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Accounts of Injury as Misappropriations of Race: Towards a Critical Black Politics of Vulnerability

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Across contexts and time, subjects marked by racial difference have expressed public accounts of the multiple injuries of race. From the vantage point of critical race and black theory, this paper sheds light on both the heuristic and critical political values of such accounts. The first part critically reassesses conceptualizations of vulnerability as an ambivalent ontological condition within critical approaches to liberalism. A close reading of Fanon's account of injury in *Black Skin, White Masks* specifies how race exploits bodily and enunciative vulnerability and materializes subjects into a state of suspension and suspicion. The second part addresses the political promise of accounts of racialized injury. Departing from sceptical readings of "wounded attachment," critical race and black analyses associate accounts of injury with citational practices that pertain to historically entrenched conventions of resistance to racial and colonial abusive power. Such accounts can be read as misappropriations of race which expand the horizon of the human.

KEYWORDS vulnerability, race, injury, critical race theory, black studies, Frantz Fanon, *Ya bon banania*, Judith Butler, misappropriation, politics of the human

Introduction: the injury of race across space and time

Race produces an injury. Those who have been or are marked by racial difference denounce the injurious force of race. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon delivers us one of the most famous analyses of the wounding power of "race," as he accounts for the injuries provoked by his forced encounter with images, discourses and stereotypes of blackness:

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but *an amputation, an excision, a*

hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together.¹

In the same French context, but some decades later, a similar discourse is at play in the rap song made by Rocé, a French activist and artist of Algerian decent:

I am *lacking oxygen* you know, *my stomach is heavy, contracted*, my hate stays muted, muted by the hypocrisy around us, so many clichés in movies, in art around us, everything is said even without discourse, freezed up clichés *put a heavy burden* on certain.²

In the North American context, Audre Lorde recalls an injury of her childhood in the 1960s inflicted by the image and narrative of *Little Black Sambo*:

The Story Hour librarian reading *Little Black Sambo*. Her white fingers hold up the little book about a shoebutton-faced little boy with big red lips and many pigtailed and a hatful of butter. *I remember the pictures hurting me* and my thinking again there must be something wrong with me because everybody else is laughing and besides the library downtown has given this little book a special prize, the library lady tells us. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, ANYWAY? DON'T BE SO SENSITIVE!³

The register of injury also saturates historical and theoretical works in slave and critical race studies, as exemplified by the following account by Saidiya Hartman of the condition of the enslaved:

Pain is a normative condition that encompasses the legal subjectivity of the enslaved that is constructed along the *lines of injury and punishment*, the *violation and suffering* inextricably enmeshed with the pleasures of minstrelsy and melodrama, the operation of power on black bodies, and the life of property ... This *pain* might best be described as the *history that hurts* – the still-unfolding narrative of captivity, dispossession, and domination that engenders the black subject in the Americas.⁴

Although they concern different contexts in different periods, all these extracts can be considered to be accounts of injury. In them all, pain, stomach ache, suffocation and the difficulty of making those injuries audible pervade the life of subjects who are marked by racial difference. In all these accounts, a specific injury seems to be implied by the circulation of racialized discourses and practices within modernity.⁵ Moreover, as they derive from an essay, a song, an autobiographic novel or a

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, [1952] 1986), 85 [my emphasis].

² Rocé, "Besoin d'Oxygène," in *Identités en Crescendo* (Paris: No Format, Universal Jazz, 2006) [translation and emphasis are mine].

³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Paperback Book Club, [1984] 1993), 148 [my emphasis].

⁴ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 51.

⁵ Following discursive approaches, I associate the modern idea of race with a complex articulation of discursive elements: rules, norms, practices, resources and subjectivities. Race gives meaning and classifies and hierarchizes subjects, practices and social relations according to a set of naturalized "endogenous" attributes such as hair texture, phenotype, form of lips and cultural ability. It is important to note that discursive approaches insist upon the ability of racialized discourse to change across contexts and time, as well as to interact and adapt with other modern discourses of difference such as gender, class and sexuality. See Stuart Hall, *Identités et Culture II, Politique des Différences* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2013); David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); Noémi Michel and Manuela Honegger, "Thinking Whiteness in French and Swiss Cyberspaces," *Social Politics* 17.4 (2010).

historical-theoretical account, these extracts exemplify *public* accounts of injury. They are expressed for an audience. They are aimed at circulating, at provoking, a counter-circulation to the invasive circulation of racialized practices and discourses.

This paper aims to shed light on both the heuristic and critical-political values of public accounts of injury expressed by subjects marked by racial difference in two stages. The first part mobilizes Fanon's account of injury in order to intervene within – but also besides – recent debates on vulnerability in critical approaches to political liberalism. As pointed out by Estelle Ferrarese, vulnerability emerges as a *constitutive* feature of the subject within critical and feminist theories of care, justice, interdependence or recognition – theories that call “for an alternative concept of the subject founded on a distinct social ontology, as opposed to the figure of a rational and sovereign, always-already autonomous subject.”⁶ The coupling of vulnerability with subjection is exemplified, for instance, by Judith Butler's early work on the linguistic, psychic and social formation of the subject.⁷ She defines vulnerability as an ambivalent figure, as a paradoxical nexus of constitutive possibilities. On the one hand, it consists of the possibility of being exploited by abusive forms of power. It qualifies the subject's dependence on the discourses of others and points to a dependence on the “active and productive vocabulary of power,” which conditions at once social survival and intelligibility as well as subordination to regulatory and disciplinary regimes.⁸ On each occasion of its reiteration, the subject can be subjugated to categories, terms and names of dominant discourses and thus be *exploited* by interpellative addresses which stabilize the subject outside of “the possible circuit of recognition” in “abjection.”⁹ On the other hand, vulnerability points towards the possibility of resisting power's pretension for exploitation. Butler also stages vulnerability as an *enabling* feature of subjection which derives from the *temporal* nature of the conventional discourses which constantly reproduce subjects. The necessity of their reiteration opens up the possibility for resistance to subjugation. From this perspective, constitutive vulnerability is at the source of subjects' paradoxical exercise of power, namely, their constrained agency.

