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A Trauma Revisited: Fanon, Žižek, and Violence

Chyatat Supachalasai, Research Student, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to examine how violence presupposed in Frantz Fanon's and Slavoj Žižek's theses are pretty helpful in urging me as a researcher on traumas, politics, subjectivities, and international politics to revisit trauma. Although Fanon and Žižek are by no means recognised as the trauma theorists – both thinkers provide less interpretation on traumas than violence especially on the contexts from which violence erupts – I insist that both thinkers' analyses on violence allow trauma to be understood in different perspectives. This article kicks off with a hypothesis that trauma can be exposed outside the realms of memories and nostalgias and trauma is even external to the vulnerable pasts preoccupied in the individual's mind. In contrast, traumas encompassed in the contexts of colonialism and neo-liberal order urges one to reflect on trauma as a contemporaneity. So I am offering the thought that trauma is not only a wounded memory from horrifying past incidents but is also referring to contemporaneous incidents relating to the continuity of violence. So, trauma is understood as a concurrent incidence in which the co-existences of the subjects' mental disorders and the structural violence against a group of the victimised people are represented. As shown in one of my previous articles published with the Thai university, I argued that as far as the pathologies of the subject and violence are concerned, trauma is a wounded memory that keeps haunting on those subjects even in the post-conflict time and I raised the example of US veterans to prove my hypothesis. However, in this article, my attempt is to expand the scope of thinking on trauma. It is necessary to bear in mind that

this article is not about Fanon's discussion on trauma and not about Žižek's analysis on trauma *per se*. Rather, the underlying assumption is that violence fuelled by the structure of disparities established in either colonialism, as regarded by Fanon, or capitalist orders as highlighted through a concept 'systemic violence' by Žižek in his book *Violence*, are the causes that create the traumatised effects for a particular group of people who have been facing traumas at the level of everyday life. And by 'everyday life' I mean trauma as the usual experience of a group of people who are pressurised in violent situations and are experiencing traumas on the daily basis owing in large part to the structural violence that plays a determining role in their lives.

I Trauma in Colonial Economic Structure

It is a slightly unusual interpretation to that Fanon is an heir to Marxism rather than a thinker most revered in postcolonial studies and literary criticism. Potentially, Fanon develops his radical thought assimilated to Marx at a time when he spent most of his reading time at the library studying the philosophy of Karl Marx, while he was a medical student at Lyon. In Marxism, the complex society of modern Europe is distinct from agrarian society because of its evolved economic structure. Fanon also argues in Marxist terms that economic structure is a superstructure in the colonial administration, in his words, "in the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem"¹.

Given the continuity of economic oppression in the post-colonial era, freedom is not just about the emergence of the independent states where the colonised(s) enjoy full liberties after a long tutelage under the colonisers; the man is by no means free just because his country is free. His true freedom resides in his need to live free from the exploited social and economic structures: it is the emancipation from those impasses. The central concern of freedom which Fanon recognises is that the quest for freedom does not end with the creation of free and independent states. Fanon meets with Marx on the point that the state cannot be free without men being free.²

Nonetheless, the purpose of this article is not centred on a discussion of freedom rather than the economic structure which must be taken into account as the socio-economic cause of the colonised's traumas. Identifying a cause of trauma is a priority and the hypothesis is that traumas are the results of rigorous economic structures. The traumatised people are those living the bottom layer of the colonised society, which means that under the regime of imperial government, the economic structure is a permanent factor that has led to a class division. For Fanon, apart from the privileged class which is no doubt the white coloniser, within society the colonised (the non-white natives) are divided thematically in four groups of people, notably, the national bourgeoisie, the urban proletariat, the peasants, and the lumpen-proletariat: "the four main groups Fanon identifies are the national bourgeoisie³, the urban proletariat⁴, the peasants⁵, and the lumpen-proletariat⁶. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon wrote of a firm establishment of a class division in the socio-economic structure of the colonial administration. Also implied is that, in the period after colonial dependence, this sociosymbolic of the *four* division even remains irreducible.

First, there are the national bourgeoisies which have been referred to the members of the non-white middle class who enormously have close ties to the white colonisers: most of them are the educated people. The national bourgeoisie consisting of the liberal professions, the administrative bourgeoisie, landowners, and a few men of commerce, occupy the top layer of the social structure in African societies.

Second, there are the urban proletarians who are otherwise known as 'city labourers'. This group of people are the city's working class such as tram conductors, taxi-drivers, dockers, interpreters, nurses, and so on.

Third, there are the peasants who are the small cultivators whose surplus value is exploited by the big farmers, the urban population, and the state generally. It must be noted that in colonial Africa there is a distinction made between the peasantry as a low-income person as such and the peasant who could generate prosperity: the latter turn into 'rich farmers' whose status is respected as equivalent to the national bourgeoisie.

Fourth, there are the lumpen-proletariats such as the urban unemployed or unemployables. Lumpen-proletariats are "the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed and the petty criminals."⁷ Among them are also the prostitutes and "all the hopeless dregs of humanity".⁸

Decolonisation is essential prior to the birth of the independent state, and it is crucial also to Fanon. Precisely, for Fanon decolonisation means "the concept of freeing a territory from external control, together with the destruction of the social and political institutions of the former colonial power and the building of new institutions and relationships to reflect the reality of the nation, including a change of collective consciousness".⁹ Therefore in Fanon's view, the hybridisation with white culture and the participation of black elites in the white man's club are definitely the negations of black identity; a denial of the black-self which pertains to a refusal of black men's consciousness as a whole. Decolonisation must render a true consciousness for all black men and for the establishment of a new social structure because decolonisation is liberation from false consciousness and a process that leads to a creation of a new man; it is the beginning of the new life of a black man as a human being.¹⁰

