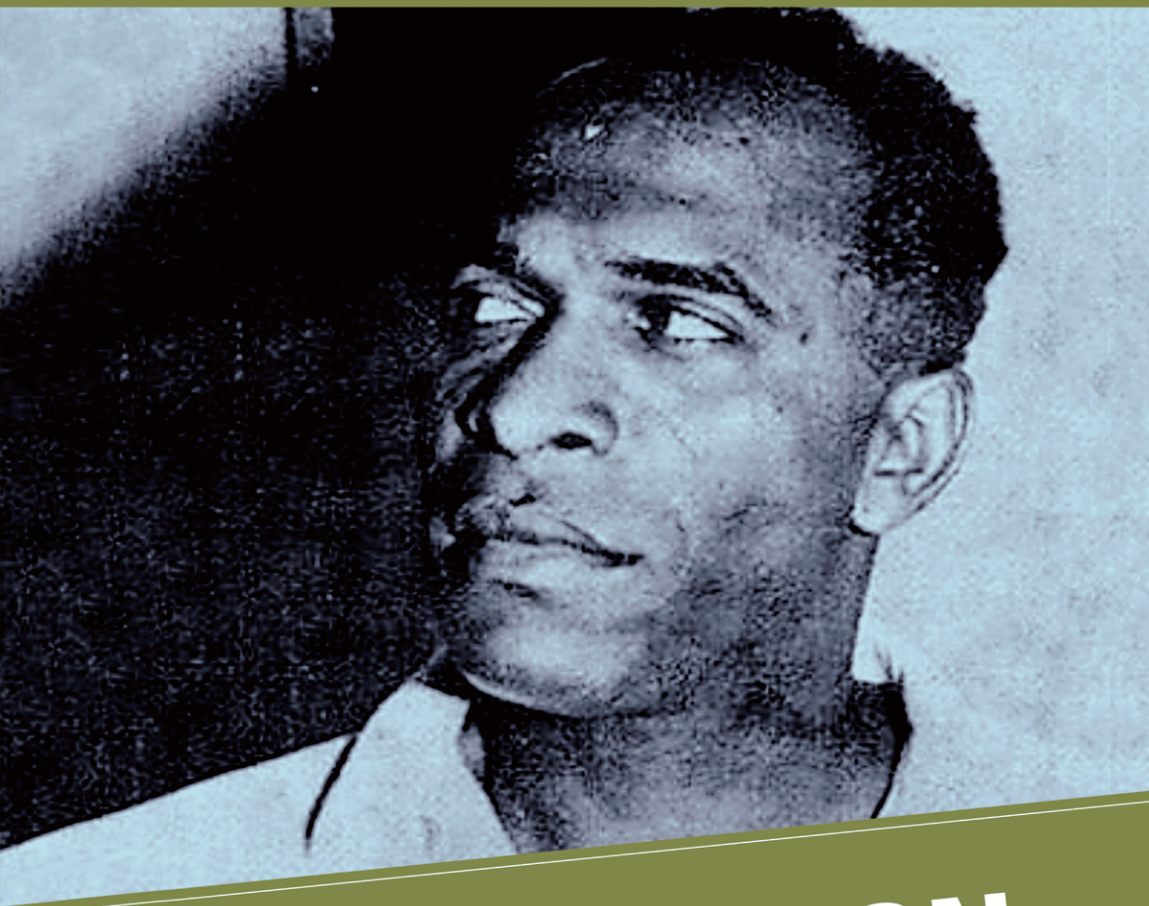


CONTEMPORARY BLACK HISTORY

SERIES EDITORS: **MANNING MARABLE
& PENIEL JOSEPH**



LIVING FANON

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY NIGEL C. GIBSON



Living Fanon

CONTEMPORARY BLACK HISTORY

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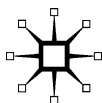
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Living Fanon

Global Perspectives

Edited by
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Any edited book is a collective endeavor and this book really depended on the patience, good humor, and commitment of all the contributors. I also want to mention two of the original contributors whose papers couldn't be published in the volume, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Jacques Depelchin. Nelson's "Rousseau and Fanon on Inequality and the Human Sciences" was published in the *C.L.R. James Journal* (Volume 15:2009) and Jacques' "Humanity Is Expecting More from Us: The Militant Life of Two Healers: Fanon and Césaire" was presented at the eighth Seminar of Francophonie at Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana-Bahia, December 2010.

Introduction

Living Fanon?

Nigel C. Gibson

A picture from Rome, 1959,
eyes intently scrutinizing a report
Your face
close to the text
still the intensity of youth
But for a few weeks
you lost your sight

You have no time for coffee house revolutionaries
or those who *stockpile their mental resources*
you said to Sartre,
red eyed, at the *small of the small hours*,
while assassins waited at your hospital bed

But Lumumba should have known better, you insisted
The enemy never retreats with sincerity

The enemy was also within
When they came for Abane
You chose to mourn
and keep those dark secrets
to yourself

Were you not also gambling with your life
on a trip through Mali?
But then you had no time
for those who hoard life

A jeep ride to the Southern front
The drama unfolded rat-a-tat-tat
Monrovia, Bamako, Timbuktu
Dodging the secret service agents
coming after you
The French combing the skies

force you down onto endless impassable roads
the infinite details of deserts
 and little sleep

Little sleep
 You have little patience for sleep
 You
 who still deny the illness
 that thief in your blood
 draining the revolution

I see you reading complicated histories
 Of ancient Africa and old empires
 Eyes close to the page
 Things are not so simple
 and so little time in that “African Year”
 to put vision into motion.

The new North African Syndrome: Revolution

To put Africa in motion... behind revolutionary principles... this was really the work I had chosen.

Frantz Fanon

Critical reflection on living, lived experience, and a lived experience that for the colonized could be summed up as a “living death” is essential to understanding Fanon’s thought, his humanism, and his revolutionary commitment. And *Living Fanon* expresses the multifaceted and contradictory dimensions of life, a life that Fanon, in his final year, declared was dedicated to an Africa “in motion behind revolutionary principles” (1967b:177). To catch the motion and intensity of Fanon’s life, of a body which always questions (1967a:232), and the dialectic of what he called his revolutionary principles is one task of *Living Fanon*.

What better way to begin a celebration of a “living Fanon” than with a new “North African syndrome”?¹ Revolution—or at least a series of revolts that have rocked regimes across North Africa and the Middle East. Fanon argues that decolonization is a program of complete disorder, an overturning of order—often against the odds—*willed* from the bottom up (1968:35). In periods of revolution radical change becomes the “new normal” and the idea that revolutionary change is impossible is simply the rantings and ravings of the conservatives and reactionaries of the ancient regime. Creating Tahrir Squares across national boundaries, the pan-Arabian revolts have opened up political space. Social media has become concretely related to social transformation, and the retaking of public space as the idea of the “right to the city” has become less about visiting rights than a collective project of social transformation. Masses of people, standing up to so much violence—from military and secret police to torture and brutality—have made concrete Fanon’s Marxist opinion that people change as they change the world: “They were scared. They are no longer scared,”

many argued, from Tunisia to Syria and from Egypt to Yemen, wondering why it had taken so long. "When we stopped being afraid we knew we would win. We will not again allow ourselves to be scared of a government. This is the revolution in our country, the revolution in our minds."² Fanon insists that the mental liberation and the radical change in consciousness that accompany revolution begin with the "revolution in our minds," questioning everything that has been hitherto taken for granted (1968:100). What had been *normal* for so long is fundamentally shaken. Yet how can the revolutions avoid the counter-revolutions from without and within, how can they hold onto their own epistemological and critical moment? This is an issue that concerned Fanon and continues to concern *Living Fanon*.

It was upon these "revolutionary beginnings" (1968:191) that Fanon insisted on a "second phase of total liberation" (see 1967b:126); a notion of freedom and human dignity created by the *authentic* liberation of the wretched of the earth, which equates with the collective actions of those hitherto damned, uncounted, and dehumanized people becoming historical protagonists, turning the world upside down. "An authentic national liberation," he argues, "exists only to the degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation" (1967b:103). In other words, Fanon's notion of a second phase of liberation describes the embodied self-activity and self-bringing forth of liberty as phenomenologies of revolution. Autonomous time is created by bodies that are no longer hemmed in and constrained, but freely thinking and moving through space. A democracy from below is developed by the will of the people, by their own power. To accomplish this new beginning, the African revolutions, he argued, could not return to the past but would have to "let the dead bury the dead," as Fanon quotes Marx as the epigraph to his "in lieu of a conclusion" to *Black Skin White Masks*. These new revolutions, Marx continued in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, would have to "criticize themselves continually ... deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts" (Marx 1963:19). And so it is with the new North African syndrome of revolutions.

Fanon After Fifty

This volume was first tentatively titled "Fanon After Fifty" to quite literally express a rendezvous with Frantz Fanon fifty years after his death and the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*. While revolutions and rebellions always make Fanon relevant, the contemporary engagement with Fanon is also manifested by the continuing rounds of international conferences and publications, as well as memorials, seminars, and anthologies dedicated to him. It was not always like this. By the late 1970s, as neoliberal structural adjustment programs began to be unleashed on Fanon's wretched of the earth—not only on the African continent but also in Latin America and America's inner cities—the revolutionary Fanon was being dismissed as a minor figure. It is also noteworthy that at the end of the cold war, Fanon was reemerging in the Northern academy, though perhaps defanged, as the "father" of a new interdisciplinary field, postcolonial studies. But there has also been a trend that turns Fanon's gaze back onto the question of what happens *after* the postcolonial. This trajectory had as its source a number of articles and books that sought to free

Fanon from obscurity and academic domestication, among them Lewis Gordon's *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, Ato Sekyi-Otu's *Fanon and the Dialectic of Experience* and my *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*. Importantly, just when Fanon was being reduced to a footnote in France, Alice Cherki's *Frantz Fanon, a Portrait* (2000) signaled a renewed interest. In addition, a slew of new editions and translations of Fanon's writings in Italian, Spanish, English, Arabic, and Hebrew emerged in the millennium, indicating that Fanon's work, including the more under-read political texts born of his revolutionary African experiences, were engaging new generations of thinkers and activists.

Today Fanon might wonder why we are still debating the relevance and *timeliness* of his work. He stated quite clearly that he belonged "irreducibly" to his time: "The future should be an edifice supported by living men." But like him, some of us might still believe that the present is "something to be exceeded" (1967a:13). For Fanon colonialism meant the end of time for the colonized. Having been expelled from history, the colonized could recover only in the struggle against colonialism. The two apparently contradictory notions of time, being in one's time and also being removed from time and thus stuck in another's time, are illuminated in the "epochal" anticolonial struggles for freedom. The struggle helps recover the time before colonialism and revalorizes cultures and practices by grounding them in the struggle to gain back land and dignity.

Just as space is central to Fanon's decolonial phenomenology, his critical geography is profoundly concerned with the temporal (see Kipfer). The new time, in other words, is not simply for reclaiming lost cultures or reclaiming history. The relationship of history and time is far from unambiguous in our postcolonial world, but even in its contemporary neoliberal guises the disconnection is quite Fanonian. For the postcolonial elites it is a time to become cosmopolitan and "postracial;" for the masses, it is the time of continued exclusion, oppression, alienation, and unfreedom. For much of the world's population, living in precarious conditions, the present is stifling. They are the living dead expelled from "human" society who struggle on a daily basis for dignity and survival.

Land is always at the heart of the anticolonial liberation struggle (see More). It is an urban as well as rural issue central to the necessary geographic remapping of the new nation that Fanon's new humanism called for (see Fanon 1968) and to the radical mutations in consciousness and the new social relations that arise from the struggles. Hunger, poverty, landlessness, lack of clean water, increasing inequalities between the North and the South as well as within each continent—the two worlds in every country (1967a:153)—these are the realities of our world fifty years after Fanon's death. Neoliberal globalization, thirty years of "structural adjustment," and the commodification of the commons have simply increased the division between the rich and the poor and the attendant Manichean ideology of the good and the bad. The citadel and gated community are just expressions of the fetishism of security—from food security to border security—that reveals the global elites' fear and need to control populations. Indeed, the Manicheanism that Fanon argued characterizes the geopolitical layout of the colonial world is quite applicable to contemporary reality characterized by a zero-sum game: scarcity and threat. Hand in hand with the neocolonial land grab is a "humanitarian intervention" led by NGO zealots, "moral

teachers,” and “bewilderers” (1968:38). Each has its security apparatus (private and public). Ideological cover is found in the World Bank’s self-help poverty elimination discourses, which promote poor peoples’ saving, and treating themselves as capital. This “proletarianization” is also pitifully absurd, as their land is enclosed and dispossessed, their homes bulldozed, their access to meager social services closed down, as they are removed to “temporary” government shacks where their rights are displaced under the ward of this or that “development” NGO or aid organization under the watchful eye of the security services. Meanwhile, new reports from the UN to the World Bank declare that quite a few millennium goals have not been met, that the life of the majority of the world’s population has not improved: its promises are unmet and the resources are siphoned off to the ever-growing NGO administration or corrupt entrepreneurial scheme (see Pithouse). And life goes on.

Today, the Manichean structure of dominance is most obviously expressed in the “war on terror” that sweeps every critical comment and action into its path. Within this construct, Islam has been newly pathologized, echoing many colonial ethnopsychological theories popularized by Carothers and Porot and criticized by Fanon (from his first published article “The North African Syndrome” to the last chapter of *The Wretched* [see Turner, Cherki]). Colonial politics is a politics of regulation and segregation based in sexual differentiation (see Boulbina); and in his analysis of the veil Fanon brings to light the “sadistic and perverse character of these contacts and relationships” (1967c:40) expressed in the struggle by the French to rend the veil, to liberate the woman, as a desire to “deflower” her (1967c:46). Today Islam is again characterized as inherently undemocratic, oppressive, and reactionary; opposed to bourgeois and Western values, it is seen as a threat to civilization. Reading Fanon’s analysis, one understands the logical conclusion of this Manicheanism: every Muslim is a potential suicide bomber. It is them or us. You know the rest. The threat level is always high alert. Every action and speech is monitored. From “humanitarian intervention” to saving Western values, the European and American liberals are quick to fall into line: a new post cold-war dividing line.