Butler's work does not exhaust the variety of conceptualizations of constitutive vulnerability. Theorists disagree about what counts as vulnerability and how vulnerability is materialized in specific power relations, subject positions and conditions of life and death. Butler's model, however, can be deemed as illustrative of a dominant tendency of these discussions to put emphasis on the ontological level,¹⁰ thus staging vulnerability as an ambivalent ontological condition. Entering these discussions from

⁶ Estelle Ferrarese, “‘Gabba-Gabba, We Accept You, One of Us:’ Vulnerability and Power in the Relationship of Recognition,” *Constellations* 16.4 (2009): 604.

⁷ The early Butlerian writings include works between the publication of *Gender Trouble* in the early 1990s and the publication of *Precarious Life* in the early 2000s. *Precarious Life* is indeed often associated with what some commentators have called Butler's ethical turn – a turn which is marked by a progressive favouring of precariousness over vulnerability. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004).

⁸ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997a), 28.

⁹ Judith Butler, “Excitable Speech:” *A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997b), 5.

¹⁰ For critiques of this ontological focus see Moya Lloyd, “Radical Democratic Activism and the Politics of Resignification,” *Constellations* 14.1 (2007); and Noémi Michel, “Equality and Postcolonial Claims of Discursive Injury,” *Swiss Political Science Review* 19.4 (2013).

the vantage point of critical race and black studies, this paper seeks to shed light on the shortcomings of such an emphasis. I argue that accounts of racialized injury offer us a heuristic space for (re-)thinking a vulnerability which is de-centred from the experience of the hegemonic subject implicitly marked as “white European.” I claim that Fanon crucially helps us to go beyond an ontological understanding of vulnerability as he sheds light on specific racialized materializations of injured states.

The second part of the paper addresses the political horizon of accounts of racialized injury. Contemporary politicizations of injuries, wounds or pain have come up against sceptical readings by some feminist and critical political theorists who express dissatisfaction with both identity and liberal politics. Following Nietzsche’s analysis of *ressentiment*, Wendy Brown contends for instance that an overinvestment in the injury can lead to its transformation into a rigid identity. Public accounts of injury risk becoming trapped in a liberal logic of politics: they risk fixing “the identities of the injured and the injuring as social positions” and codifying “the meanings of their actions against all possibilities of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and struggle for resignification or repositioning.”¹¹ Brown warns against the unfreedom which can result from “wounded attachments,” since the latter follow a logic of reaction and negation instead of openness and imagination: “confessing injury can become that which attaches us to the injury, paralyzes us within it, and prevents us from seeking or even desiring a status other than that of injured.”¹² Do past and present accounts of racialized injury take part in the risky politicization of identity outlined by Brown? Or do they entail some political promises for contesting and resisting abusive forms of power? Critical race and black studies approaches, I contend, provide us with a less sceptical and more alternatively historically informed answer to such questions.¹³ They help us to specify the resignifying operation of accounts of injury. Such accounts reactivate historically entrenched conventions of resistance to racial and colonial abusive powers. They take part in what I understand to be necessary misappropriations of race which expand the horizon of the human.

1. Injurious materializations: Frantz Fanon and the *Nègre y a Bon Banania*

In the extract above, Audre Lorde recalls the wound inflicted by the pictures of *Little Black Sambo*. By telling how the pictures “hurt” her, Lorde suggests that the source

¹¹ Wendy Brown, *State of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 27.

¹² Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 91.

¹³ Brown’s genealogy apprehends politicized racial (as well as gendered and sexualized) identities as “both a production and contestation of the political terms of liberalism, disciplinary-bureaucratic regimes, certain forces of global capitalism, and the demographic flows of postcoloniality that together might be taken as constitutive of the contemporary North American political condition.” See Brown, *States of Injury*, 54. In contrast, within critical race and black perspectives, subject positions marked by racial difference emerge through diasporic spaces as well as diffuse and non-linear temporalities. See, for instance, Achille Mbembe, “What is Postcolonial Thinking? An Interview with Achille Mbembe,” *Eurozine* 2008-01-09 ([2006] 2008); and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).

of the wound is external. The wound originates in pre-existing discourses coming from others, namely, in conventions of injurious representation of blackness. However, in the same sentence, Lorde also associates the source of the wound as being in herself, with her subjectivity, as she says: “there must be something wrong with me.” By locating the injury in a space made by others and by herself at once, Lorde echoes the equation between vulnerability and subjection made by critical and feminist theories of vulnerability. Indeed, she suggests that we are vulnerable to discursive conventions that are reiterated by others but also come to constitute us and become part of what we are and how we live. Lorde’s account can be paralleled with Judith Butler’s definition of vulnerability in terms of exploitability:

[V]ulnerability qualifies the subject as an exploitable kind of being. If one is to oppose the abuses of power (which is not the same as opposing power itself), it seems wise to consider *in what our vulnerability to that abuses consists*. That subjects are constituted in primary vulnerability does not exonerate the abuses they suffer; on the contrary, it makes all the more clear how fundamental the vulnerability can be.¹⁴

Following Butler’s perspective, Lorde’s critique of “Little Sambo” can be read as a critique of racialized “abuses of power;” thus it calls us to explain what vulnerability to racialized forms of power consists of. Yet, Lorde’s account also suggests something more. It indicates that constitutive vulnerability *materializes* into a wound. Her testimony, as well as the quoted extracts of Fanon, Rocé and Hartman, calls us to further explain how constitutive vulnerability transforms into an injurious state. If we acknowledge that subjects are fundamentally vulnerable, then we also need to grasp when and how they become subjects *enacted* by injury. We need to identify and specify which conventions involve abuses of power that exploit our vulnerability.¹⁵ We need to account for the operations, that is, for moments of abuse, which transform primary vulnerability into a state of suffering. In what does our vulnerability to abuses of power consist? What are the effects of such exploitations? What kind of subjects do they produce? How do these subjects suffer from those abuses?

This section addresses these question with a close reading of Fanon’s account of vulnerability in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Prefiguring the whole project of critical race, postcolonial and black studies, this seminal essay can be read as a stage for a multitude of episodes of subjection into racial difference.¹⁶ I concentrate here on

¹⁴ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 20.