What remains a distinctive argument in Fanon's theory is that a creation of a new man may have a narrow meaning as the term only refers to a collective consciousness of black culture and to which black cultures are homogeneously labelled as the 'Negritude'.¹¹ Decolonisation according to this meaning does not succeed in reducing a number of the traumatised people living *en masse* as proletarians in the rural areas. To cope with trauma rooted in economic oppression, decolonisation *ought to be* a synonym of the working class's revolution to which all human beings can stand in egalitarian grounds. As a Marxist, Fanon has a higher ambition in not only advocating independent state, but also to a restructuring of the colonised society alongside the Marxist utopian vision as he wrote with Marxist spirit: "but when one has taken cognizance of this situation, when one has understood it, one considers the job completed. How can one then be deaf to that voice rolling down the stages of history: What matters is not to know the world but to change it."¹²

In most countries in Africa after colonialism, the local bourgeoisie is likely to be the dominant economic class and their increments of power are the results of their usurpations against white colonisers. The black bourgeoisies are the powerful class and are considered the new emergent colonisers.¹³ Given the rise of the black bourgeoisie, the independent

countries are not entirely free from oppression as long as a number of traumatised persons suffer from being exploited by the black elites. It is nothing less than a fantasy to think that nations are free symbolically, despite the real economic conditions that most of the poor remain traumatically poor and not yet free. To encounter the symptoms of decolonisation requires bravery in facing the real so as to discuss the persistent problem of class division as well as economic exploitation. Given this perspective, Fanon becomes as close to classical Marxism as Žižek. The proletariat is enacted in the role to transform class division because decolonisation steered in a liberal course definitely drives a country in vain. In light of this reconsideration, if the colonial struggle follows the principles of freedom, liberty, and universal suffrage will mistakenly lead to a pseudo-emancipatory liberation. Decolonisation conceptualised in a theory of the ultra-liberalism does not lead to a true emancipation. It is rather a fantasy that keeps the traumatised proletariat subjects bound to a faulty enjoyment and a symbolic freedom that marks new subjection.¹⁴

One of the central debates in Fanon is the relationship between colonised subjectivity, decolonisation, and mental pathology. Decolonisation is a political act yet also a treatment for the mental pathology of traumatised (proletarian) subjects. In Tunisia, “what is clear is that colonisation weakens the colonised and that all those weaknesses contribute to one another. Nonindustrialisation and the absence of technical development in the country lead to a slow of economic collapse of the colonised. This collapse threatens the standard of living of the colonised.”¹⁵ Mental disorder is a result of a social situation characterised by economic oppression, political violence, racism, torture, murder, and inhuman degradation. As a psychiatrist, Fanon was aware that it was, therefore, futile to treat a patient and send him back to the same environment. What had to be changed were not the people as such but the dominant social and political conditions in Algeria.¹⁶ Therefore the traumatic condition as a result of social and political conditions that the colonised faced that had led to a melancholic depression of the black-colonised could only be remedied only by a reformation of the existing colonial system.¹⁷ Sympathising with his own black patients, Fanon chose to become a political activist. Therefore, Fanon decided to resign from the hospital that he worked and decided to join a national movement liberation front. His aim was to put an end to the colonial system not only because of the political aim of making Algeria an independent country, but also due to his ethical (medical) stance, especially his profession as a psychiatrist. It seems that, for Fanon, violence against the existing colonial order has a medical reason: to provide a psychological treatment ‘wholesale’ to the traumatised colonised. After realising that his treatment for his black patients was unsuccessful given the violence of colonialism that kept ‘depersonalising’ (dehumanising) the colonised, his letter of resignation signalled his determination to annihilate the colonial system and to set up social institutions more suitable for people’s needs:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation...The function of social structure is to set up institutions to serve man’s needs. A society that derives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced.¹⁸

Fanon’s disagreement with strategy of *lactification* (the whitening of the non-white) including the strategy of hybridity is because it does not lead to a reformation of economic

relations. Indeed, as long as the colonised needs a new consciousness, Fanon advocates a strategy of socio-economic revolution that calls for an immediate change in the colonial relationship from its roots.¹⁹ He wrote “in no way should my colour be regarded as a flaw. From the moment the Negro accepts the separation imposed by the European he has no further respite, and “is it not understandable that thenceforward he will try to elevate himself to the white man’s level? To elevate himself in the range of colours to which he attributes a kind of hierarchy? We shall see that another solution is possible. It implies a restructuring of the world.”²⁰ His solution in ‘restructuring of the world’ refers to a change in social structure as well as cultural aspects of value systems. Therefore, lactification or assimilating the White is the colonised’s hallucination and avoids facing up the problematic issues of colonial enslavement. ‘Restructuring the world’ is a strategy not only to liberate their own countries but also the reestablishment of social relations and for the members of the lower class to be freed from traumatic conditions as Fanon wrote:

What emerges then is the need for combined action on the individual and on the group. As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become conscious of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of change in the social structure.²¹

Also highlighted by Fanon is violence as a preliminary act to rebuild social structures and institutions. Mature violence is a necessity and it is different from the naïve violence (discussed later) that changes nothing in the social condition. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Fanon had committed to a revolutionary violence to achieve independence. His experiences in Algeria confirmed a thesis he had already arrived at his thought on the use of violence intellectually.²² However, it must be added that “Fanon’s use of the dialectic differs from Marxist usage. Here the dialectic that progresses by conflict is not so set into motion as a result of the disharmonious relations between the forces of production and the relations of production. It is the will and the consciousness of the individual that set the dialectic in motion.”²³ Sometimes Fanon gives the impression that violence will be an instinctive reaction of a rabble against the existing traumatic situation. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon states that “for the Negro who works on a sugar plantation...there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle...not as a result of a Marxist or idealist analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger.”²⁴ This point will be elaborated in the next section when our focus is turned onto a relation between trauma and violence.