The new reality for all is torture and imprisonment without trial, absent of any of the rights that Western society claims to fight for. As Turner points out, torture accompanies all wars. It creates and recreates, as Fanon pointed out, military and chemical technology, doctors, soldiers, civil servants, and a whole structure of society that is given over to it as active or knowing participants, while liberal civil society throws up its hands in the face of the “special” situation. The contemporary situation echoes Fanon’s criticism of the French liberal and left paralysis with regard to torture during the Algerian war. Indeed it took over forty years for the French to even acknowledge that they tortured, just as there were fifty years of British denials about torture in Kenya, when hundreds of thousands of people were forced into concentration camps and backbreaking labor (including Barack Obama’s grandfather who was imprisoned for two years and tortured by British soldiers during Kenya’s “Mau Mau” struggle for land and freedom—which at that time was represented as a barbaric movement threatening civilization). Support for torture becomes a technical question. American and European leaders declare waterboarding “legal.” Psychiatrists continue to openly support it, or at least unthinkingly overmedicate for victims of “post-traumatic stress” as other forms of treatment are too expensive (see Cherki).

“Is Fanon relevant?” Just read his analysis of medicine and colonialism or the case studies in *The Wretched*.

The repetitiveness of writing about the oppressive “reality” is tiring (Fanon 1967a:137). The Manichean structures that Fanon outlined might have shifted but still return. The suffocating reality that he so brilliantly described, the physical experience, the lived space, literally “oppression” of the body of the oppressed, remains remarkably topical; the struggles of the wretched of the earth—the landless, the poor, the precarious workers: those hemmed in and accounted for by the security apparatus but discounted both in the global South and in the margins of the global North; the dehumanized and illegitimate—are clear to anyone who looks. The revolts of the wretched of the earth, those silenced or denied the right to speak but who make themselves heard, are continuous. These struggles and this anger of the poor, as S’bu Zikode, the chairperson of the South African shack dwellers’ organization Abahlali baseMjondolo, puts it, “can go in many directions” (see More). And Fanon warned that reactionary, chauvinist, and often brutal directions are encouraged by the ruling elites who do everything possible to deflect and divide revolts. “Channeling” the anger is exactly what is at stake. When Fanon warned that the greatest threat to Africa’s liberation was the lack of a liberatory ideology, is it outrageous now to say that liberatory ideology was Fanon’s revolutionary humanism?

The Rationality of Revolt

But the war continues, justified and rationalized. How to get out of this cycle? How to stand up and resist? How not to be defined by the other or by a reaction to the other? This is Fanon’s question; the problem he set himself in *Black Skin, White Masks* and in *The Wretched*. Indeed, writing about the veil in *A Dying Colonialism* (1967b:47), he notes that the “laws of the psychology of colonization”—the actions of the colonizer—first determine the centers of resistance. Beyond Manicheanism, it is with the liberation struggle that attitudes fundamentally change. This problem of will and subjectivity, of reason and identity is one that each of the contributors to *Living Fanon* subtly confronts from different perspectives—psychoanalytic, sociological, philosophical: the disappearance of reason that Fanon describes in *Black Skin* is not based on postmodern skepticism but rather on “blacks exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white” (1967a:202, translation modified). Reason, fundamentally linked to freedom and in opposition to the unreason and unfreedom of neocolonial globalized capitalism, makes its reappearance in the anticolonial revolts. It is what Fanon calls the rationality of revolt that is a basis for reconsidering Peter Hallward’s question, echoing Percy Bysshe Shelley’s line from *The Mask of Anarchy*, “Ye are many, they are few”: are there or are there not “enough people on this earth resolved to impose reason on this unreason” (Fanon 1967c:18)?

Since Fanon insists that there were no universal truths and that every problem has to be understood in its context, why should we even be concerned, fifty years later, about Fanon’s relevance? Does the question itself underscore the disconnect between truth and reality? Indeed, the colonized can respond only to the living lie

of colonialism with another lie. The colonized are liars because they refuse to tell the truth. For Fanon, by this denial the colonized remained true to themselves (see Renault). Fanon claimed no Truth; truth was commitment—truth was to take a stand against the oppressive “reality.” But clearly he was a man of his time and we should get on with ours. But before we do that we have to ask about “our” standpoint.

Living Fanon has a resonance on the margins of disciplines and academic settings because Fanon demanded action; action—not reaction but commitment—and then also reflection on commitment. At his most ethical, Fanon demanded a stand against any injustice. For Fanon if you remain cowed and silent, if you do not do everything in your power to prevent injustice—the torture, the terror, the destruction of the human being—and unfreedom—in the most “normal” daily interactions—then you are complicit with it. Karl Jaspers’ notion of solidarity against injustice took on concrete form for Fanon as a *will* to struggle. In Algeria, torture was employed to break the human being, to break the individual’s will and crush her spirit. The medical staff were there simply to keep the tortured alive for another session. Because of its focus on “subjectification,” psychiatry is essential to regimes of torture and violence (see Boulbina, Farred). For Fanon, living in a society under these conditions continues to be nonviable. There is no other choice, for Fanon or any ethical intellectual, but to join the revolutionary movement and do away with the oppressive society. Yet, how to join it? Fanon also reminds us that the relationship, time-lag, and gap between the intellectuals and the mass movements cannot be bridged by sheer will. In short, the problem lies in the intellectuals’ inability to “rationalize popular action” and to “attribute to it any reason” (2004:98). Already in *Black Skin* he had declared that bourgeois society was stiflingly corrupt and motionless, and that anyone who took a stand against its “living death” was a revolutionary. But to move from taking a stand to a radical commitment that risked life and well-being is something more. There is no space outside of colonialism and under this condition, he writes, where each breath is observed. Breath is life, and thus what the South African shack dweller organization, Abhalali baseMjondolo, calls a “living politics” is a “combat breathing” (1967c:65). With the “rationality of revolt” as the point of departure, a wholly different attitude to intellectual work was required. The point is not to meditate too long on the “zone of occult instability” (1968:227) between the movement and the intellectuals since, for Fanon, there simply isn’t any autonomous space, no standpoint outside of commitment. Yet it often appears that to address the fragility of the new society—the internal and external threats—and the fragility of the colonized psyche that has experienced repression and brutality—one has to suppress discussion and present a united front; but Fanon insists that such problems, which are continually faced, can be addressed only by the widest, most open, and exhaustive discussions.

Fidelity with Fanon

How can we take Fanon seriously, aware of the unproductive *conflict of interpretations* between the “historical Fanon” and the “postcolonial Fanon?” Rather than reigniting these debates or reducing Fanon to the new trend of interpretation, argues Renault, the movement beyond them requires resituating Fanon in his time and place,

while simultaneously evading these coordinates by moving into our time and place. Thus a paean to “living Fanon” engages Fanon’s thought as a constant process of asking political questions—a process that finds our age wanting. Here, Fanon’s notions of race, nation, violence, and geography, for example (see Bernasconi, Neocosmos, Jane Gordon, Mellino, Boulbina, Lazali, Farred and Kipfer), undergo mutation. In a Fanonian way the investigations are also contemporary self-questionings. After writing *Black Skin*, Fanon argues in “Racism and Culture” (see Bernasconi) that “racism is not the whole, but the most visible, the most day-to-day and, not to mince matters, the crudest element of a given structure” (1967b:32). Fanon is concerned with how European racism is appropriated as a mobilizing force. He warns that the Manichean certainty of a “native” movement against the “settler” leads to brutality. Built on the rationality of the revolt, the new nation comes into being out of the new social relations and discussion of where we are going and why (see Fanon 1967c). It is often forgotten that *The Wretched* is structured so that its final chapter, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” problematizes the violence that seemed originally absolute and indicates, for the future, the huge psychological costs of colonial brutality on the individual as well as on the social (Lazali). In addition, after arguing that violence was essential to national independence, he goes on to speak of the “pitfalls of national consciousness” (a talk he first delivered to the ALN at Ghardimaou, on the Algerian/Tunisian border). Rather than a biological, cultural, or religious authenticity, the nation would come into being through the collective action of all (and thus anybody) who was committed to it. Belâïd Abane reminds us that Fanon’s thinking was influenced by his experience of Algerians committed to the revolution and by debates with Ramdane Abane, the leader of the FLN. Before the Battle of Algiers, the FLN’s program articulated at Soumman under Abane’s direction continued to influence Fanon’s political writings. Both Fanon and Abane never advocated a future state based on a “return to Islam”; they both can be considered revolutionary African “modernists” (Mellino, also see Sekyi-Otu) who believed in radical democratization and the creativity of national culture born of social change.

Dying of myeloid leukemia, Fanon wanted to breathe his last breath in combat, yet the dialectic took the upper hand. *The Wretched* was written in the last months of his life as a form of intervention in ongoing events. This rushed summation about decolonization and the problematic of national consciousness, written as time was running out, has turned out to have an important afterlife (Mellino). Thus just as a “requiem” for Fanon (Lewis Gordon) is a song of Fanon’s life lived to the fullest, any “fidelity to Fanon” (Pithouse) can neither focus on his concepts as conclusions, nor simply apply his ideas to the contemporary world. Indeed, Fanonian questions also mean confronting limitations in Fanon’s thought. Neocosmos notes that despite Fanon’s accurate observations about the postcolonial state, he was unable to “politically transcend the limits of the party-state.”

Fanon’s plea to his comrades, namely those committed to human liberation, to work out new concepts, was best understood as an untidy dialectic of liberation in perpetual motion. Indeed, Fanon’s concept of negativity is not only practical but also positive—in other words, there is the concept of negative as purely detrimental and repressive, and there is both a negativity that is reactional and a negativity that is actional. In *Black Skin*, Fanon writes that his humanism “is a no”: a

no against exploitation and the butchery of what is most human, namely freedom (1967a:222). Not wanting to be “contingent,” not willing to be defined in reaction to an Other, Fanon understood that it is from that negativity, namely struggles for freedom, that the concrete human “yes” emerges. Colonialism is simply the negation of the “native’s” being, culture, and personality; in other words, it is a destruction of humanness with disabling psychosocial effects. On the other hand, the negation that is a process moving from reaction to action best explains Fanon’s notion of how the anticolonial movement must develop. It is in and through the challenge of the “less than human” (1968:130) to the colonial world that the revolutionary protagonists are created; not in the spontaneous reaction to colonialism but in reflecting on the new situation (1968:143). Colonialism, he argues, forces the colonized to ask the question “in reality, who am I” (1968:250). He insists that human praxis, both this questioning and action, is not only negating but positively creates the possibility of a new humanism.

Anticolonialism is not the end; it must be filled out and developed into a practice and awareness of political and social inclusion of the most marginal, and only then will it have developed into a true humanism. There will be an authentic disalienation, Fanon proclaims in the introduction to *Black Skin*, “only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places” (14–15). What is this restoration in the most materialistic sense but a “revolution,” a turning the world right way up? But this is merely the beginning: before it can adopt a positive voice, there needs to be a struggle for disalienation (1967a:231). In other words, the positive is not a return to the past, but a new beginning, which Fanon posits as an “original idea propounded as an absolute.” As Sekyi-Otu argues, decolonization “is first and foremost a resumption of interrupted history. A resumption not indeed of some original purities and essences before the Fall, but of interrupted dramas, the essential tensions of native universals; above all a resumption of our dialogue and disputation with one another, with ourselves.” Fanon discussed the problematic of subjectivity that is essential to actionality in terms of alienation and insisted that liberation will be the result not of mechanical forces but of human subjectivity. For Fanon, political will (Hallward, Jane Gordon) was not synonymous with Nkrumah’s dictum to “seek first the political kingdom” because it limited independence to grabbing power without fundamentally changing social relations. For Fanon this became synonymous with the pitfalls of national consciousness (see More). Instead, political will means self-organization of the people and the tricky and difficult but horizontal relations that must develop between the militant, national intellectuals and the mass of the people. There are a number of interests, barriers, and screens that get in the way of such a development, including the internalization of debilitating ideologies of worthlessness. In *The Wretched*, the petrification of the subject, understood psychoanalytically and philosophically, is applied to the problem of national liberation (see Ficek) and to the profound effects of colonial violence both on an individual and social level that concerns contemporary postcolonial Algeria (Lazali). Colonial violence is at the same time “sexed,” including in the exercise of violence. Fanon suggests this in “Algeria Unveils Herself” and contemporary subaltern feminist theorists provide parallels with Fanon in rethinking the idea of subjectivity (Boulbina). Others see an affinity between Fanon’s idea that the nation

is created in practice as the people make themselves, with Badiou's notion of "subject becoming" (Neocosmos).

How do we keep fidelity with Fanon today, when communication with those interrupted dramas has been profoundly broken? In the face of the betrayal by the nationalist bourgeoisie, Fanon sounds his most Leninist. The skipping of the nationalist bourgeois phase can be carried out only by "the combined effort of the masses led by a party and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle class" (1968:175). While it sounds much like the party of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, armed with revolutionary theory, the dialectic that Fanon develops in *The Wretched* with its focus on the "thermidor" emerging from within the newly independent nation indicates that the issue will not be resolved by insisting on a few "men of good will." Instead, what do "revolutionary principles" possibly mean today in the context of the apparent hegemony of the neoliberal bewilders and capitalist and neocolonial exploitation? And what can be done to keep open the free flow of ideas?

Notes

1. Fanon's first published article was "The North African Syndrome."
2. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/09/egypt-north-africa-revolution>.

Chapter One

Requiem on a Life Well Lived: In Memory of Fanon

Lewis R. Gordon

[D]eath is always with us and...what matters is not to know whether we can escape it but whether we have achieved the maximum for the ideas we have made our own.

