Fanon through Lacan: Decolonization via Psychoanalysis

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents Heddy and Eric Walsarie Wolff. Without their endless love,

kindness and support I could never have been the person I am today. Ik hou van jullie!

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Introduction

On the 20th of March 2020, several Dutch media outlets produced reports about the royal visit of king

Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands to the Republic of Indonesia that had taken place the day before.

As one could tell from the headlines, this specific royal visit was considered by many to be an

extraordinary one: not just for the sole reason of Indonesia having been a colony of the Netherlands in

the past, but because of something that took place during the visit that can be understood as a direct

consequence of this colonial past. The Dutch king managed to surprise friend and foe during this visit as

he offered the Republic of Indonesia and its people an official apology for the *"derailment of violence on

the Dutch side"* that took place *"in the years directly following the Proklamasi (independence) that cost

the lives of many"*[1] (translation provided by the author). As RTL Nieuws rightly points out, this gesture

was not an apology for the colonial past in general, but more specifically one for the Dutch side of this

eruption of violence that took place in the wake of Indonesian independence[2]. Even though an apology

for any instance of excessive violence would seem to be a crucial and healthy step in any process of

reconciliation, this particular case caused a wide variety of emotional responses, not all of them being

positive. The FIN (Federatie Indische Nederlanders) stated that they were *"unpleasantly surprised and

deeply affected"* by the king's move[3]. In their statement they claimed that their *"parents would turn in

their graves when hearing this news"*, describing their parents as *"a group who barely survived the

Indonesian slaughtering and of which many worked on the rebuilding of the Netherlands after the

Second World War"*[4]. A representative of the FIN further added that these apologies *"shamelessly

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[1] Tonny van der Mee, "Koning biedt excuses aan voor Nederlands geweld in Indonesië", *Algemeen Dagblad,* March 10, 2020. https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/koning-biedt-excuses-aan-voor-nederlands-geweld-in-indonesie~ae345c22/.
[2] RTL Nieuws, "Blijdschap, maar ook woede om excuses van de koning", March 10, 2020. https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/5050841/blijdschap-en-boosheid-om-excuus-van-de-koning#:~:text=Tegen%20de%20verwachtingen%20in%2C%20maakte,maar%20er%20is%20ook%20woede.
[3] https://www.federatie-indo.nl/20-03-10/
[4] Ibid.

ignored the suffering and sadness of 'Indisch Nederland': a group that suffered severely under Indonesian terror"[5]. Regardless of whether one chooses to 'pick a side' or not, it is clear that the symbolic gesture that was meant as a step towards reconciliation between the colonizer and the colonized has, arguably, done more harm than it has done good in terms of actual reconciliation. But how can this be the case? How can it be that a seemingly harmless and well-intentioned gesture of apologizing for something as abominable as excessive violence is capable of producing such discord among people involved? Put more bluntly: how can a conscious gesture of postcolonial reconciliation seemingly cause the polar opposite of actual reconciliation? I would argue that the dynamics that seem to be in play in this particular instance can be used to exemplify a mindset that is present in both the public discourse surrounding the socio-political reality of post-colonial times, as well as in the academic discourse of postcolonial studies.

This rhetorical and philosophical predicament can be accurately described by citing the words of Gautam Basu Thakur who writes the following:

"In effect, on the one hand, postcolonial studies today is dominated by a competition for tragedy (i.e., discover who is the most victimized among all victims), anointing in process the victim of history as the only authentic subject (of speech)."[6]

Applying this reading to the particular case of the Dutch king's apologies allows for an understanding of why such anger could arise among the Dutch-Indonesian part of society. As was highlighted by the spokesperson of the FIN, there were eruptions of violence on multiple sides of the conflict at the time, and the one-sided apology provided by the king seems to have provoked such passionate responses due

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[5] Sebastiaan Quekel, "Woede bij Indische Nederlanders: 'Onze ouders draaien zich om in hun graf door excuses koning'", *Algemeen Dagblad*, March 10, 2020. https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/woede-bij-indische-nederlanders-onze-ouders-draaien-zich-om-in-hun-graf-door-excuses-koning~a9b49b8b/.

[6] Gautam Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack: Identity, Culture, Surplus* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020): xiv.

to the fact that it presented the Indonesian people as the winner of this 'competition for tragedy', effectively making them 'the only authentic subject of speech'. However, the unfortunate side of this dynamic is that where there is a winner, there must also be a loser: in this case the Dutch-Indonesian group. But can the underlying dynamic of our postcolonial thinking really be based on that of a zero-sum-game? This thesis will argue that the example of the king's apology shows that this cannot be the case. Observing the negative emotive responses to the apology, this thesis will explore the philosophical structures that the gesture of the apology is based upon in order to show how this structure is fundamentally lacking in a way that prevents it from reaching the goal it was trying to achieve in the first place.

I should be clear: this is by no means to be read as a downgrading of the violence that was endured by the Indonesian people. However, once the situation of an all-out war has come into being, personal losses and other traumas take place on both sides in the process. The Dutch-Indonesians who fought in the war have suffered these personal traumas too, in the name of the country that sent them there in order to preserve the colony (the Kingdom of the Netherlands), adding even more dark irony to the fact that it is precisely this royal house that has now distanced themselves from the deeds in question. The overarching sentiment that is present in the Dutch-Indonesian segment of society is that those of Dutch-Indonesian descend are now portrayed as 'the bad guys', effectively denying them a voice to articulate the traumas experienced during this war but also stripping these traumas of any potential for carrying symbolic meaning. After all, one cannot give symbolic meaning to traumas if they were consequences of actions that took place in the name of the 'wrong side of history'.

So what are we to do with this phenomenon? Are we to simply ignore these emotions and tell these people that they should not complain, blaming the tide of history for their predicament? Or are we to read this situation as a symptom of an underlying inconsistency, telling us that these dynamics of postcolonial thinking are perhaps not well-developed enough for achieving their actual goal of

reconciliation? I suggest the latter, while at the same time proposing a different theoretical framework that can help us to look beyond deadlocks such as the one discussed above, thereby bringing postcolonial thought one step closer to achieving actual reconciliation instead of only ending up with new points of hostility. In order to do this, I will argue that postcolonial philosophy must return to an alignment with a field of study with which it has a rather uncomfortable history: that of Lacanian psychoanalysis. By achieving this, the discipline will be able to move beyond dead ends, and we will be enabled to read the grand masters such as Franz Fanon in a new, constructive and academically innovative way.

Turning to the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan will enable a conceptualization of the nature of the symbolic gesture of the apology that shows how both the origin of the gesture, as well as the philosophical structure of such a gesture, are antithetical to the original intention of achieving post-colonial reconciliation. Having thereby properly outlined the problematic nature and structure of such gestures, the philosophical analysis of Frantz Fanon will provide a possible solution to this problematic situation by showing a way out of it. This synthesis between a Lacanian question and a Fanonian answer will provide the basis for a new way of looking at and dealing with questions of postcoloniality: it will show how it was possible for the well-intended gesture of the king to produce such counter-productive emotive results, as well as suggesting an outline for how a different approach to such post-colonial situation might be taken in future endeavours.

Methodology

To begin with, an overview of the literature on both the tradition of postcolonial studies and the relationship between psychoanalysis and the Fanonian project of postcolonial studies will be provided. Throughout history, these two academic traditions have had a rather controversial relationship. On the one hand, one can read Fanon's work as being thoroughly influenced by the psychoanalytic discourse: not only in the fact that Lacan's work is cited multiple times in *Black Skin, White Masks*, but it will be shown that a close reading of this work can even show that Fanon shared a conceptual overlap with Lacan to a significant extent.

However, on the other hand there exists a substantial stream of literature that has been criticizing psychoanalysis from a postcolonial perspective, proclaiming it to be unsuitable for and even hostile towards the postcolonial project in general. What this literature review will do is develop a working definition of postcolonial theory that enables a proper analysis of the situation outlined in the introduction. Following this, chapter two will show that the history of hostility between the two traditions of postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis is a largely unfounded one, and that this animosity is largely based on concerns that have actually already been taken into account in the development of Lacan's discourse of psychoanalytic analysis. Acknowledging this will open the door towards letting both disciplines engage with one another once again for the purpose of further developing both.

Having established the theoretical groundwork upon which further argumentation can be produced, the third chapter will put forward the argument that the problematic deadlock within postcolonial thinking that was encountered in the introduction can actually be constructively dealt with through the application of a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of both the king's apology itself and its philosophical structure, as well as the way through which this apology was realized. Lacan's theory of subjectivity as consisting of the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real will be

combined with his theory of desire, showing the fundamental role that desire plays in this Lacanian theory of subjectivity. First of all, this will help understanding why exactly the gesture of the king's apology is in fact a deeply unproductive one and therefore a pseudo-gesture to anyone who want to achieve actual progress in the postcolonial sense. Secondly, it will also direct us towards new imagined ways of overcoming such deadlocks. This Lacanian reading of the problem is an important step in conceptualizing the problem, but in order to try and overcome it we need to go one step further.

This next step will take place in the fourth chapter, where the problem outlined so far will, in an attempt to create a potential solution, be infused with the critical theory of Franz Fanon, most notably as it is represented in his work "*Black Skin, White Masks*". In this chapter it will be argued that, when read through a Lacanian lens, the Fanonian notion of the "zone of none being" can serve as a starting point for furthering postcolonial thinking today. It must be said that I am by no means trying to reduce Fanon's work to a mere 'branch' of Lacanian analysis, as the mastermind that is Fanon deserves more credit than that. But the point being made here is not one of trying to equate two thinkers with one another: it is an effort of not only reading an author's concept through the lens of another author, but of using the previously established Lacanian framework to show how this Fanonian concept can actually function as a starting point for the creation of newer imaginaries that might help further develop both psychoanalytical as well as postcolonial means of analysis. If anything, it will be aiming at providing Fanon's ideas and analyses with a new, fresh coating of paint; an attempt to show how, in order to try and fix contemporary discourses, we can try and learn from the grand-masters of the past by taking their old philosophical gems and polishing them to shine like new. This method will not only be able to produce exciting new results and developments in the academic fields, but it will also show that whatever problems might exist in contemporary postcolonial thinking are not necessarily due to some supposed fundamental lack or shortcoming in the field and its founding fathers, and that they might have instead resulted from not drawing upon their philosophical gems enough.

Chapter 1 - Postcolonial Studies: An Overview

The following chapter will provide an overview of the literature on the issues that make up the most significant theoretical backdrop against which this thesis is written. Outlining these specific debates is paramount to properly understanding the philosophical motive, as well as the theoretical validity of the thoughts and suggestions that emerge from this research.

First, a summary will be given of the most contemporary debates concerning the field of postcolonial studies in general. This will facilitate understanding the most important questions that shape the discipline today: both external questions that relate to potential objects of analysis, as well as internal questions on what the discipline actually is or ought to be striving for. Having established this fundament, I will elaborate on the role of decolonizing subjectivity itself and the relation of this process to the field of postcolonial studies.

Following this, a more specific synopsis will be given of the literature on the history of postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis as disciplines, providing the opportunity to reflect upon what has at sometimes been a difficult relationship, and to start trying to bridge the gap between them as a means of furthering the development of both.

Postcolonial Studies as a Construction of Discourse

As a colleague of mine once jokingly yet accurately remarked: if you would ask one hundred different postcolonial scholars what exactly constitutes the discipline of postcolonial studies, you would probably get one hundred different answers. Even though this might have been said in an informal context, it nonetheless highlights an important characteristic of postcolonial studies, namely its heterogeneity.

This may in part be due to the fact that it is a relatively young established discipline within the academy, but it most definitely also has to do with the fact that different scholars have different opinions about what constitutes both the object of postcolonial studies, as well as about the exact dynamics that a postcolonial analysis should consist of. This is only natural when taking into consideration the differences that existed between all the different colonial situations that have existed in the past. For example, in his 2021 article *Asymmetries: South Africa, Ireland and Postcolonial Comparison*, Parsons notes that "*comparisons often rely on an assumed solidarity or affinity based on a shared colonial history, but the radically different economic and political realities of the two sites make such assumptions unstable*"[7]. Even though this specific example is about South Africa and Ireland, it nonetheless captures an important essence of postcolonial studies that it owes to the colonial situation that it arose from: its great diversity. Even though it is the case that for every case of colonialism there is a shared factor of oppression, it simply cannot be said that the actual lived experience of colonialism turned out the same everywhere.