¹⁵ Note that my use of “exploitation” and “exploitability” departs from a Marxist approach and emerges at the crossroads of Foucauldian and critical race and black understandings of subjects’ relations to productive power. From such a perspective, the “subject” is a discursive site constantly reproduced by historical and socio-political forces. Exploitation designates any operation which takes advantage of the subject’s dependence on discursive conventions of survival and intelligibility in order to materialize their near death or being at the limit of intelligibility.

¹⁶ On the importance of Fanon for anglophone postcolonial studies, see Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory: African Inflections* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, [1994] 2004). On the importance of Fanon for the emerging and consolidating francophone critique of postcoloniality and race, see Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la Grande Nuit: Essai sur l’Afrique Décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010); Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013); and Françoise Vergès, “Approches Postcoloniales de l’Esclavage et de la Colonisation,” *Mouvements* 3.51 (2007). On Fanon’s contribution to black studies, see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

Fanon's account of the operations, instances and effects involved in the production of one peculiar subject – a subject which he calls “*Nègre type y a bon banania*” (which has a family resemblance with Little Sambo).¹⁷ Unravelling Fanon's *Y a bon banania*, I wish to show that it sheds light on various forms and effects of vulnerability's injurious materializations, which all pertain to abuses of power implied by racialized conventions.

Indeed, the *Nègre type y a bon banania* constitutes one of the most important characters in Fanon's theatre. The figure appears in many episodes, for instance, in children's books and popular movies:

Willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him. Look at children's picture magazines: Out of every Negro mouth comes the ritual “Yassuh, boss.” It is even more remarkable in motion pictures. Most of the American films for which French dialogue is dubbed in offer the type-Negro: “Sho' good!” [*le Nègre type y a bon banania*] ... It is because the Negro has to be shown in a certain way; and from the Negro in *Sans Pitié* – “Me work hard, me never lie, me never steal” – to the servant girl of *Duel in the Sun* one meets the same stereotype.¹⁸

The *Nègre type y a bon banania* is the “good nigger,”¹⁹ whose constant smile is a gift to the white:

Gifts without end, in every advertisement, on every screen, on every food-product label ... The black man gives Madame the new “dark Creole colors” for her pure nylons, courtesy of the House of Vigny; her “imaginative, coil-like” bottles of Golliwog toilet water and perfume. Schoeshines, clothes white as snow, comfortable lower berths, quick baggage-handling; jazz, jitterbug, jive, jokes, and the wonderful stories of Br'er Rabbit to amuse little children. Service with a smile, every time.²⁰

Y a bon banania refers to the *tirailleur sénégalais*.²¹ It thus evokes ambivalent images: images of “the-good-soldier-under-command, the brave fellow-who-only-knows-how-to-obey”²² or “the nice Negro with the red army tarboosh and the infinite Fernandel-like grin, the symbol of some chocolate confection,” but also images of “that remote black and naked being, almost

¹⁷ The expression can be translated as a “Banania-type N-.” Banania is the label of a famous French product: a beverage with a chocolate and banana flavour that was first commercialized in the wake of World War I. See Anne Donadey, “Y'a Bon Banania: Ethics and Cultural Criticism in the Colonial Context,” *French Cultural Studies* 11.31 (2000); and Sylvie Chalaye, *Nègres en Images*, La Bibliothèque d'Afrique (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002). The advertising and customizing of this product represent a caricatured Senegalese trooper smiling over the product while exclaiming “Y a bon!” In French, *parler petit-nègre* is the equivalent of “Sho' good” in pidgin. It is important to note that the *Nègre type y a bon banania* as well as the evocations of Banania disappear in the English version as the translator has replaced their occurrences with Anglo-American equivalent figures. The reading presented in this section is thus based on the original version: Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952).

¹⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 22.

¹⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 22.

²⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 34–5 footnote 7.

²¹ The *tirailleur sénégalais* is the Senegalese trooper who was enrolled as a French soldier during both World Wars. For an account of the historical conditions that constitute the *tirailleur sénégalais* as a national mascot after World War I, see Chalaye, *Nègres en Images*; Donadey, “Y'a Bon Banania;” Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire: Essai sur une Minorité Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009); Cécile Van Den Avenue, “Les Petits Noirs du Type y a Bon Banania, Messieurs, C'est Terminé, L'usage Subversif du Français-Tirailleur dans Camp de Thiaroye de Sembène Ousmane,” *Glottopol* 12 (May 2008).

²² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 77.

nonexistent”²³ who is perceived as “dreadful, bloody, tough, strong.”²⁴ Furthermore, these ambivalent images come to occupy whites’ imaginary, namely, their dreams, desires and fears: “I just can’t see them putting those big hands of theirs on my shoulders. I shudder at the mere thought of it” tells, for instance, a white acquaintance to Fanon.²⁵ The *tirailleur sénégalais* equally invades the imaginary of the colonized subjects studied by Fanon. In his account of horrifying dreams of Madagascans, the black soldier is a central source of “the irruption of real fantasies into sleep.”²⁶

Finally, *Ya bon banania* also refers to the *parler petit nègre* [pidgin-nigger] as in the following scene:

You are in a bar, in Rouen or Strasbourg, and you have the misfortune to be spotted by an old drunk. He sits down at your table right off. “You – Africa? Dakar, Rufisque, whore-house, dames, café, mangoes, bananas ...” You stand up and leave, and your farewell is a torrent of abuse: “You didn’t play big shot like that in your jungle, you dirty nigger!” ... to talk pidgin-nigger is to express this thought: “You’d better keep your place.”²⁷

Fanon is assigned to “his” place, namely, to a childish state as signified by pidgin-nigger and to exotism and an ape-like way of life as signified by “banana.”