—*Frantz Fanon*

In 1960, Fanon was appointed ambassador in Ghana for the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). He had devoted the prior six years of his life to the struggle for independence and had, among many efforts at articulating the FLN's international image, composed *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959). The world had changed much by then; it was clear that Algeria was on the eve of national liberation, and in Fanon's native Caribbean, the revolutionary spirit had begun to take hold. The Cuban Revolution raised considerable challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, an imperial declaration establishing the United States' hegemonic relationship with the Caribbean and Latin America. Civil unrest soon followed in Martinique and Guadeloupe, events that Fanon celebrated in his January 1960 article "Blood Flows in the Antilles under French Domination" (1967b:167–169). According to David Caute, these events signaled for Fanon the possibility of participating in a growing revolutionary movement in the Caribbean. He began to seek an appointment as the FLN's ambassador to Cuba, a logical choice given Césaire's change of politics after 1956 when he broke with the Communist Party. Césaire subsequently led the campaign to affirm Martinique's status as a colony of France. Here is Caute's account of the spectacle:

Malraux, former left-wing novelist and hero of the Spanish Civil War and now a Minister of the Fifth Republic, was dispatched by de Gaulle to secure the umbilical cord which tied the Antilles and Guiana to France. This was the Malraux whose concepts of Western man and Western civilization Fanon sarcastically derided.

Malraux traveled from village to village, receiving flowers and laying them at the foot of the bust of the Republic or, when she was not available, on the ubiquitous plaques commemorating Schoelcher, the enemy of slavery. At Fort-de-France, the mayor of the town, none other than Aimé Césaire, received Malraux with the words, "I salute in your person the real French nation to which we are passionately attached." (Caute 1970:61)

Fanon, a wanted enemy of the French government, could not immigrate to any island in the Caribbean save Cuba, since all the other islands were either overseas departments or allies of France. One could imagine what might have happened if Fanon's bidding was successful.

Alas, it wasn't to be. Fanon's arduous schedule of organizing supply routes for the FLN, providing medical and military training to FLN members, writing responses to French propaganda (which included some FLN counterpropaganda), and participating in endless strategic meetings and internal squabbles began to take its inevitable toll. Fanon, the great revolutionary, looked tired.

Today, a popular photograph of Fanon appears on the cover of several volumes devoted to his life and thought, including my coedited critical reader (Gordon et al. 1996). The photograph is an enlarged version that enables his face to fill the frame (see figure 1).



Figure 1

The original photograph was at a distance, revealing Fanon as rarely seen, without a buttoned up shirt and tie (see figure 2).



Figure 2

Shocking, however, is a still more distanced photograph of Fanon, apparently from the same meeting, seated on a couch, leaning to his right, clothing disheveled, revealing an emaciated torso (see figure 3).



Figure 3

It is a photograph of Fanon as he appears in no prior instance. In previous photographs, he is neat, often in a business suit or another suitable uniform (for instance, a soccer uniform during his days at the *lycée*):¹



Figure 4a

But, as we saw in figures 1, 2, and 3, Fanon was unkempt, his hair disheveled, and in the long-framed version of figure 3, his posture sloped. The persistence of figure



Figure 4b



Figure 4c

l's photograph's reprint on the covers of many texts by and on him is perhaps a function of contingent matters—for example, permission for its reprint is easily obtained from any Algerian embassy—yet it also presents an image that is at once powerful, iconoclastic, and *mortal*. The humanity of the man appears as an effort to struggle on in the face of his limitations. His eyes, looking to the side, appear suspicious, and his slightly tightened jaws and narrowed eyes betray a moment of irritation, disdain, perhaps contempt. He is listening to something that has left him agitated in the midst of his ceaseless struggle, as he often put it, “to set man free.” On the cover of the critical reader, my coeditors and I included a quotation from one of his letters found at the lower left end of the photograph from *Sans Frontière*: “En tant qu’homme, je m’engage à affronter le risque de l’anéantissement pour que deux ou trois vérités jettent sur le monde leur essentielle clartés” (see figure 5).



Figure 5

To translate, “As a man, I have committed myself to facing the risk of annihilation in order to throw into the world some essential clarity on two or three truths.” *Annihilation. Death.* Yes, Fanon didn’t look well, and his comrades began to tell him so. It is doubtless that the doctor, in the end, is he who is most reluctant to consult the aid of a physician. Eventually, while traveling in Mali to secure supply routes, he fell ill and reluctantly inquired about his health. The results? Granulocytic leukemia. In less technical language, blood cancer.

There is irony in Fanon—a man who devoted much theoretical and political energy to defanging the impact of race on modern society, a concept marked from its inception by proscriptions premised upon blood—dying of a blood disease. “Race” has etymological roots in the word *raza*, a term used by Christians in Muslim-ruled Iberia to refer to breeds of dogs, horses, and human populations, especially Moors and Jews (see Covarrubias Orozco 1611). As Muslims from North Africa, the Moors, along with the Jews (many of whom were determined by fourth century Roman edicts limiting Jewish proselytizing and intermixing), represented a deviation from Christian normativity. Given that history, there is much insight in Fanon’s observation that he who hates Jews invariably hates blacks as well. The defeat of the Moors in Grenada in 1492 was followed by the Inquisition to assess the Christian authenticity of the remaining *conversos*, converted populations, a process that led to demands for demonstrations of “purity of blood” (*limpieza de sangre*) (see Covarrubias Orozco 1611). The standard was the individual whose origins were “purely” Christian. The notion of purity here emerged from theological naturalism, where the natural was determined by its alignment with theological dogma. Since all that was natural emanated from the theological center, Moors and Jews stood as prototypical formulations of the anthropology of damnation that took a path to the modern term *race*, as used by Francois Bernier in his 1684 account, “A New Division of the Earth.”

In today’s terms, Fanon’s dormant genes of self-destruction were awakened. His body, saturated with a flowing cancer, was eating itself. The genes linked Fanon to some of his ancestors, his “blood relatives,” in a way that repeated his famous reflections in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, on the body, blood, and the salty fluids of desperation. In its fifth chapter, he recounted the previous chapters through autobiographical reflections on the forms of self-consciousness stimulated and struggled for after the crisis occasioned by a little boy pointing at him and shouting, “*Tiens, un nègre!*” Fanon’s presupposition of nonraciality, which he realized was the presumption of a white normative standpoint on reality, was shattered as the imago of *le nègre* latched onto him as its referent. “*Qui, moi?*” he seemed to ask himself, while the world encircled him and closed in to offer no exit. That body, his body, wanted refuge, a world in which it could move with the flowing certainty of its own worth and conviction, but he found himself caught in a web of unwanted, imposed designations, wrapping him in what seemed to be a sealed fate by which he fell to the ground, ready for the role set for him to play: *le nègre* offers a black body as one *manqué*, as a body gone bad. In such a body flows bad blood, that which, as fluid, offers a constant risk of spilling beyond its bounds, of pollution. Thus, whether as *le nègre* psychiatrist (which he was called by his critics in Algeria), *le nègre* writer, *le nègre* singer, *le nègre* a-host-of-other-things, the neurotic role was unveiled in the folly of illegitimizing membership: his presence constituted the absence. He was, by definition, that which

is illegitimate in relation to everything but his own illegitimacy, although, as the success of white minstrels suggests, more radical forms of illegitimacy were demanded: *le nègre* was even bad at being himself.² The paradox of his existence was its nonexistence. Even his efforts to claim it, as Fanon's foray into Negritude revealed, led to failure. Understandably, the situation occasioned despair and led him to weep. But getting to that point was circuitous.

The body is of central importance in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, because the body is a necessary condition of appearance, since to be seen is to be seen somewhere. Much of the text explores illicit dimensions of black appearance, including its neurotic, self-defeating structure: as illegitimate-in-itself, black existence attempts to be seen in a world in which its appearance is a violation of its norms. Compared with our earlier observations on Christendom and damnation, the black thus faces a twice-fallen reality, which Fanon describes as "a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell [*Enfers*]" (1952:6; 1967b:8). This is more of a collapse than a fall, then, that places the black body into a schema of deviations and imitation. As deviation, it falls from a presumed original white body. Why doesn't it *rise* from the white body? As the standard, the white body would make illegitimate the movement in any direction of deviation; whether up or down, the consequence is failure. The path, then, seems to be to overcome the deviation by reclaiming an original unity. The white, however, denies the original unity, because that would entail a potential blackness at the heart of whiteness, which makes the claimed reclamation imitation. As imitation, what is lacking is the original advantage of the self as standard. The imitation, in other words, is not its own standard. It is a failure, as we have seen, even of its achievement. To achieve imitation is to fail at what an imitation imitates, namely, an original.

"Failure," for Fanon, requires a *sociodiagnosis*, since, as he argues in his introduction, racism and colonialism are sociogenetic. Working at the level of failure summons psychoanalytical resources of interpretation: "If there can be no discussion on a philosophical level—that is, the plane of the basic needs of human reality—I am willing to work on the psychoanalytical level—in other words, the level of the 'failures,' in the sense in which one speaks of engine failures" (Fanon 1967b:23).³ Working with failure carries the danger, however, of resignation, for implicit in such a conception is the preference for its overcoming: to fail at failure offers its own paradoxes. So Fanon ventures through the minefield of failures. The social diagnostics of failure in an anti-black and colonial world relies on the human capacity to construct a symbolic world that transcends, at least at the construction of meaning, reductive biological and other natural forces. The black body, here also marked as the "black soul," demands demystification at its source: "what is called the black soul is a white construction" (1967b:14, translation modified). This construction, a failure of human understanding, asserts itself through a variety of idolatrous offerings: language, bad-faith love, and law-like constitutional theories of psychic life. Deviation and imitation reveal themselves in the failure of each movement; to speak, the black appears as an echo of white speech:

Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black express himself properly, for then in truth he is putting on the white world. I have had occasion to talk with students

of foreign origin. They speak French badly: Little Crusoe, alias Prospero, is at ease then. He explains, informs, interprets, helps them with their studies. (Fanon 1967b:36)

To love is to seek a reflection that is not one's own: the quest for recognition leads such blacks, whether female or male, to the arms and reflecting eyes of white men. To dream is to rehearse the trauma of the collapsed and closed symbols; in the dream life of colonial subjects, a gun is a gun. These series of failures recur in the fifth chapter, "L'expérience vécue du Noir" (The Lived-Experience of the Black), Fanon's autobiographical reflection that is also not autobiography. This seemingly awkward formulation is connected to an additional underlying thesis: that *a* black means *the* black, which means a collapse of differentiation from the encroaching *négre*. Autobiography is an individuated narrative hindered by the racial and colonial situation of the narrative; as an effort to unveil an inner world whose legitimacy is denied by social circumstances, Fanon, as the black and *le nègre*, performs the supposedly impossible. He achieves magic.

Magic is the effort to control and dominate reality by producing something seemingly from nothing (Cavendish 1990:2). Fanon's magical reflection announces itself immediately from the body, but one marked for non-appearance because of its illegitimacy. To see that body is to acknowledge what should be disavowed. Thus, it is those susceptible to the prereflective, those not yet socialized into self-deceiving norms of social propriety, who belch out the image, including the self image, the society prefers to repress:

"Sale nègre!" ou simplement, "Tiens, un nègre!" (Fanon 1952:8)
 ["Dirty nègre!" or simply, "Look, a nègre."]

The encounter is reminiscent of the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale "The Emperor's New Clothes." Duped by the system, Fanon walked with a white imago, and its being white meant that its identification would be redundant because it was supposedly encompassed by the term "normal." Thus, being normal, Fanon presumed others would see the white skin that should have come along with his white mask. Like the Emperor's new suit, Fanon's wasn't there. The effect was collapse:

I arrived in the world anxious to make sense of things, my spirit filled with desire to be at the origin of the world, and here I discovered myself an object amongst other objects.

Imprisoned in this overwhelming objectivity, I implored others. Their liberating regard, running over my body, which suddenly became smooth, returns to me a lightness that I believed lost, and, absenting me from the world, returns me to it. But there, just at the opposite slope, I stumble, and the other, by gestures, attitudes, looks, fixed me, in the sense that one fixes a chemical preparation with a dye. I was furious. I demanded an explanation.... Nothing happened. I exploded. Here are the tiny pieces assembled by another self. (Fanon 1952:88, translation mine)

The assembling of the self, or effort to *re-assemble*, *re-collect*, *re-member* the self, was Fanon's body offered back to him. He now saw that body, although viewed before

in mirrors, differently. The mirror of the self as white and whole was shattered, and the realization of how he was seen by whites challenged anti-*nègre* through the offering of the *nègre* self. That self, that body, not associated before with *his* body, fell from the fallen into his transformed consciousness. The result, in Fanon's reflection, brought him to two stages of what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) called double consciousness.⁴ The first involves seeing oneself through the eyes of the hostile Other. The second is the realization of the first as a constructed reality. That involves demonstration of the contradictions of the imposed self (the fall after the collapse) on the lived-reality of the everyday self. For Fanon, this demonstration had already begun with the appeal to social diagnostics, with his observation of the black as a white construction, and continued through the analysis of failures and the body. At the point of bodily identification, of the image of himself in the little white boy's eyes as the *nègre*, Fanon confessed:

An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (1967a:110–111)

By contrast, there is the original condition, the body at home with itself. That body is fluid in its movements:

I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world. (Fanon 1967a:111)

White normativity bogs the body down with “a historical-racial schema,” constructing the body of the *nègre*, a body turned inward in conflict with itself, devouring itself. For such a body, the ordinary would be an extraordinary achievement: “I had sketched a historico-schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by [quoting Jean Lhermitte] ‘residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,’ but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more” (Fanon 1967a:111). The result is a body marred by endless self-negations, a body *de trop*, a body that is too much: “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all: ‘*Y a bon banania*’” (1967a:112)! *Bon Banania* is the name of a popular cocoa-banana cereal whose iconic figure in the

company's advertisements was a Senegalese soldier, who, in turn, became known as *bon banania*. "Y a bon" is an African patois or creolized formulation of "c'est bon," that is, "it is good." Over the years, *bon banania* became more simian. Today, he is a smiling black monkey wearing a fez. The *orality* of the *nègre*, whether as smile or as continued rationalizations of "oral culture," is thrown into the tide of overdetermined forces, the effect of which was that, as Fanon reflected, "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning on that white winter day" (1967a:113). Overdetermined, *de trop* historical forces had a role for him to play:

Les nègres are savages, brutes, and illiterates. But in my own case I knew that these statements were false. There was a myth of the *nègre* that had to be destroyed at all costs. The time had long since passed when a *nègre* priest was an occasion for wonder. We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases. "We have a Senegalese history teacher. He is quite bright.... Our doctor is colored. He is very gentle."

