

Sociogeny beyond the Human: Race and Animality in Frantz Fanon and Patrick Chamoiseau

Christie Oliver-Hobley | ORCID: 0000-0003-3428-6935

School of English, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom
c.oliver-hobley@sheffield.ac.uk

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Abstract

Extending a recent turn at the interstice of Black and animal studies, this article analyzes two works by Martinican writers: Frantz Fanon's (2008/1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Patrick Chamoiseau's (2018/1997) *The Old Slave and the Mastiff*. I read Fanon's concept of "sociogeny" as an effort to conceptualize Black subjectivity within a reformulated analytic of European phenomenology, interpreting it as a non-anthroponormative mode of meaning-making that is independent of language or consciousness. In this light, Fanon's human becomes an animal able to recognize their non-humanization. My interpretation of Chamoiseau highlights the implications of Fanon's concept for understanding the coproduction and incommensurability of "race" and "animality." Enslaved man and mastiff are subject to an identity that is not merely discursive but sociogenic, and both possess an agency that exceeds their subjectivation at the enslaver's hands. Chamoiseau, I argue, directly represents what Fanon leaves only tacit: sociogeny beyond the human.

Keywords

Black Studies – phenomenology – postcolonialism – literature – philosophy – Martinique – Frantz Fanon – Patrick Chamoiseau

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The Negro is only biological. The Negroes are animals.

FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*



In his reading of Carl Linnaeus, Giorgio Agamben (2002) notes the taxonomist's struggle in distinguishing humans from anthropoid apes. Linnaeus' (1735) *Systema Naturae* offers only the maxim "know yourself," leading Agamben (2002) to conclude that the human "must recognize itself as human to be human" (p. 26). A growing body of work has examined how this form of self-recognition has been produced throughout the era of coloniality, not only by excluding nonhuman animals, but through colonial Europe's ideological non-humanization of its nonwhite others, whom it situates "between human and animal" (Kim, 2015, pp. 24–25). In this racialized ontology, Black subjects and the figure of the enslaved African in particular "oscillate constantly between the classifications of animality and humanity" (Johnson, 2018, p. 37). As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) argues, the field of animal studies has historically neglected this division, assuming "a humanity that is secure within the logic of liberal humanism" rather than one that is "debatable or contingent" (p. 15). Responding to this elision, a number of researchers at the interstice of Black and animal studies – including Joshua Bennett and Jackson herself – have turned to Black authors who, as Bennett (2020) says, have "envisioned and enacted alternative ways of being human and thinking human personhood" (p. 13). As these scholars argue, the perspectives of those who are excluded from the western "descriptive statement of the human" (Wynter, 2003) offer avenues to reterritorialize "humanity" and "animality," in addition to being vital subjects of study in themselves.

Extending this engagement, here I examine two works by Martinican authors: Frantz Fanon's (2008/1952) *Black Skin, White Masks* and Patrick Chamoiseau's (2018/1997) *The Old Slave and the Mastiff*. Both explore Black subjectivity in the enduring aftermath of slavery, and their relevance to animal studies has been partially considered, most recently by Baumeister (2021), who has examined Fanon's exploration of "Black animality." Following Jackson (2020) and Bennett (2020), I focus instead on Fanon's "new humanism" and his concept of "sociogeny." Jackson (2020), Weheliye (2014), and McKay (forthcoming) have examined Wynter's (2001, 2003) use of this term to describe humans' ostensibly unique capacity for "self-representation." I argue that these (indirect) engagements have not fully recognized the implications of Fanon's concept.

Returning to Fanon, I read “sociogeny” as an effort to view Black subjectivity within a reformulated analytic of European phenomenology and interpret it as an existentialist and non-anthroponormative mode of meaning-making that is independent of both language and consciousness; this leads me to read Fanon’s “human” as an animal able to recognize their own non-humanization. I unpack the implications of this analysis, turning to Chamoiseau’s novel as a case study. Expanding on Meylor (2012), Boisseron (2018), and Lee’s (2021) readings of the original French text, I argue that Chamoiseau represents the sociogenic coproduction *and* incommensurability of animality and race, while depicting something Fanon leaves only tacit: sociogeny beyond the human.