II Violence and Trauma

How are violence and trauma related? Our basic assumption is that trauma is a social condition that the victimised subjects are pressurised into. In other words, trauma is constituted in the socio-economic situation and its victims cannot escape from its precariousness. In Fanon’s view, the violence of colonialism creates vast destructive impacts upon the bodies, cultures, and psyches of the colonised. Violence is a basic structure of colonialism and is infectious across various domains of economic, culture, and space. These points are linked to a ‘systemic violence’ proposed in Žižekian perspective. In his book *Violence* (2008), Žižek writes that “there is what I call ‘systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political

systems. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious ‘dark matter’ of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be ‘irrational’ explosions of subjective violence.”²⁵ In the colonial era, the domain of oppressive economics is one of the social conditions that creates the systemic violence of the colonised’s living condition. “We must not, of course, underestimate the importance of economic relations, which is paramount; indeed it is very likely that economic conditions will determine the whole future of colonial peoples.”²⁶ Therefore, it is not surprising to see how Fanonian politics is linked to Žižekian politics. The excluded, notably ‘de-structured masses’ of the poor is a condition for the politics to come. Masses formed from an organisation with multitudinous agents is the most likely condition for the transformation of the socio-political order.²⁷

‘Systemic violence’, “a catastrophic consequence of the smooth functioning of our economic and political system” is a cause that creates the effects of the anonymous outbursts of the ‘subjective violence’, notably, a reactionary violence acted out by the irrational subjects. In order to understand the *reactionary* violence acted out by the irrational subjects, it is necessary to understand the systemic violence which is inherent in economic and political systems. Žižek sets a link between systemic violence and traumas constituted in the economic condition generated by the neoliberal order. Noam Chomsky gives a nuanced analysis on how capitalism generates violence and how neoliberal policy traumatises the working class. It is a bit bizarre that in order for one to understand how capitalism generates a systemic violence and how it structurally traumatises a particular group of people, one cannot find a proper explanation from Žižek but an answer is instead found in the writing of Chomsky his critic.

One important question raised by Chomsky in his book *Occupy* (2012) is what does ‘person’ mean these days? In response, Chomsky’s view is that the meaning of ‘persons’ covers only ‘the corporate entities’ coupled with state apparatuses such as laws and courts, which means that ‘persons’ include “corporations, legal fictions established and sustained by the state”²⁸ while the conceptual ‘persons’ deliberately excludes others and defines the ‘non-corporates’ as ‘non-persons’. Precisely, those who participate in the management of corporations become persons.²⁹ Chomsky adds that even the Founding Fathers of the United States had dreamt of ‘persons’ as a group of people who are protected by law. At a time of ‘manifest destiny’, the indigenous population are not defined as ‘persons’ and neither are the slaves and the blacks ‘persons’ either. In Chomsky’s words:

We’re supposed to worship the U.S. Constitution these days. The Fifth Amendment says that “no person shall be deprived” of rights “without due process of law”. Well, by “person,” the Founding Fathers didn’t actually mean “person.” So, for example, there were a lot of creatures of flesh and blood that weren’t addressed to be the “persons.” The indigenous population, for example. They did not have any rights. In the U.S. Constitution there was a category of creatures called three-fifth humans – the enslaved population.³⁰

Chomsky emphasises that under the atmosphere of states’ support of neo-liberal order, the concept of person has a narrow meaning as its inclusive account covered only the corporate entities while excluding the non-corporate entities.³¹ Žižek writes with ambiguity that ‘systemic violence’ is invisible as it is analogous to a ‘dark-matter’ of physic. ‘Systemic violence’ is a *neat violence* embodied in a smooth functioning of economic order, so, the

innocent poor people who are outside the neoliberal policies are ill-informed about policies designed by the superclass. Those policies have been decided to serve the extreme concentration of wealth in a tiny sector of the population. Chomsky also observes that most of the people are victimised while the few, especially the financial sectors like hedge fund managers, CEOs of financial corporations are becoming extremely prosperous. What Chomsky explains really helps depict what Žižek means by 'systemic violence', which is less substantial in Žižek's own explication, and Chomsky himself seems not realising that he does provide explanation that assists the Žižekian understand Žižek. On some occasions, Chomsky is Žižekian more than Žižek himself: in Chomsky's words:

The population is angry, frustrated, bitter – and for good reasons. For the past generation, policies have been initiated that have led to an extremely sharp concentration of wealth in a tiny sector of the population. In fact, the wealth distribution is very heavily weighted by, literally, the top tenth of one percent of the population, a fraction so small that they're not even picked up on the census. You have to do statistical analysis just to detect them. And they have benefited enormously. This is mostly from the financial sector – hedge fund managers, CEOs of financial corporations, and so on.³²

Chomsky's analysis helps describe how Žižek's systemic violence works side by side with the neoliberal order; he avows that across the world both First World and Third World people are facing the implementations of the deliberate policies *designed* by the alliances of states and the business enterprises. This majority of people are helplessly victimised and traumatised by the economic policies initiated from the above that they cannot escape. In Chomsky's words:

In Egypt and the United States, and in fact much of the world, what's happening is a reaction to the neoliberal policies of roughly the last thirty years. They have been implemented in different ways in different countries. But it's generally the case that, to the extent that they have been implemented everywhere; *they have been harmful to the general population and beneficial to a very small sector. And that's not accidental.* There is a new small book by the Economic Policy Institute called *Failure by Design: The Story behind America's Broken Economy*. And the phrase, "*by design,*" is accurate. These things do not happen by the laws of nature or by principles of economics, to the extent they exist. They are choices. And they are choices made by the wealthy and powerful elements to create a society that answers to their needs. It's happened, and it's happening in Europe right now. Take the European Central Bank (ECB). There are many economists, Nobel Laureates and others, and I agree with them, who think that the policies that the ECB is following and pursuing – basically austerity in a period of recession – are guaranteed to make the situation worse (my italic).³³