It was always the *nègre* teacher, the *nègre* doctor; brittle as I was becoming, I shivered at the slightest pretext. I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a *nègre* physician? As long as everything went well, he was praised to the skies, but look out, no nonsense, under any conditions! The black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace. I tell you, I was walled in: No exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of the quantum theory. (1967a:117)

We see here the logic of rule and exception, where the system could be maintained in spite of individual progress: regarding an achieved black person as an exception to a rule of black inferiority only maintains the rule. The logic is preserved through an inversion with whites: a white person's failure is treated as an exception to the rule of white superiority. This logic enables the emergence of a black body as an exception to black bodies, yet as an exception, it is at war with its inner functioning principles. The consequence is a resigned effort at repressed pathology: The exception is the *absoluteness of the rule* waiting to come out. That lurking reassertion of mythic cohesion leads to the heaviness of action under the historical-racial schema.

Fanon makes his diagnosis, anticipating the reassertion of racism in contemporary genetics: "My chromosomes were supposed to have a few thicker or thinner genes representing cannibalism. In addition to the *sex-linked*, the scholars had now discovered the *racial-linked*. What a shameful science" (1967a:120)!⁵ The black body, in which lurked *le nègre*, is cannibalistic and mechanistically overdetermined: it is an appetitive consciousness and thus consciousness without freedom. In existential phenomenology, which greatly influenced Fanon's thought, the idea of at least self-consciousness without freedom leads to contradictions. In living, which amounts to living our body, living ourselves, we are freedom. The effect of antiblack racism is a demand for blacks not to live and for them to embrace this prescription. The *nègre*, then, faces an additional imposition on the self in a social world of expected consciousness without freedom, namely, the responsibility for such a lived un-lived

reality. That responsibility for what is imposed upon one offers a unique form of suffering—namely, oppression.

An effect of oppression is the set of additions to negotiate in one's effort to live ordinary existence. Although the ordinary, from the perspective of phenomenological treatments of the social world, should be understood as an extraordinary achievement, it is so through precisely that: its ordinariness. Most people obey, almost effortlessly, the set of rules or practices that enable coexistence. Human beings live together in ways that facilitate a generally unimpeded dialectic between body and world. Oppression, however, weighs down each moment of bodily reach, as Fanon observed, which makes the extraordinary achievement of the ordinary even *more extraordinary*. There is, in other words, a reevocation of the extraordinary in ordinary life, which means, then, the lived-reality of the oppressed body as a body *de trop*, overflowing with superfluity. It is, in other words, a body of extremes. It is a body that is "too much" of whatever quality considered to be divergent from the normal harmony of embodiment: to be black, it has fallen away from normativity; to be black is, in other words, to be *too black* since to be just right is to not be black at all. As, then, a reaching consciousness brought down under the weight of a historical-racial schema, the black body, Fanon's body, moves thus: "I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling" (1967a:116).

Fanon dedicated his life to breaking free of the weighted expectations of consciousness without freedom. In each instance, the potential of cultural transformation as a bodily phenomenon comes to the fore. In *L'An V*, the Algerian woman's various transformations of bodily representation present new considerations for the postcolonial state, for the Algerian woman who carries bombs, who experiences herself in Western clothing, who learns acts of comportment in military campaigns, exemplifies an upsurge whose containment is a dialectic of body and world beyond a consciousness without freedom to one fighting for it (Fanon 1967a; cf. Cornell 2001). In *Les Damnés*, the plea takes the form of asking, in the concluding sentence, for the development of "new skin," through which a new humanity could be born. Yet in the early *Peau noire*, Fanon had concluded with a consideration on bodily freedom:

My final prayer:

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

As oppressed embodied consciousness is overly determined inward, the direction of one marked by questioning that oppression points outward; it is that second form of double consciousness born of dialectical critique. Fanon's first book offered this prayer, and his life, as it came to a close, never stopped him from questioning, and exemplifying his humanistic commitment, ultimately, to life.

There continues to be no cure for leukemia. In Fanon's time, the best that could be done was to sustain the patient through blood transfusions and do one's best to keep him alive as long as possible. Near the end, the best thing is to alleviate the patient's suffering with pain-relieving drugs. What was Fanon to do? He was a notorious revolutionary and committed critic of European colonialism, but he needed medical attention beyond the resources of the FLN facilities in Tunisia. The first option was to seek medical attention in the Soviet Union, a nation that supported the FLN. He

visited there in December 1960, where he received treatment, but the prognosis—that he had a few months to live—was confirmed. He was advised to rest.

Fanon rest?

Instead, he took the opportunity to tour the Soviet Union's psychiatric facilities. He was greatly disappointed by what he found. Writes Bulhan (1985: 34), "The straightjackets, barred windows, and barren rooms in these institutions reminded him of [Algeria's] Blida-Joinville Hospital when he had first arrived. His observations convinced him that genuine rehabilitation of troubled psyches awaited new discoveries."

Fanon's remaining time turned out to be more than a few months—in fact, nearly a year. The Soviet physicians had advised him to seek treatment in Bethesda, Maryland, where the most advanced treatment was available for leukemia. Fanon's response has become a legend. He refused to seek aid in "a nation of lynchers." His remark could be interpreted in many ways. One obvious interpretation is his condemnation of American racism. That he did not subscribe to the practice of comparison racism—whether, for example, U.S. antiblack racism was "worse" than French antiblack racism and whether South African antiblack racism was worse than both—suggests that he meant something else by his remark. Here is another interpretation. Fanon was a black man married to Joséphe Dublé, a white woman (albeit of Corsican and Gypsy descent). A rationale for lynching in the United States included not only claims of supposed black male predation of white women, but also violation of antimiscegenation laws. Sexual relations between blacks and whites were, in 1961, sources of controversy, which they continue to be in much of the Americas. Worse, Bethesda was in Maryland, which, we should remember, is part of the American South. Segregation was the rule even in the District of Columbia, the nation's capital.

Upon Fanon's return to Tunis, he immediately set to work on several projects, including what turned out to be his final and most influential work, *Les Damnés de la terre*. He also hoped, as recounted by David Hansen, to produce a work on death and dying. He is reputed to have written *Les Damnés* in ten weeks. A work of intense prose rich with phenomenological description, broad historical scope, and theoretical precision with at times ice-cold dialectical logic, it is a classic in political thought and a masterpiece of political writing. To achieve such a work in any age would be remarkable enough, but for a dying thirty-six-year-old revolutionary to do so within ten weeks, with limited access to libraries and other research materials, is a Promethean achievement, at the least.

After completing *Les Damnés*, Fanon invited Sartre to write its preface. Fanon's fame (and infamy) by this time was such that he did not need Sartre's endorsement for promotion of the book. *L'An V*, for instance, had sold out within two weeks upon publication in 1959 before being banned in France. Speculation varies on why he invited Sartre to write the preface. One consideration was that he was impressed by Sartre's devotion of more than seventy pages of his *Critique de la raison dialectique* to the racism of French colonialism in Algeria and the terror exemplified by French efforts to maintain colonial rule there. But that by itself did not warrant the invitation. A statement of affinity and agreement would have sufficed. Here is another reading. In

Peau noire, masques blancs, Fanon had accused Sartre of guiding a Trojan horse to black semiotic resistance by pointing out, in his “*Orphée noir*” (1948), that Negritude was an antiracist racism that was revolutionizing black consciousness as a negative moment of a dialectic in which the “universal” proletariat of Marxism would emerge through a cross-racial coalition of black, brown, and white workers.⁶ The Reality Principle of this revolutionary position turned out, again, to be White Reason. Fanon had admired Sartre. He had even written a play, *Les Mains parallèles*, during his medical school years, with affinities to Sartre’s *Mains sales*. Sartre’s open position on the Algerian war, a position that endangered his life in France as the bombings of his apartments attest, redeemed Sartre in Fanon’s eyes. But more, Fanon was not a black separatist. He had long ago moved on from the seduction of Senghorian Negritude and sought a multiracial postcolonial project. The FLN faction to which he belonged was secularist and shared his multiracial hopes for Algeria. What better demonstration of his antiracism not being a form of racism than to present the work on violence, counter violence, and the need to forge a new humanity, in partnership with the most eminent *white* intellectual supporter of anticolonial struggles at the time? Fanon by himself represented critique and creativity, but with Sartre, there was demonstrated possibility of such a postcolonial future.

The first chapter, “De la violence,” was published in *Les Temps Modernes*, the famous left review of the editorial collective that included Sartre, De Beauvoir, Raymond Aron, and several other influential mid-century French intellectuals. Fanon had met with Sartre and de Beauvoir in Rome in spring 1961, where the latter were on vacation. In his influential biography of Sartre, Ronald Hayman describes their meeting as follows:

Fanon came to Rome, although, two years earlier, when he was in a hospital there, he had escaped only just in time when an assassin found the way to his room. After he and Sartre had lunch together, the conversation went on until two in the morning, and when de Beauvoir pleaded that Sartre needed sleep, Fanon’s response was: “I don’t like men who hoard their resources.” He told [Claude] Lanzmann: “I’d give twenty thousand francs a day if I could talk to Sartre from morning till night for two weeks.” As it was, they talked almost nonstop for three days. In the Algerian war, Fanon, who had been supplying the guerrillas with drugs, had trained terrorists in how to resist torture and how to keep calm when planting bombs or throwing grenades. According to de Beauvoir, Fanon’s face would express less anguish when he described the “counterviolence” of the blacks and the vengeance of the Algerians than when he spoke of Congolese mutilated by Belgians or Angolans by Portuguese—faces battered to flatness, lips pierced and padlocked. He accused Sartre of not doing enough to expiate the crime of being French: how could he go on trying to live normally? The two men talked again when Fanon came back to Rome, ten days later, on his way to Tunis, but this was to be their last meeting. . . . As soon as he left Rome, Sartre started on the preface, writing less feverishly than during the early summer in Paris. “I am recomposing myself,” he said. (Hayman 1987:384–385)

While Sartre was recomposing himself, Fanon returned to Tunis to continue his efforts on behalf of the Algerian struggle for national liberation, a struggle that he

analyzed in the context of the broader struggle for the international liberation of humankind. As his body deteriorated because of his illness, his comrades began to urge him to take the advice of the Soviet doctors and seek treatment in the United States. He finally agreed. Then, he faced another problem. How was he to get there when it was clear, given the U.S. government's increased involvement in Vietnam, that it was a staunch ally of France? It had to be done in secrecy and with the aid of the reconnaissance division of the government he often criticized. Peter Geismar related the situation:

The black doctor was a nice catch for the intelligence services.... Washington would be able to fatten its dossiers on the leftist segment of the FLN; Fanon knew a lot about other African liberation movements. His kind of thinking and activities were a threat to Western interests in the Third World. (Geismar 1971:182)

The CIA got Fanon into the United States under promised stealth. What followed, however, is unclear among Fanon scholars. Reports have ranged from Fanon visiting and subsequently dying in New York City to his remaining just in Washington, D.C. What has become orthodoxy, however, is that he was kept in a hotel without treatment for several days until he contracted pneumonia. Who knows what information the CIA may have received from Fanon under the delirium of his illness? It is possible that they didn't receive much, if any, information, for Fanon was a specialist in techniques for resisting torture. It was his early service for the FLN while head physician at Blida-Joinville that led to his eventual resignation and public enlistment in their cause. He trained guerrillas on how not to divulge secrets under the worst of conditions. His time in CIA custody was such an instance. By the time Fanon was taken to Bethesda, he was on the verge of death. He was put through several blood transfusions. After one instance, he declared, "They put me through the cleaners last night." His wife Jose (the nickname for Josèphe) and his son were brought to him, and he spoke, occasionally, of his future projects. He managed to write a letter to his brother Jobi:

What I wanted to tell you is that death is always with us and that what matters is not to know whether we can escape it but whether we have achieved the maximum for the ideas we have made our own. What shocked me here in my bed when I felt my strength ebbing away along with my blood was not the fact of dying as such, but to die of leukemia, in Washington, when three months ago I could have died facing the enemy.... We are nothing on earth if we are not in the first place the slaves of a cause, the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and liberty. (Geismar 1971:185)

The tragedy of Fanon's situation was that his intense relationship with his body had come full circle through the drama of dying. From earlier reflections on the dreaded epidermal schema, his vital spirit was now under the scrutiny of those microtomes he feared but eight years earlier. No longer facing an explosion, he found himself suffering the experience of dissolution, of withering away. On December 6, 1961, a few days after composing his letter to Jobi, it was over. Fanon had survived many life-threatening episodes: while a youth, a gun firing off while a friend and he played with it; two instances of injury on the battlefield for which he was honored

for valor in World War II; being thrown by the explosion from a jeep that ran over a mine; assassins from the French Right seeking him out over North Africa and southern Europe, including machine-gunning the bed in a hospital room in Rome reputed to be his. He survived all that, but in the end, the ultimate threat to his life was in his own body, in the cells of his blood, and the microassassins of bacteria and viruses that prevailed.

Fanon probably would have preferred his dead body to be hurled at the enemy. It was brought, instead, to Tunis and then to Algeria, where, after a long procession with military rituals befitting an honored soldier and martyr, he was laid to rest. There is no longer a Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algeria but instead, amid many Fanonian legacies, a hospital that now bears the name of that young man whose encomia continue to make us question and serve as examples of lives well lived.