Frantz Fanon: from Experience to Existence

Frantz Fanon was born in 1925 in Martinique, a French colonial territory in the Lesser Antilles. He received his baccalaureate there before moving to France to study medicine, psychiatry, and philosophy (Gordon, 2015). His first book, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952; titled *Black Skin, White Masks* in English), published shortly thereafter, bears the marks of this wide schooling: Framed by Fanon (2008) as a work of psychoanalysis, in practice, the tract develops through psychiatric, philosophical, and literary registers and passages of ironized rhetoric that resist any straightforward interpretation.

Fanon’s (2008) exposition of “sociogeny” is sparse. The term appears only once, when he states that “beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” (p. 4), leaving readers to interpret and place the concept within his analytical framework. Fanon (2008) characterizes the book as an attempt to diagnose the “psychoexistential complex” of coloniality (p. 5) and posits his fullest analysis of his experience of sociogenic racialization as a rejoinder to his contemporaries in the phenomenological tradition, specifically Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a key influence on Fanon (Taylor, 2011), whose lectures Fanon attended while studying in Lyon (Gordon, 2015), and one of whose key examples Fanon adapts: smoking tobacco (Fanon, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Existential phenomenology – pioneered by Edmund Husserl and furthered by Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre – is a method of reasoning from firsthand experience to draw inferences about the nature of existence. Itself a response to a then-hegemonic, Western, metaphysical dualism, marked by the Cartesian subject’s transcendence of its body, Merleau-Pontian phenomenology emphasizes instead the body’s role in producing subjectivity. Directly referencing Merleau-Ponty’s work (Taylor, 2011), Fanon (2008) states “my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be

the schema" (p. 83). In contrast to the *cogito* – a universalized subject blind to its worldly imbrication – Fanon (2008) notes that Merleau-Ponty's analysis appears to offer "a definitive structuring of the self and of the world," establishing "a real dialectic between my body and the world" (p. 83).

Reformulating this phenomenological analytic, Fanon (2008) observes: "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema" (p. 83). Analyzing his own experience as a Black man, he recalls that "below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me ... by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). Fanon's metaphors are telling: "Sketched" and "woven," this schema is an ideological construct; in short, it is sociogenic. Under this weight, "the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema" (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). In Baumeister's (2021) reading of this passage, the "corporeal schema is flattened and externalized, its locus shifting from body to skin" (p. 962), as if this schema were overlayed upon a non-racialized corporeality. Fanon's (2008) precise language suggests otherwise: He locates the historico-racial schema "below the corporeal" and feels "responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors" (Fanon, 2008, p. 84). Reasoning from his experience, he discovers something prior to and independent of it; his existence was always determined sociogenically by his "race," whether he recognized this or not. It follows that while Merleau-Ponty (2012) does not *experience* his existence as sociogenically determined, it is nonetheless (see Romdenh-Romluc, forthcoming), and his belief in a pre-sociogenic body is an effect of the overgeneralization of his identity – a white, European man – as the default "human." This insight via Fanon prefigures Weheliye's (2014) criticism of the posthumanisms of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, which neglect "how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human," relying on "an indivisible biological substance anterior to racialization" (p. 4). Unable to escape this identity, Fanon (2008) is "given no choice. I am overdetermined from without" (p. 87).

Perhaps due to Fanon's sparse explication, sociogeny is best known in animal studies via Sylvia Wynter; it is her elaboration of the term (see Wynter 2001; 2003) that is examined by Jackson (2020), Weheliye (2014), and McKay (forthcoming). This departs from Fanon's original with a biologized argument, in which humans are "pre-adapted, primarily through the co-evolution of language and the brain, to be ... a self-representing species" (Wynter, 2003, p. 326). Jackson's (2020) extension of sociogeny to consider "antiblackness's potential evolutionary significance via the epigenome" (p. 163) is couched in these same biologized terms. Though Fanon does appropriate such language, as Jackson

(2020) notes, I detect some irony in his use of the biologist's tools; they are incompatible with the phenomenological method by which he elaborates his fullest account of sociogenic racialization, a method that sees firsthand experience as the only *a priori* from which to philosophize (Webber, 2023), and he elsewhere rejects contemporaneous biology – an attempt, he feels, “to make man ... put an end to the narcissism on which he relies in order to imagine that he is different from the other ‘animals’” (Fanon, 2008, p. 12).