In Parsons' example, the vastly different 'economic and political realities' of South Africa and Ireland are the reason for not being able to simply compare the colonial histories of the two countries. This reason is based on differences in the colonized regions, but the same holds for the different colonizers. Present-day Cameroon, for example, has been under both British and French colonial rule, and the British and French colonial practice in this territory differed substantially in several important categories that all contributed to the lived colonial experience being significantly different in both areas[8]. Noting the different ways in which different colonizers engaged in the colonization of different areas, and adding to that the vastly different economic and social realities of these colonized areas, the

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[7] Cóilín Parsons, "Asymmetries: South Africa, Ireland and Postcolonial Comparison," *Interventions* (London, England) 23, no. 1 (2021): 1. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1813610.
[8] Alexander Lee and Kenneth A. Schultz, "Comparing British and French Colonial Legacy: A Discontinuity Analysis of Cameroon," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 7 (2012): 3. https://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/alexander_lee/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/lee-schultz-2012.pdf.

overall history of colonialism simply cannot be generalized. Following from this, any analysis of these diverse colonial situations is naturally going to be just as diverse, hence the great variety of different answers to the question of what postcolonialism consists of. This is not necessarily to say that all these different opinions rule each other out, but the differences in colonial situations surely make the field a very heterogeneous one, since a different colonial situation requires a different mode of analysis in order to produce meaningful results.

For beginning to make sense of all the different possibilities of what can be considered to fall under the term of 'postcolonial studies', we can refer to a key text written by Stephen Slemon which can be found in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader,* which says the following on the term:

"It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and [..] *as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies"*[9].

This quote provides a variety of useful examples of the different critical and constructive ways in which postcolonial studies can be conceptualized. Some of these possibilities focus on the creation of new emphases of study in the wake of a decolonized world, such as the emergence of postcolonial literature

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[9] Stephen Slemon, "The Scramble for Post-colonialism," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge: 45.

as juxtaposed to 'Commonwealth' literature or the 'condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings'. Other definitions are based on conceptualizing postcolonial studies as constitutively being a 'perspective' or mode of analysis through which one can analyse contemporary phenomena, as is seen in the example of postcolonialism as a 'critique of totalizing Western historicism' or the form of analysis that explores the inherent 'underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power'.

Another outline of postcolonial studies is given by Homi K. Bhabha, who writes that "*postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order*"[10]: a definition which again clearly emphasizes postcolonial studies as a kind of mode of analysis from which one can conduct meaningful and critical analysis and one that is clearly aiming at moving away from an situation of 'uneven forces of cultural representation'. This 'moving away' can also be found in Achille Mbembe's account of postcolonial studies when he mentions that "*postcolonial thinking stresses humanity-in-the-making, the humanity that will emerge once the colonial figures of the inhuman and of racial difference have been swept away*"[11].

I would add to this list of possible types of objects of analysis for postcolonial studies scenarios such as the one of the king's apology that was discussed in the introduction to this thesis. After all, a discussion of this scenario consists of an analysis of a socio-political significant act that takes place in the period after colonial rule, but which nonetheless in its content explicitly deals with the contemporary narratives that directly relate to the colonial past. This need not limit itself to statements delivered by a head of state regarding colonial history: it could extend to questions regarding the potential removal of statues, or debates on how a museum ought to frame and give shape to an exposition. In short, I would

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[10] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency," *The Location of Culture.*
[11] https://www.eurozine.com/what-is-postcolonial-thinking/

argue that any question regarding the creation or alteration of a contemporary discourse relating back to the colonial times could also fall under the term of 'postcolonial analysis'. I consider this to be the case not only because it is an analysis that takes place in the post-independence era, but also because it is about issues that relate to the way in which we collectively give meaning to the colonial past and, by extension, to our postcolonial social reality in which we live today.

What these definitions have in common so far is that they all come together to eventually give shape to a discourse of postcoloniality; a discourse that can function both as a point of departure for critical analysis of contemporary phenomena, as well as a set goal for this analysis in trying to build towards a post-colonial humanity that has rid itself of the influences of the colonial discourse. In this sense, it can be said that postcolonial studies is the totality of studies and analyses that gives rise to theories that try to explain how to move from a colonial discourse towards a postcolonial discourse. These theories can be called 'decolonial theories', a term to which I shall return later on, which in turn come together to facilitate the creation of postcolonial discourse. In this definition, the 'postcolonial discourse' as it has been described can be understood by referring to Mbembe's 'humanity-in-the-making', referring to a new discourse to be created that exists both after the time of colonization and one that is no longer influenced by the inhumanities of the colonial discourse. This postcolonial discourse is then created by postcolonial studies' endeavours of critically engaging with the objects of analysis that were outlined in the section above, as these critical engagements give rise to decolonial theories. These decolonial theories are then instrumental to creating a postcolonial discourse, as they are the theoretical ways through which the creation of this postcolonial discourse is achieved.

In this thesis, I want to argue how the example of the king's apology and the negative emotive responses it produced can be read as a symptom of how the decolonial theory in play in this scenario is fundamentally lacking. Since the apology was intended to move beyond the Dutch-Indonesian colonial discourse, the gesture must have had a decolonial theoretical motivation. In this case, it was the

presupposition that such an apology could contribute to a moving away from the colonial discourse, and towards a discourse that is both post-colonial and postcolonial. In order to make this argument, it is necessary to pay some more attention to how exactly these terms 'post-colonial', 'postcolonial' and 'decolonial' are to be understood in relation to one another. Conceptualizing these nuances will open up the way towards understanding the crucial aspect of postcoloniality that is in play in this particular example, namely the decolonization of the subject.

Post-Colonial, Postcolonial and Decolonization

What might look like a trivial difference between spelling the term either with or without hyphen actually signifies a difference in understanding of the term that is crucial in trying to make sense of it within the multitude of different definitions at hand, as much as it symbolizes this multitude of different ways in which one can interpret the term. This difference can be unpacked by taking a closer look at what the different constructions of the words actually mean.

To begin with, there is the prefix 'post': this prefix generally takes on the definition of 'after'. A post mortem research refers to an investigation that takes place *after* someone passed away, just as postmodern, notwithstanding its variety of contested definitions, for sure refers to a period *after* modernism. What these examples show is that both terms do not only signify a period of time that took place after another specific period. It also signifies that the entire term 'post mortem' or 'postmodernism' obtains part of its definition by negating its predecessor. Postmodernism is both *no longer* modernism as much as it is *the negation of* modernism.

Here immediately some parallels can be made with the term 'postcolonial'. First, postcolonial certainly refers to something that takes place in the time period after colonialism in the direct sense as we know it today. The term actually signified only this when it first started to appear in the academic

discourse. As Neil Lazarus observes about the use of the term in the early 1970's, that "*when Hamza*

Alavi and John S. Saul wrote about the state in "post-colonial" societies in 1972 and 1974, respectively,

they were using the term in a strict historically and politically delimited sense, to identify the period

immediately following decolonization"[12], adding that ""*Post-colonial", in these usages from the early*

1970's, was a periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept"[13] which "*bespoke no political*

desire or aspiration, looked forward to no particular social or political order"[14]. How different this

definition is from, for example, the definition provided by Bhabha, who in the very definition of

'postcolonial' already presupposes not only "*unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation"* but

also formulates this idea as situated within a "*contest for political and social authority within the modern*

world order". Whereas 'post-colonial' is merely dealing with indicating a period of time, 'postcolonial'

carries with it an explicit desire to move away from colonialism and its effects and aftermath, and an

intention of creating a 'postcolonial discourse' as one that can replace the colonial discourse.

There is, however, a pitfall in this conceptualization that should be noted. Seeing a postcolonial

discourse as merely being a negation of a colonial discourse has the risk of reducing the postcolonial

discourse to what Michael Eze has called a 'residual term'. A residual term, as defined by Eze, exists

together with and is dependent on a 'lead term', which in this case would be 'colonial'. In such cases,

"*the lead term (development, capitalist, industrial etc.) embodies a universal significance and analytical*

essence. The residual term (underdevelopment, precapitalist etc) does neither generate an authentic

history nor a genuine future insofar as its essence is defined and dependent on its lead twin term"[15]. If,

then, 'postcolonialism' as a residual term is not capable of generating a genuine future, some caution

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[12] Neil Lazarus, "Introducing Postcolonial Studies," *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies,* 1-16. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 2.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 149.

should be taken in using the term in such a manner. If this is not done, then the 'humanity-in-the-making' highlighted by Mbembe can never be achieved. In this case, the colonial discourse will always be needed in order to sustain the essence of the postcolonial discourse, thereby not achieving the actual goal of moving beyond the colonial discourse.

However, it simply cannot be denied that in order to be a postcolonial discourse, this discourse per definition has to drop certain aspects of the colonial discourse which preceded it. Therefore, in order to avoid fully reducing the postcolonial discourse to a residual term, the aforementioned distinction between the postcolonial discourse itself and the decolonial theories that are instrumental to it can be called upon. In this distinction, the decolonial theories can function as the residual essence, since these theories are instrumental to navigating a way away from the essential characteristics of the colonial discourse. The postcolonial discourse that this process gives rise to can then be constructed in a way that does not only juxtaposes it with the colonial discourse, but can instead aim at creating a 'genuine future' that is informed by decolonial theory. In order to understand this claim, some further elaboration on 'decolonial theory' and its aim is warranted.

'Decolonial theory', which can be seen as theory aiming at 'decolonization', can to a large extent be analysed in a similar fashion as has been done until now. To begin with, the same principle holds for this term as for 'postcolonial', which is that a prefix plays a big part in the definition of the term. In this sense, 'decolonization' is to be understood as the reversal of colonization. But even this understanding can be taken to different levels of interpretation, as has been done throughout the years. First, there is what might be called a literal or technical definition of the term, or the 'traditionalist definition' as Helene von Bismarck calls it, who understands it as "*a process by which legally dependent territories obtained their constitutional independence and entered the world stage of international relations as*

sovereign states"[16]. This definition reflects much of the same social and political neutrality as the

technical definition of postcolonial, basing its definition largely on the indication of a specific period in

time. However, the second definition that she gives is a lot more loaded, as she writes that

decolonization can also be understood as *"the reversal of the process of European imperial expansion*

with all its political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic consequences"[17]. Such a definition was,

albeit in different words, already being formulated as early as 1967 by American historian David

Gardinier, who wrote, as noted by Raymond Betts, that decolonization *"was initially a political*

phenomenon soon extended in meaning to include all elements incurred in the colonial experience,

'whether political, economic, cultural or psychological'"[18]. This definition of decolonization opens up the

possibility of properly understanding decolonization and decolonial theory as a tool for constructing a

discourse that is both post-colonial and postcolonial.

As was highlighted by both Von Bismarck and Betts, the process of decolonization can extend

beyond the political process to which it colloquially refers to aspects of economic, cultural and

psychological nature. In order to achieve this decolonization, then, a decolonial theory is required in

order to facilitate this. Via this definition, the original definition of postcolonial studies as creating a

postcolonial discourse is reached. Summarized by Lazarus, this definition of postcolonial studies

accounts for *"the rise of a veritable battery of projects* […] *aimed at the recovery and adequate*

theorization of popular consciousness and popular practice: a variety of "histories from below", insurgent

sociologies, new approaches in political economy, mould-breaking developments in anthropology,

feminist and environmentalist work in all sectors of the social sciences, and so on"[19]. The definition of

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[16] Helene von Bismarck, 'Defining Decolonization'. Essay for The British Scholar Society, December 2012.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Raymond F. Betts, "Decolonization A Brief History of the Word" in *Beyond Empire and Nation*, ed. Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012): 23.
[19] Lazarus, "Introducing postcolonial studies" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 8.

what is 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonial studies' provided above then nicely fits the previously described aim of the formulation of decolonial theories, as this 'veritable battery of projects' manages to develop elaborate decolonial theories that can create a truly postcolonial discourse.

So far, the postcolonial discourse that postcolonial studies tries to construct through the development and application of decolonial theory mostly relates to decolonization in an academic sense, in the sense. However, what I attempt to analyse in this thesis goes even beyond the well-documented tradition of academic disciplines trying to rid themselves of the colonialist discourse upon which they were founded. To understand this, it is necessary to perceive decolonization as not just something that can relate to academic disciplines, but as a process which can extend itself to individual subjects.

Decolonization of the Subject

In order to make sense of this notion of decolonizing individual subjects and giving it a clear place within the previously established conceptualization of decolonial theory, I propose to work with the distinction made by Michael Eze regarding this term. In one of his works he writes the following:

"'Postcolonialism' is not the same as Post-colonialism. Post-colonialism (hyphenated) refers to a time

period after colonialism, or the condition of life at the end of colonialism. Postcolonialism (non-

hyphenated) on the other hand is the theory that attempts to understand the post-colonial condition. […]

Postcolonialism involves the challenge or the attempt to decolonize the mind from its ideological

prison"[20].

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[20] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *"The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa"*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 95, quoted in Angela Roothaan, "Political and Cultural Identity in the Global Postcolony: Postcolonial Thinkers on the Racist Enlightenment and the Struggle for Humanity,"*Acta Politologica* 9, no. 1 (2017): 31.