Notes

1. So concerned was he about his appearance that he often changed into several suits while on duty as the chief psychiatric officer so as not to appear overcome by the North African heat. See Cherki (2006). For a wonderful array of photographs of Fanon from his adolescent years through to those in his last, see the special edition of *Sans Frontière* (Février 1982), which was a memorial issue at the twentieth anniversary of his death.
2. For discussion of this double bind on black existence, see Gordon and Gordon (2010:84).
3. For discussion of this conception of failure, see Gordon (2005).
4. For discussion, see, e.g., Henry (2005:79–112) and Jane Gordon (2007:143–161).
5. Cf. Gilroy (2000) for a recent discussion of genetics bringing race beneath the skin.
6. For a critical discussion of Sartrean Negritude and Fanon's response, see Rabaka (2010:72–82).

Chapter Two

Frantz Fanon and Abane Ramdane: Brief Encounter in the Algerian Revolution

Beläïd Abane

From modest social origins, though neither knew poverty, the child of Azouza and the child of Fort de France were, each in his own way, leaders and fearless youths. Aware very early of their status as the “wretched of the earth,” Abane Ramdane the Algerian and Frantz Fanon the Martinican both reached consecration: political for the one, who went on to be head of the National Liberation Front (FLN) for two decisive years; intellectual for the other, who was recognized as one of the most brilliant minds of his generation and whose ideas inspired revolutionaries and leaders throughout the Third World.

Another point of commonality between the revolutionary and the theoretician was the rejection of any compromise with the dominant racial or colonial order, the refusal of secondary paths or muddled ideas. They had a character entirely shared, which no doubt inspired the playwright who reunited them in theater, unfurling “two individual stories suddenly snared by a great History and leading all the time two prodigiously dense lives, two humans simply human... who through their posture assumed that irrepressible force sometimes called Destiny” (Benyoucef 2003).

Both Abane and Fanon had shortened lives. Because of the treachery and perfidy of his brothers in combat, Abane lived only to thirty-seven. Fanon followed less than four years later: leukemia took him at thirty-six. The two men, devoted body and soul to Algeria’s liberation, would not see that independence to which they had each contributed so much.

Abane and Fanon are both products of the turbulent history of their time, the history of Algeria and of the Third World, but rare are those who, in such a short time, put their stamp on the struggle for Algerian liberation on the one hand and revolutionary Third-Worldist thought on the other. Their lives left no one indifferent. Mohamed El Mili, a member of the editorial staff of *El Mujahid* in Tunis, who knew both men well, speaks in awe and admiration, not hesitating to declare (to *La*

Nouvelle Republique, May 15, 2004): “During the whole war of liberation, I did not know any militants as sincere as Frantz Fanon and Abane Ramdane, our leader. As I must say, I found certain of Abane’s ideas in *The Wretched of the Earth*. One must recognize that the latter always advocated a Third World battle.”

Let us look again at the concatenation of facts that led to the brief, but nonetheless rich, encounter between these two men of uncommon destiny.

The Encounter

While serving as the secretary of the *commune mixte*, Abane snapped at the director, who reproached his nationalist activities: “Between the system that you represent and me there is no other link than this pen. Take it, I give it to you.” Abane made his break with the colonial order to devote himself to militant activism. This was several days after the Sétif massacre of May 8, 1945.

Ten years later, Fanon decided, in the face of the untenable Algerian reality, to break with the colonial medical system. He renounced his position as chief physician of psychiatric services and his enviable social status. Yet, he was neither Algerian nor Muslim. One could even say it was only his black skin that put Fanon on the right side of the barrier. Black skin! This was the most cutting side of the torment that nagged Fanon, since the same France responsible for the slavery that had enchained his ancestors was now subjugating the Algerians. Fanon could no longer subdue that dull resentment with which he had lived since his adolescence, about which he would one day write: “Every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellow man, I have felt a sense of solidarity with his refusal” (1967a:226). By all logic, he will distance himself from the crushing colonial system that he saw as similar to the slavery suffered by his family. For in the colonial situation, “slavery of the native population is the prime,” he wrote (1967b:33, translation modified).

At that moment—November 1956—when Fanon broke with the colonial order, the Algerian insurrection had reached a decisive stage. Since the spring of 1955, Abane had endeavored to strengthen the FLN politically. His concern was that violence had to be submitted, in whatever form, to political reason. Also, he was open to people of all skills. What concerned the FLN leader above all was their contribution to strategy and to the efficacy and credibility of the insurrectionary movement that in its early days sorely lacked political skills. This is precisely the principle of the primacy of politics over the military that Abane was determined to put in practice at the risk of his own life.

To give new political life to the insurgency and transform it into a national resistance movement, Abane had gathered within the FLN a vast assortment of Algerian political forces, consolidating them into a univocal anticolonial force. The liberation of the Algerian people, casting off their inferior political status—the Algerians had 10 percent of the political power although they represented 90 percent of the population—and the independence of the country became the common program of all Algerian patriots, regardless of their other loyalties. All those potential political agencies that had acted a few months prior within the strictures of colonial legality decided under Abane’s influence to break with the colonial administration and join

the FLN, including the elites of the PPA/MTLD¹ who opposed the personal power of El Hadj Messali; the Algerian communists who distanced themselves from their French comrades, who had not hesitated to vote for the "Special Powers" of Guy Mollet's colonial government; the Liberal Party of Ferhat Abbas and his supporters of the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto; the clerics of Sheikh Bachir El Ibrahimi's Association of Algerian Ulemas; European liberals and all those who opposed maintaining the colonial status quo.

At the end of the summer of 1956, the Algerian resistance had acquired institutional and revolutionary maturity. Abane was the designer and energizing force behind the Congress of Soummam (CS, hereafter) on August 20, 1956, which reunited the principal heads of the insurgency active in the country's interior. The meeting was to give the governing insurgent leadership bodies—the Committee of Coordination and Execution (CCE) and a Counsel of the Revolution (CNRA)—an Army of National Liberation (ALN) and a program that traced the strategic axes of the struggle, fixed the course, and defined the conditions of peace negotiations with the French government.

In autumn of 1956, the Abanian FLN had the wind in its sails. But opposition to certain measures taken at the congress of August 20, even within the congress itself, began to manifest. The discontent of those who had not been represented—notably the leaders established in Cairo, especially Ben Bella—became an irremediable source of estrangement, hatching a conflict of legitimacy among the heads of the Revolution.

During this period, however, the national direction (CCE), comprising five leaders (Abane, Ben Khedda, Ben M'hidi, Dahlab and Krim), remained relatively homogenous and functioned as a collegial body, even if Abane appeared to be at the top of the FLN's hierarchy. All the energy of this national directory of Algerian resistance was focused toward liberatory combat and facing the barbs of opponents to Soummam's decisions, led by Ben Bella and his right-hand man, Mahsa. Abane, in the name of CCE, would also organize a counterattack against his rival Messali, head of the Algerian National Movement, which had been resuscitated from the PPA/MTLD and which disputed the political representation of the Algerian people with regard to negotiating with French authority.

What happened at the moment when Fanon, senior physician at the psychiatric hospital in Blida-Joinville, grew resolved in his decision to break with the colonial establishment? In Algiers, the atmosphere was explosive. All the beginnings of the Battle of Algiers were in place. The FLN's indiscriminate urban terrorism redoubled the violence against European civilians, in response to the first indiscriminate attack committed on August 10, 1956, by stalwart colonists on the Rue de Thèbes in the Kasbah (the medina of Algiers) and the court-sanctioned execution of nationalist fighters whom the FLN considered its own fighters. The FLN leaders decided to hold the European population collectively responsible, adopting the repressive methods the French army had used against civilians in the Algerian hinterlands from the beginning of the war.

On the political front, the situation became critical following the October 22, 1956, kidnapping, in broad daylight, of the external leaders of the FLN (Aït Ahmed, Ben Bella, Boudiaf, Khider, and Lacheraf) who had traveled to Tunis to debate with

President Bourguiba and King Mohamed V about the conditions of eventual negotiation with the French government. This hijacking made those leaders give up their last illusions that there would be any imminent peace. One week later, on October 31, 1956, the French government, allied with Great Britain and Israel, launched an attack against Egypt, which was considered the foreign source of the Algerian revolution. The pretext for attacking the Egyptian raj, presented as a new Hitler, was the nationalization of the Suez Canal.

Was this exacerbation of the Franco-Algerian war responsible for Fanon's grave decision to resign his post as chief physician of the Blida-Joinville Hospital? One is tempted to believe so, though, as he wrote, "for long months (his) conscience is the seat of unforgiveable debates." In his extremely severe letter to Minister-Resident Lacoste, Fanon refused to "ensure accountability at all costs under the false pretext that there is nothing else to do" (1967b). He measures with "fear the extent of alienation of the people who live in this country" whose status derives from "an absolute dehumanization," resting on the lawlessness, inequality, the murder of man in countless facets of everyday life, erected into principles of law (1967b). For Fanon, there was no doubt that "the events of Algeria are the logical outcome of an abortive attempt to decerebralize a people" (1967b:53). He left the hospital of Blida-Joinville in November 1956. This is what leads one to believe that his decision was connected to the "events."

Moreover, well before his resignation, Fanon had already chosen sides. His journey began with the first days of his career at Blida. Having grasped early on the dehumanizing/oppressive mechanism of colonial alienation and its scientific legitimization by the theory of "primitivism," Fanon began "deconstructing" colonial psychiatry. Despite the hostility of his European colleagues, he used group therapy to free native patients who had been put in shackles, in the guise of treatment, and put an end to the carceral regime in the asylum. For Fanon, the native Algerian's state of subhumanity is neither genetic nor does it emanate from his so-called undifferentiated brain (Porot et al. 1918, 1932). For the psychiatrist, "the social structure in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged" (Fanon 1967b:53). "The absurd bet," "the morbid preservation," for Fanon, was to fight individual alienation, mental illness, without putting an end to collective alienation generated by colonial oppression.

Next came political engagement. Brave, unaware, or not wanting to remain a spectator of the absolute iniquity unfolding before his eyes, Fanon took the leap several months later, after the outbreak of the Algerian insurgency. His office became a refuge for the accommodation and care of insurgents from the four corners of the Mitdja. In the fourth military region of the ALN (Wilaya 4) near Algiers, high school and university students came together following the strike declared by the General Union of Algerian Muslim Students (UGEMA) in May 1956. Fanon's contacts with the "people of the bush" intensified during this period. The Martinican psychiatrist, used to receiving for consultations the sick and those families overwhelmed by colonial domination, was no doubt impressed by the people at war and above all by the youth, the urban elite, who joined the largely peasant struggle for national liberation. The sight of these boys and girls engaged headlong in the battle for liberation, trying to turn over a new leaf and become masters of their fates,

was for the Martinican psychiatrist something completely new, as he was used to patients—largely peasants and lumpenproletarians—who were poor, malnourished, and subjugated by a colonial regime that froze them into a state of reified dehumanization. Passing through the Blidean maquis bound for Soummam at the beginning of summer 1956, Abane and Ben M'hidi were also greatly impressed by the enthusiasm of these new recruits and above all by the courage of the young women who sacrificed their studies and their opulent lives—they were mostly from commercial, bourgeois Muslim families—to endure the hard life of the maquis. For Abane, as no doubt for Fanon, something essential was happening to Algerian society.

By autumn 1956, the Algerian revolution under Abane's leadership had matured. "The revolution has grown up," he repeatedly said, obsessively searching for skilled people. At the same time, Fanon became conscious that the end of colonial domination in Algeria was historically inevitable because, as he wrote, "a society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a nonviable society, a society to be replaced" (1967b:53). In recognition of the urgent need to change society, Fanon added that "silence becomes a lie" before "the fundamental requirement of dignity." Further, his awareness of the "wretched of the earth" did not allow him to continue to act as a neutral observer of the oppression of the Algerian people who were being delivered into the juggernaut of "pacification."

In addition, Fanon had shrewdly gauged the Algerian revolutionary project. The enterprise seemed viable and serious. Probably initially taken with the colonialist propaganda that characterized the Algerian revolutionaries as nothing more than "bandits," "bloodthirsty barbarians," or "criminals," and denying their combat any political dimension, Fanon quickly disentangled himself from the influence of the colonial media to realize that the struggle had a political soul and a national spirit. An exceptional intellectual at an exceptional historical conjunction, he lacked only a little boost from fate, "coincidence" to use more scientific language, for him to reach the full potential of his genius.

That boost would come from Abane himself, who was looking to contact the psychiatrist from Blida. Colonel Sadek, who was responsible for the political and military affairs of Wilaya IV and who knew Fanon well, had probably spoken well of him during Sadek's stay with Ben M'hidi in the Blidean Atlases, during the course of their Soummanian expedition at the beginning of summer 1956. What might have actually interested Abane in the psychiatrist from Blida was reading a newspaper article about Fanon featuring the testimony of Pierre Chaulet, a liberal doctor close to the leader of the FLN. Was this the letter of resignation Fanon had addressed to the minister in November 1956? We cannot say with certainty that the press had published his letter; the only newspaper that would have been able to publish it was the *Algiers Republican*, the organ of Algerian communists. But in November 1956, they were largely engaged in the struggle on the side of the FLN, and their newspaper was banned. We know equally that Fanon, present at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists gathered at the Sorbonne in September 1956, has made a strong impression by speaking on a theme dear to Algerian nationalists: "Racism and Culture." Did the metropolitan press—in particular *Le Monde*, which Abane read avidly—refer to the meeting and underscore the pertinent uniqueness and relevance of Fanon's

approach? In any event, Abane had been equally impressed by the Antillean doctor and his ideas.

Fanon expressed in psychiatric and intellectual discourse what the head of the FLN had not known how to express in political language. Had he not declared to the French *Observer* in September 1955 (Barrat 1987) that “we face death... for the right to live as dignified, free men... for honor, justice and liberty”? The quest for dignity and honor for the colonized man: isn’t this the search for a “new skin,” the central theme of Fanonism?