The vehemence of Fanon's rejection of biologized discourse can be partially explained as a response to its implication with coloniality. As Wynter (2003) has shown, this Western, racialized ideology has established “Man” – the white man of European descent – as the only rational, only properly human subject; as Wynter also notes, biology never superseded but was merely mapped onto this othering logic via “race,” a term that still separates whites from their non-white and nonhuman others by highlighting their supposed transcendence (Kim, 2015). Within this ideology, Fanon (2008) observes, “the Negro ... has no culture, no civilization, no ‘long historical past’” (p. 21), and “symbolizes the biological” (p. 128). Yet Fanon does not only reject such biologized discourse as a technology for racial othering. Reflecting on the insights biology purports to offer, Fanon (2008) chooses to “grasp my narcissism” and “turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism” (p. 12); for Fanon, all biocentrism risks flattening the qualities of life he is taking pains to understand. There are two logics of corporealization, here: a reduction of humanity – and all life – to the mechanics of biology, and a focus upon the phenomenological body. Reacting to the reductionism of the former, Fanon rejects it for the latter, with a qualification: sociogeny, a mechanism by which meaning determines the body prior to one's experience of it.

As Jackson (2020) notes, “if *the* body remains purely a discursive abstraction, we potentially lose our ability to gauge the consequences of racism for the *organismic* body” (p. 166, emphasis in original); nonhuman animals, too, are subject to such abstractions – coded by myth, depiction, and “trope” (Ortiz Robles, 2016). However, Wynter (2003) and Jackson's (2020) solution to the former dilemma – arguing for sociogeny's biomechanical force – further problematizes the latter. As McKay (forthcoming) observes, having diagnosed evolution as a reification of sociogenic othering, Wynter's recourse to an evolutionary explanation for sociogeny itself merely displaces biological determinism to the lines between “species.” I would add that by emphasizing sociogeny's power over the genome, Jackson's and Wynter's accounts remain limited by a tacit nature–culture dualism, albeit figured dialectically rather than as rigid dichotomy. Regardless of the porosity of this membrane, to say that humans alone transcend it to practice “culture,” which alone holds the

power to influence our “biology,” is to reify an age-old exceptionalism, sealing nonhumans in “mere” biology, precluding their participation in bringing meaning to their own and other existences.

Most significantly, however, Wynter’s (2003) and Jackson’s (2020) elaborations overlook the already radical implication of Fanon’s concept: A phenomenological exercise in reasoning from experience to draw an inference about the nature of being, sociogeny takes us beyond epistemology or discourse, describing a process by which meanings produce the existence they purport to describe. At the same time, in refusing to reason “inwards” from the “objective” capacities of species, Fanon holds open the possibility that nonhumans might participate in bringing such meaning to the world. Though he at times dabbles in dualistic nature/culture thinking – “man is what brings society into being” (Fanon, 2008, p. 4) – and seems to entertain nonhumans’ reduction to biology – as in his apposition of “biological” and “animals” in my opening epigraph – these questions are not so much raised as left hanging. Nowhere does Fanon state that nonhumans *are* mere “mechanisms,” and he rejects a mode of biocentrism he fears would see life thus reduced. The scare quotes he includes when referencing the “other ‘animals,’” (Fanon, 2008, p. 12) meanwhile, might be read as a hint to this category’s own constructedness, and all the false homogenization it performs.

To reincorporate actual nonhuman animals within this account is not to equate human and nonhuman experiences. As Ahuja (2009) observes, Fanon “holds race and species as intersecting yet discrete aspects of identity” (p. 558). In line with this, Fanon’s analysis makes clear that the phenomenology of Blackness is also to experience oneself as constructed as Black. When consciousness reflection occurs, it is triple: Fanon is aware “at the same time” of his “body,” “race,” and “ancestors.” Such experience is unique to this sociogenic identity but reveals a reflexivity accompanying human phenomenology. Missing the full implications of Fanon’s existentialist analysis, however, Wynter (2003) conflates sociogeny with this reflection upon it; hence her use of Fanon’s concept as a tool for interrogating the problem of “consciousness” without recognizing its radical potential to unsettle any mind–body dualism (see Oliver-Hobley, forthcoming). In keeping with the phenomenological method, Fanon’s own experience is the starting point – not the end – of his analysis, which reasons from there to articulate an existential principle that precedes subjective reflection and remains independent of it. To understand this, we have only to recall Merleau-Ponty (2012): oblivious to his white privilege, even as it defines, sociogenically, the manner of his existence – and would, of course, continue to do so, even if he were never to become conscious of it.