To emphasise the point, a view that Žižek holds about violence is that it can be interpreted in two dimensions, which are - 'subjective violence' and 'systemic violence' in which both dimensions of violence are interacting with each other. Most people are familiar with 'subjective violence' because it is a visible kind of violence which is exercised through the use of straightforward violence against others whilst 'systemic violence' is a kind of invisible violence inherent in the economic system in which the few are fabulously wealthy but millions of people around the world are (financially) traumatised. So, the socio-symbolic

dimension of violence is a cause of trauma and the subjective violence that is exercised in response is not entirely irrational because it is a reactionary violence against a 'systemic violence'. Part of it is a reactionary violence by instincts from a traumatised victim who receives less (financially) benefits than a traumatiser. In Žižek's theory on violence, the bodily violence is not really an insane violence but just a reaction to the socio-symbolic realm.³⁴ Erik Vogt also comments that "for this reason, one of the most important tasks for radical political thought today must consist in a 'dispassionate conceptual development of the typology of violence' that distances itself from the fascination with immediately visible 'subjective' violence and reveals the very 'objective' and systemic violence hidden behind the supposedly 'political neutral' and nonviolent socioeconomic order of the present."³⁵

In Žižek's view, he is not comfortable with the riots in the Parisian suburbs that took place in fall 2005 as it rather illustrates a 'senseless' or 'irrational' violence that does not lead to a destructuralisation and restructuralisation of social and economic accounts. Vogt affirms this point; "Žižek's account of the riots in the Parisian suburbs that took place in fall 2005 can illustrate this seminal point: As 'senseless' and 'irrational' violent protests lacking any direct political and socio-economic demands."³⁶ Subjective violence is randomly an *anonymous* violence occurring as a result of people's frustration and is a kind of violence which cannot be conceptualised and intellectualised. Subjective violence is an irrational eruption of a useless violence because it lacks political ambition to renew a universal framework either for (personal identity) recognition or for (the proletariat's) resocialisation in which the living conditions of a traumatised poor will be assuaged, will no longer be suffocated, and will be allowed more socio-economic space within which to breathe. As a result, and in order to correspond to the objective of the resocialisation of the traumatised poor, Žižek redeems another category of violence invented conceptually by Walter Benjamin - 'divine violence':

[Divine Violence] is divine in the precise sense of the old Latin motto *vox populi, vox dei*: not in the perverse sense of 'we are doing it as mere instruments of the People's Will', but as the heroic assumption of sovereign decision. It is a decision (to mill, to risk or lose one's own life) made in absolute solitude, with no cover in the big Other. If it is extra-moral, it is not 'immoral', it does not give the agent license just to kill with some kind of angelic innocence. When those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly', demanding and enacting immediate justice, this is divine violence... Divine violence belongs to the order of Event (Badiou)³⁷

It is clear from the above passage that divine violence in Žižek's rather than Benjamin's account illustrates Žižek's political will to empower People to be a sovereign decision-maker. 'Divine' in this absolutely secularised sense does not refer to a transcendental entity (God) as *such*: "it is a decision made in absolute solitude, with no cover in the big Other", thus, divine violence in Žižek's account refers to human violence. It is also implied in the passage that given that divine violence consists of killing, it cannot be interpreted as an immoral crime as such because divine violence is carried out in the name of justice. Following Žižek enables us to hypothesise that divine violence is a plea for a violence in which a traumatised people, together with their accurate historical consciousness, can perform this act of violence in order to turn the course of history, that is, to be set free from a traumatised socioeconomic situation. Because of his revitalisation of Benjamin's divine violence as violence that is *demanding and enacting immediate justice*, Žižek's theory

on violence is intimately related to Fanon's. Theses on violence elaborated by both thinkers are calling for a destructuralisation and restructuralisation of certain socioeconomic oppressions that consistently tormenting and traumatising people. Fanon and Žižek agree to the necessity of violence as a means to provide alternative avenues of escape from (our current era of) dominant capitalism (Žižek) and from colonial system (Fanon) to rebuild a new institution that suits human dignities and needs to which as written by Vogt "everyone can meet on the egalitarian ground". Again, to repeat Žižek's words, "it is a decision (to mill, to risk or lose one's own life) made in absolute solitude, with no cover in the big Other. If it is extra-moral, it is not 'immoral', it does not give the agent license just to kill with some kind of angelic innocence. When those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly', demanding and enacting immediate justice, this is divine violence". And, in Fanon's, "violence is an attempt on the part of the desperate, frustrated and alienated colonised subject to retrieve a certain dignity and sense of the Self that colonial violence had destroyed. It takes the form of anti-colonial struggle." Vogt's comment on both thinkers is persuasive:

[The] alternative avenues of escape from the capitalist (neo)-colonialist system contains the germ for modes of collective political subjectivisation arising out of a space where the excluded masses, militants, and those intellectual identifying with 'the wretched of the earth' (can) meet on strictly egalitarian grounds; however, if this new collective political subjectivisation is not to exhaust itself in mere spontaneous voluntarism, specific structures for its political organisation must be devised so as to enable and stabilise proper universal politicisation. Furthermore, neither Fanon nor Žižek dismiss the relevance of existing cultural, racial, or ethnic differences for the project of a universal postcolonial politics; that is, they maintain that these differences remain important, as long as they are sustained by the collective, transversal, and egalitarian struggle on the part of militant subjects against the repressive and oppressive cores concealed within their own respective cultures and civilisations.³⁸