To know more, Abane decided to probe the psychiatrist from Blida. He charged Doctor Chaulet and Salah Louanchi, a former executive of the MTLN, linked to the FLN, with setting the meeting. At the end of December 1956, the young doctor—Fanon was only thirty-one years old—appeared before the head of the FLN. An electric charge passed instantly between the two men that encouraged Fanon to become more deeply engaged with the FLN. He said, “I am assured that the Algerian revolution is in good hands.” There was no other contact between the two men in Algeria, and for good reason.

Exile

Algeria plunges into war. Repression intensifies as the beginning of 1957, the D-Day of the general strike planned by the FLN to capture the attention of the eleventh session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, approaches. In Greater Algiers, a cloak of terror falls over the Muslim population. Hundreds of FLN fighters and leaders are arrested, tortured, and often summarily executed or made to disappear. The security of the national leaders in hiding is considerably increased.

The tension grows when Amédée Froger, president of the Federation of Mayors of Algeria and a strong supporter of French Algeria, is assassinated. The attack is logically attributed to the nationalists. The funeral on December 29, 1956, degenerates into anti-Arab violence. Results: “Around 400 dead” (Kadache 2000; Montagnon 2004). We will later find out that the attack was instigated by extremist political and military circles, which had an interest in intensifying the conflict and entrusting the outcome of the war to the military (Yacef 1984; Fleury 2000). This would happen several days after Amédée Froger’s assassination.

The tenth paratrooper division (tenth DP) which had returned from the expedition to the Suez is charged with breaking the strike planned by the FLN. General Massu has carte blanche to win the “Battle of Algiers” by all means, including illegal means. Algiers is submitted, without any legal standard, to the juggernaut of General Massu’s paratroopers.

The D-Day for general strike called by the FLN was fixed for January 28, 1957. Despite the impressive deployment of forces, the Algerian population does not hesitate to show its support. The French army reacts with extreme brutality. The poor, disarmed, and terrified population are subjected to the violent whims of the paratroopers without recourse to any legal framework.

For its part, the FLN decides to resume its bombing strategy and carry out a blind terrorism against the Pied Noirs that spares neither women nor children or

the elderly. The Pied Noir population of Algeria discovers in its turn the terror and violence against civilians that the Algerian civilians had endured from the beginning of the insurrection.

Around this period, pompously called the "Battle of Algiers," the colonial authorities decided to expel Frantz Fanon and his family. Was this decision a response to his letter of resignation, in which he had declared himself openly to be "concerned . . . each time that the dignity and liberty of man are in question"? Or had they heard about his sympathies and secret contact with the FLN? Whatever the case, Fanon and his family were forced to leave Algeria and to live in Paris.

For several months the former head of Blida's psychiatric service paced like a caged lion. The change of atmosphere was brutal. In a France entirely absorbed with post-war reconstruction, Algeria had become suddenly distant. But the shockwaves of the Battle of Algiers had already arrived in the metropole, where the scandal of torture practiced on a grand scale resonated like a deep moral earthquake. The arrests, disappearances, summary executions, and widespread torture, denounced by General Pâris de la Bollardière, inspired a vast movement of condemnation in the metropole, led by the French intellectual and cultural elite.

However, Fanon remained calm despite the disquieting echoes from Algeria. The story takes place elsewhere and advances rapidly while he languishes in a drab Parisian apartment. Yet, like much of the French elite, in his eyes Algerian independence had become a historical inevitability. Should he assist from afar, from the comfort of his Parisian life, an indifferent spectator to the accomplishment of a national Algerian destiny in which he had been so invested? Or should he become again an agent of that destiny and throw himself anew into the battle? "The dignity and freedom of man"—were they not then more than ever in question? Otherwise, whence that "engagement without return" he had several years prior made his creed?

It is the beginning of spring, 1957. Larbi Ben M'hidi, a member of the CCE, is arrested and savagely executed by a hidden section of the French army with the blessing of those politically responsible. Faced with the brutal resolution of colonial power and the ferocious practices of the colonial army, the national leadership of the FLN left the capital for Tunisia.

Was Fanon aware of the expatriation of the four surviving members of the CCE? Did he know that Abane and Ben Khedda, in whom he recognized the future of the Algerian revolution, were settled in Tunis? Whatever the case, the young intellectual decided to go to the Tunisian capital to offer his services to the FLN and the Algerian cause.

Tunisian Period

But in Tunis the atmosphere is strange. An air of suspicion rules in the circles of the Algerian leaders. The balance of power within the FLN has shifted. Abane, already known in Algiers as the *de facto* leader of the FLN, is eyed by the colonels. Away from the Algerian cauldron with time on the side of the Algerian masses, maneuvers of all kind intensify around politicians such as Ben Khedda and Dahlab, but especially Abane. High-ranking officers from the *maquis* or eastern and western borders of the

Algerian territory flock to Tunis as the first session of the CNRA approaches. Also making the trip are Krim Belkacem as a member of the CCE, Colonels Boussouf (w5), Dehiles (w4), Mahmoud Chérif (w1), Amara Bouglez (Eastern Base), Ouamrane, Commanders Benaouda, Boumedienne, Lamouri, Mezhoudi. What is happening? What are they preparing?

Determined to restore military rule, the colonels, backed by their respective constituencies, decide to invalidate Soummam's principle of the primacy of politics over the military force and of the interior over the exterior. And above all, to reshape the governing bodies to their advantage, oust Abane's friends and finally weaken and marginalize him. Roles are redistributed before the reunion of the CNRA (which endorses them without debate).

Although he is still part of a CCE expanded to fourteen members, Abane is completely divested of affairs related to conducting the war. While the colonels share power in proportion to the military forces they have on the borders and in the maquis, Abane is relegated to an "intellectual" function: information and propaganda. He notably directs the journal *El Moudjahid* he had founded the previous year.

Logically, Fanon is integrated into Abane's team. Moreover, he finds himself again in his element: writing, denouncing, theorizing—all the things he loved and which he returned to the art of action and history. However, he does not stop practicing medicine. He intends to continue to practice group-therapy and psychiatry adapted to the sociocultural environment of his patients and creates a therapeutic day unit in Manouba, a suburb of Tunis.

At *El Moudjahid*, he gives free rein to his vision, which goes beyond the war waged by the Algerians against French colonialism. For Fanon, Algerian liberation can have meaning only as part of a vast continental or worldwide movement for the liberation of oppressed peoples.

But despite the excitement his involvement in the Algerian cause brings him, and the stimulating environment in which he is perfectly at home, Fanon feels uneasy. A sneaky atmosphere of intrigue and subterranean maneuvers weaves itself around Abane. Fanon feels the antagonism between his leader and the first circle of colonels—Krim, Boussouf, and Ben Tobbal—better known as the "3B." Near Abane, he can nevertheless take advantage, considering himself a guest of the Algerian revolution even if he feels perfectly Algerian at heart.

Fanon invests his energy in the anticolonial fight. During the Battle of Algiers, the colonial consensus of the French is revealed by the unspeakable practices of torture of the tenth DP. It revolts Fanon. The intellectual denounces "France, that perverted nation," in *El Moudjahid*. But at the last minute Abane withdraws Fanon's harsh article, a diatribe in line with the anger he felt at the ruthless oppression of the Algerian civilian population. Abane points out to his comrade that the war of national liberation is not directed against the French nation but against the colonialism that has dominated Algeria and subjugated its people for more than a century (Malek, interview, 2010).

In another article in *Algerian Resistance*, Fanon, driven by his passion and anti-colonial resentment, announces that "the conditions of a colonial Dien Bien Phù are in place." When he becomes aware of the article, Abane meets with his friend to tell him that "we cannot defeat the French militarily" but must "pose a political

problem [because] our only possible victory is political in nature" (Malek, interview, 2010).

Other testimonies by Reda Malek, a member of *El Moudjahid's* editorial staff, indicate Fanon's and Abane's attitudes toward the use of the word "revolutionary": "The conservative segment of the FLN made us suppress the words 'revolution,' 'feudalism' in *El Moudjahid*... They said to use that such words would offend some of our supporters, notably the Saudis. We were, especially Fanon and myself, against this questioning of our concepts. Abane supported us even if on account of political discipline he suggested that we be prudent" (Malek, interview, 2010).

These anecdotes reveal three implicit questions. The first is the meaning of Algerian violence in the anticolonial struggle. There is no generally accepted opinion on the subject in the writings on the Algerian revolution. The only references available are the platform of the Soummam (hereafter PFS) and the account of the first CNRA session held in Cairo in August 1957. In both, Abane affirms the "primacy of politics over the military." This principle establishes the fundamentally political character of the struggle for Algerian liberation: political in its spirit, in its objectives, and in its means of exercising violence. Having become historically necessary and privileged, violence must be guided by political reason to achieve its sole objective: negotiated peace. "War is the continuation of politics by other means." For Abane, who appropriated this old Clausewitzian adage, revolutionary violence, which does not undo colonial power, has no other meaning than the pursuit of those goals that cannot be reached by political practice alone. It should never, therefore, displace the essential political objectives that subtend it. For Abane, there is an overriding need to fight, but also an immense challenge. The uprising of November 1, having staked everything on the military, would have to transform itself into a political project driven by "a true, organized revolution, national and popular." If not, as the upheavals of the past, it would be damned to be nothing more than one more regressive and painful enterprise in Algerian colonial history.

But the brutal war brought to the Messalists (partisans of El Hadj Messali's Mouvement National Algérien—trans.) and the indiscriminate terrorism against the European civilian population during the Battle of Algiers is not clearly consistent with Abane's sacrosanct principle of violence. We know indeed that in the fratricidal conflict between the FLN and the MNA, Abane had given clear orders for the destruction of the Messaliste movement (Belhocine 2000). Did he support so much unregulated violence free from political reason? Surely not. The FLN's merciless fight against its Messaliste rival was highly political (Abane B., 2008). Should he have left the field open for the Messaliste movement and assumed the responsibility for a setback that would have been a fatal blow to the process of national liberation initiated and directed by the FLN? Or should he have faced the MNA and reduced the FLN's function to preserving the unity of the national movement for the sake of the liberatory project's chance of success? These were the choices facing Abane with the support, it must be remembered, of the whole Frontist leadership.

The option of military action against the rival MNA after tentative negotiations with Messali, its leader, was thus dictated by an imminently political principle, "the revolutionary unity of action and command," without which the struggle would risk, in the eyes of the Frontist leaders, taking as in the past the path to failure and

regression. Convinced that they embodied the mainstream current of the national movement, Abane's FLN decided to achieve national unity at any cost. This obsessive search for national unity was the energy that drove the FLN and motivated their actions but that also sometimes led to excesses, such as the bloody massacre of Melouza perpetuated in May 1957 by the ALN against civilians accused of being complicit with the Messalist movement. "Virtuous" as these principles are, they can be undermined in practice.

With regard to the indiscriminate violence of the bomb attacks, one can explain by referring to the decision of the FLN to apply the same methods of collective responsibility that the French army applied to the Algerian population to the European population. This violence of the weak against the strong is perfectly illustrated by what happened in 1957 in Algiers. During the course of the Battle of Algiers, the colonial authorities justified torture, summary executions, and the disappearance of Algerian militants as part of France's struggle against the bombers. The FLN, for its part, justified indiscriminate terrorism as a legitimate reaction to the repression of the Algerian population. In fact, after the attack on Rue de Thèbes, perpetuated against the inhabitants of the Kasbah by Pied Noir extremists, the FLN had tilted into a logic of total war: people against people, nation against nation. It considered the bombs carried by the young girls of Yacef Saadi's bomb network to be the maximal response of the weak against the napalm and bombs that the strong rained down on the villages, mechtas of Jebel, and the countryside. The changeover to indiscriminate terrorism by the FLN proceeded not with an unbridled criminal violence, but with a real political analysis of the situation then characterized by the colonizer's unleashed, disproportionate, Hobbesian violence.

What did Fanon make of the violence? Is violence, even without political regulation, a good in itself? We know of Fanon's ideas about the necessity for the colonized to have recourse to liberatory violence. Is it really a "senseless solution" that Fanon advocates? Is it really violence for its own sake? For the theoretician of Third World struggles, the choice of the colonized is between "depersonalizing petrification" and "violence organized in a struggle for liberation" (Cherki 2002). Far from being an incitement to criminality, Fanonian violence is inscribed in the historic process of decolonization made inevitably by "red-hot cannon balls and bloody knives" "This program of total disorder... can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, violence." In the colonial system, Fanon adds, "the colonized... is prepared at all times for violence." "Cleaning the slate" of the colonial order implies using an "absolute violence." For "colonialism, violence in its natural state, can only bow before a greater violence" (2004:3, 1968:37).

We thus see clearly that for Fanon, the important thing is not violence for the sake of violence but rather violence against violence. "The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized balance each other and respond in an extraordinary, reciprocal homogeneity" (1968:88). These are the effects of the unprecedented violence of colonialism that generate the desire for an absolute violence within the colonized, put in practice by anticolonial war.

For Fanon, this brings colonial domination down to where it is found: in Algeria of course, but also in Africa and the Caribbean. "Europe has put its paws on our continents, we must slash her until she removes them," he writes. The verb is very

violent, of course, but it is a violent response to an act of extreme violence—in a way, a violence of self-defense.

In fact, Fanon could only offer a diagnosis: the psycho-socio-political diagnosis of the effects of colonial alienation, its logical developments, notably the rude awakening of the colonized, their awareness and taking in hand of their national destiny. He not only considers revolutionary violence legitimate, but also observes that in the inventory of “therapeutic choices,” violent action is the most sure and certainly the fastest and most efficacious means by which a new man emerges from within a colonized society at war, mentally remodeled and capable of reclaiming his culture and his dignity, and of being freed from the instinct of submission that characterized him until then, faced with the crushing reality of colonialism. For Fanon, liberating, revolutionary violence puts an end to the alienation of the colonized. It is one means to “make new skin,” to free himself from “inferiority complex[es] and his contemplative or hopeless attitudes.” The rebirth of the colonized, he writes, “can only emerge from the decaying corpse of the colony” (1968:93). This is no doubt what Jean-Paul Sartre wanted to express in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, by summarizing in a familiar, provocative tone the metaphor of the “dead man and the free man.”