This entire passage encapsulates exactly the main point of what we have been discussing so far: it shows not only how postcolonialism and post-colonialism do not refer to the same thing, but it also accentuates the relation between these two terms, highlighting how 'postcolonial theory' attempts at understanding the 'post-colonial condition' through decolonial theory. But what is perhaps most striking about this quote is the last line which states that postcolonialism is actually constitutively engaging in the decolonization of the subject.

This understanding of postcoloniality being involved in the decolonization of the mind did not appear out of nothing. As early as 1950, Aimé Césaire already observed the need for this and wrote about it in his *Discourse on Colonialism* when he wrote that he was "*talking about millions of men whom they have knowingly instilled with fear and a complex of inferiority, whom they have infused with despair and trained to tremble, to kneel and behave like flunkeys*"[21]. Iconic as this work has proven to be within the field of postcolonial studies, this can to a large extent be attributed to precisely this fact that he managed to sketch what the profound effects of colonialism and all of its aspects had been on the black man's psyche. This was rather revolutionary, as this mode of analysis goes beyond the mere pointing towards political, economic, sociological and military empirical realities that exist within the colonial reality, and instead focusses on what kind of effect these different empirical realities can have on the psychological state of the colonized man. Highlighting this profound effect of internalizing an inferiority complex was a revolutionary step, because highlighting this meta-category of how far the effects of the colonial discourse reach paved the way for not only furthering descriptive research on how the colonial discourse manifests itself in the psyche, but this initial start is also required in order to even begin to develop decolonial theories related to the psyche. After all, one cannot solve a problem that has not yet been identified.

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[21] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 43.

When considered, this development can actually be said to follow the same trajectory as the decolonizing other academic disciplines. First, someone has to observe the effect that the colonialist discourse has had on the development and functioning of a specific discipline and articulate this, and only then can the process of decolonizing the discipline take place. In line with that process, one cannot begin with analysing the decolonization of the subject without reference to Frantz Fanon, who in his work *Black Skins, White Masks* identified the *"internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority"*[22]as one of the effects of the colonial discourse. Understanding this deep psychological effect of the colonial discourse on the colonial subject allows for a conceptualization of decolonization as being something that can also extend to the individual subject. This notion of decolonization as extending to the decolonization of the subject is, in my opinion, one of the most fascinating, exciting and necessary facets of decolonization. Having come to understand this, it became clear to me why my professor decided to open my first-ever class in philosophy and decolonization by simply playing the iconic Bob Marley song 'Redemption Song', which contains the beautifully powerful call to "*emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds"*. The internalized psychic complexes that were the consequence material colonialism must be overcome in order to achieve true postcoloniality, and it is for exactly this reason that I want to argue that the situation of the Dutch king offering apologies to a people that used to be his colonized subject should be subjected to a postcolonial analysis.

Furthermore, I claim that it is in this aspect of the decolonization of the subject that the decolonial theory underlying this gesture falls short. Instances such as this one regarding the construction of a common discourse of the colonized past shared by both the colonizer and the colonized provide an excellent opportunity to try and achieve such a construction of a postcolonial

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[22] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, xv.

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discourse. However, when this is done according to a flawed decolonial theory, then this can lead to

counterproductive results as was the case in the aforementioned scenario. My claim is that it is precisely

in this dimension of the decolonization of the subject that the decolonial theory underlying the apology

is lacking, and that it was based on an oversimplified and wrong notion of decoloniality that overlooked

the precise dynamics of decolonization within a Colonizer-Colonized dichotomy. In trying to overcome

this dichotomy, I want to argue that the king entrenched the same dichotomy by not transcending it but

reversing it instead. This claim warrants some elaboration.

Dealing with the Dichotomy: Reversing or Transcending?

Transcending the dichotomic relation of Colonizer-Colonized thus seems to be a crucial step in trying to

construct a truly postcolonial discourse and leaving behind the colonial discourse. After all, a true

postcolonial discourse cannot be created with this dichotomy still in place, since this would mean that

the relationship between two parties (in this case the Dutch as former colonizer and the Indonesians as

former colonized) is still defined along the lines of colonizer and colonized. This is precisely what a

postcolonial discourse is trying to transcend: for the Dutch and the Indonesians to no longer see each

other as colonizer or colonized, but simply as fellow humans. I argue that, by offering one-sided

apologies for the violence committed by the Dutch side in the wake of Indonesian independence, and

thereby fully ignoring the violence committed by the Indonesian side, the king has not managed to

transcend this binary of Colonizer-Colonized, but instead has reversed it and has therefore actually kept

the binary intact.

It is crucial to understand how reversing such a dichotomy is something completely different

from transcending it. First, there is the question of how a reversal of the dichotomy keeps it in place.

Conceptualizing this can be done in quite a literal sense. If the Colonizer and the Colonized would switch

roles and the Colonizer would become the Colonized, then the power structure of Colonizer-Colonized is

still there but just with different parties on different sides of it. This is antithetical to the previously formulated aim of creating a postcolonial discourse, since this postcolonial discourse would require the elimination of this very power structure. This is not only required because the very presence of this binary is constitutive of the colonial discourse, but also because a reversal of this power relation *would not achieve the decolonization of both subjects involved.*

The underlying mechanics of this principle are accurately portrayed by Michael Eze. The quote cited here is to be read in the context of the Colonizer-Colonized binary. Suppose for a moment that a colonial subject is filled with a strong desire to one day reverse the binary and to become the colonizer himself. Eze here then accurately explains how such a reversal would leave the colonized subject colonized still, while the choice of forgiving and moving on would actually liberate him:

"The choice to forgive is to disengage from a cycle of violence initiated by the perpetrator. To respond in the manner of retribution is to admit to his terms and thereby neutralize my own subjectivity for my actions are merely an "invention" of his initiative to become enslaved to his will—my subjective is colonized. To forgive is to empower for I am engaged to initiate my own point of proceeding. The power lies in the subject and not on the other; there is no colonization of subjectivity"[23].

Indeed, when in this scenario opting for the option of revenge, one still operates as if the subject is colonized by the gaze of the other. Reasoning from this principle, I argue that in order to properly work according to an agenda of decolonization and the accompanied decolonization of the subject, this transcending of the dichotomy ought to always be one of the primary goals of any postcolonial act or conduct. So how then, from this perspective, does the Dutch King's apology fall short in this?

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[23] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 189.

In order to understand how this gesture falls short, it is important to realize that, as was mentioned before, this war in the wake of Indonesian independence was a terrible armed conflict, with atrocities being committed on both sides. Again, once the disastrous spiral of violence is initiated in any violent conflict, it is bound to continue and to become more severe as every act of violence inflicted upon comrades invokes an emotional response from those involved. But even if one disagrees with this, or if one is determined to put the Dutch in the position of those being at wrong (which is an opinion that can be argued for), then this still does not properly take into consideration the sentiments of the Dutch-Indonesian soldiers who were sent there on behalf of the same royal house that later apologized for their acts without paying any respect to the cruelties these soldiers endured.

Recall here the characterisation that was put forward by Basu Thakur that "*postcolonial studies is dominated by a competition for tragedy, anointing in process the victim of history as the only authentic subject (of speech)"[24]*. Whether or not one agrees with this wider characterisation of the field of postcolonial studies in general, it cannot be denied that these dynamics very much seem to be at play in this symbolic gesture of the king. It downplays and ignores historical specificities, constructing an oversimplified version of reality where the Dutch side is the 'bad side' whose guilt is absolute, and the Indonesian side of the story is the 'good side' whose innocence is just as absolute.

When applying this reading of the situation to the previously described dynamics of the colonizer-colonized dichotomy, an interesting reading of the situation arises. When discussing the inversion (not transcendence) of a colonizer-colonized dichotomy, it might at first seem as if such a reversal is only possible from the side of the colonized. At least it might be a lot easier to imagine this occurring in the shape of a revolt, or in the imagining of anti-white legislature in a post-colonial political reality.

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[24] Gautam Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack: Identity, Culture, Surplus* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020), xiv.

Much more subtle is to imagine the reversal taking place from the other side, namely from the side of the colonizer. The discussed situation, however, most surely shows signs of being able to function as an example of such a scenario. After all, when the king is putting all the blame on his side, he is effectively taking away any opportunity for a proper dialogue of reconciliation, using an essentialist view of history to construct another dichotomy that looks an awful lot like the reversed version of the colonizer-colonized dichotomy. An apologetic stance that constitutively ignores the pains of the Dutch-Indonesian soldiers and the violence that came from the Indonesian side indeed constructs a binary in which the Indonesian side is the 'only authentic subject of speech', while the Dutch-Indonesian side is reduced to a mere spectator, a victim of history without any real discursive agency to challenge this. This is precisely the source of the frustration and anger within the Dutch-Indonesian community that followed the apologies. The effort of the king to create a postcolonial discourse seems to have ended in a move of reversing the binary instead of transcending it. In this case, the terms Colonizer-Colonized can, for clarity, be infused with the secondary binary of good-bad, with the colonizer being unconditionally good and the colonized unconditionally bad. Not acknowledging historical specificities, the Dutch king has simply reversed the binary, thereby keeping it intact and not contributing to the decolonization of his own subject.

Apart from entrenching and reinforcing the colonial binary, this furthermore closes off the way for any further dialogue for collectively giving meaning to this violence, thereby blocking any further attempts in creating a truly postcolonial discourse and instead provoking intense negative emotions with those whose traumas can now no longer be given symbolic meaning. The postcolonial thinking underpinning the king's gesture seems to be based on the aforementioned 'competition for tragedy', and 'anointing the victim of history as the only authentic subject of speech' still allows for only one side of the binary to be an authentic subject of speech, thereby keeping the binary in place.

Having established this, it seems to be necessary to develop a more sophisticated decolonial theory to apply to the situation of collectively dealing with a violent past. If the decolonial strategy of simply taking all the blame does not help in producing a constructive and healthy postcolonial discourse, then a different decolonial theory is needed. But how to begin? What would an act of decolonization look like when the colonizer's subject has managed to free itself from the colonizer-colonized dichotomy? And where do we find the analytic and philosophical tools to begin the conceptualization of such a development?

My crucial argument arises precisely as a response to these questions, and it reads that the answer can be found in the Lacanian mode of psychoanalysis. Lacan's theory of the three registers of subjectivity, accompanied by his theory of the enigmatic desire of the Other contains the necessary vocabulary and analytic lens that is needed to make sense of the problems outlined above, as well as that it provides with clues of a direction in which to look for trying to formulate answers to them. Bringing psychoanalytic theory into postcolonial analysis, however, is a theoretical move that is not uncontested. Therefore, this decision warrants a degree of justification of what I am doing, as well as some space to declare what I am not doing.

Chapter 2 - Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism: A Turbulent History

In order to be able to properly start conducting something of a creative project that revolves around the bringing together of scholars and ideas from postcolonial theory and psychoanalytic analysis, it is important to first come to understand the somewhat difficult history that these two disciplines have in relation to one another. This chapter will bring to the foreground the most influential points of critique that authors on both sides of this debate have brought up against one another, with the intention of allowing us to understand the dynamics that underly any attempt at trying to merge the two disciplines. Following this, it will become clear that in the more recent literature, this hostile relation is more and more looking to be resolved, as many of the provided points of critique are actually incorporated in the late-Freudian version of psychoanalysis that is the Lacanian mode of analysis. Comprehending how these criticisms arose and how they were dealt with in the development of later Lacanian analysis enables seeing the exact outlines of the theoretical territory that this philosophical exploration will take place in.

Postcolonial Critique: The Main Issues

A good starting point for exploring the somewhat uneasy relationship between the two academic fields is the article "*Fanon via Lacan, or: Decolonization by Psychoanalytic Means…?*" written by Derek Hook in 2020. Noting Hook's specialization in both Lacanian psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, his biography is a useful starting point for exploring the potential of bringing these fields together.[25] In this article, Hook makes a case for opening ourselves up to the possibility of studying Lacan as a way of furthering our understanding of Franz Fanon's work, and in making this case he gives a useful overview

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[25] For further discussions on the intersections of psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, please also refer to his Youtube channel for more discussions and interviews:
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=derek+hook.

of some of the main criticisms that have been given against doing so in the past. Mainly, these points of critique all in some way support the assumption that "*Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is necessarily antithetical to Fanon's over-arching political project*".[26] I will show how this assumption is refuted by a significant amount of authors in the field.

The first point of critique that is often raised against the cooperation of psychoanalysis and postcolonial analysis is a typical example of the seeming philosophical incompatibility of these two modes of analysis. In this case it comes from Nigel Gibson, who highlights that the psychoanalytic framework bases itself on "*Eurocentric and bourgeois assumptions which are passed off as universals*"[27]. In his article, Gibson states that, for Fanon, "*all psychoanalytic theory comes up short*" precisely because of this, and in the case of Lacan more specifically this was mainly due to the fact that neither "*Lacan or his circle give any hint that race mattered in France*"[28].