In addition, there is an attempt to define a 'root' of the black identity emphasised in the postcolonised notion of Negritude. Negritude if presumed as violence is not violent enough because it has no aim to put an end to socioeconomic structure of inequality that characterised the neoliberal discourse. It is legitimate as a cultural strategy as an attempt to seize on cultural essence - to what it means by being originally Black. Negritude is essentialised as politics of identity and it is basically involved with a revivification of the African Myth. However, Negritude is not a politics that does bring transformative aspect to the structural violence of neo-capitalism *per se* and it also fails to capture and to refresh a living condition of the traumatised poor such as the slum-dwellers, the unemployed, and the starving people and so on. Therefore, Negritude is a beautiful theorisation in cultural politics and maybe attractive to pupils of cultural studies and postcolonial studies. But, in reality, it is still consent to subject to liberalism's doctrine, bringing no transformative aspects to the existing socioeconomic situations. A radicalised aspect on violence in both Fanon and Žižek demands a destructuralisation and restructuralisation of the social relation, swearing on those bulk of new relationships among the coloniser and the colonised, the traumatiser and the traumatised, the CEOs and the proletariats, and with this hypothesis, Negritude is nothing else except being the term in postcolonial politics initiated by some ultra-nationalists

who completely avoid touching on the real political responsibility. Amalgamating Fanon and Žižek, Vogt offers an insightful account:

Ultimately, Negritude as (cultural, racial, and nationalist) identity politics perpetuates a (long history of a) 'politics' of recognition lacking the central feature of any genuine political and, thus, violent struggle for freedom: namely the concomitant acceptance of 'convulsions of death, invincible dissolution' on the part of the colonised subjects. In short, since its cultural politics remains separated from militant anti-colonial struggle and continue to affirm inversely (Western) colonialism's bourgeois-individualist and elitist residues, *Negritude as such cannot be a sufficient condition for the liberation from colonial subjugation. This explains why the (liberal-bourgeois) representative proponents of negritude cannot but fail to grasp 'the possibility of the impossible' characterising radical anti-colonial politics* (my italic).³⁹

III A Trauma Revisited

In Fanon's view, a suppression of the colonised's civic life was a result of structural violence imposed by western cultural imperialism. In this regard, the understanding of colonialism is that it is a hegemonic political-cultural system that uprooted the others' way of living, which results in the so-called wounded past embodied in the colonised's subjectivities and collective emotions. Fanon seems to hold the view that colonialism is a systematic negation of the other persons through a process of westernisation that is determined to destroy the native cultures of the colonised. Colonialism is a social system imposed from the higher-power that forces the subordinated and the repressed people to displace their own ways of life. Therefore, a wounded past is a result of the violent erasure of native culture in colonialism leading to the so-called 'cultural trauma' experienced by the colonised.⁴⁰ As highlighted by Jeffrey Alexander, *cultural trauma* "occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness"⁴¹ The colonised(s) were no doubt experiencing these cultural traumas as a result of cultural imposition by the West. Yet, some commentators like Homi Bhabha may not agree with cultural trauma because in their view there are other strategies like 'hybridity' emerging as a mythologised elusiveness and as a strategy of resistance to the colonial discourse.⁴²

Hybridisation of culture by the colonised is analogous to guerrilla warfare as it is defined as actions performed by the non-African colonised (presumably the Indians) in which those camouflages are embedded in the hegemony of the colonial discourse. Subsequently, the colonised reproduced their new subjectivities by mimicking western culture as prototype, resulting in a 'third cultural space'⁴³ which for Bhabha is the *unsignified meaning* that belongs neither to the West nor the natives; it is an ambivalent space of culture as a result of the cultural process of hybridisation. Precisely, hybridity is a clandestine violence performed by the colonised against the imperial cultural discourse. However, hybridity is vehemently criticised in *Towards the African Revolution* (1967), a book composed by Fanon, that, "native cultures were rotting with mimic men, natives with no sense of dignity and the loss of cultural identity itself."⁴⁴ Because of colonialism, the landscape of the natives' culture are shattered and left in oblivion. Worse, hybridity seems to betray the originality of culture by means of mimicking western cultures ranging from languages, dresses, and thinking patterns. It is

implied in Fanon's viewpoint that, at its extreme, hybridity avoids dealing with cultural trauma in the structural lives of the colonised. Hybridity provides insufficient room to challenge colonial socioeconomic exploitation. Ironically, hybridity is a cultural space in which the colonised forget and overlook their indelible cultural traumas. Nonetheless, Fanon argues that the colonised indeed experiencing a cultural trauma as he wrote in 'Racism and Culture' that "we witness the destruction of cultural values, of way of life. Language, dress, techniques, are devalorised. The social panorama is destroyed; values are flaunted, crushed, emptied, and a new system of values is imposed."⁴⁵

Nonetheless, if we overemphasise cultural traumas as a result of the cultural destruction of the colonised experience by Western cultural hegemony, we will be blinded to Fanon's central argument about violence, revolution, and the traumatised poor. Indeed, rather than cultural violence, Fanon is sensitive to the matter of economic conditions and the poor who are traumatised by this set of economic institutions. He wrote that: "the Negro problem does not resolve itself into the problem of Negroes living among white men but rather of Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white."⁴⁶ In our own current era in which millions of people are economically poor whilst most of the affluences and prosperities are concentrated in the hands of the few, shifting Alexander's original definition of cultural trauma leads me to coin the term 'capitalist trauma' which can be juxtaposed with Fanon's violence and Žižek's 'systemic violence'. From my small perspective, a capitalist trauma occurs when members of the economically under-privileged persons begin to feel and to realise that they have been subjected constantly to a horrendous capitalist event that leaves an indelible trauma upon their group consciousness.

The problematical point is that at a time of his invention of the concept cultural trauma, Alexander is thinking neither of anti-capitalism nor anti-colonialism, this is implied by the fact his analysis of trauma does not take into account the structural violence that colonialism and capitalism generate. To illustrate this, here is the definition of Alexander's 'Cultural Trauma':

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness.