Moreover, this conception of necessary and ineluctable violence for the colonized society is for Fanon the logical continuation of his enterprise of deconstructing the racial and genetic foundations of “primitivist theory” and of colonial psychiatric thought. When he was appointed head physician of the psychiatric hospital of Blida-Joinville, which retained that name until Algerian independence, Fanon never stopped believing that at the bottom of an “Algerian” psychiatry lay the tools to develop new practices to fight the effects of colonization (alienation, acculturation, infantilization, reification, etc.) on the colonized. For Fanon, the appeal of liberating violence for psychic transformation—the recovery of the colonized’s self-esteem, honor and dignity—is only one aspect, though certainly the most important one, of the deconstruction of the colonial world and the ideology that supports it.

Even if Abane considers the war on French colonialism to be the means to a turn over a new leaf, permitting Algerians to recover “their pride and dignity,” violence directed against the colonial system must before all else be loaded with political meaning. This political regulation of military and armed violence prioritized by Soummam’s revolutionary will remain until the moment when the balance of power within FLN leadership, dominated by military men from the summer of 1957 on, no longer lets Abane play a leading role. For Melouza, who was emblematic of the total absence of political regulation for violence—it is no coincidence that the massacre was perpetrated after the expatriation of the political body, the CCE in Tunisia—Fanon only saw the effects of alienation and colonial brutalization. Nevertheless, he deplored the behavior of “those brothers who are thrown in action with the almost physiological brutality that centuries of oppression give rise to and feed” (Fanon 1967c:25).

The other question raised by the brief collaboration between Abane and Fanon is the meaning given to the concept of revolution and the role of the peasantry in the Algerian uprising. Many historians (Lyotard 1989; Harbi 1980) have been tempted to borrow the keys needed to analyze and understand the motivations of the Algerian insurgency from Marxist-Leninism. They dissect colonial society with the settled

intention to find the class struggle that, while leading Algeria on its path of national liberation and independence, would give birth to a new social and political order. The question inevitably returns in the debate: which class plays the major political role—the peasantry or the proletariat?

In his analysis of the Algerian revolution, Fanon underlined the major role of the peasantry. He explained that the “embryonic proletariat” was devoid of class consciousness and had everything to lose with the end of colonialism. The Algerian peasantry, in contrast, constituted a homogenous class made of the disciplined and altruistic rural masses. Threatened, the peasantry would be ready to throw itself into the generalized insurgency.

The ambition here is not to decide on the perspicacity of Fanonian thought, but to suggest the reasons why Fanon assigns the Algerian peasantry a determinant political role. Having no firm understanding of the agrarian question in the Algerian colony, Fanon would have probably taken up the analysis of the PFS. The major role assigned to the Algerian peasant masses gives evidence of an analysis of the colonial policy, of land theft, and its repercussions for the condition of the Algerian peasantry. Consider this extract from the PFS, which was overseen by Abane: “The massive participation of the population (peasants) in the Revolution, the dominant proportion that they represent in the ALN, has profoundly marked the character of Algerian resistance... For the peasant population is deeply convinced that its thirst for land can only be satisfied by the victory of national independence.”

While Fanon undervalues or devalues the role of the working class, “the nucleus of the colonized people, privileged and pampered by the colonial regime,” they also receive this treatment because of what is written about the “working world” by the PFS. “The working class, it is said, can and must make a *more dynamic contribution* [my emphasis], may condition the rapid development of the Revolution, its strength and its ultimate success. The FLN welcomes the creation of the UGTA [General Union of Algerian Workers created in April 1956], as the expression of a *healthy reaction of workers*... to leave the salaried population held in *fog, confusion and the rationalist doctrine that one must wait to act until one sees the events ahead clearly*.” The Soummamians, probable sources of inspiration for Fanon, even evoke the existence of a “labor aristocracy (officials and railway workers)” opposed to the most numerous and most exploited, the dockworkers and miners, but also to the agricultural workers, “veritable pariahs most shamefully abandoned to the mercy of the lords of the vine.” This is probably the evocation of that “aristocracy” to which the Fanonian vision is opposed, the world of urban workers, the pets of the colonial system, and the peasant masses, the system’s pests.

Pragmatic Abane quickly realized, however, that the development of the Revolution and the end of the war would play out in the hearts of cities, especially Algiers, and that there would be “no progress in the guerilla campaigns unless the peasants move in the cities.” While he conferred onto the peasants a massive and decisive role in the first stage of the insurgency, Abane thought, however, that the mobilization of the workers in the cities was a more decisive factor. This, incidentally, led members of the CCE newly appointed to Soummam to consider new forms of struggle heavily involving salaried workers and the urban masses in general. The general strike of January 1957 was the perfect illustration. The future, with massive

popular demonstrations in the cities of Algeria and the metropole, and their hard-won success, gave them reason.

Postindependence Vision and Postcolonial Premonitions

What would have most attracted Fanon after his first encounter with Abane in December 1956 is this postindependence vision (Cherki, interview, 2010). This vision beyond the war can also be viewed through two seminal ideas in Abane's work. First, the primacy of citizenship over identities (Arab, Amazigh, Muslim, Christian, European, etc.), as the only guarantee for the establishment of a modern and balanced postcolonial society. The PFS invokes neither the question of identity nor the Islamic principles dear to the proponents of the Ummahist vision (Ummah, Islamic community) but calls European liberals and "fellow Jews" to "no longer remain above the fray and declare their choice for Algerian nationality." For Fanon, the FLN leader was totally liberated from every ethnic interference, religious or narrowly nationalistic. Also, Abane trusted and worked with Muslims, as well as with Europeans and Jews, who supposedly belonged to another camp. And he appealed to Fanon, a black, neither Algerian nor Muslim, only a doctor, psychiatrist, and intellectual whose ideas he liked.

This projection in the postwar was also reflected in the modern principle, dear to Abane, of the preeminence of political power and especially the distinction between civilian and military functions. It was still in the midst of war that Abane advocated "the separation of civilian and military power" (report to CNRA, 1957)—a true challenge for the time, when we know that to this day, in Algeria, that separation has still not completely become fact.

In the logic of this postindependence vision, Abane, more Kantian than Hobbesian, was not as we say a staunch supporter of the *Bellum Internecinum*, that war of extermination for the pleasure of annihilating the enemy (Abane 2009). Had he not adhered to the Camusian approach of civilian truce to spare the innocent and recommended the Directives of the Soummam before the paroxysm of the Battle of Algiers to "conform to international laws in the destruction of enemy forces"? The fact that he had exempted the French nation from the crimes of colonialism is in this regard very revealing of his irenic postindependence vision. Even if it looks the most radical from the perspective of a negotiation with the French government, notably in the course of the Tunisian period, Abane also intended future harmonious relations between the two nations.

The protection of liberties in postindependence Algeria is another commonality Fanon and Abane shared. For the revolutionary as for the theoretician, merely waging war against colonialism would not suffice. One must not only conceptualize a political vision for the war, but also for the postwar society. Abane (PFS) and Fanon (*Wretched of the Earth*) probably wanted to guard the future against any shift that might undermine the liberty and justice that were supposed to be the primary political objectives in the coming of independence. In Abane's mind, the rule of politics was also seen as a guarantee of the future, so that postcolonial relations would not be determined by force as they had been in colonial society.

Between Abane and Fanon, there is also that other commonality: their premonition about the postcolonial aftermath. Each sensed the drift of the future in view of the processes of bureaucratization and militarization that insidiously took over the workings of the Algerian resistance after the weakening of Abane's position and the scrapping of the principles of the CS. Each denounced the threats they saw weighing on postindependence Algerian society. Abane vehemently accused the colonels of being "Oriental despots," "feudalists," or "apprentice dictators." But he, in confidence with Ferhat Abbas, shared his most prescient diagnosis. Evoking the practices of the military leaders and especially the Stalinist excesses of Boussouf, one of his future assassins, Abane, who already suspected them of a "tendency to exercise absolute power," confided his fears to the future president of the Provisional Algerian Government during the summer of 1957 in these terms: "They constitute a danger for the future of Algeria. They carry a personal politics contrary to the unity of the nation... By their attitude, they are the negation of the liberty and the democracy that we want to establish in an independent Algeria" (Abbas 1980).

Like Abane, Fanon had also seen growing perils, from the beginning of his Tunisian sojourn. He quickly grasped the inexorable mechanism of the praetorian ascendancy, its clannish tendencies, its thirst for power, and its reflexes of domination. The Martinican intellectual became worried. Concerning the growing power of these praetorian ambitions, Fanon also confided to Ferhat Abbas: "Another colonel rules them (the '3B' of the NDLA) on their behalf. This is Colonel Boumediene. This taste of power and command is pathological" (Abbas 1980).

Abane and Fanon had come to the same conclusions about the authoritarian postcolonial drift that had begun to emerge in the summer of 1957, notably after the surrender under the colonels' threat of the cardinal Soummamian principles—the primacy of politics over the military and the interior over the exterior—the year before.

However, Fanon, who survived Abane by almost five years, would be free as an ambassador of the GPRA to observe more closely the first African independences (Ghana in 1957, Guinea in 1958, and the French West Africa beginning in 1960). Also, he furthered his revolutionary vision. The future he announced and the practices of postcolonial regimes he described are astonishingly and accurate (Achour 1990). Fanon indeed saw that decolonization could lead to a new form of domination: neo-colonialism, with its pitfalls and perils that burdened the people. This was an astonishingly precise premonition:

The national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the Europeans... It discovers its historic mission as an intermediary... to serve as a conveyor belt for a capitalism forced to camouflage itself... The national bourgeoisie with no misgivings and with great pride revels in the role of business agents in its dealings with the Western bourgeoisie... The dynamic, pioneering aspect, the inventor and discoverer of worlds is here lamentably absent... This bourgeoisie, which has unreservedly and enthusiastically, adopted the intellectual reflexes that characterize the metropole, which has marvelously alienated its own thought and grounded its consciousness on typically foreign bases. (Fanon 2004:100–126, translation modified)

Under the rule of the national bourgeoisie that Fanon describes in his vision of postindependence, the economies of the decolonized countries are not producers of wealth but captors of commissions and distributors of bribes and favoritism. The “deep vocation” of postcolonial national bourgeoisies “is not...production, invention, construction, work”; they are, on the contrary, “all channeled towards intermediate activities” with “networking and scheming...its underlying vocation” (Fanon 2004:98, translation modified). Considering the majority of Arab and African countries leaving colonial rule, the future will surely prove him right.

Concerning the Algerian case with which he had a deep familiarity, Fanon also saw in the colonial practices of absolute brutalization extending to mass crimes and the “banalization of evil”—that extreme, protean repression exercised “naturally” by the colonizer on the native—the difficulty of becoming a country that would be delivered one day from all forms of violence. Had he not predicted in effect (in *Wretched of the Earth*) that “a whole generation of Algerians, steeped in a collective, gratuitous violence with the psycho-affective consequences that it entails, will be the legacy of France in Algeria”? It is obviously difficult to establish a connection of cause and effect between the multiform colonial violence suffered by the Algerians and that which they inflicted on each other during the “dark decade” of the 1990s, after the suspension of the democratic processes and the prohibition of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). We know, however, that “the cultural and psychological destructions” that result from the “daily humiliation of the colonized and its objective subjugation” cannot completely spare the postindependence generations (Memmi 1968). The Tunisian intellectual asked, “How can one believe that there will be not distortion in the soul, the physiognomy and the conduct of the oppressed?” Moreover, is not the assassination of Abane, to whom Fanon had been very close, the harbinger of all the postcolonial excesses that mark the tormented history of Algerian independence? Is not this act the precursor to that state of mind that knows no other method but recourse to force and to violence to resolve political differences, with such consequences as the birth and durable anchoring in Algerian society of the tradition of the allegiance to force, of the most damaging unanimous submission, mocking and scornful rejection of political debate relegated to the attic of hackneyed and derisory artifacts?

Fanon and Abane's Assassination

During of the second half of 1957, three colonels of the ALN take power. Abane is rejected, payment for his opposition to this first coup d'état and his obstinacy in defending “the primacy of politics over the military,” the principle the FLN had adopted the prior year. The amount of bureaucratic despotism grows for the colonels, henceforth relegated to representative functions.

All enmities crystallize around Abane, the first opponent to the colonels' power. His relations with military colleagues of the CCE continue to deteriorate during the autumn of 1957. In the hushed atmospheres of Cairene and Tunisian salons, prone to maneuvers and conspiracies of all kinds, the military coterie organizes themselves. The widespread mentality of the military elements in the strategic centers of

the decision was endorsed to the detriment of those ephemeral politicians grouped around Abane. The war, directed from the outside, is now an affair of a triumvirate of colonels whose only common ground is their hatred of politicians, especially Abane. This drift, which completes the reconfiguration of Soummam primacy, draws a straight line to the assassination of the former number one, then a limitless hegemony of the military clan installed on the outside and a total effacement of politics.

Abane is indeed drawn into an ambush in Morocco on the pretext of negotiation of a dispute between the ALN and the Royal Moroccan army with King Mohamed V. He dies strangled under the gaze of his CCE colleagues, who had taken seriously his threats of returning to Algeria and restoring the primacies of Soummam, especially that of the interior over the exterior. The crime will be passed off as a glorious death on the field of honor. His collaborators in the department of information, especially Fanon, are not duped. They are forced to publish a full page in *El Moudjahid* devoted to the glory of the “martyr.”

Apart from the political members of the CCE, especially Ferhat Abbas, who vehemently protested the fascist methods of the colonels, no one dared raise his voice before the new omnipotent power. Fanon, who had just lost “a friend and brother,” was also under the influence of terror inspired by the colonels. He refrained from any protest because he was himself on the list of those who would be assassinated in the event of a violent reaction to Abane’s assassination (Macey 2001; Lanzmann 2009).