This kind of attitude towards psychoanalysis from the postcolonial corner is not rare, as Basu Thakur also observes that "*postcolonial critics* […] *charge psychoanalytic theory with overwriting the particularities of the non-West in favour of its uniform metaphysics of being*"[29]. The further points of critique that are cited and subsequently dealt with by Hook in his article seem to reflect much of the same worries as the one put forward by Gibson. For example, David Macey states that one of the risks of using classical psychoanalysis in a Fanonian context is that it "*thinks with a paradigm that makes it*

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[26] Derek Hook, "Fanon via Lacan, or: Decolonization by Psychoanalytic Means…?," *Journal for the British Society for Phenomenology* 51, no. (2020): 306.

[27] Nigel Gibson, "Losing Sight of the Real: Recasting Merleau-Ponty in Fanon's Critique of Mannoni." *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Robert Bernasconi. Indiana: Indiana University Press 2003: 129-50 (as cited in Hook 2020, 306).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Basu Thakur, "Postcolonial Lack", xiii.

difficult to discuss precolonial and colonial societies without falling back the evolutionary-

anthropological trop [of the savage]"[30].

Furthermore, Kelly Oliver raises the concern that Lacan's conceptualization of subjectivity

"*presupposes a privileged subject and cannot account for the subject of oppression*"[31] while at the same

time accusing Lacan of making "*theoretical moves … [that] cover over the alienation inherent in*

oppression by postulating universal alienation that renders invisible concrete forms of alienation"[32].

The main thought that one can take away from all these points of critique does, at first sight,

seem to be a valid one. For all of these criticisms, it holds that the essence of the argument revolves

around the notion that psychoanalysis has a certain *attitude* that makes it unsuitable for furthering

postcolonial analysis. In the case of both Macey's and Oliver's argument, it is not only the case that they

are accusing the psychoanalytic discourse of over-universalizing tendencies, but they point out that the

particular attitude that brought forward these tendencies is precisely deemed particularly unfit for

Fanonian, or even postcolonial in general, analysis. Their arguments echo a concern that goes further

than merely claiming that the psychoanalytical structure of the subject might be too 'imported' or too

European and therefore not a good match for the non-Western subject: the problem for them lies in the

fact that when you base an entire analytical model on universalizing mould, you are precisely

overlooking the racist social and psychic structures that are specific to the colonial and post-colonial

social fields. If there was ever a philosophical move that Fanon himself would disapprove of, then this is

probably it, and therefore the cited concerns should most certainly be taken seriously when one is trying

to further develop any Fanonian theory.

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[30] David Macey, "The Recall of the Real: Franz Fanon and Psychoanalysis." *Constellations* 6, no. 1 (March 1999): 101-102 (as cited in Hook 2020, 306).
[31] Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of the Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytical Social Theory of Oppression*, New Edition, Minnesota University Press (2004): 4. (as cited in Hook 2020, 306).
[32] Ibid.

Investigating the uncomfortable yet closed shared history of postcolonial studies and psychoanalytic theory even further, we can turn to Mrinalili Greedharry's work with the already much-revealing title "*Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique*". In this useful overview, a lot of the critiques that are given about this 'uneasy engagement' can also be said to fall into the same categories as the ones mentioned above. As usually goes with postcolonial critique on psychoanalysis, the first worries that are articulated are about Sigmund Freud, criticizing how he, in his earlier works, refers to 'primitive peoples' or 'savages or half-savages' when he is speaking about people from Africa or the Pacific Islands[33]. Obviously, such an attitude towards people from what we now refer to as the Global South is not only problematic, but specifically incompatible with any notion of postcolonial critique. The same goes for the fact that Freud can be accused of heavily contributing to "*the Othering of non-Western cultures, by defining them, explicitly or implicitly, as lacking or anterior in comparison with domestic metropolitan 'norms'"[34].* However, as is also rightly pointed out by Greedharry later in this introduction, for Freud, "*the primitive or half-savage subjects serve the purpose of illustrating and demonstrating his complex theory of relations, they do not figure as specifically situated agents in that theory*"[35].

Be that as it may, this tendency of postcolonial to highlight this attitude towards non-Western societies in the works of the man who can be called the 'father of psychoanalysis' offers a clear and fundamental insight in the uneasy relationship that the two fields have had. Some of the other criticisms

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[33] Mrinanili Greedharry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique*, first edition. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 1-2.

[34] Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics.* London and New York: Verso, 1997 quoted in Mrinalini Greedharry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

[35] Greedharry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis*, 3.

of a cooperation between psychoanalysis and critical social analysis in general that are put forward in this work go a bit deeper and focus less on the wording of Freud specifically.

For example, Elizabeth Abel is cited as she highlights "*the traditional indifference of psychoanalysis to racial, class and cultural differences, and the tendency of psychoanalysis to insulate subjectivity from social practices and discourses all run contrary to a feminism increasingly attuned to the power of social exigencies and differences in the constitution of subjectivity*"[36].

One can immediately feel a kind of uncomfortable relation here: any method of analysis that could potentially be based on any false notion of universality (and Eurocentric ones even more specifically) does indeed seem to go against the fundamental message of Fanonian theory. After all, any attempt to reduce the cause of the symptom, which in the case of Fanon would be alienation, to pure individual subjective registers and thereby underscoring the intersubjective racist structures that exist within the colonial social reality seems to fully miss the point that Fanon is trying to make: namely the existence of such structures on an intersubjective level in such a way that they both reinforce themselves as well as exercise influence on an individual's experience. However, using this scepticism towards psychoanalysis' universalizing tendencies as an argument against using it in context of postcolonial analysis seems to be a bit extreme, as this move does not appreciate the degree to which Lacanian psychoanalysis, through a notion of the unconscious as constituted and structured by language, has been able to bring psychoanalysis "*much closer to the issues and concerns of social constructionism*"[37], and enabled the discipline to "*move from an individual to a social version of subjectivity*"[38].

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[36] Elizabeth Abel, 'Race, class and psychoanalysis? Opening questions'. *Conflicts in Feminism.* Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 184-204, quoted in Greedharry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis*, 3.

[37] Eugenie Georgaca, "Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Social Constructionist Psychology," *International Journal of Critical Psychology,* vol. L4 (2005): 76.

[38] Ibid, 76-77.

Put differently, it can be said that the Lacanian mode of psychoanalysis "*views subjectivity as an effect of subjectification, that is to say socially, interactionally and linguistically produced*"[39]. When acknowledging this, it is a bit unfair to wholly exclude the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis in furthering the Fanonian project: it actually seems to be the case that the Lacanian mode of analysis opens up the space for understanding the subject precisely as a product of the intersubjective structures, where the subject not only 'exists' within these structures, but actually 'comes into being' in and because of them.

The points of critique that have been outlined above all in one way or another seem to reflect a negative sentiment towards psychoanalysis based on its generalizing tendencies. This tendency in academic literature is perhaps best summarized by Stephen Frosh who accurately writes that psychoanalytic theory "*has been regularly under fire from its more radical critics for its political, gender and social normativeness; its colonialist and racialized practical and theoretical frameworks; and its continued adoption of a psychologically reductionist vision of what has become a radically decentred world*"[40]. To answer these legitimate concerns is therefore an absolute necessity when trying to make these two fields meet in order to achieve productive results, and one person to turn to while doing this would be Mari Ruti.

In her 2012 article "*Reading Lacan as a Social Critic*" she provides an accurate outline of just how exactly such a social critique through a Lacanian lens could look like, while at the same time showing how the adaptation of such a Lacanian lens need not lead to the aforementioned theoretical errors at all. Ruti manages to touch upon an aspect of Lacanian theory that, in my opinion, is one of its characteristics that gives it such a potential for postcolonial analysis (or indeed social critique of any

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[39] Ibid, 90.
[40] Stephen Frosh, "Rethinking Psychoanalysis in the Psychosocial," 6. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (2018): 6.

kind). Commenting on the fact that we as subjects are 'born into' a socio-symbolic realm that was already in existence before us, she notes that "*social signifiers, after all, do not function in a cultural vacuum but rather communicate and perpetuate deeply entrenched forms of economic, national, racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and gendered power*"[41], while adding that "*individuals who experience themselves as being under attack by the external world may find it next to impossible to relax their wakeful vigilance in relation to their surroundings*"[42]. Though a deeper, more thorough analysis of the specific Lacanian concepts that are used in this context will be conducted later in this thesis, this example already shows how the concern raised by Oliver is not necessarily the case. Obviously, this is not to say that this point of critique ought to be abandoned as such: if anything, a good critique should be kept in mind at all times so that one can try to falsify it, thereby strengthening any theory it criticized in the first place.

Furthermore, it might depend on how any one specific writer might interpret the Lacanian lens for him/herself whether one commits this theoretical error, and therefore it is always a good idea to remain mindful of this remark. However, to argue that the whole Lacanian system of not being able to account for "*the alienation inherent in oppression by postulating universal alienation that renders invisible concrete forms of alienation*"[43] seems to openly deny the potentiality of this mode of analysis based solely on a potential tendency. Again, discussions on the specific Lacanian jargon will follow later, but for now this example already helps enough to show that the theoretical context of the Big Other and it's enigmatic desire is most definitely not one that has no eye for specific dynamics of oppression. Quite on the contrary: the way in which Ruti portrays an outline for potential Lacanian social critique is indicative of how Lacanian psychoanalysis is actually very suitable for such an analysis based on the

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[41] Mari Ruti, "Reading Lacan as a Social Critic: what it means not to cede to one's desire," *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 17, no. 1 (2012): 74.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Oliver *The Colonization of the Psychic Space,* 4. (as cited in Hook 2020, 306).

emphasis it puts on the fact that we are born into a socio-symbolic structure that already exists, and on how such a social predicament might affect a subject in any given social surrounding. Even though it might be the case that Lacan himself does not necessarily highlight race as a social category that might produce negative effects, this does not mean that it cannot account for it at all. As Ruti shows, we might just have to fill in the blanks ourselves to see what such a Lacanian postcolonial critique would look like.

Furthermore, even the most severe critics of the use of psychoanalytic theory for postcolonial critique cannot deny one crucial fact that is without any doubt known to postcolonial critics, which is the fact that Frantz Fanon himself, arguably one of the most important figures in the history of postcolonial analysis, used psychoanalytic analysis in his works himself. As was mentioned before, this was not without a critical note, as Fanon himself was very much aware of the philosophical limitations of this framework precisely in the context of what he wanted to achieve. In *Black Skins, White Masks* he strikingly notes that "*whenever we read a work on psychoanalysis* [..], *we have been struck by the incongruity between the corresponding schemata and the reality presented by the black man*"[44], adding that he came to the conclusion that "*there is a dialectical substitution when we switch from the psychology of the white man to that of the black man*"[45]. From these citations, one can immediately tell that Fanon himself was aware of precisely the criticisms of psychoanalysis that were already discussed above: ones largely based on the universalizing tendency of psychoanalysis. But the relevance of the fact that he was aware of these criticisms goes further than merely highlighting the fact that he actually used it himself.

When reading this, one should not forget both the historical as well as the specific philosophical context in which this book was written. It should be noted that this book was first published in the year 1952, and that it was written by a psychiatrist who wrote it with an explicit aim. Obviously, the material

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[44] Fanon, *Black Skin, White,* 129.
[45] Ibid.

reality considering the colonial situation and all of its different facets were vastly different from today. It

is therefore important to highlight what exactly Fanon was trying to achieve at the time, as we are

aiming for a furthering of Fanon's works and ideas, and in order to do this one ought not simply take the

historical factors and try to project them on the contemporary situation. Instead, this historical

philosophical context should be deeply understood in its own context, so that we might come to a

useful, truthful, and not over-simplified application of it in contemporary reality.

Greedharry's analysis provides some useful starting points for doing so, mentioning that Fanon

presents "'*a psychoanalytic interpretation of the lived experience of the black man' that attempts to*

understand through reference to politics and material conditions how the black man experiences his

world"[46] and adding that Fanon "*is interested in in explaining in psychoanalytic terms how the black man*

experiences his life in the wake of racist myths that degrade, devalue and make the black man a fearful

object in society"[47]. This last quote specifically recalls the previously discussed methodological reading of

Lacan that was used by Ruti as a means for social criticism: it highlights the notion that the Lacanian lens

can indeed be used productively as a way of analysing the fact that a socialized subject is born into an

already existing socio-symbolic order, or in this specific case a discourse of racist myths.