Ya bon banania is involved in multiple ways and in multiple episodes of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Taken together, they give us a sense of the complex and various rituals of race. They shed light on the multiple *forms* and *instances* that take part in the discursive production of subjects marked by racial difference under colonialism.²⁸ The figure condenses a plurality of *forms* of subjection. *Ya bon banania* takes a visual form. The figure sticks to the black subject through visual codes of bodily, clothing and chromatic attributes, such as the “black” skin colour, “imposing” and “muscled” body, “thick” lips, “smile” of “white teeth,” red colour of the army tarboosh as well as the “yellow” of the banana and the background of the advertisement. *Ya bon banania* takes the form of a verbal or textual address: it appears in advertisements, children’s or scientific books, and carries other terms such as “banana,” “Yassuh boss,” “savage,” “nigga” and “jungle.” It becomes part of a “stereotype,” as it participates in a structure of meaning and knowledge consolidated by several narratives and legends that put the black in the fixed role of a stupid child or a brute savage. *Ya bon banania* interpellates

²³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 155.

²⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 128.

²⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 128.

²⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 79.

²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 21.

²⁸ Other episodes and figures in *Black Skin, White Masks* have been widely commented on. One of the most famous and quoted scenes – “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” “Kiss the handsome Negro’s ass, madame!” constitutes a topos within critical discursive approaches to race. See, for instance, analyses by Judith Butler, “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. R. Gooding-Williams (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993); Raka Shome, “Whiteness and the Politics of Location: Postcolonial Reflections,” in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, ed. T. K. Nakayama and J. N. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); and Elsa Dorlin, “‘Performe ton Genre, Performe ta Race!’ Re-penser l’Articulation entre Sexisme et Racisme à l’Ère de la Postcolonie,” in *Soirées de Sophia, 2006–2007*, ed. Réseau Sophia (Bruxelles: Sophia, 2007) (2007).

under the form of artefacts: it appears on coffee cups, perfumes and nylons. In short, the figure points towards the *protean nature* of the conventional discourses of race.

Furthermore, the multiple encounters with *Ya bon banania* encapsulate the various instances and practices that constantly reiterate racialized discourses. Fanon indicates to us that subjection to racial difference occurs through verbal address (as in the episode with the old drunk), third-person references, a specific gaze (Fanon evokes the “white eye”), gestures of consumption (eating, shopping and cooking) or dreams and fantasies. These racializing practices occur across various public spaces: the walls of the street, human zoos in national fairs and the transnational and trans-imperial routes of colonial goods (*Ya bon banania* travels on various food-product labels, in popular movies and school history books). These racializing practices also take place in the most private spaces, such as in the kitchens of European households or in dreams and the imagination. Thus the *Nègre* constitutes a space of affective investments involving horror, mockery, laughter, sexual desire or consumerist attachments. In short, in Fanon’s theatre, subjection occurs in various and complex ways. The *Nègre* is constantly and pervasively reiterated through verbal, scopic, consumerist and fantasmatic ritualized practices. They all converge to constitute and fix the residence of the subject marked by racial difference.

The “body” constitutes the *nodal site* of this convergence:

[The white man] had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories ... I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other ... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea ...²⁹

It is with, through and on the body that “a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” acquire a unified meaning. Prefiguring the critical philosophy of race, Fanon’s account signals how the “body” facilitates discursive unity for the protean, diffuse and dense rituals that stabilize race and constantly reproduce racialized subjects.³⁰ In the extract above, the “body” also emerges as the main site which is *affected* by the injurious operation of race. Frozen into a “racial epidermal schema,” the *Nègre* comes to exist “in triple person,” to experience “nausea” and to be cut from the “other.”

²⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.

³⁰ In *Racist Culture*, 54, Goldberg insists upon the unifying function of the “body:” “[The body] is a symbol of a ‘bounded system,’ a system the boundaries of which are formed by skin at once porous but perceived as inviolable and impenetrable. Body parts and functions are accordingly related in a complex structure, their substance confined by boundaries and limits that are fragile, vulnerable, and threatened.” In the same vein, Stuart Hall contends that anyone who is interested in modern classifying and hierarchic systems of differentiation needs to understand the body as a “text.” See Hall, *Identités et Culture II*, 107.

One could list many other extracts of *Black Skin, White Masks* that expand and detail the somatic effects implied by subjections to racial difference. Indeed, Fanon not only helps us to understand the complex forms and instances involved in racialized rituals, he also permits us to grasp how such rituals constantly materialize an injurious state. Fanon makes it explicit: “We need to put our fingers on every sore that mottles the black uniform.”³¹ In his account, the *Nègre* produced by race is tied to a body that takes the form of a “uniform” or a “black livery.” The *Nègre* is “fastened,” “snared” to an “effigy of him,” he is “imprisoned” and he is the “eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible.”³² Race, argues Fanon, produces an *objectified* subject attached to a body lived as a prison, as a toxic state, as a “state of conflict in which the white man injects the black with extremely dangerous foreign bodies.”³³

According to the philosopher Achille Mbembe, Fanon images the matter of race as a “calcified shell – a second ontology” [*une coque calcifiée – une deuxième ontologie*].³⁴ Fanon, argues Mbembe, gives an account of the vivid, pervasive, voracious and destructive wound that qualifies the life attached to such a shell.³⁵ Indeed, Fanon’s account suggests that race operates as a mutilating force: it produces a subject whose relationship to their body is *unsustainable*. In the remaining part of this section, I discuss Fanon’s many declinations of that unsustainable relation. I claim that they all feature racialized abuses of power and thus give sense to specific forms of exploitation and materialization of vulnerability.

Fanon evokes a *durable injury*: the constant subjection to *Ya bon banania* and other racializing practices stabilize an “amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that [spatter the] whole body with black blood.”³⁶ He evokes a *loss of senses*, a bodily disorientation: “The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty,”³⁷ “Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? ... Where shall I hide?” he asks.³⁸ However, unsustainability also qualifies as an *overload of senses*. Fanon relates how his encounters with *Ya bon banania* or with the white gaze “batter him down”³⁹ and leave him “shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones.”⁴⁰ Unsustainability is further referred to as a *cut*. Living a life as a subject marked by racial difference means being cut from one’s own body: “[m]y body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning.”⁴¹ It means being dissected “under white eyes:” “they objectively cut away slices of my reality” denounces Fanon.⁴² It also means having one’s own body “burst apart” into “fragments” or “haunted by a galaxy of erosive

³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 144.

³² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 22.

³³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 23.

³⁴ Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre*, 67 [my translation].

³⁵ Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre*, 67.

³⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 85.

³⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 83.

³⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 85.

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.

⁴⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 86.

⁴¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 86.

⁴² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 87.

stereotypes.”⁴³ Finally, Fanon also associates his unsustainable body with a heavy *weight*. He evokes a constant feeling of being suffocated or squashed as exemplified by the following extracts: “I have to throw off an attacker who is strangling me, because I literally cannot breathe;”⁴⁴ “[a]nd then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me;”⁴⁵ “the first encounter with a white man oppresses [the Negro] with the whole weight of his blackness.”⁴⁶

“Cut,” “mutilation,” “imprisonment” and “suffocation” not only specify an unsustainable relation with one’s own body; the register of injury also comes to qualify one’s relation with a specific community or, more broadly, with humanity. By being attached to an objectified, wounded, unbearable body, the *Nègre* is also *detached* from the community. In the extract above, Fanon evokes an existence in “a triple person.” The racial epidermal schema impedes him to move “toward the other;” the “hostile” and “evanescent other” “disappears” and leaves him alone with a “nausea.” In this way, Fanon describes a *state of suspension*. Since he is attached to a body which is the object of a fearful and desiring gaze, he is blocked from the possibility of aligning himself with a given community. As illustrated in the following extract, such a suspension nurtures a permanent state of affective disorientation:

Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.⁴⁷

The sense of “shame” and “nausea” further nurtures the *state of suspicion* which constantly conditions subjects marked by racial difference:

We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases ... I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him ... The black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace.⁴⁸

Although he occupies a recognized status within the community (such as being a physician, a professor or a statesman), the black subject always remains in a state marked by suspicion, namely, by “something out of the ordinary” and by “disgrace.” Besides describing an apartness from a given community of friends and citizens, injury also qualifies a liminal place in humanity, as expressed in the following extract:

The white world, the only honorable one, *barred me from all participation*. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least like a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and *the world slashed away my joy*. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged.⁴⁹

⁴³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82, 99.

⁴⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17.

⁴⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 83.

⁴⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 116.

⁴⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88.

⁴⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88–89.

⁴⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 86 [my emphases].

Fanon associates the objectifying and mutilating force of race with an impediment to “be a man among other men,” namely, to take part in the world, in universal humanity.

Objectification, imprisonment, toxicity, mutilation, disorientation, sensory overload, explosion, suspension, suspicion, isolation and dehumanization – within the Fanonian account, these many facets describe the unsustainable relation between the *Nègre* and his body. These facets qualify injurious materializations of subjection to racial difference. They attest to what it means to be reiterated as a *Nègre type y a bon banania*. A very similar discourse of injury can be found in Rocé’s, Lorde’s and Hartman’s accounts. Although their testimonies relate to different contexts or periods, they all decline similar dimensions and effects of the injury of race. Rocé expresses, for instance, the “weight he feels in his stomach” and his “impossibility to breathe” as he is objectified and overwhelmed by stereotypes which he exemplifies with images of *Y a bon banania* in his videoclip.⁵⁰ Such discourses, I suggest, must be all situated within a transcontinental ensemble of public accounts of injuries that have been and continue to be expressed by those who have been subjected to racial difference since the beginning of the history of the modern race. These accounts nurture a critical discourse which powerfully denounces how racialized forms of colonial and postcolonial power abusively exploit subjects’ vulnerability.⁵¹

More specifically, accounts of racialized injury permit me to answer Butler’s inquiry and consider *what* our vulnerability to abuses of power consists of. Indeed, these accounts allow me to identify two specific forms of vulnerability that come to be exploited by race. On the one hand, racialized power exploits a *bodily form of vulnerability*: by constituting subjects with a toxic, injured and imprisoning body, race exploits the impossibility for subjects to be detached from their body. On the other hand, racialized forms of power exploit what can be called *enunciative vulnerability*: by constituting subjects who stand in affective suspension apart from others and whose voices are permanently marked as suspicious or criminal, race exploits the possibility for subjects to be stabilized in a noisy and unintelligible position. In her discussion about the constitution of political subjectivity, Aletta Norval designates such a form of vulnerability as the “possibility of a deprivation of voice.”⁵² She recalls that “there is no pure, original moment or site in which the voice is present to itself; there is no immediacy which can be clearly heard without mediation.”⁵³ Acknowledging the inherent division of every voice “means not only that we need to take account of the multiplicity of voices that clamour for our attention, but also that we need to be aware of and think through the *consequences* of the division of voice, of every voice.”⁵⁴ Accounts of injury suggest some specific consequences of the division of voice. They suggest that racialized abuses of power exploit the inherent division of voice to constitute

⁵⁰ Rocé, “Besoin d’Oxygène.”

⁵¹ I emphasize the similarities at play in these various accounts of injury. However, one should also note important variations: for instance, black feminist accounts tend to put a greater emphasis on gendered dimensions of injurious materializations as exemplified by the natal alienation of the enslaved “mother.” See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; and Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987).

⁵² Aletta Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization and Voice,” *Ethics & Global Politics* 2.4 (2009).

⁵³ Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization and Voice,” 303.

⁵⁴ Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization and Voice,” 304.

positions which are heavily deprived of voice. By producing suspended and suspicious bodies, subjection into racial difference simultaneously produces *muted* positions – positions in which subjects are barely intelligible. Moreover, accounts of racialized injury suggest that moments where bodily or enunciative vulnerability is exploited reinforce each other and come to spawn a *vicious circle of exploitation*. By producing bodies that are over-exposed in and to the public, race facilitates the production of voices that are under-exposed. Such a deprivation of voice hinders subjects marked by race from denouncing the injurious conditions that govern their attachment to an unsustainable body. This attachment is consequentially reinforced and amplified at the following occasion of racial subjection. In summary, accounts of racialized injury shed light on forms of life that are *constantly exposed* to abusive operations which *reinforce and amplify each other*.