Again, (my) Capitalist Trauma and playing with Alexander's words:

Capitalist trauma occurs when the poor feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event of capitalism that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness.

Capitalist trauma (if allowed) is a notion rising out of colonialism's and capitalism's structure of 'systemic violence'. In rethinking trauma, I argued in the introductory section that trauma does not need at all times to deal with memories that the subjects have towards the traumatic events in which the subject's mental pathologies are the effects from those events. Traumatic memory, which signifies a mental pathology of the subject, is because subjects are unable to avoid violent incidents e.g. wars, genocides, and massacres. However, thanks to the theses of violence and critical imperative obtained from Fanon and Žižek, there is a possibility for the alternative thinking on trauma outside the realms of human memories and conceptually suggesting that trauma is meant to be understood as a form of contemporaneity. Through structural violence such as colonialism and capitalism that illustrates the desolate living conditions of a majority of global population, trauma

conceptually understood as a wounded memory is no longer sufficient. Instead, I urge trauma to be understood as the on-going violence affecting in the lives of the millions of the powerless human beings; trauma is a contemporaneous incident occurring every second and every minute (occurring even the time of the writing of this article). Conventional thinking on trauma may regard trauma as connecting to human memories, mental health as well as the human psyches. Apart from that understanding, I otherwise suggest that trauma should be impregnated with a sense of the contemporaneity of the event, as a synchronised event where the subjects (the poor, the slum-dwellers, the unemployed people etc.) are either unable to struggle against the horrendous events or incapable of finding a way out of it. A trauma revisited is my small attempt to struggle against the conceptualised trauma that often mingles trauma with the subjects' pathologies of memories. A result of my small attempt is a proposal of the concept of a capitalist trauma modified from Alexander's cultural trauma, which, to repeat again, means that capitalism trauma occurs when the poor (the proletariat) feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event of capitalism that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness.

Indeed, the 'trauma revisited' which is the title's name of this article is not only an endeavour of my re-reading of Fanon's and Žižek's theses on violence, but also the idea is presupposed by Žižek's articulation on the proletarian position in which he links it to the concept of the 'post-traumatic subject', a term Žižek draws from the French Hegelian philosopher, Catherine Malabou. In Žižek's view, there are people who do not realise themselves that they, in Žižek's rhetoric, are proletarianised and are reduced to a zero-level of subjectivity. What Žižek has in mind is that traumatised people after being immersed in violent incidents no longer find themselves identical to the same selves of the time before the incident. The post-traumatic subjects are the subjects who no longer have confidence in the social order in which after catastrophes they still inhabit. Žižek seems to hold a traditional Freudian viewpoint, which focuses on the relationship between violence and its negative impact on the subject's mental illness, that is, an emergence of the traumatised subject whose subjects – as a result of dwelling in those precarious conditions for a long due of time – are possibly transformative. In Žižek's words, "I think that they are the people who find themselves in what I call a proletarian position: they are sometimes poor, sometimes well-off. What I would like to say about this notion of the proletarian position is that when you are reduced to some kind of zero level, then another subject emerges who is no longer the same self."⁴⁷ According to Malabou, the subject that has been referred to is the subject who has a post-traumatic personality and according to Žižek, is the subject that withdraws themselves from external reality to the abyss of pure cogito (the 'night of the world' in Hegel).⁴⁸ For Malabou, she coins the term 'destructive plasticity' so as to describe the subject who continues to live after encountering death. Here, is what Žižek elaborates this point further:

No wonder, then, that we encounter the Cartesian cogito at the very core of what is today emerging as the predominant form of pathology, the so-called post-traumatic subject. Our socio-political reality imposes multiple versions of external intrusions, traumas, which are just that – meaningless, brutal interruptions that destroy the symbolic texture of the subject's identity. First, there is external physical violence: terror attacks like 9/11, the US 'shock and awe' bombing of Iraq, street violence, rapes, etc., but also natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, tsunamis and so on. Then there is the 'irrational' (meaningless) destruction of the material base of inner

reality: brain-tumours, Alzheimer's disease, organic cerebral lesions, etc., which can utterly change – destroy even – the victims' personality. Finally, there are the destructive effects of socio-symbolic violence through social exclusion, etc. Most of these forms of violence have, of course, been known for centuries, some even from the very pre-history of humanity. What is new today is that, since we lived in a 'disenchanted' post-religious era, they are more directly experienced as meaningless intrusions of the real, and, for this very reason, although utterly different in nature, they appear as belonging to the same series and produce the same effect.⁴⁹

It can be suggested that at a time of his discussion on Malabou's post-traumatic subject, Žižek should add those slum dwellers who definitely enduring in poor conditions, including the favelas as well as the 'non-corporate' people whom labelled as the 'non-persons' as articulated in Chomsky's *Occupy*. All of these subjects emerge as a result of their enduring in the desperate situations; some of them fortunately survive whilst others don't. Both survivors and non-survivors share a similarity; their subjectivities are transformed and they no longer find themselves having the same attitudes, mental conditions etc. identical to pre-violence times: "after the shock, literally a new subject emerges. This subject *lives death as a form of life* (italic original)"⁵⁰ In my hypothesis, the post-traumatic subject conceptualised by Malabou and (presumably) modified in some parts by Žižek can be applied both to a traumatised person who need to endure their livelihoods in a frail condition on the basis of everyday life and to some people who suffer traumatic incidents: in both situations there are people who are close to becoming the so-called 'living dead'. Once again, it can be concluded that *a trauma revisited* urges one to take into account trauma as a contemporaneity of event that is referring to the existence of traumatic incidents as well as the traumatised persons; imagining the kidnapped girls in Nigeria, the living conditions of the North Korean people, and violence against the minorities Rohingyas in the southern part of Myanmar etc. In my hypothesis, trauma is not necessarily 'a belatedness'⁵¹ but a deeper understanding of trauma must take the 'now' quality of trauma into account. Furthermore, can be understood outside memories and essentially separate from bad dreams, unconscious, and nightmares which have been highlighted in a traditional psychoanalytic conceptualizations of trauma. In short, thinking about trauma is not only about memory which is likely to relate trauma to the past tense (nostalgias, childhood memories, and war diaries), what is required is that trauma has several contexts and several tenses. It is sometimes *the present tense* (the unemployed persons, the kidnapped girls, and the minorities), *the present perfect tense* (a man who has just been asked to resign from the company, the proletariats who have just been reduced salaries by the CEO of the companies) and *the future tense* (the girls being raped tomorrow, there will be a suicide bomber tomorrow, the future tsunamis, the future terrorist attacks etc.), which means that ultimately a conceptualisation over trauma cannot avoid taking into account traumas in the genus of the multiplicities of temporal events occurring in diverse global spaces.