But to get back to the initial goal of analysing Fanon's implicit objective in writing this book, we

can turn to another quote on this work which states that Fanon "*did not seek to destabilize the discourse*

of colonial medicine, he did seek to reform the colonial practice of medicine"[48]. This point accurately

sums up the effect that *Black Skins, White Masks* had within the historical context in which it was

produced. Surely we must acknowledge the fact that, in the colonial history, psychoanalysis was used

for means that were serving the colonial power. However, in writing *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon

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[46] Greedharry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis*, 136.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

managed to outline the fundamental ways in which it might not be accurate to simply transfer the

European presuppositions of psychoanalytic analysis onto the colonial subject. Why is this the case,

then? The answer to this question is precisely what makes his work so revolutionary: because it provides

an outline and in-depth analysis of the socio-symbolic order that the black man is born into, and an

overview of the different ways in which this affects the black man's psyche.

What can this then teach us about the way in which we ought to look at the way in which Fanon

mixes both usage and criticism of psychoanalysis in his work? If anything, it shows how something as

broad as 'psychoanalysis' is constantly under construction, being improved and adjusted by everyone

who uses it. At the time of Fanon writing, psychoanalysis was not yet in the state it is today. As was

mentioned before, psychoanalysis did a lot already to distance itself from the universalizing tendencies

that were so heavily criticised by people like Fanon himself. If Fanon wanted to show us how a pre-

existing socio-symbolic order can affect black people born into it in far-reaching ways, then a critical

analysis of this process is very much in line with the one conducted by Ruti. It therefore does not seem

to be the case that the psychoanalytic framework is on such bad terms with the Fanonian project, as

much as it is actually the case that Fanon recognized the need to pay attention to the reformulating of

the relationship between the colonized subject and the existing social order. As Fanon himself writes,

"*psychoanalysis – and this can never be stressed enough – sets out to understand a given behaviour

within a specific group represented by the family*"[49], adding the observation that in the examples he uses

"*morbidity is located in the family environment*"[50]. But his point becomes clear later on, when he writes

that "*we observe the opposite in the black man. A normal black child, having grown up with a normal

family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world*[51]. This Fanonian twist in the

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[49] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 120.
[50] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks,* 122.
[51] Ibid.

conceptualization of the dynamics of the psychoanalytic framework serves as a perfect example of how Fanon's criticisms can be understood in their own historical and philosophical context: it should be read of an attempt to show how a truly postcolonial psychoanalysis should be acknowledging this is fundamental difference in attitude towards the symbolic realm, which is based on the position of the colonized within the social framework of the colonizer. Instead of rejecting the psychoanalytic mode of analysis altogether, this move should be understood as a guiding observation in using it productively in this postcolonial context.

To conclude, it can be said that most of the objections from the corner of postcolonial studies against the use of psychoanalytic theory for postcolonial means are based on a properly universalizing image of psychoanalysis as a whole. Surely, there is a number of theoretical pitfalls that one ought to be aware of when trying to apply psychoanalysis to any means of postcolonial analysis, and it is important to be mindful of these. However, to fully exclude the creative effort that might follow from letting these two disciplines interact with one another seems to me to be a statement that simply cannot be accounted for to such an extent that it becomes a viable position to hold. Therefore, with that out of the way, such a creative effort is exactly what I want to engage in. However, in order to do so it is important to first get a feel of the precise psychoanalytic framework that will be used, which in this case will be the theory of three registers as presented by Jacques Lacan.

Chapter 3 – Lacan: The Three Registers, Desire and Postcolonialism

Born in Paris on the 13th of April 1901, Jacques Lacan has left a legacy amongst psychoanalysts, but also among theorists in general that is almost impossible to ignore. Whether he is being praised as being 'the best and least known psychoanalyst'[52] or being dismissed as a 'total charlatan'[53], references to his work are likely to be found in both psychoanalysis as well as in contemporary socio-political analysis. Deciding wherever one would situate oneself within this specific debate is not of crucial importance, nor is it necessary for being able to appreciate that he was probably the most influential psychoanalyst after Sigmund Freud, or to see how his theory of the socialized subject has an enormous potential for critical social analysis.

Providing a full analysis of all the different concepts and theories that Lacan developed throughout his life lies beyond the scope of this thesis, neither is it relevant for the main argument here. In this chapter I want to show how Lacan's theory of subjectivity provides us with an excellent vocabulary for analysing and giving a philosophical explanation of how the king's well-intended apology was able to produce such intense negative emotions instead of achieving its initial goal of postcolonial reconciliation. I will demonstrate that the vocabulary of Lacanian psychoanalysis can serve as a useful inspiration for conceptualizing this problematic situation, and for beginning to articulate a way out of it.

Lacan's Three Registers: An Introduction

In order to achieve this, a brief outline is required of what exactly this theory of three registers actually consists of, before diving deeper into each of the three individual registers. According to Lacan, the way in which we as human subjects experience reality consists of three different registers that are all

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[52] https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/jacques-lacan-best-and-least-known-psychoanalyst

[53] http://www.critical-theory.com/noam-chomsky-calls-jacques-lacan-a-charlatan/#:~:text=An%20alleged%20text%20from%20Chomsky,in%20fact%20originated%20from%20Chomsky.

interdependent: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The way in which all three of these registers come together to give shape to our subjective experience of reality can be neatly represented by the image below.
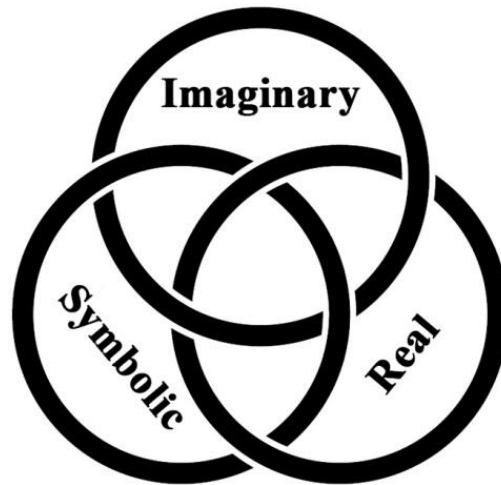
As one can tell by the way in which all three circles are interconnected, they do not function separately from one another and come together to make up what is our subjective experience. For beginning to explore the meaning and content of these three different registers, I will draw upon the useful explanatory metaphor of a game of chess put forward by Slavoj Žižek in his handy manual *How To Read Lacan*:

"The rules one has to follow in order to play are its symbolic dimension: from the purely symbolic standpoint, 'knight' is defined only by the moves the figure can make. This level is clearly different from the imaginary one, namely the way in which different pieces are shaped and characterized by their names (king, queen, knight), and it is easy to envisage a game with the same rules, but with a different imaginary, in which this figure would be called 'messenger' or 'runner' or whatever. Finally, real is the

entire complex set of contingent circumstances that affect the course of the game: the intelligence of the

players, the unpredictable intrusions that may disconcert one player or directly cut the game short"[54].

This simplified reading of the three registers is my no means a complete and, depending on whom you ask, probably also not a perfect one, but it functions well as an explanatory beginning. Personally, I feel that it is mainly the description of the Real that falls short in some aspects, but this is more in the sense that this specific explanation might require a bit more understanding of the three registers in order to actually understand this example in the proper way. However, as we shall see later on, the Real is arguably Lacan's most illustrious concept that tends to be the most difficult one to understand, so as a point of departure for exploring Lacan this example serves us well.

Especially regarding the current discussion in this thesis of the king's apology not achieving what it was trying to achieve, it might already be possible to recognize how the Lacanian distinction between these three different registers of the same reality (or of the same game of chess in this example) can be useful for the analysis of this very example. Most strikingly is perhaps the description of the Symbolic order as understanding the knight solely through the moves that it is allowed to make within the game of chess: a game whose existence, both that of the game itself as well as of the set of rules that are constitutive of it, predated that of the players' existence. This is one of the most important aspects of Lacanian theory when applying it in the context of social criticism: the fact that it gives us a useful conceptual framework in the sense that it includes a category that the social subject is per definition born into an already existing network of symbolic meaning, something we shall return to later on. First, a more elaborate outline of each of the three different registers is required.

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[54] Slavoj Žižek, *How To Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006): 8-9.

The Imaginary, Fantasy and the Mirror Stage

The register of the Imaginary is the register that will mainly help furthering analysis on how the king's

apology came into being. Furthermore, in order to fully comprehend the functioning of all the registers

in their totality, outlining the Imaginary register as well is of crucial importance, as the registers are

inherently interdependent and inter-functional.

An important thing to realize when trying to make sense of the register of the Imaginary is that

it is not the exact same thing as our every-day fantasy or imagination. This is rightly pointed out by

Claudia Strauss, who reminds us that the imaginary (lower-case i) when dealt with in colloquial context

can be understood as "*something positive, an imaginative creation*", while Lacan on the other hand

conceptualizes it according to a "*Marxian tradition that emphasizes the imaginary as an illusion and a*

Freudian one that treats this illusion as a fantasy, an illusion created in response to a psychological

need"[55]. This reminder at the same time shows that it does indeed have something to do with what is

colloquially referred to as 'fantasy', while also highlighting that it is thus not the positive presence of

something like the entirety of this fantasy. In order to understand why this fantasy itself is then an

illusion, one must turn to one of Lacan's most iconic concepts that is known as the Mirror Stage.

The Mirror Stage
The Lacanian notion of the Mirror Stage is, as its name already suggests, best explained by the metaphor

of ourselves looking in a mirror and seeing or own reflection, even though it need not necessarily

include such an actual experience in order to take place. Explained in such a way, the Mirror Stage takes

place at the moment when a small infant child sees his or her own reflection in a mirror for the first

time. Even though this might seem like a rather trivial event, it is of crucial important to Lacan's theory

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[55] Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary", *Anthropological Theory* 6, no, 3 (2006): 326.

of subjectivity in the sense that it provides a fundament for many of his explanations as of why a subject behaves in the way that it does.

According to Lacan, what happens at this moment is that it *"immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made by the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him"*[56]. For Lacan, this is a crucial moment because, as it reflected in this quote, it is the first time that we as a human subject identify ourselves with a 'thing'; with a solid and singular image instead of the vague multitude of things that we have experienced so far such as our hands, feet and the sound of our voice. Apart from this image being a singular form that one can recognize and that one can refer to as a single thing ("I"), it is important to realize that, for Lacan, this image of the "I" one in its pure form, before it is exposed to and shaped by the Symbolic order: the singular form that we identify ourselves with is one that is *"constituent rather than constituted"*[57]. Or, to use the wording of Lacan himself, we can

"understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. […] The jubilant assumption of his specular image by the kind of being – still trapped in his motor impotence and nursing dependence – the little man is at the infant stage thus seems to me to manifest in exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the 'I' is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject"[58].

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[56] Jacques Lacan, *"Écrits"* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company): 75.
[57] Farooq Ahmad Sheikh, "Subjectivity, desire and theory: Reading Lacan", *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2017): 3.
[58] Lacan, *Écrits*, 76.

What exactly Lacan means by our function as a subject being restored by language, which he considers to be part of the Symbolic order, will be clarified later on. But in order to understand just how this functions, it is paramount to first understand the role that desire plays in this dynamic, and how it relates back to the point of the Mirror Stage.

Lacanian Desire

The most often quoted formulation of Lacan's theory of desire and its constitutive role in the formation of the subject is found in the second book of his famous *Seminars* which is titled '*The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*'. In this work, he provides a theory of this phenomenon by writing that "*desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but the lack by which the being exists*"[59]. This fascinating conceptualization of desire has quite some implications to it which are fundamental to the Lacanian understanding of the subject.

The first important lesson to take away from this quote can be found in the first part and the last part. When Lacan writes that 'desire is a relation of *being* to lack' and adds that it is 'the lack *by which* the being exists', it becomes clear that desire is not just one concept among many when dissecting the subject, but that it is actually constitutive of the subject ('*by which* the being exists'). For Lacan, desire is among the most fundamental phenomena that defines us as subjects. To be a subject is to desire, and vice versa. However, once we accept this predicament of the subject necessarily being a desiring subject, we run into what seems to be a dead end. If we as subjects necessary desire, then what do we desire? And, more crucially, once we obtain what we desire, should this then not entail that we

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[59] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* 76.

then stop desiring? And if this the case, does this then mean, based on logical necessity, that we stop being a subject?

This can, of course, not be the case. Therefore, we must turn to the second important notion to take away from this formulation of desire, which is that it is a relation of being to *lack*. This is crucial for understanding how we function as subjects: our desire is not our beings relation to something positively present that has ceased to be there, or to something that should be there that is not there, but it is our relation to a *lack* of something. This is a fundamentally different view on desire and, by extension, to what our being relates to, because it relates to a non-thing. For, as Lacan writes, 'it isn't the lack *of this or that*, but the lack by which the being exist'. Desire is not our being's relation to a presence, it is rather our being's relation to a fundamental *absence* that is constitutive of us as subjects.

