collective we approached this special issue as integral to the larger transnational dynamic work of building and supporting critical, compassionate, and considered companionship among and between scholar activists, activist thinkers, organizers, and practitioners who write, think, reflect, and engage on race, racism, gender, and sexuality, and who insist on breathing deeply wherever they may be located. From the onset, our intention was to 190

bring all the accomplished contributors into conversation with the editorial collective, with each other, and then with a wide readership situated across multiple geographical and sociological spaces. Building critical compassionate companionship as resistance against persistent and ever-morphing forms of coloniality and the myriad manifestations of oppressive and extractive relationships is an ethico-political responsibility and professional imperative. 195

In this instance, despite our faltering in some moments, the responsibility was gifted to us by Lara Sheehi, a tireless advocate for the relevance of southern theory and for the cause of liberation and decoloniality. Lara, you registered full confidence and unconditional trust in us as the editorial collective. You nourished us with your composed and delicately framed thoughts when we were in danger of floating deadlines or felt uncertain. Your interventions were always generative and punctuated with fecundity. Thank you. 200

We are honored by all the contributors who accepted our invitation to write for the special issue. We are mindful that despite your accomplished records, histories, and the many writing opportunities and invitations you receive regularly, you elected to write and think along and with us about the multidimensional intersections among race, racism, gender, and sexuality. Your contributions bring fresh and incisive thinking to southern theory and scholarship. We experienced the spirit of liberatory community, albeit transitory, in working with you all. 205

Shahnaaz and Mohamed were delighted when Nelson, Mireille, and Kopano accepted their invitation to join the editorial collective. Nelson, we know that we leaned on you beyond what may be expected of a comrade professor activist. Your elegant, incisive, and considered interventions made working with you a comradely learning experience. Mireille, we are inspired by your leadership, critical thinking, and activism and consider ourselves fortunate that you were able to take time from your important work in the Frantz Fanon Foundation to offer crucial input at each step of the editorial process. Kopano, your inputs and valuable contributions amid migration and change were much appreciated. 210

Josephine Cornell, your sophisticated skills and artistry as the editorial assistant helped produce an intellectually pleasing journal special issue. Nick Malherbe, we are grateful for your generous contributions to the making of community in which this special issue is placed. 215

Managing editor Jeff Jackson, we thank you for your flexibility and support.

Finally, we recognize the shaping influences of our many intellectual and activist ancestors and formative communities who bequeath us a rich liberatory tradition that affirms and insists on critical thinking, regard, dignity, action, ethics, and connection as the substance of radical humanism. We offer this special issue as part of the work of radical humanism. 220

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Kopano Ratele is professor of psychology at the University of Stellenbosch and Head of the Stellenbosch Centre for Critical and Creative Thought. He has published extensively, and his books include *There Was This Goat: Investigating the Truth Commission Testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile* (2009, co-authored with Antjie Krog and Nosisi Mpolweni, *Liberating Masculinities* (2016), *Engaging Youth in Activism, Research and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives on Gender, Sex, Race* (2018, co-edited with Jeff Hearn, Tammy Shefer, and Floretta Boonzaier), and *The World Looks Like This From Here: Thoughts on African Psychology* (2019). 225

Shahnaaz Suffla is an associate professor at the University of South Africa, senior researcher affiliated with the South African Medical Research Council, and President-Elect of the Psychological Society of South Africa. Her thinking and scholarship are influenced by the vision of research as a transforming, humanizing, and decolonizing enterprise. Her research interests include a focus on community-engaged interventions in contexts of structural and epistemic violence, participatory engagement as a site of activism, resistance, and social change, and Africa-centered knowledges and knowledge-making. Shahnaaz has numerous publications in her areas of interest. She is a reviewer and editorial team member for select journals, including *Journal of Community Psychology*, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, *Feminism and Psychology*, and *Social and Health Sciences*. 235

Mohamed Seedat heads the Institute for Social and Health Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He directed the Violence, Injury and Peace Promotion Research Unit, a national UNISA and South African Medical Research Council initiative, for 19 years. His current scholarship revolves around liberation, critical and decolonial community–social psychology, the social anatomy of protests, emancipatory approaches to health, safety, and peace promotion, psychologies underlying large-scale sociopolitical transformation in “postcolonial” contexts, transdisciplinary knowledge architectures, and indigenous knowledge-making spaces. Mohamed continues to support community-engaged research, the capacitation of next generation socially engaged researchers and academic leaders, and the transformation of writing cultures in the academy. Mohamed is a member of numerous professional bodies, including the Academy of Science of South Africa. 240

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