CONCLUSION

As the title stands, this article aims to revisit trauma and reinterprets it in a critical perspective by drawing on theses of violence theorised by Frantz Fanon and Slavoj Žižek. Drawing to some extent from Marxist theories, it seems that in Fanon's as well as Žižek's hypotheses, trauma is a living condition that has represented the proletariat's subsistence

from colonial times up until the current era of neoliberalism. Implied in Fanon's theory, the structural violence of colonialism was responsible for the poor condition of the colonised proletariat whilst the local bourgeoisie were more comfortable as a result of their affiliation with their Western coloniser counterparts. If the past were to be corrected, which is by no means possible, decolonisation should not go by the name of liberalism, autonomy, or free nations. Also, it should ideally go by the name of the proletarian revolution aiming at reducing the gap between the rich and the poor in order to remedy traumatised persons and in order to improve their economic conditions since colonial times. In fact, decolonisation carried out by most of the countries in the former colonies went by the name of patriotism, nationalism, and the recognition of the originality, therefore, decolonisation under liberal discourse is untenable. Decolonisation is not genuine emancipation because such impacts of faulty liberations or pseudo-emancipations continue even today: in Africa millions of people are still poor and illiterate and class divisions continue. As long as structural violence remains, there are no means for the traumatised people to recover from the poor conditions they are enduring today. The emphasis is that *trauma stands outside memory* and the revision on trauma is to relate it to a current and on-going situation endowed with the current facts of capitalism's negative impacts upon people livelihoods such as the unemployed people, the poor, the slum-dwellers in which their desolate conditions have not yet been improved much since colonial time. As I mentioned in the introductory section, thanks to Fanon and Žižek, both suggest that trauma is to be understood at the level of everyday life: a usual experience of a group of people who are pressurised in violent situations and are experiencing traumas on the daily basis. Juxtaposed to 'cultural trauma', I suggest that trauma in some level must be understood as the collective trauma of the group of the violated people and given its structural condition predicated upon human lives is comprehended as 'capitalist trauma' which is defined as an event when *the poor feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event of capitalism that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness.*

From the Žižekian perspective, there is the possibility of taking into account a 'trauma revisited' in other venues and it should be noted here as a suggestion on trauma research. Following his emphasis on 'the critique of ideology' through the interplays of the 'known/unknown' categories, Žižek recommends that there are 4 'known/unknown' categories which offer the paradigms on how the critique of ideology really works today.⁵² The first category is the 'known-known', referring to something that we know that we know. The second category is the 'known-unknown', referring to something that we know that we do not know. Then, the third category is 'the unknown-unknown', referring to something mysteriously Other which is beyond our scope of knowledge such as we never know the deep impacts the weapon of mass destruction (WMD) caused to one country: all we can do is to estimate that WMD possess an extreme level of a destruction but we may overestimate it. The fourth category, the last one, is 'unknown-known' – referring to Jacques Lacan's famous dictum on unconscious 'you do not know that you know' – has a meaning that there is something that we do not know that we know. The fourth category relates to the (Lacanian) Real in that the subject fails to reflect upon their mental landscapes and the subject is dominated by something (desires, drives) that exists in the subject's mind. All these points relate to a 'trauma revisited' that allows for the possibilities of intellectualisation on trauma in a very sharp psychoanalytic fashion.

In my schema, the first category is trauma as *known-known*: trauma is a mental pathology that the subjects know that they are traumatised. The second category is trauma as *known-unknown*: the subjects know that they are not traumatised people and although immersed in violent incidents are not traumatised by them (e.g. wars, genocides, famines) horrifying events. The third category is that trauma is the *unknown-unknown*: trauma is a mysterious Other in the eyes of the people who really have no idea what trauma does look like because in their lives they have never experienced traumas. The fourth category is that trauma is the *unknown-known*: trauma as the Lacanian Real that the subjects fail to encounter as their own madness - hallucinations, pathologies, hysterics, and so on. In the fourth category, trauma is a mental pathology that the subject does realize she has been affected by. If trauma is situated at the level of unconscious, trauma will be nothing else except *something that the subjects do not know that they know*. This presupposition is a Lacanian thesis on trauma which stays beyond the scope of this article but it is tempted for one to start revisiting trauma in an intense Lacanian perspective; it is the account of trauma that is related to the notions of drives, desires, fantasies, affects, and subjectivities.

Notes

¹ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977), p. 5.

² Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977), p. 9.