2. Misappropriations of race: alternative citations of body and voice

Race produces the suspended and suspicious subject position that Fanon associates with the *Nègre type y a bon banania*; however, argues Mbembe, there is a second text of race. This alternative discourse *in the first person* is made by what the *Nègres* say about themselves. It comprises a set of practices, addresses and stories that seek to displace the injurious effects of racialization. Whereas the main discourse of race must be associated with a judgment of identity, contends Mbembe, the second text is a *declaration* of identity.⁵⁵ Through such a text, subjects marked as *Nègres* declare that they can escape conditions of subjugation, they belong somewhere else and they cannot be found where they are looked for but, rather, where they are not thought of.⁵⁶

Mbembe's call for an understanding of race's double text echoes Butler's call for a critical analysis of vulnerability's ambivalence as a source both of exploitability and agency. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, she suggests that a "critical analysis of subjection" must not only involve "an account of the way regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility and place," but also must involve "an account of the iterability of the subject that shows how agency may well consist in opposing and transforming the social terms by which it is spawned."⁵⁷ From this perspective, dissociating herself from calls for hate-speech regulations, Butler contends that injurious words must necessarily be repeated: "(in court, as testimony; in psychoanalysis, as traumatic emblems; in aesthetic modes, as cultural working-thought) in order to enter them as objects of another discourse."⁵⁸ Words that wound can be decontextualized and recontextualized through "another discourse," namely, through what Butler names "radical acts of public misappropriation" which establish "an ironic

⁵⁵ Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre*, 51–2.

⁵⁶ I translate from the following extract: "A travers ce texte, le Nègre dit de lui-même qu'il est celui sur qui on n'a pas prise; celui qui n'est pas là où on le dit, encore moins là où on le cherche, mais plutôt là où il n'est pas pensé." Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre*, 51–2.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 29.

⁵⁸ Butler, "Excitable Speech," 100.

hopefulness that the conventional relation between word and wound might become tenuous and even broken over time.”⁵⁹ Referring to the rapper Ice T’s aesthetic use of the N-word, Butler emphasizes the importance of *critical citation* as a potential practice of misappropriation:

An aesthetic enactment of an injurious word may both *use* the word and *mention* it, that is, make use of it to produce certain effects but also at the same time make reference to that very use, calling attention to it as a citation, situating that use within a citational legacy, making that use into an explicit discursive item to be reflected on rather than a taken for granted operation of ordinary language. Or, it may be that an aesthetic reenactment *uses* that word, but also *displays* it, points to it, outlines it as the arbitrary material instance of language that is exploited to produce certain kinds of effects.⁶⁰

Following Butler, public mentions, displays and re-enactments of injurious discursive practices can initiate another discourse. They can actualize subaltern conventions of *counter-exploitations* that seek to displace the effects of hegemonic conventions of exploitation. Departing from the sceptical readings of Wendy Brown, who warns against the risks of the politicization of injury, one thus could ask whether the public accounts of racialized pain, suffocation or freezing could be read as moments of public misappropriation.⁶¹ This section suggests that, when such counter-exploitations are oriented towards racialized injurious effects, they take part in the alternative discourse of race evoked by Mbembe. With the help of Fanon and other critical studies of resistance to “race,” it is demonstrated how accounts of racialized vulnerability are at the core of such misappropriations.

Let me draw again upon Fanon’s *Ya bon banania*. Fanon elaborates this figure through multiple mentions that display *Ya bon banania*’s conventional use and citational legacy. Fanon’s obsessive citations aim to draw attention to the injurious effects implied by the incessant interpellation into racial difference. To put it in Butler’s words, Fanon re-enacts *Ya bon banania* in order to outline the figure as an “arbitrary material instance” of discourse that is exploited to produce objectification, mutilation, marginalization and dehumanization. The incessant mention of *Ya bon banania* “implicates us in a relation of knowingness about its conventional force and meaning.”⁶²

More specifically, Fanon deploys three citational uses around *Ya bon banania*. First, he mentions it. Second, he accounts for its multiplying injurious effects. Third, he expresses refusal. In the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon claims his refusal to be associated with *Ya bon banania*: “If the white man

⁵⁹ Butler, “Excitable Speech,” 100.

⁶⁰ Butler, “Excitable Speech,” 99.

⁶¹ Brown’s initial critique mainly targets legal codification of injury. According to her, “[w]hen ‘social hurt’ is conveyed to the law for resolution, political ground is ceded to moral and juridical ground.” See Brown, *States of Injury*, 27. I share Brown’s concerns about the limiting reach of demands expressed within the judicial framework. However, I wish to stress that, even when they are conveyed through legal channels, public accounts of injury always hail a broad and complex community of publics and counterpublics – a community which Nancy Fraser would call a “multiplicity of publics.” See Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 84. It is in the context of such a multiplicity that I read and analyse the misappropriative power of accounts of injury.

⁶² Butler, “Excitable Speech,” 100.

challenges my humanity, I will impose my whole weight as a man on his life and show him that I am not that ‘sho’ good eatin’ [*Ya bon banania*] that he persists in imagining.”⁶³ By declaring that he is ready to physically confront the white man in order to detach himself from *Ya bon banania*, Fanon echoes Leopold Sedar Senghor. About one decade earlier, in one of his poems, the Senegalese figure of *Négritude* had declared: “But I will rip all the Banania laughs off the walls of France.” [*Mais je déchirerai les rires banania sur tous les murs de France.*]⁶⁴ Both Fanon and Senghor deploy a misappropriative strategy. They seek to rip off the addresses and images that stick to their bodies. Such a strategy is aimed at establishing discursive conditions which block and counter the constant subjugation to race. As illustrated in the last pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, refusing to be *Ya bon banania* opens up the possibility to re-ground oneself:

I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself ... No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free.

The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions.

I am my own foundation.⁶⁵

I argue that Fanon’s three citational practices around *Ya bon banania* – mentioning it, accounting for its injurious effects and refusing it – converge to create the basis for a politics of self-displacement and self-foundation. They all seek to redress or subvert the injurious effects of race’s intense exploitation of bodily and enunciative vulnerability. Thus, these citational acts open the way for an alternative politics of the body and the voice. However, the examples of *Ya bon banania*’s misappropriation by Fanon or Senghor do not exhaust the multitude of strategies of resistance to injurious racialized conventions. I would like to list three other kinds of misappropriative acts that have nurtured the long history of resistance to colonial and racial power.