This misreading – perpetuated by those who have engaged Wynter's work since – leads to a second: seeing “sociogeny” as definitionally *human*. As Fanon concedes, having rejected biology and established sociogeny as an existential principle preceding language and consciousness, his only way to retain his humanity is “narcissism.” Like Linnaeus, he has no criterion other than his ability to recognize himself. If Fanon's thought makes an unlikely bedfellow for this forebear of scientific racism (Blakey, 1999), however, we should remember that racialization is precisely the new insight Fanon brings. Whereas *Homo sapiens* is a device for producing its own recognition, Fanon's category is born of his awareness of his exclusion from it: the anguish of knowing oneself *not once* but three times over. Fanon's “human” is not merely “cast as debatable or contingent” (Jackson, 2020, p. 15), but incorporates this contestability within its very definition, figuring the human as an animal who can come to recognize their own non-humanization, a social construction that is able to recognize its constructedness as such. In the second half of this article, I analyze a text that perfectly captures the implications of my new reading of Fanon for figuring the coproduction and incommensurability of “race” and “animality” while thinking sociogeny *beyond the human*.

Patrick Chamoiseau: Sociogeny beyond the Human

Patrick Chamoiseau initially makes another unlikely comparator for Fanon. Whereas Fanon adopted – and reformulated – European academic traditions, Chamoiseau is a proponent of “Créolité,” which advocates an understanding of Caribbean identity as creolized, and is marked by suspicion of the cultural institutions and language of colonial France (see Bernabé et al., 1990). Despite this, the reading of sociogeny I have offered so far provides a perfect framework to read the novel to which I now turn. *The Old Slave and the Mastiff* is set in Martinique, during chattel slavery. It describes plantation life before narrating the escape of the enslaved old man – known as the “old man slave,” “slave old man,” or simply “old man” – and his pursuit by the mastiff, whom the “Master” (referred to hereafter as the *enslaver*) keeps to chase down fugitives from slavery.¹

The first chapter is told by a seemingly omniscient narrative voice, focalized on the old man, with occasional reporting of his and other perspectives. Their descriptions blend the man with the plantation machinery: “His skin takes on

1 For more on this decision, and other points of phrasing I employ when talking about enslaved persons and the institution of racial slavery see Foreman and others (2023).

the texture of the cast-iron buckets or rusty pipes. ... His sweat dots him with the varnish of old windmill beams and gives off an odor of heated rock and mulling syrup" (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 18). To the enslaver, the old man is such a mechanism: He "does not distinguish him from the mass of machines; they seem to keep going on their own" (p. 18). He has "no words, no promises ... compact and infinitely fluid in the gestures of labor that alone engross him in a faceless, locked-in life" (p. 19), his identity reduced to his stolen labor. Echoing the accounts of anti-Black racism I have already discussed, he is depicted as without history: "He no longer knew if he was born on the Plantation or had known that crossing in the hold" (pp. 32–33). Reference is made to "his incalculable age," a birthdate no one can remember (p. 14). The narrator's suggestion that he is "bound to the Plantation like the air and the earth and the sugar, more ancient than the most ancient of the trees, and of no conceivable age" (p. 19) makes sense if we recall that he is named here only as a "slave," a socio-genic identity coproduced with the plantation, that never existed prior to his kidnap and transportation.