This definition of desire is actually very much in line with how we experience desire in our everyday lives. We might desire something: to start with, this is then fundamentally something that we do not yet have, otherwise there would be no desire for it in the first place. We might desire a promotion at work, a new guitar, or a bigger house. We can even take it one step further, look at the meta-implications of such desires, and straight away state that we desire a better social status, or that we desire to be seen differently by the others around us. What we then picture in our mind what we would look like once we have obtained this object of desire is the fundament of our Imaginary register. However, as we know from our every-day experience, it is not the case that our desire is satisfied once we have obtained this new guitar. Instead, the object of our desire will turn into something different, like a new amplifier, an even more expensive guitar, or to be perceived as a better musician by my bandmates. This is the moment where we see just what exactly Lacan means when he writes of '*the lack of being properly speaking*': when we get what we desire, we start to desire something else as the focus of our desire turns to something different. According to Lacan, this is the somewhat tragic truth of being a subject. We as subjects are programmed to desire and are thereby fundamentally lacking subjects,

endlessly desiring and trying to reach things which we hope will fill up this void, when in reality reaching that very thing will only start the whole cycle of desire again.

Now that we have defined the constitutive nature of our subjectivity as being desiring and therefore lacking by necessity, we can turn back to the earlier quoted explanation that Lacan gives of the Mirror Stage, in which he describes the infant recognizing itself in the mirror as being conceptualized in a 'primordial form' and 'before language restores to it its function as a subject'. So how then does this infant not (yet) behave according to its 'function as a subject'.

As was established just now, a subject is per definition a desiring subject, and the infant does not yet desire in the precise way that was just discussed. Of course it might want things like food or warmth, but these are biological needs and not desires. After all, a baby wanting warmth can be satisfied with warmth. Now it is of course the case that when an infant is given food, it will still at some later point obviously want more food. This, however, is not desire in the Lacanian sense for two reasons. First, this is a need that is biologically determined, and it is biologically necessary to keep feeding yourself. But more importantly, this longing for food does not have an Imaginary level to it. When the infant desires food, it by no means can be said to imagine itself with the food and then using this self-image of him with the food as a motivation for trying to obtain this food. Instead, it does so out of necessity for survival. Therefore, the infant is not yet a subject in the Lacanian sense, as it is not yet a desiring subject.

But then what does Lacan mean when he says that later on, 'language will restore to it its function as a subject'? In other words, he is hereby declaring that language, which he understands to belong to the register of the Symbolic, will restore the functioning as a subject proper. As will be demonstrated below, it is through this Symbolic order that our desire is directed. If our desire is directed by the Symbolic order, then this can also be the place for finding out the true motivations for our

actions, since it is the place where the nature of our desires is located. To return to the original topic:

this could mean that, in order to fully understand the motivation and intention of the Dutch king

offering apologies, the structure of the Symbolic order in place can provide with answers. To understand

how exactly this works, an explanation is first needed of how the Symbolic order directs our desire.

The Symbolic, the Big Other and Language

In order to try and understand how we become subjects that are programmed to desire and therefore

become fundamentally lacking, we must turn to the Symbolic order. Reminding ourselves of the

metaphor of the game of chess, the Symbolic order can be defined as defining the different pieces in

terms of the moves that they are allowed to make. It is a set of 'game rules' that already existed before

we as subjects were thrown into it. As Slavoj Žižek accurately puts it:

"the symbolic order, society's unwritten constitution, is the second nature of every speaking being: it is

here, directing and controlling my acts; it is the sea I swim in, yet it remains ultimately impenetrable – I

can never put it in front of me and grasp it. It is as if we, subjects of language, talk and interact like

puppets, our speech and gestures dictated by some nameless all-pervasive agency."[60]

The Symbolic order, as becomes clear in this definition, is the network of (symbolic) rules that

we as subjects are born into. However, this goes further than merely saying that we are born into a

society with laws telling us the things we can and cannot do. Otherwise, it could not so easily be

referred to as a 'second nature of every speaking being'. The Symbolic order structures the way in which

we perceive reality and the way in which we interact with it, and I will provide an everyday example of

how it does so.

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[60] Žižek, *How To Read Lacan*, 8.

The Last Piece of Cheese and the Big Other

Explaining the functioning of the Symbolic register can perhaps best be done by quoting an example that

has been used perhaps a bit too often but which is useful nonetheless: when we see a red traffic light,

we know that it is a message for us to stop, even though there is nothing inherent to the red light that

could tell us such. This way of interpreting the light as such has been determined in the Symbolic order

that we were born into, as we all together decided that the red light should carry that message. This

example can still be reflected in actual written legal laws, but this is not always the case.

To take an example that is thoroughly Dutch: suppose you are sitting in a circle at a typical

Dutch birthday, and the iconic platter with sausage and cheese in the middle is almost empty. Should

you just take the last piece of cheese without first asking all your relatives if someone else wants that

last piece, this would be considered to be rude. However, should you ask, then most probably everyone

will tell you to take it yourself. This is an interesting scenario for multiple reasons. First of all, why should

you ask if someone else wants it if you actually want it yourself? Does this not make the question

insincere and therefore undesirable? Or a more subtle analysis of the situation is one that my father

would always give with the intention of being funny: he always told me to respond to people asking this

question with an instant 'yes' and to take the last piece myself. But how come that this suggestion is

considered to be funny and therefore transgressive?

The answers to all these questions is that this simply is what our social rules look like. And it is

here that we have reached the definition that was quoted above: 'society's unwritten constitution'. It is

the system of not just legal laws, but also unwritten laws that we must abide by, rules that we have not

created ourselves but are simply 'born into' and that we did not create ourselves, just as the chess

player cannot move the pieces freely as he wishes. Put differently, this act of asking your relative if he or

she wants the last piece of cheese is, as we colloquially call it, a *symbolic* gesture. As socialized subjects, we are taught to abide by these social rules, but we are also programmed to do so. For if we do not comply with this network of social and cultural rules, what will become of us? We could be frowned upon, turn into outcasts, or eventually even be completely rejected by society. Not to say that we risk being imprisoned by taking the last piece of cheese, but essentially we are taught that there is always the risk of being excluded and judged.

But then arises the question: who will be judging us to this extent? Surely it cannot only be our relatives present around the table, who would assumingly not banish us from the family simply by this act of being mildly inconsiderate. There is a multitude of possible answers to this question: God, your consciousness, the thought police, or quite literally your father. But Lacan in his writings extrapolates this source of authority from any possible concrete agent that might take it on and calls this the 'big Other'.

The big Other stands in contrast with the small other, which can be understood as being merely other individuals. The big Other is the one that is always looking over my shoulder, the one that tells me I am doing something wrong, even when there is not actually anyone around to tell me so. To turn to Žižek's illustration of this again:

"This symbolic space acts like a yardstick against which I can measure myself. This is why the big Other can be personified or reified in a single agent: the 'God' who watches over me from beyond, and over all real individuals, or the Cause that involves me (Freedom, Communism, Nation) and for which I am ready to give my life. While talking, I am never merely a 'small other' (individual) interacting with other 'small others': the big Other must always be there."[61]

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[61] Žižek, *How To Read Lacan*, 9.

What this explanation manages to show is that it does not even matter whether you believe in God or even in commonly accepted morality, but that it can also be your own cause that you believe in or just your own conscience. This is also the reason people tell themselves things out loud even when there is no one there to hear them. This is precisely the reason why it is the case that Lacan writes that it is the Symbolic register, which is the realm of the big Other, is responsible for the subjectification proper of the previously described infant: it is because whereas the Imaginary order is characterized as a relation between two 'selves' or between two 'ego's', the Symbolic relation is one between two 'subjects', between the self and the big Other[62]. Once we have constructed our Symbolic order, we have become Lacanian subjects properly speaking. Partially, it is because we now have the presence of other subjects to act as a mirror against which we can identify ourselves. This is what was meant earlier on when it was mentioned that the occurrence of the mirror stage need not necessarily involve an actual mirror: one can also recognize oneself as an authentic "I" in the dialectical process of identification with the Other.

But what then does all of this have to do with the previous discussion on the nature of desire? The relation between that story and this one is a direct one: for Lacan, the subject's desire can be understood as the desire of the Other[63]. This statement is to be understood in a twofold manner: first, it could be said that our desire is fundamentally the desire to be the object of the Other's desire. This can explain why people want to be famous and liked, since this effectively makes them the object of the Other's desire. But I argue that the second way in which this statement can be read is one of the main reasons for Lacanian analysis possessing such enormous potential for critical social analysis. The point of this second reading is not so much that we want to be desired by the Other, but that our desire is the

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[62] Julien, Philippe., Leo Goldberger, and William J. Richardson. *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud The Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary*, 1994, 55.
[63] Ibid.

desire of the Other in the sense that *the Other directs our desire*, that the Other literally tells us what to desire.

This idea can clearly be seen when we go back to Lacan's discussion of the Mirror Stage. When he is discussing the ideal-I, the "I" that is recognized before subjectivation, he points out something crucial about this "I", namely that *"the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual"[64].* What Lacan is pointing out here, is that in this recognition, the subject places the 'agency of the ego before its social determination': something that can indeed be called a misrecognition, because indeed the agency of our ego's is socially determined by the Symbolic network that we are born into, and it is this very same Symbolic network that programmes us as subjects to desire certain things in order to be approved by the big Other. The infant has turned into a subjectivised being, having started the endless cycle of desiring in the gaze of the big Other.

What has taken place in this discussion so far is a rudimentary outline of just exactly how two of the three Lacanian registers function. By no means am I claiming this explanation to be complete: Lacan himself developed these registers over the course of many years, and any effort at summarizing or briefly explaining it will inevitably be flawed. Nonetheless, this effort suffices for a basic understanding of the ways in which these two registers function, in a way that proves to be enough in order to deploy it for the purpose of postcolonial analysis. But how does all this then relate to the postcolonial discussion so far? And how can these registers enable a conceptualization that can help us to philosophically account for the lacking decolonial theory underpinning the gesture of the king's apology? For making sense of this, it is crucial to first turn to the third and final one of Lacan's three registers.

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[64] Lacan, *Écrits,* 76.

The Real and Post-Symbolic Postcolonialism

Of all the three registers that Lacan has developed for explaining his theory of subjectivity, the Real is perhaps the one that is most difficult to understand and the one that is most often misunderstood. This is not very surprising, noting that Lacan himself writes that *"the very idea of the Real entails the exclusion of any meaning. Only insofar as the Real is emptied of all meaning can we apprehend it a little"[65]*. The Real is therefore inherently not to be captured in language: it is precisely this impossibility of being symbolized that is constitutive of the Real.

But be not tricked into thinking that the Real is a 'thing', something that can be located somewhere. For making sense of this concept, I will again turn to Žižek who reminds us that *"for Lacan the Real, at its most radical, had to be totally de-substantialized. It is not an external thing that resists being caught in the symbolic network, but the fissures within the symbolic network itself"[66]*. Apart from again affirming that the Real is not to be thought of as a singular thing, the most important information that is found in this citation is located in the last sentence, namely that the Real can be seen as being the very cracks in the Symbolic order. The Real is what lies behind the our Symbolic order, it is the reality of our Symbolic order only being an effort at covering up what is behind it. This is where Lacan's famous quote comes from where he states: *"I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail"[67]*. In this particular example, the Real can be understood as the permanent gap between the signifier and the signified, therefore representing the ever-present lack of words as part of our Symbolic order.

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[65] Julien, *Lacan's Return To Freud,* 103.
[66] Žižek, *How To Read Lacan,* 72.
[67] Jacques Lacan, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson. "Television." *October* 40 (1987): 7.

The Real is therefore not a thing, and as such it is also not a thing whose presence causes something because a non-thing cannot be said to have a presence. It is only through the shortcomings of the Symbolic order, through the cracks in the picture of meaning that we create for ourselves by means of the Imaginary and Symbolic in order to be able to function as subjects, that we can grasp the Real. This notion then connects back to the quote at the beginning of page 30 which reads that Lacan understands the illusional fantasy of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as *'created in response to a psychological need'*: we need this fantasy of our Imaginary and Symbolic order in order to function properly as subjects, to protect ourselves from the frightening realization that behind our created network of language, purpose and morality, there is only the complete absence of actual meaning of all these things. In such an utter absence of meaning it becomes impossible to function normally as a subject. This is the reason why subjects spend most of their time covering it up, and why an encounter with it can rightly be called traumatic.

This notion of trauma can be found in the early Freud, who developed trauma as "*something that, from outside, intrudes our psychic life and disturbs its balance, throwing out of joint the symbolic coordinates that organize our experience.* [...] *From this perspective, the problem is how to symbolize the trauma, how to integrate it into our universe of meaning and cancel its disorienting impact*"[68]. This dark yet accurate conceptualization of the function of the Real is perhaps the best route for understanding it, because it is something we can relate to. Whenever we experience something so tragic and traumatic as the examples mentioned above, we tend to ask ourselves the question "why?", in order to cover up our confrontation with the utter meaninglessness of the event and the complete absence of a symbolic explanation.