A first set of acts can be designated as *capitalization* and can be illustrated by reference to the black Marxist Lamine Senghor’s call of 1927. According to Brent Hayes Edwards, the latter was one of the first to call for an appropriation of the word *nègre* in his essay “*Le Mot ‘Nègre’*” [*The Word ‘Nègre’*] which was published in the first issue of a newspaper called *La Voix des Nègres* [“Negroes’ Voice”], the mouthpiece of his group the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* [“The Defense Committee of the Negro Race”]:

Yes, sirs, you have tried to use this word as a tool to divide. But we use it as a rallying cry: a torch! [*Nous, nous en servons comme mot d’ordre de ralliement: un flambeau!*] We do ourselves honor and glory by calling ourselves Nègres, *with a capital N*. It is our race nègre that we want to guide on the path of total liberation from its suffering under a yoke of enslavement.⁶⁶

⁶³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 178.

⁶⁴ Translation by Rosello quoted in Jana Evans Braziel, *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 48.

⁶⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179–80.

Prefiguring the Negritude movement, Lamine Senghor's call seeks to transform the word *nègre* into a *proper name* possessed collectively by all black subjects.⁶⁷ In this way, the committee seeks to re-appropriate and redirect the affective capital accumulated through the injurious circulation of the term. Capitalization strategies aim to invert race's mutilating and dividing force into a rallying and empowering force.

Following a very different logic, a second set of practices consists of *underground forms* of resistance to race. One can illustrate them with the help of Philippe Chanson's study of naming practices in the French Antilles. The latter describes how the enslaved used to whisper a secret name to their newborns. Following this ritual, the secret name would never be pronounced aloud.⁶⁸ This form of self-naming can be associated with other secret practices such as coded language and underground cultural rituals which have been outlined in black and critical race studies.⁶⁹ These practices create temporary spaces that escape from the incessant and invasive interpellation into racial difference. They forge subaltern scenes of subjection where subjects are not constantly dispossessed of their body and voice.

The third set of misappropriative acts constitutes what Saidiya Hartman defines as "*counterinvestment in the body*."⁷⁰ In her study of the North-American context of enslavement, Hartman puts emphasis on everyday practices that are oriented towards the "body," which I have previously identified as the nodal discursive site of race. This group of practices comprise counter-uses, gestures, movements, erotic forms of investments, caring rituals and expressions of pleasure all deployed through and with (-in) the body. Hartman evokes, for instance, everyday practices of "stealing away:"

Stealing away involved unlicensed movement, collective assembly, and an abrogation of terms of subjection in acts as simple as sneaking off to laugh and talk with friends or making nocturnal visits to loved ones ... These nighttime visits to lovers and family were a way of redressing the natal alienation or enforced "kinlessness" of the enslaved ...⁷¹

Hartman also describes the vernacular songs and dance of juba: this collective performance "involves using the body for pleasure and protesting the conditions of enslavement."⁷²

The repertoire of songs address the body's need – in particular, the condition of hunger – and the unjust distribution of resources between the producers and the owners ... [T]he art of need entails the utilization of the body as a literal vessel of communication, attending to unmet longing and expressing dissent. Beating the body like a drum and for one's own ends delivers a certain measure of pleasure, comforts the pained body, and offers a fleeting glimpse of dominion.⁷³

⁶⁶ Quoted in Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 33 [my emphasis].

⁶⁷ For a study of the various political and poetic trends of the Negritude movement see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; and Lucie K. Mercier, "Négritude," in *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. S. Maty Bâ and I. Ness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁶⁸ Philippe Chanson, *La Blessure du Nom: Une Anthropologie d'une Sèquelle de l'Esclavage aux Antilles-Guyane* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 2008), 93.

⁶⁹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Mbembe, *Critique de la Raison Nègre*.

⁷⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 58–9.

⁷¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 67.

⁷² Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 71.

⁷³ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 71–2.

As illustrated by Hartman's study, misappropriative acts oriented towards the "body" imply a displacement, a rejection and a temporary abrogation of the mutilating, isolating and imprisoning effects of the "anatomy-politics" involved in racialized subjection.⁷⁴ Such acts seek to expose and frustrate the unsustainable relation to the body produced and fixed by race. Fanon's "final prayer" in *Black Skins, White Masks* – "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" – thus can be associated with such a strategy of counterinvestment and (temporary) repossession of the body.

Refusal, capitalization, underground practices and counterinvestment in the body come to form, among others, a disparate and disseminated ensemble of acts which I identify as misappropriations of race. Each of these acts is invested in the discourse of race in order to denaturalize its conventional functioning and to outline its arbitrary abuses. Each of these acts can be considered as comprising the elements of a counter-convention. As I have shown, such a misappropriative convention draws upon three discursive events: first, a critical mention of race (e.g. Fanon's many citations of *Ya bon banania*); second, a detailed account of the corporeal and existential injuries inflicted by the constant subjection to racial difference (e.g. Fanon's detailed narration of the amplified and multiplying pain inflicted by his thematization as a *Nègre type y a bon banania*); and third, a declaration or displacement of oneself (e.g. Fanon's refusal of being *Ya bon banania* or Lamine Senghor's claim to be a *Nègre* with a capital N). Articulated together these three elements actualize the second text of race. They create discursive possibilities for establishing subjects with sustainable relations to their body and an intelligible voice.

Throughout the history of colonialism, rituals of misappropriation nurtured transcontinental movements of resistance to abusive colonial power. They were, for instance, actualized within the struggles for the Haitian revolution, the abolition of slavery, decolonization, independence and civil rights.⁷⁵ However, as claimed by postcolonial and critical race studies, racialized forms of power have not ceased to operate. Despite decolonization and the legal dismantling of racial and colonial modes of governing, race persists in exploiting certain subjects' vulnerability, namely, in adhering their body and voice to a state of suspension and suspicion. In parallel, misappropriations of race also persist. When the French singer Rocé expresses his need for oxygen and denounces the persistence of racist stereotypes in contemporary France, he cites and actualizes the historically entrenched

⁷⁴ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 59.