Yet this overdetermination from the narrator's and enslaver's perspective belies a resilient subjectivity: The old man performs "simply the hypocritical aping of obedience, the postures of servility, the cadence of plantings and cane cuttings" (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 17). The pun on "aping" (*les macaqueries de l'obéissance* in the original French), invokes the same racializing non-humanization of Black subjects that Fanon (2008) observes: "It has been said that the Negro is the link between monkey and man – meaning, of course, white man." (p. 18). At the same time, these descriptions recall Hartman's (2022) consideration of enslaved persons performing "acts of defiance conducted under the cover of nonsense, indirection, and seeming acquiescence" (p. 9), thereby maintaining an "opacity" to their character that "made them illegible and uncertain" (p. 10). Like the enslaved persons of Hartman's (2022) study, the old man remains unreadable, even as he is loaded with semantic weight. Later, we are told explicitly:

The Master cannot see it, but there are so many shattering and bewildering presences in the old man that he must (like the other slaves) increase the inertia of his skin, the gentleness of his gestures, the drawl of his heartbeat, the bluntness of his face. (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 41)

His survival strategy in the face of his enslavement resonates, strikingly, with Fanon's account of racialization as a sociogenic overdetermination of Black subjectivity at the level of the phenomenological body.

Chapter two focuses on the mastiff, similarly reducing them to mere corporeality – “its muscles bulged like lava bubbles; the pitiless face ... the gaze, unseeing” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 35) – and attributing them an identity similarly instrumentalized: “Folks wondered what this monster could be for” (p. 36). When an enslaved man “maroons,” we are told explicitly that the mastiff’s growling “revealed to everyone how the monster would be used” (p. 37). Despite this apparent legibility, however, the mastiff too is uninterpretable. The most striking aspect of their description is their peculiar polysemy. They are known as “mastiff,” “animal,” “dog,” “beast,” and “monster,” the latter being only the most common. This is mirrored in the conflicting ways they are perceived: “No one knew the precise color of its coat. ... No doubt it changed *alé-liron*: constantly and everywhere” (p. 30, emphasis in original). Echoing Fanon’s (2008) analysis of the historico-racial schema, “woven ... out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (p. 84), the Storyteller “assign[s] insane attributes to the animal. The mastiff, he said, was the watchdog of hell and the dead. He gave it the body of a furry bird, a feathered horse, a one-horned buffalo” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 45). In keeping with Fanon’s analysis, the mastiff’s identity is not merely discursive but sociogenic, determining their very manner of being: They are guided by “a meaning now tied to the taste of the bloody flesh the Master feeds the beast as the meaning of existence” (p. 44).

The non-humanization of the enslaved characters does not equate them with nonhuman animals. In line with Jackson’s (2020) analysis of anti-Blackness, their identity is “plasticized,” marked by a paradoxical “privation and exorbitance of form” that is “sub, supra, and human” simultaneously (p. 35): The old man “takes on the opaque substance of that mass of men who are no longer men, who are not beasts, who are not, either, like that oceanic maw all around the country” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 20). Nor does Chamoiseau elide the sufferings or resistances of the enslaved persons and the mastiff. The dog, we are told, “is the slave’s suffering double” (p. 44), but Chamoiseau is clear that these sufferings are not the same. The old man is haunted by the trauma of the Middle Passage:

[T]he old man slave does not remember the ship, but in a way he is still down in its hold. His head has become home to that vast misery. ... The mastiff is like that, but it commands a mass of instincts that delude the dog into seeing sense there. (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 44)

The mastiff’s experience may not be the same, but they are not reduced to a mechanism: They “command” these instincts, their ability to be deluded evidence of an experience meaningful (perhaps only) to themselves.

In their guise as “monster,” the mastiff also codetermines the enslaver’s identity as “Master.” As Bennett (2020) observes, a dog is “an example par excellence of *being-for-the-master* from the very first, enchained the moment it enters the scene” (p. 141, emphasis in original). Accordingly, Chamoiseau’s (2019) narrator observes of the enslaver and mastiff that “an accord old as eternity seemed to unite them” (p. 37) and describes the dog as “the Master’s rudderless soul” (p. 44). Despite this dependence, however, the mastiff exceeds any meaning the enslaver imposes upon them. The mastiff “expressed the cruelty of the Master and that plantation” (p. 39), a qualified ascription of agency that recalls Boisseron’s (2018) analysis of dogs’ participation in anti-Black violence: “The animalization of the black is not the responsibility of the dog,” who is “only ... an accessory to racial discrimination,” but “the bite is real ... an expression of the animal’s voice, no matter how conditioned the biting act itself has been” (pp. 68–70). Such acts are sociogenic, in Fanon’s original sense, productive of racial subjectivation, and Chamoiseau’s emphasis on the mastiff’s subjectivity leaves no doubt as to their complicity in this racializing violence. The enslaved people on the plantation “avoided having the dog ‘take’ their scent,” fearing that “it could sculpt you in its dreams, taste in anticipation the splendors of your blood, and above all capture you with ease if you bolted” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 38). The old man’s encounters with the mastiff are also marked by a mutual subjectivity: “His look of the living dead has never fooled the dog. No doubt the monster perceives in him a passel of possibilities. It sees itself bound to this old man slave” (pp. 44–45).