³ "In the colonial countries, the spirit of indulgence is dominant at the core of the bourgeoisie; and this is because the national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the Western bourgeoisie, from whom it has learnt its lessons. It follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention." For Fanon decolonisation involves not merely taking over the colonial state apparatus, or Africanisation of the local bureaucracy and its authority structure, but structural and institutional change in the society that lead to the creation of 'new man' and new social relationships. Having an intimate relationship with the white-man club, the black bourgeoisies seem comfortable with their current social status and expected no change in structural and institutional structures. For this reason, Fanon concludes that the national bourgeoisie proved unable to play a progressive role in decolonisation." About the discussions see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 123.

⁴ Fanon argues that the working class of the underdeveloped countries performs the same tasks as the European proletariat, but has been subject to embourgeoisement: "tram conductors, taxi-drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, nurses, intellectuals and so on. It is these elements which constitute the most faithful followers of the nationalist parties, and who because of the privileged place which they hold in the colonial system constitute also the "bourgeois" fraction of the colonised people". About the discussions see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 86.

⁵ The peasantry remains the most "disciplined element" of the population. It is much easier to arouse the peasants to political consciousness, since they have not suffered alienation as have the urban working class and the national bourgeoisie. They have not been made to feel inferior, and they have not sunk to that psychological state of a feeling of impotence or of nonbeing. In addition, in their folklore the anti-colonial struggle still looms large in a form that is not distorted by the coloniser. The peasants are also supposed to be 'pure'. They live in close contact with their traditional societies and are not corrupted by Westernisation. Fanon also argues that what contributes to the revolutionary potential of the peasant is his economic deprivation and suffering: "For it [the peasantry] knows naked oppression, and suffers far more from it than the workers in the towns, and in order not to die of hunger, it demands no less than a complete demolishing of all existing structures." All that Fanon is entitled to claim by the logic of his own argument is that the peasants constitute a potentially revolutionary class. About the discussions see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 10. However, to show a propensity for violence to protect one's own interests is one thing, and to engage in revolutionary violence is another. Nguyen Nghe adds that even when the peasant engages in

armed struggle, he does not follow it through to seek the structural changes in the society that revolution entails. After the struggle is over, he returns to his old habits.

⁶ The lumpen-proletariats form a “horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan” Fanon regards them as “the men whom the growing population of the country districts and colonial expropriation have brought to desert their family holdings circle tirelessly around the different towns, hoping that one day or another they will be allowed inside.” About the discussions see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 102-103. In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels refer to it as that “dangerous class”, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society.

⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 103.

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 104.

⁹ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, pp. 120-122. The revolution must be carried out by the proletariat because for George Sorel, the proletariat is the only pure and non-corrupted class.

¹¹ Pramod Nayar, *Frantz Fanon*, p. 111. According to Nayar, Fanon is also known as a critic of Negritude. “Negritude, Fanon argued, cannot be based on a homogenous vision of black cultures. As he famously put it, ‘there is not merely one Negro, there are Negroes’ (*Black Skin*: 104, emphasis is original). With this, Fanon was calling for a multiplicity of interpretations of what ‘black culture’ itself meant. While he accepts that negritude has a definite role in the construction of an anti-colonial political consciousness, he also argues that this consciousness needs to go beyond homogenising concepts”

¹² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 17.

¹³ Joanne Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism*, p. 129.

¹⁴ Erik Vogt “Žižek and Fanon: On Violence and Related Matters” in *Žižek Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies*, Jamil Khader and Molly Anne Rothenberg (eds.) (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013), p. 140.

¹⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* p. 142.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, p. 42.

¹⁷ It should be noted carefully that destruction does not necessarily refer to a naïve meaning as to take on a physical violence against the oppressors (the colonisers, the capitalists). Destruction underlying in a Marxist sense refers instead in a proper sense, that is, the purpose is to put an end to the existing (colonial, capitalism) systems and to renew, to restructure, and to reorganise a social and economic relation in a better condition. Destruction in this sense means destroying something in order to create another in which a renewal of the social relation is anticipated and is expected to be better than the old (existing) one. If there is someone who trying to look for the meaning of communism in today’s world, this probably will be one of the possible answers.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, p. 119.

²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 81-82.

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 100.

²² Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, pp. 40-41.

²³ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon social and political thought*, p. 128.

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 224.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), pp. 1-2.

²⁶ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (2003), p. 42.

²⁷ It is a ‘divine violence’ that Žižek said that ‘we should fearlessly identify divine violence with positively existing historical phenomena, thus avoiding any obscurantist mystification. About this point, see more discussions in Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, p. 167.

²⁸ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p. 41.

²⁹ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy*, p. 41.

³⁰ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy*, p. 40.

³¹ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy*, p. 46.

³² Noam Chomsky, *Occupy*, p. 54.

³³ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy*, pp. 62-63.

³⁴ Erik Vogt “Žižek and Fanon: On Violence and Related Matters”, p. 147.

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- ³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, p. 3.
- ³⁶ Erik Vogt “Žižek and Fanon: On Violence and Related Matters”, p. 147.
- ³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 69-70.
- ³⁸ Erik Vogt “Žižek and Fanon: On Violence and Related Matters”, pp. 140-141.
- ³⁹ Erik Vogt “Žižek and Fanon: On Violence and Related Matters”, p. 146.
- ⁴⁰ Pramod Nayar, *Frantz Fanon*, p. 76.
- ⁴¹ Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2012), p. 1.
- ⁴² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 85.
- ⁴³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁴ Pramod Nayar, *Frantz Fanon*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, Haakon Chavalier trans. (New York: Grove, 1967), pp. 33-34.
- ⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 115.
- ⁴⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Demanding the Impossible* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press 2013), p. 56.
- ⁴⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Event Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin Books: 2014), p. 78.
- ⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Event Philosophy in Transit*, pp. 95-96.
- ⁵⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Event Philosophy in Transit*, p. 96.
- ⁵¹ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 8-9.
- ⁵² Slavoj Žižek, “Ideology of Violence” in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIHpNXP7IA0>, accessed 22/05/2014.

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