⁷⁵ Goldberg offers us a comprehensive review of the different waves and movements of antiracism, see David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race; Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). However, his narration must be completed by Cedric Robinson's emphasis on the pre-colonial dimension of the struggle against colonialism and racism. While accounting for the first revolts of the enslaved, the latter stresses: "the cargoes of laborers also contained African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality ... These cargoes, then, did not consist of intellectual isolates or deculturated Blacks—men, women, and children separated from their previous universe. African labor brought the past with it, a past that had produced it and settled on it the first elements of consciousness and comprehension." See Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, [1983] 2005), 121–2. The fact that practices such as secret naming are encountered in the Caribbean region as well as on the African continent highlights the need to read misappropriative practices as inventive assemblages which articulate elements that pre-date modern slavery and colonial power. I thank Robbie Shilliam for having brought this important issue to my attention.

convention of resistance to racialized injurious power. He seeks to divert abusive exploitations of the site occupied by his body and to clear a way for his voice to be heard.

With the help of Fanon and other critical studies of resistance to race, I have shown that accounts of racialized injury – confessions of pain, suffocation, mutilation, disorientation and dehumanization – are at the core of the second text of race. They seek to initiate a counter-exploitation of bodily and enunciative vulnerability by misappropriating racialized power's abusive pretensions. If one identifies accounts of injury as crucial misappropriations of race, one needs to reconsider Wendy Brown's warning against claims of injury. Brown argues that "confessing injury can become that which attaches us to the injury."⁷⁶ In the context of racialized abusive operations, it seems that confessing injury can become, reversely, that which *detaches* us from the injury. When contextualized within the histories of resistance and from the perspective of subjects marked by racial difference, public accounts of injury disclose a promising politics of body and voice.

Conclusion: black suffering as a politics of the human

I began this paper with quotes of public accounts of the multiple and intense injuries inflicted by race. I have sought to expose the heuristic and political values of accounts of pain and suffocation expressed by subjects marked by racial difference. I have thus sought to answer two sets of questions. On the one hand: What counts as vulnerability within such accounts? Do their readings provide us with a deeper understanding of constitutive vulnerability? On the other hand: Do past and present accounts of racialized injury participate in a risky over-investment in injury? Or do they entail some potential for protestation and resistance against abuses of power? The trajectory taken throughout this paper leads me to formulate two synthetic responses.

First, my reading of public accounts of racialized injury calls for a reformulation of the problem of vulnerability, which I sketched, with the help of Butler, as an ambivalent source of both life and death and both social stability and disorientation. Butler's model exemplifies the tendency within critiques of political liberalism to emphasize constitutive vulnerability's paradoxical possibilities between exploitability and agency. However, while addressed from within the history of racist and (post) colonial institutions and from the perspective of those who were and still are subjugated to these institutions, exploitability becomes a *virtual* condition. Intense and self-amplifying *exploitation*, instead, comes to qualify the life and subjectivity of those who are marked by racial difference. Re-inscribed within (post)colonial history and critical race analysis, constitutive vulnerability emerges as an *asymmetric ambivalence* generated by the modern production of racialized difference. Consequently, it must be apprehended as the source of a life near to death, as well as a social status stabilized into suspension and suspicion. In line with Weheliye's

⁷⁶ Brown, *Edgework*, 91.

and Abbas's calls for a "materialist reconceptualization of suffering,"⁷⁷ my reformulation calls for the necessity of inquiring into vulnerability beyond ontology and for the importance of outlining the *historicity* of different vulnerable states and their respective materializations.

Second, my reading calls for an inscription of accounts of racialized injury within a broader group of conventional discourses of resistance to racist and colonial abusive forms of power. As exemplified by Fanon's citational uses of the injurious figure of *Ya bon banania*, accounts of injury are most often articulated with critical mention of racial discourses and with re-appropriative declaration of identity. They thus nurture and prolong the long history of resistance to subjection in racial difference. Reading accounts of racialized injury as misappropriations of race calls us to reconsider Brown's warning against the risky politicization of injury. Indeed, such a reading sheds light on the risks of equating claims of injury with logics of *ressentiment* and paralysis. Joining Sara Ahmed and Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, I claim that "the critique of injury needs to recognize the different rhetorical forms of injury as signs of an uneven and antagonistic history"⁷⁸ and I call for a "historically oriented study of racial injury" that treats the past as a site of "counter-memory."⁷⁹ From such perspectives, the ability to actualize a critical-theoretical space for the apprehension of vulnerability requires the acknowledgement that (post)colonial history has stabilized uneven vulnerabilities.

As Weheliye points out: "[g]iven the histories of slavery, colonialism, segregation, lynching and so on, humanity has always been a principal question within black life and thought in the west," and thus, "the functioning of blackness as both inside and outside modernity sets the stage for a general theory of the human, and not its particular exception."⁸⁰ Through the trajectory taken in this paper – the double move from vulnerability towards injury, from sceptical reading of wounded attachment towards a listening to the history that hurts – I hope I have contributed to the broader project of critical race and black studies, a project which, in Weheliye's words, offers "pathways to distinctive understanding of suffering that serve as the speculative blueprint for new forms of humanity."⁸¹

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⁷⁷ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 14. Weheliye relies on Abbas's following call: "Constituting a historical and materialist politics of suffering centered on the labors of those who suffer requires intervening on the side of the experience of suffering, before and beyond considering it merely an object of the agency that causes it or that solves the problem. In this process, the subjectivity of sufferers, their 'health,' their deaths, their presence, their absence, their love, and their hope all stand to be rethought in light of the continuing legacy of colonialism in the cartographies of global suffering and the gaping rosters of the wounded ranked according to the most valuable and visible injury." Asma Abbas, *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Materialist Reflections on Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 15.

⁷⁸ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 33.

⁷⁹ Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, "Injury by Design," *Cultural Critique* 40 (Autumn 1998): 98.

⁸⁰ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 19.

⁸¹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 14.

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