The old man’s escape is initially evident only via the disruption that follows: “His hand is missing in certain places where no problem usually occurs. A mule no one can calm down. Then a boiler that *macaye*, acts-up,” and “other annoying events” that “leave everyone at a perplexing loss” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 21, emphasis in original). Rats, snakes, and crabs begin behaving strangely, or, rather, as they would before being driven from the plantation. The enslaver cannot calm his horse – a symbol of his racial and human superiority (Boisseron, 2018) – bringing him down to the level of everyone he previously rode and ruled over (Chamoiseau, 2018). Emphasizing the mastiff’s imbrication in all of this, however, it is not the old man’s escape but the mastiff’s reaction to it that is identified as the origin of all this disruption, their howling “dis-in-te-gra-ting the substance of [the enslaver’s] world” (p. 23), and instigating “strange little hitches ... with which the science of slavery gave way” (p. 48). The enslaver’s identity unravels: His “personal chronicle ... no longer carried much weight,” and his “pride ... came apart like the finery of a mountebank” (p. 97), his regalia as the “Master” – dominion over nature, transcendence, historicity – revealed to be merely the costume of a charlatan. Because these poles – “slave,”

“monster,” “master” – are sociogenically coproduced, once one shifts, so do the others, and the “plantation” itself collapses.

Most of the novel narrates the old man's flight and the mastiff's pursuit. In Meylor's (2012) reading of his escape, the man “asserts his manhood and becomes a subject free to continue his journey” (p. 79). This, I argue, downplays the refiguration of the “human” Chamoiseau (2018) enacts. The most striking aspect of the narrative, here, is its emphasis on the old man's phenomenological body, as on the first night, when he collapses from exhaustion, and is “forced to listen to himself in unknown zones ... the giddy whirl of his blood ... the sensation of every bit of his body, every unknown organ” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 57). This is not a transcendent *cogito* erasing its embodiedness and worldly imbrication; it resonates instead with Fanon's (2008) account of the bodily schema as a “third-person consciousness” (p. 83): external, yet intimate enough to relay the force of the man's pulse. This focus on his bodily exertion also contrasts starkly with the earlier description of his need to master his body – “the inertia of his skin, the gentleness of his gestures, the drawl of his heartbeat, the bluntness of his face” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 41) – to stave off his overwhelming desire to flee. If, as Chrisman (2011) argues, Fanon's “pain results ... from the loss of corporeal self-possession” (p. 21), these descriptions illustrate the old man reclaiming his body. Preventing any “return” to a pre-sociogenic corporeality, however, is the mastiff himself: No sooner has the old man found this attunement with his bodily rhythms than he finds them invaded by “the pounding of the monster's paws pursuing him. They almost matched the rhythm of his heart” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 59).

Chamoiseau's ultimate expression of more-than-human sociogeny comes with the final confrontation between the old man and mastiff. Having broken his leg in a previous encounter, the man crawls through a ravine, finding his passage blocked by an enormous boulder. Speaking by this point in first person, the man recalls that “the Stone is engraved all over. ... Human and animal forms subjected to invisible forces. ... My eyes halt at these forms but there I divine fundamental words, sacred gestures and conjurations.” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 121). “The stone is Amerindian,” he concludes, recalling that he “had learned of their extermination” (p. 122), before expressing a powerful connection with the carvers: “These vanished ones live in me by means of the Stone” (p. 123). This climax epitomizes Chamoiseau's Créolité project, a union between the former enslaved African and indigenous Caribbeans, born in part of anticolonial solidarity. At the same time, the stone is a figure of sociogeny itself, bearing the markings of agencies, in both human and nonhuman signs. The fantastical element of Chamoiseau's narrative style comes to the fore with the man's ability to read the “fundamental words, sacred gestures and

conjurations,” despite being written in no language he can understand. But most striking of all is the mastiff’s perception of these sociogenic traces, and even those who carved them: “The monster did not believe its eyes. Its prey was mingling with a stone teeming with a myriad of peoples, voices, sufferings, outcries” (p. 128).