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[68] Ibid.

Think of the cinematic moment of a mother mourning the loss of her child as she calls out cries of "why", trying to rebuild her register of meaning in the world. In the same fashion, in the Dutch language, whenever someone goes through something tragic like the loss of a good friend, it is common to ask "heb je het al een plek kunnen geven?", which translates to something like "have you been able to process it?". But the nice touch about the Dutch transliteration is that is asks whether you have been able to 'give it a spot', which beautifully captures the way in which it is considered to be a process of finding a place in the network of meaning to try and place it, in order to be able to overcome the trauma and to continue functioning normally again. The Real is a traumatic absence of meaning; it is the reality that our desire will never be fulfilled and will always direct itself to another thing, and it is the reason that all our symbolic efforts at making sense of the world eventually fall short.

How, then, can this framework of Lacan's three registers help analysing where the decolonial theory of king's apology is lacking? How can this conceptual framework function as a tool for highlighting where the act of apologizing conducted by the Dutch King went wrong and how it managed to produce such strong negative sentiments with some people? And how can the answer to this question serve as a guiding point of departure for future endeavours of effective decolonization? In order to answer these questions, a proper Lacanian reading of the situation is required.

The King's Apology: A Lacanian Analysis

Having established an understanding of Lacan's theory of the three registers, it is now possible to apply this theory to the main example of this thesis, namely the king's gesture of offering apologies. As stated before, I claim that the Lacanian theory explained above provides the necessary philosophical vocabulary for accurately analysing and pinpointing the problematic parts of the gesture. Drawing upon the three registers, a few things can be said about the king's apology.

First, an analysis of this situation based on the Lacanian notions of desire and the big Other allow for a conceptualization of the origin of the apology as being both problematic and well-intended at the same time. As was mentioned, the big Other can also take the form of an abstract ideal against which one can measure one's own actions. In this case, this 'yardstick' can be seen as being the decolonial theory in place, as this concept provides one with the criterium of what ought to be done in order to move towards a postcolonial discourse. However, if the postcolonial discourse in place is indeed based on a 'competition for tragedy' which entails that decolonial theories revolve around 'anointing the victim of history as the only authentic subject of speech', then it is only natural that the king's desire is hereby directed towards wanting to declare the Indonesian side the 'winner' of this competition for tragedy. This explains how the apology, regardless of its effects, was well-intended: if the big Other looking over his shoulder is a notion of a postcolonial discourse that requires him to inverse the colonizer-colonized binary by making the Indonesian side of the story 'the only authentic subject of speech', then it is only natural that he will do exactly that. If he is 'born into' a symbolic order in which this is desired of him by the big Other, then this gesture will be made with the idea that it is the right thing to do: both morally and as way of creating a postcolonial discourse. This understanding of the well-intended nature of the gesture is paramount to building a constructive dialogue around it that goes beyond aggressively attacking the gesture for its negative effects only.

Second, as was established in the first chapter, this notion of decoloniality is actually a deeply flawed one because it leads not to the transcendence of the colonial binary but only to its reversal and therefore to is entrenchment. Simply ignoring the violence from the Indonesian side and only apologizing for the deeds done by the Dutch is a way of imposing a specific historicity on the situation in which there is an absolute 'good side' and an absolute 'bad side'. This specific imposed historicity is then a symbolic representation of the situation that keeps this binary power relation in its place and therefore does not manage to transcend it. This is where the philosophical issue is located: it is a

symbolic representation that arose out of the desire to construct a postcolonial discourse, but in the end this very symbolic representation only entrenches the colonial binaries that the postcolonial discourse tries to transcend.

Third, the strong negative emotional responses of the Dutch-Indonesian part of society can be read as an encounter with the Real in this specific scenario. Recall how the Real was defined as 'the cracks in the Symbolic order': is it not the case that the Dutch-Indonesians who were sent to defend the colony are precisely the fissures in the aforementioned symbolic representation of the situation? Since the anger that these people feel is based on the fact that their traumas and losses are stripped of any potential positive symbolic meaning, the pain that they endure because of this is precisely a sign of that which does not allow itself to be symbolized by this specific symbolic representation. If any symbolic representation is lacking per definition, then the traumas of the Dutch-Indonesians are here the Real that show the faultiness that is inherent to this symbolic representation.

Now that the philosophically problematic aspects of the gesture have been conceptualized within the Lacanian framework, it becomes clear how the action might have been well-intended but based on a philosophically incoherent notion of decolonization. The Lacanian concept of the Real, however, also shows how any symbolic representation will be inherently lacking in one way or another, and it allows for understanding the way in which the Dutch-Indonesian sentiments are the aspect of reality that in this case resists symbolization in the constructed symbolic order. The question then is how to move forward from here. It is easy to simply claim that a new symbolic representation should be constructed: one that is not derived from a philosophically incoherent notion of postcoloniality and that does not exclude the symbolic representation of the Dutch-Indonesian traumas. But the Lacanian framework shows that *any* symbolic representation will always per definition be flawed. How to take this notion and apply it in such a way it will give rise to a more coherent and constructive theory of decoloniality? This will be explored in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 4 - Forward Through Fanon: The Zone of Non-Being

Now that the problematic essence of the notion of a postcolonial discourse and the flawed symbolic representation that was used in order to construct it have been properly conceptualized, it becomes possible to think of ways out of this problematic situation. In this final chapter I will be exploring philosophical efforts of creating a decolonial theory that manages to transcend the colonizer-colonized dichotomy instead of entrenching it, but one which also keeps in mind the constitutive lack of any symbolic representation and therefore does not end up with the same problem of necessarily excluding certain voices. I will do so based on the point put forward by Gautam Basu Thakur which reads that "*postcolonial studies must move from interrogating the politics of symbolic difference to exploring the excess, surplus or lack that linger in the wake of self-representation*"[69], and that postcolonial studies should "*accomplish the critical task of turning focus away from the symbolic and towards the Real*"[70]. My argument put forward in this chapter is that in order to do so, the work of Frantz Fanon can be of the most useful inspiration in trying to conceptualize what such a turn might look like.

"Politics of Symbolic Difference": Unpacking the Statement

Now that we have developed a basic understanding of Lacan and his theory of the three registers of subjectivity, the statement that postcolonial studies should 'turn away from the symbolic and towards the real' is a whole lot easier to discuss. Nonetheless, it needs a bit of clarification, as well as a test to see if this particular method is actually the answer to any of the questions that we have been asking.

The start of the full argument analysed here reads that postcolonial studies must move away from 'interrogating the politics of symbolic difference'. How to understand this turning away? To draw

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[69] Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack*, xiv.
[70] Ibid.

back on last chapter's crash course on Lacanian theory, we can start with the analogy of the game of chess again. If the symbolic order is to be understood as the different moves that the pieces can make, defined by an already existing network of rules, then this gives an idea of what this notion of symbolic difference means. After all, the symbolic difference is here conceptualized in terms of the difference in moves that every piece is allowed to make. How can this idea then be transferred onto the actual social sphere? Basu Thakur inspires adds that this can be thought of by means of 'symbolic positions', and some of the examples he gives of this are "*the self versus the Other, the centre versus the margin, and the nonhuman instead of the human*"[71]. In spirit of the discussions on decolonization that took place earlier in this thesis, the dichotomy of the colonizer versus the colonized can be added to this list. What we take to be the essential differences between the two symbolic positions that are juxtaposed to one another in every case can be understood as being the 'Symbolic difference'. Now the next question to ask is, then, what the 'politics of symbolic difference' and its interrogation could look like.

If we associate politics with the famous definition given by Harold D. Lasswell and work with the notion that it is about 'who gets what, when, how', then this opens up the way for unpacking this concept. If in postcolonial studies one can find such a previously described 'competition for victimhood', then this competition is precisely what this politics of symbolic difference constitutes. It is this negotiation ('politics') of which actor embodies which piece on the chessboard. Or, more precisely, it is a negotiation of who can claim the specific set of moves allowed for that particular piece on the board, the discussion about who is allowed to say what base on his or her symbolic position. To use the words that Basu Thakur uses in this aspect, it is a "*competition for tragedy, anointing in the process the victim of history as the only authentic subject of speech*"[72]. Who turns out to be the authentic subject of speech is here then based on the assumption of a symbolic position. However, as we have learned from Lacan,

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[71] Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack*, xv.
[72] Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack*, xiv.

any symbolic position is inherently incomplete and flawed: any construction of a symbolic position as something that can account for the 'right to speak' will always have some cracks and fissures through which one can catch glimpses of the Real. It should now slowly become clear how this analytical lens can provide us with new ideas on the Dutch-Indonesian situation.

For how are, when properly considered, the Dutch-Indonesian soldiers that defended the colony and whose pains are now being fumbled away under the carpet of the tide of history, supposed to be placed within this discourse of the king apologizing? The mixed nature of this group is what makes it difficult: they too suffered great traumas during the war that followed Indonesian independence, but they were also the children of the Indonesian soil. Historical factors might have led to them serving the Dutch Royal Family at the time, but they are still also a group of people that were forced to leave their native land and move to the other side of the world. Therefore they form a difficult category in the colonizer-colonized symbolic dichotomy that exists in the colonial history of the Netherlands. Are the painful emotions caused by the king's apologies not indicative of the Real here? Can this not be directly understood as a fundamental lack in the symbolic positions that are assumed in this scenario?

My argument is that this is precisely the case. We started off with the question of how an act of supposed reconciliation can produce such pains, how it can do so much harm and produce such traumatic feelings with part of the population, and the Lacanian framework of analysis has in this case provided us with an answer. At the very least it has supplied us with an explanation as of why this can be the case. In unconditionally declaring the Dutch side of that particular conflict as having been in the wrong, the king has, in his best intentions of achieving a decolonized postcolonial narrative, committed an error that we have outlined in the first chapter, namely the reversal of the symbolic dichotomy. As we have noted before, such a reversal ultimately does not achieve the transcendence of the dichotomy. Or, to put it in the words of Gayatri Spivak, "*reversing symbolic positions only reproduces the existing*

hierarchy by another name"[73]. In this sense, we can by the previously established logic say that it did not

effectively do much of decolonizing, as it is mainly re-establishing the colonizer-colonized discourse in a

different name. Not being able to account for the horrible deeds committed on both sides does indeed

not seem to transcend this dichotomy to facilitate a dialogue on an equal level.

But how to proceed from here? According to the argument that was presented at the start of

this chapter, we ought to move away from this politics of symbolic difference, and turn towards the Real

instead. An inspiring quote to help think of what such a theoretical approach might look like is found in

the work '*Lacanian Left*', where Yannis Stavrakakis tries to conceptualize what a collective of thinkers

who aim at doing exactly this might look like:

"Taken in this sense, 'Lacanian Left' can only be the signifier of its own division, a division which is not to

be repressed or disavowed but, instead, highlighted and negotiated again and again as a locus of

immense productivity, as the encounter – within theoretical discourse – of the constitutive gap between

the symbolic and the real, knowledge and truth, the social and the political"[74].

Focussing on this constitutive gap between the Symbolic and the Real can indeed be a way of

moving beyond the frames of thinking which are currently in use. In other words: instead of silencing the

voices of the pains of the Dutch-Indonesian community, accepting the flaws of the logic of the Symbolic

positions and thereby denying these people their symbolic right to articulate their sadness, we can shift

the focus of analysis to the very lack that is inherent in these symbolic positions. This Lacanian

understanding of the lack being constitutive of these positions will both contribute to the transcending

of the dichotomy and therefore to decolonization proper, as well as that it will not turn into a tool for

silencing whoever loses the 'race to the bottom'. In such a discourse that takes this constitutive lack into

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[73] Gayatri Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Harvard UP, 1999, as quoted in Basu Thakur, *Postcolonial Lack*, xv.
[74] Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 4.

account, old dichotomies of colonizer and colonized will not be turned around and perpetuated, but instead they will be turned redundant and so these colonial binaries of power will therefore be overcome. Furthermore, the narrative that can evolve out of this will be a properly inclusive one, in which there is space for the articulation of the pains of every single person, no longer relying on a dichotomy that gives the right to speak to one by taking it away from the other. In other words, this will create a postcolonial discourse that is no longer functioning as a zero-sum-game.

Surely this is a nice theoretical approach, but it seems to be one that is also inherently flawed. For if one would take a literal turn in focus solely towards the Real, then this would be inherently impossible for us as subjects. After all, we cannot function properly when confronted with it, and in the context of highlighting the Real as opposed to symbolic positions this would ultimately lead us into some kind of never-ending downward spiral that ends with us not being able to use language functionally anymore. So, how to produce productive results by focussing on the gap between the Symbolic and the Real without falling into this regression of no meaning whatsoever? It is here that the old philosophical gems of Frantz Fanon should be uncovered and given a fresh layer of polish.