Here, at the end of the novel, Chamoiseau extends the power of recognition beyond any narcissistic anthropogenesis. Ambiguously awestruck by the man, the stone, or both, we are told that the mastiff “perceived things that its mind could not envisage. It soon dismissed its own memories. It put aside the mass of instincts where its behaviors were dozing” (Chamoiseau, 2018, p. 128). For Boisseron (2018), this encounter is characterized by the lack of “distinction ... between dog and man in their conjoined diaspora” (p. 86). I agree the old man and mastiff are profoundly imbricated – and sociogeny, I have argued, is precisely what connects them – but I argue this reading elides a persistent emphasis on alterity: “Mass of instincts” is a repeat from the passage describing how the mastiff’s experience differs from that of the enslaved persons (Chamoiseau, 2019, p. 44). The man feels that the dog “is planting itself on the edge of a precipice” (p. 124) and the mastiff surveys the man from the farthest reaches and liminal spaces: “the height of a chasm, the dusk of a star, or the great-work of its birth” (p. 128). The mastiff has a “mind” and “memories,” but Chamoiseau refuses to translate these. Despite – or because of – this alterity, there is recognition; the mastiff perceives the man as a fellow being, responding with a significant – if ambiguous – gesture: “The monster ... began to lick. The monster did not lick blood, or flesh. ... It was licking. That was the only gesture he was given” (p. 128). Underscoring the mastiff’s escape from their overdetermined identity as “monster,” when they next encounter the enslaver, “the Master did not know him. He had loosed a killer; returning to him was an enormous animal. ... The mastiff had changed. ... The Master wept for the monster he had lost” (p. 129).

Conclusion

Fanon’s elaboration of sociogeny, interpreted as I have done so here, offers a means to reckon with the existentiality of racialization and animalization. A phenomenological exercise in reasoning from experience to draw an inference about the nature of existence, sociogeny describes a process by which meaning pervades the body, independent of language or consciousness. Contrasting with Wynter’s (2003) elaboration – and those who have built upon it – it also offers a means to conceptualize nonhuman animals’ participation in bringing

meaning to the world. Chamoiseau's (2018/1952) novel perfectly captures the implications of Fanon's concept for understanding the sociogenic coproduction and incommensurability of "race" and "animality." Both enslaved man and mastiff are "overdetermined from without," to borrow Fanon's phrase, subject to an identity that is not merely discursive but sociogenic. Both also possess a resilient agency that exceeds their subjectivation at the enslaver's hands: the one inscrutable in his opacity, the other so polysemous as to be unreadable. Fanon and Chamoiseau both consider the phenomenological uniqueness of human and nonhuman modes of being, hence their mutual alterity, even as they offer accounts – tacit and direct, respectively – of sociogeny beyond the human. And the latter text has one final twist: Foreshadowed earlier in the novel, when the seemingly omniscient narration slips into first-person, the final chapter reveals the narrator to be the "Marqueur de Paroles," a fictional storyteller who is also ostensibly the author of the tale. Analyzing this revelation via Hartman's (2008) notion of "critical fabulation," Lee (2021) reads it as an effort to construct a creolized Antillean history in resistance to "the political grammar of imperial historiographies" (p. 50). I would add to this the specific nonhuman inflection Chamoiseau imparts. Preventing this postcolonial project from reproducing any anthroponormative validation of human storytelling is Chamoiseau's repeated insistence on the mastiff's own subjectivity and sociogenic agency – a fabulation, then, not only of creolized Caribbean history, but of a new humanity, and a vision of more-than-human sociogeny beyond.

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