Fanon and the Zone of Non-Being

The reason why I end up at the writings of Frantz Fanon is not only because of the fact that he is one of the most important and most influential scholars in the field of postcolonial studies. Even though this is most certainly the case, there is something specific about Fanon's writings, most notably *Black Skins, White Masks,* that makes him specifically suitable to being placed in conversation with Lacan, precisely because Fanon manages to portray such an accurate and touching picture of what it is to be black in a world (or Symbolic order for that matter) that requires you to be white. As Lewis R. Gordon highlights, Fanon in this sense bases his analysis on "*the dehumanizing bridge between individual and structure*

posed by antiblack racism marks the black, who is, in the end, "anonymous" in a perversive way, which enables "the black" to collapse into "blacks". It is perverse because whereas "blacks" is not a proper name, antiblack racism makes it function as such, as a name of familiarity that closes off the need for further knowledge"[75]. This relationship between the individual that exists and the structure in which it exists makes that the individual is forced to exist within a system that is constantly turning the individual into a 'problematic being'[76]. Or, as Fanon himself writs, "*there is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge"*[77]. This 'zone of nonbeing' is the effect of what occurs when an individual has to make sense of his existence within a structure that fundamentally denies him of his humanity, and when the big Other surrounding him is constantly asking of him to redefine himself in a way that he cannot. In this sense, the Fanonian notion of the zone of nonbeing provides with a unique phenomenological account of the far-reaching effects on the psyche that can be experienced when one exists in a subject within a symbolic order that reduces this very subject to a subject of nonbeing.

This is precisely the point where I claim that the epistemologies of Fanon and Lacan show an overlap that can be used for the furthering of both. As I stated earlier in this thesis, my claim is that the problematic scenario that followed the king's apology can be properly and constructively understood by turning it into a Lacanian question and providing a Fanonian answer. The argument that I want to put forward, then, is that a Lacanan reading of the predicament that is sketched by Fanon can proof to be a good starting point for further developing a postcolonial analysis that moves away from the Symbolic and towards the Real.

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[75] Lewis R. Gordon, "Writing through the Zone of Nonbeing." in *What Fanon Said*. (New York: Fordham University Press: 2020): 22.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks,* xii,

Fanonian Perspectives

In order to understand why Fanon can lead the way in creating a decolonial theory that turns towards the Real, this can be explained based on the conclusions that were drawn at the end of chapter three regarding the apologies of the king. First, this well-intended apology was based on a philosophically inconsistent notion of decolonization that leads to the gesture not being able to transcend the binary power structure of Colonizer-Colonized. Second, this failure to transcend the binary is inherently antithetical to achieving true decolonization. Third, The Dutch-Indonesian sentiment can be understood as the Real as it is indicative of the lack of the symbolic representation. The question then is how Fanon's philosophy can be read as being a solution to these aforementioned problems.

To begin with, Fanon's phenomenological account of what it means to be a colonized subject can serve as an excellent conceptual framework for beginning to understand what it means to exist within a social framework that demands of the subject to be something which it is not. This is why, according to Derek Hook, something of a Fanonian decolonial project would focus on a subject's *"relationship to the cultural situation (to the symbolic order, the big Other)"*[78]. If such a Fanonian analysis indeed capable of accounting for the alienation that occurs within a subject when this subject is placed in a symbolic order that denies this very subject access to this symbolic space, then this Fanonian reading is the first step towards imagining a more constructive and more inclusive decolonial theory.

The symbolic representation that was created by the king offering his apologies is clearly one that lacks, as can be seen by the emotional responses from the Dutch-Indonesian segment of society. This lack then constitutes of the fact that it is this specific Dutch-Indonesian group that is not allowed access to this symbolic structure: they cannot give meaning to their traumas, nor can they meaningfully

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[78] Hook, "Fanon via Lacan", 312.

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articulate their experiences within this discourse. A Fanonian reading of this excluding dynamic of the discourse can account for how a subject exists within a social structure that does not provide access to the symbolic realm. Adapting this kind of lens for looking at situations like the anger of the Dutch-Indonesian people is a good beginning for producing a postcolonial discourse that is more inclusive and, by extension, more truly postcolonial.

The deadlock that this kind of analysis solves can be recognized by the discursive responses that people currently give to the Dutch-Indonesian emotions. Within the current symbolic representation of the history of the war, there is simply no space to account for the suffering endured by the Dutch-Indonesians that does not break down the entire structure. One has to resort to either telling them that there is nothing that can be done about their pains, or (perhaps even worse) one has to tell them that even though they might have suffered, they have not suffered *as much* as the Indonesians and should therefore just accept their position. These discursive ways of dealing with the Dutch-Indonesian emotions can, within this symbolic structure, simply not be accounted for in a way that would actually solve it.

In order to solve this, which would be to acknowledge the suffering endured by the Dutch-Indonesians, this group would need access to the symbolic space from which they have been excluded by the king's unilateral apology, and therefore this situation can rightly be called a deadlock. Fanon's analysis, taking as a starting point the phenomenology of a subject of which the symbolic realm surrounding asks the subject to be something which it is not, should function as the starting point for a different decolonial take on this situation. Fanon's account can not only account for, but also recognize and understand how such a symbolic structure can produce such strong emotive responses. Instead of plainly accepting these heavy emotive responses as being some kind of necessary evil that cannot be overcome, Fanon helps understanding how any excluding symbolic structure naturally produces such discord in subjects.

Seeing the situation as such, it can account for this emotion as a phenomenon instead of dismissing it as some kind of collateral damage. Conceptualizing it as such already provides more symbolic space for the Dutch-Indonesians to articulate their emotions: the Fanonian perspective then serves as a starting point of critique for criticising this specific symbolic structure and the way in which it excludes these voices; something that cannot be accounted for in a discourse in which the king's apology are the final conclusion. In this sense, a Fanonian reading of this situation is able to confront the Real: it accounts for both the cause as well as the consequence of treating such an established discourse as final. It accounts for the consequence in that it articulates the severe alienation that comes from this (and consequentially gives rise to such intense emotions), and it accounts for the cause in that it can provide an accurate description of the dynamics in play in not being granted access to the symbolic order via his zone of nonbeing. This makes the Fanonian reading of the situation perfect for confronting the Real here: it accounts for the way in which there is a lack within a created symbolic framework.

Furthermore, the way in which a Fanonian reading of the situation conceptualizes this attitude towards those who are excluded from the symbolic framework in such a way that one is forced to acknowledge the necessity of transcending the binary power structure instead of reversing it. What I mean by this is the following: any account of alienation from the symbolic structures in place warrants the construction of a new symbolic structure in order to try and fix this. But how to prevent the eternal reconfiguration of the symbolic structure in different ways that all simply resort to reversing the binary power relation? This, I argue, can only be done by, to put it in Lacanian terms, facing and coming to terms with the Real. Only by facing the inherent lack of adopting symbolic positions such as colonizer or colonized can we begin to understand that such a symbolic position based on binaries is inherently flawed.

In the case of the king offering unilateral apologies, this is clearly a choice of symbolic positions based on a binary, since it puts the full blame on the Dutch and fully takes away the blame from the

Indonesians. Fanon's account of how being alienated from this symbolic structure not only shows how this is the Real, in the Lacanian sense that it is the category of people that show the limits of the symbolic structure in place. Fanon goes one step further in this aspect: he actually manages to portray an image of what this predicament of embodying the Real would look like. When adding up this Fanonian account with the binary oppositional symbolic positions of this example, it becomes clear that any such endeavour of creating a symbolic structure based on binary symbolic positions would eventually lead to this same scenario where people feel left out and hurt. Fanon in this aspect is truly the answer to a Lacanian question. The Lacanian psychoanalytic framework is useful for conceptualizing the problem, but it offers no solution. At best, it provides a notion of where to look for the answer, which would be the Real. What Fanon then manages to do is to 'fill in' this Real, so that it may become more than a mere theoretical constituent lack of any hypothetical symbolic structure.

Recall the question that was asked on page 60 of how one can possibly turn towards the Real without ending up in a nihilistic regression that prevents normal subjective functioning. My claim here is that Fanon gives the answer to precisely this question by showing the necessity of transcending binary symbolic positions. Lacan himself would then probably state that symbolic positions that are not based on binary power structure nonetheless have their own lacks and are imperfect, and I would agree with this if I was trying to paint a complete picture of Lacanian theory. However, in order to stay within the practical realm of achieving decolonization, we cannot simply say that it is in the nature of words that decolonization will never be possible. At least I am not willing to do so, since this would render the whole postcolonial project redundant. But Fanon's notion of alienation from a symbolic structure that a symbolic structure based on binary positions is sure to give rise to an instance of the Real: in this case the great pains endured by the Dutch-Indonesians who are excluded from meaningfully articulating their traumas within the symbolic order.

If we allow a Fanonian reading of the situation from the perspective of the Dutch-Indonesians to articulate how the binary symbolic positions necessarily exclude them, then this articulates the flawed nature of such a symbolic structure and it teaches us to look at the inherent lack of such positions. This is then the way forward for trying to conceive of different postcolonial attitudes that no longer revolve around a 'competition for tragedy': the only kind of attitude that can truly transcend the colonizer-colonized dichotomy instead of reversing and entrenching it.

Conclusion: Beyond the Binary

Earlier in this thesis, the claim was made that the decolonial theory that was in place in the case of the king's unilateral apology was based on seeing decoloniality as a 'competition for victimhood', and I conceptualized it as a 'race to the bottom'. Such a race to the bottom implies a winner, and a winner implies a loser. This situation in which there necessarily needs to be both a winner and a loser can be understood as being a binary symbolic structure. This binary symbolic structure was clearly created by the Dutch king with his unilateral apology, since this creates the binary of one side that is completely 'good' and another that is completely 'bad'; one side that has won the race to the bottom and another one that has not, and that has therefore lost access to the symbolic structure as a way of giving meaning to trauma. However, as Lacan's theory of the three registers of subjectivity show, any such a symbolic position is per definition lacking and flawed, and this is in this case embodied by the painful emotions endured by the Dutch-Indonesians who are not able to articulate their traumas in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, the Dutch king letting his side take all the blame and the Indonesian side all the innocence sustains the very same colonial binary power relation that the postcolonial discourse is trying to overcome. Therefore the decolonial theory underlying the king's gesture can rightly be called both flawed and counterproductive, since it only entrenches the binary it intends to overcome. Because of this, another decolonial approach is required: one that does not exclude certain voices from engaging with the symbolic structure of this postcolonial discourse, and also one that manages to transcend the colonial binaries instead of perpetuating them.

In order to do this we must, in Lacanian terms, move away from using postcolonialism to interrogate the validity of symbolic position: this interrogation will only result in another 'race to the bottom'. Instead, the postcolonial lens must start moving its focus towards the Real; towards the

inherent shortcomings of any symbolic position. But how to do this without ending up in an endless spiral of negation and scepticism?

Fanon here provides a way out. Focussing on Fanon's account of the effects of being alienated from the symbolic structure in place, this account should be taken as a focus to show that a narrative that is based on binary symbolic positions will always necessarily create a group of people who are alienated from the symbolic structure. The risk and effects of this alienation must be recognized and always be placed on the forefront when conceiving of decolonial theories.

It might be the case that, in the strictly Lacanian sense, symbolic positions that are not binary are inherently lacking nonetheless. But this is the case in an absolute sense, and not within the pragmatic boundaries of decolonization. In this way, we have a Lacanian question with a Fanonian answer. How to move towards a decoloniality that moves away from binary symbolic positions that reinforce colonial binary power relations? By recognizing and emphasizing the deeply negative effects of creating a symbolic structure in which subjects feel alienated. Instead, an effort could be made to create a symbolic representation of the situation that does not think in the binaries of a 'race to the bottom'; one that recognizes the constitutive shortcoming of any effort to adopt fixed symbolic positions and which instead acknowledges the fact that corresponding reality is simply not so black and white. Such a symbolic structure would refrain from reproducing binary power relations, allowing for a proper postcolonial discourse to emerge.

So what could have been done instead of the gesture of unilateral apologies? An example of this could be to create something of a transnational commemoration day, in which both Indonesia and the Netherlands commemorate what has happened in a shared ritual. This would create a symbolic structure in which both former colonizer and former colonized stand side by side on equal terms to collectively engage in a process of giving meaning to this shared past. In this way, there is no 'winner'

and no 'loser'; no reversal of the binary, but a proper transcendence of it. It will acknowledge the

Fanonian demand of creating a symbolic structure that is not alienating to anyone and allow for the

transcendence of binary power structures, opening the way towards true postcoloniality. This is just a

first suggestion, but creating a decolonial dynamic that manages to turn towards the constitutive lack of

any binary symbolic position by prioritizing Fanon's reading of alienation from the symbolic order is

most certainly an open project. It is my hope that many more conceptualizations can arise from the

theoretical structure that I have outlined in this thesis.

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