For Fanon, Abane’s death, apart from his friendship, was a big loss. Fanon privately confided in his closest friends, including Alice Cherki, who was then working on his side with her husband Charles Geronimi at the hospital in Manouba. “The Revolution is now in the hands of the goat herders,” he spit at his young colleagues. Later, Fanon brooded and felt remorseful for having failed at preventing Abane’s assassination by not having sufficiently warned him against the criminal designs of the colonels.

In Rome, where he met Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, he expressed his regret, even a form of culpability. De Beauvoir recounted in her memoirs the confidences that Fanon shared in the course of the meeting in Rome, organized by Claude Lanzmann: “Until autumn 1961, Fanon continued to carry Abane’s death as a serious burden.” Fanon confided to her: “I have two deaths on my conscience that I will never be able to forgive myself for: Abane’s and Patrice Lumumba’s.”

Conclusion

Abane and Fanon both had a universal vision. Seeing wide, gathering beyond his own origin, braving partisan chauvinism from most of the activist leaders who renounced their former comrades of the PPA, pejoratively called “politicailleurs” [i.e., politicians who hold forth about worthless or contemptible political issues—trans.], integrating liberal Europeans, Abane overcame the narrow confines of religion- or communitarian-based nationalism. Like Abane, Fanon also left behind his “ethnicity,” his community, and his “habitus” to go into the unknown of the then beginning Algerian revolution, to defend all the wretched of the earth, and to sing the song of liberty without borders.

Abane and Fanon had, and continue to have, detractors. The former is reproached for having erred on the side of rashness in a society still steeped in the burdens and archaisms of the past, for having hastily and prematurely imposed a modernity (separation of politics and military rule, primacy of citizenship over identities, clear distinctions between the spiritual and the temporal) on the movement of national liberation that did not correspond with the level of historical development of Algerian society. It is this unsuccessful effort to put the revolution on the rails of universal modernity, liberating political practice from its relation with military force, that cost Abane his life.

Regarding the latter, Fanon is not only reproached for the advocacy of violence that is attributed to him, but also for producing theory that has now been surpassed. Unlike Abane, it is this “obsolete” character of his thought that poses a problem. His detractors argue that we have reached “the end of Third World history” with the end of colonial empires. However, it remains unarguable that Fanon’s work presciently analyzes postindependence regimes. And there precisely, Fanon’s considerable contribution is burningly urgent.

Note

1. The Algerian People’s Party dissolved after the May 8, 1945 Sétif massacres and resumed under the name Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties.

Chapter Three

Fanon and the Possibility of Postcolonial Critical Imagination

Ato Sekyi-Otu

Et véritablement il s'agit de lâcher l'homme

—*Frantz Fanon*, *Peau noir, masques blancs*

Introduction

In most parts of the African continent, the name of Fanon sounds today like a spectre from another time and place, an emanation from a past so recent yet so remote. Outside of South Africa where Fanon features prominently in debates concerning the “postapartheid” dispensation, the fate of his words uncannily imitates that which he famously assigned to the national bourgeoisie of the nascent postcolony: precocious demise; his claim on our attention “untimely ripped” from the tormented, mocking body of contemporary African history. I stress the strange fate of Fanon’s name in the living drama of contemporary African history and thought, the virtual oblivion to which he has generally been consigned in these times of wonder, in this place of his most passionate solicitude. For, of course, he is fervently remembered and invoked in the service of other passions in other places. I have been chastised for distinguishing “our Fanon,” the Fanon of the postcolony, from the Fanon who informs the preoccupations of critics in these other places, the Fanon of “postcolonialism.” It is as if I meant by that distinction to espouse a kind of possessive individualism with respect to the intellectual artifacts of the African world. Or even more crudely, to lay down a residential-determinist criterion of validity in the interpretation of these artifacts. What I meant to signal was not indeed an unbridgeable chasm in geographies of understanding, still less an ethnoracial proprietorship of African works, but simply demonstrable differences in situations of reading, alternative hermeneutic circumstances, always the

province of finite histories and particular spaces of political existence. Needless to say, that variety in idioms of reading obtains not simply between critics of the African world and those outside that world, but among members of the interpretive community of readers within the African world. But there is no denying the fact that there are situated differences, whatever their provenance may be, in the contemporary reception of Fanon's work. A little detail will illustrate the point. The original blurb proposed for my book *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* began thus: "With the flowering of postcolonialism, we return to Frantz Fanon." The "flowering" of postcolonialism? Would that locution come from critics for whom the outcome of the "African revolution" and the predicament of the African postcolony are *their* principal preoccupation?

Concerning the African revolution and the predicament of the postcolony, Fanon has sometimes been relegated to the status of an untruthful witness, his putative predictions contradicted by the actual course of events in African history. Or he seems to our contemporary eyes with their educated sobriety as an irrelevant visionary, "the prophet of the black nirvana" according to Kofi Awoonor (1992:91). Fanon's dream of a "new humanity" irrevocably schooled by revolution in "the practice of action" strikes us today as the risible relic of one of those "orthodoxies of deliverance" satirized by Achebe. New orthodoxies of deliverance are abroad, although their adherents ritually disown fealty to any doctrine and swear to apprehend the real world and human necessities unfettered by the chains of ideology.

But it is not simply the substance of things Fanon hoped for, say, the egalitarian, nonauthoritarian socialist society of his latent dreams, that appears discredited today. Questionable in a more fundamental sense is what is taken by some to be the defining grammar of his historical and critical vision, the principal terms of moral and political argument that accompany that vision and that would seem to bear a regrettable family resemblance to what Achille Mbembe sees as the dominant tradition of "African modes of self-writing" (2002:239–273)

"African Modes of Self-Writing" offers a sweeping excoriation of two centuries of social thought in the African world for being driven by a debilitating historicism in the twin forms of "Afro-radicalism" and "the metaphysics of difference (*nativism*)" (Mbembe 2002:240). The hallmark of these twin currents of thought, according to Mbembe, is a fixation upon the three emblematic historical events of slavery, colonization, and apartheid construed as violent and exogenous acts of radical evil. This triad of evils, in "the canonical meanings" ascribed to it (2002:241), is the alienation of the African self from itself, its material dispossession and spiritual degradation—the seizure of native soil and soul. And the redemptive enterprise mandated by this story of ruinous estrangement? Let the alienated self come home, the divided subject retrieve its ancient wholeness, the captive mind attain knowledge of itself. Into the service of this epic enterprise is to be pressed all thought and action. The "sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse" (2002:241), complains Mbembe, is the degree to which that discourse contributes to this program of emancipation, in the severely reduced meaning assigned to it by Afro-radical and nativist criticism. Mbembe could have cited as a prime exhibit of this politicohistoricist reductionism the famous passage in *The Wretched of the Earth* regarding "the problem of truth"—regularly quoted out of its dramatic narrative context—according

to which “Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonial system” and *its* regime of truth (Fanon 1968:50). Case closed. No further questions of truth and justification, no disquieting moral conditions or conundrums lying in ambush, it would seem, to trouble the insurgent anticolonial mind and jolt it from its dogmatic understanding of the world’s design.

But the most compelling yet problematic aspect of Mbembe’s brief against the alleged historicist foundations of “Afro-radicalism” and “nativism” is what he charges them with evading and failing to do. The habit of disowning responsibility for the catastrophes befalling Africa, manifest in the prevailing rhetoric of exogenous ruination (Mbembe 2002:243), is but a symptomatic expression of a deeper evasion. A related and more grievous sin of omission on the part of these discourses is that they renounced “the possibility of a properly philosophical reflection on the African condition,” let alone a meditation on the universal “question of *being and time*—in other words, of life” (Mbembe 2002:251, 263). In this historicist politicism, everything is reducible to power, its theft by the enslavers and imperialists and its just return to native hands. What place is left for other questions, even those of power—to leave matters at the *merely* political—to say nothing of *the* question of power? Expelled from the purview of this tradition is any philosophical exploration of the African condition—“the most profoundly human condition,” according to Ayi Kwei Armah (1976:11)—as an instance of the human condition in history; any critical reflection on the metaphysics of human existence.¹ Such, to echo the title of Karl Popper’s famous work, is the poverty of African historicism.

I am not unsympathetic to Mbembe’s critical intentions, particularly his insistence on a philosophical attention to the reality of indigenous iniquity and responsibility for the African predicament within an overarching interpretation of the human condition in history. Nor am I unconcerned with the fundamental question of a tension between historicism on the one hand and political philosophy and metaphysics on the other. Still, I take it that Mbembe’s is not the kind of critique of historicism that, with Leo Strauss (*What Is Political Philosophy?*) and Emil Fackenheim (*Metaphysics and Historicity*), erects an epistemological apartheid between the historical consciousness, and political philosophy and metaphysics. I hear him saying that knowledge of history, its terrible and obdurate effects, above all, the experience of crisis, which is its hallmark and of which the African condition is replete, is and ought to be the occasion of language and thought regarding what Fanon called “human things” (1968:205). I hear in Mbembe’s brief the voice of the Akan elders according to whom “crisis is the occasion of the proverb.” The proverb understood not as received precept, still less as dogma, but, with Kwame Gyekye (1995[1987]) and Kwesi Yankah (1989), as the inventive work of thought and language aroused by enigma. But if that is the case, if that is what Mbembe means to say, then what distinguishes him from the best in the tradition he so summarily dismisses?

The Native Forest and the Fifth Grove

Courageous tom-tom rider / is it true that you mistrust the native forest?

—Aimé Césaire, “The Verb ‘Marronner’”

The fifth grove is not a place of visible paths.

—Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*

The most profoundly searching among the anticolonial texts of the African world do not aver, as if possessed of a perverse will to self-renunciation, that the history of Africa is the history of its invaders; that the burden of history, imperial history, trumps all internal stories of historical existence, and that it *radically* frames all there is to be, all there is to be known, and all there is to be done. That, contrary to Mbembe's caricature, is not their complaint. They say quite simply, with Stathis Kouvelakis (2003:8) and his understanding of the historical consciousness, that the effects of that history impose *limits* on being, knowledge, and action. By virtue of that very plaintive cognizance of limits, however, they signal the human refusal of abject captivity to their dominion. For they wonder aloud what the world and the drama of human life would look like, what promises and predicaments they might proffer, were they unshackled from the constraints of a particular time and place, a particular historical circumstance? A coherent historicism is and must be predicated on a consciousness of the possibility of freedom, intimations of what the nature of things might have been. Call this stance *critical historicism*.

Nor do these foundational anticolonial texts say, or mean to say, that there was a fullness of being before the Fall, that we had no questions about the justice of the earth, no arguments among ourselves, or that the good is identical with what is our own, and that the conquerors came and wrecked everything. No, that is not their claim. That is not what, to take a hallowed text in the canon, *Things Fall Apart*, says. True, a maligned idiom of the accursed nativist jeremiad, *déracinement*, can always be heard in these discourses. So it is that Damas laments "the hour of deracination" (1972:44), and Césaire's griot in the *Cahier* sings with sardonic exultation of "those who have known voyages only through uprootings [*déracinelements*]" (1983:65). But what is this cherished treasure lost to the vanquished world? Césaire says this violated earth is "cast adrift from its *precious malignant purpose*" (1983:61, emphasis added). "Precious malignant purpose": Césaire's name for the world we have lost. What, then, contrary to doctrines attributed to them in sweeping and fashionable denunciations of nativism, do these canonical "African modes of self-writing" ultimately want to say? Simply this: that our local terms of disputation regarding conditions of existence and our contending idioms of wondering about the nature of things—native *partisan* universals—not our pristine and tearless purities, were dislocated, displaced, disparaged, made instrumental and subservient to the requirements of racial vindication and political litigation with the white man. Soyinka has called the results "the schemata of interrupted histories" (1976:x). It may well be that even this claim is bogus. I mean this idea of the dislocation of native principles and procedures of moral argument, of the displacement of idioms of existential predicaments and metaphysical wonder, as distinct from the notion of the alienation of moral essences: not stolen substances but shattered frames, foundations "assaulted and destroyed" (Armah 1975:8). It may be that this idea is the false complaint of truly alienated intellectuals woefully ignorant of the effervescent dramas in which African peoples have always enacted the essential tensions of human existence. But what this complaint cannot

foster is the fantasy of prelapsarian harmony and the dream of a “black nirvana.” For by virtue of this very complaint, such discourses foreswear the facile identification of the best with the indigenous, preferring to see in the native the occasion of questions and quests regarding the true, the good, the just, and the beautiful. On this view, to put it in a mythopoetic idiom, the wisest and most audacious of our pathfinders encountered in the native forest and sacred grove not moral directions and “visible paths” or “channels already found” (Armah 1975:186, xiv), but auguries of crisis in historical existence and summons to the remembrance of things not yet done. Call this stance *universalist* nativism or, if you prefer, *nativist* universalism.²

A historicism cognizant of the constraints history has imposed on being, knowledge, and action, and of possibilities it has repressed; subjugated, misdirected, untried possibilities of material culture and moral life; and a nativism that attends to homeland idioms of critical practice and inventive work, one for which the vernacular bespeaks the promise and agony of human universals: together they inform the understandings that major thinkers in the African world have brought to bear on what Mbembe identifies as the cluster of three defining historical events of slavery, colonization, and apartheid. And together they make possible a vocabulary of moral and political judgment that transcends the burden of these events even as it inescapably testifies to their fateful consequences. They make possible, that is to say, a postcolonial, or to invoke a synecdoche, a *postapartheid* critical imagination. What, then, is Fanon’s relationship, manifest in his understanding of the colonial order and his vision of decolonization, to this metadiscursive tradition of critical historicism and nativist universalism—the enabling condition of a postcolonial ethical and political vocabulary?

“This Narrow World Strewn with Prohibitions”: Probing the “Farthest Meaning” of Fanon’s Spatial Metaphor

Mbembe is concerned with “reinterpret[ing] subjectivity as time” rather than motionless substance. With some qualifications Fanon would not have disapproved. For with Heidegger, Sartre, and Marx before him, Fanon understood subjectivity and its constitutive agon, freedom, as time. Fanon associated freedom with human temporality, specifically with our openness toward the future, such that we are not slaves of any past. This is precisely how he framed the question of “alienation” and “disalienation” faced by the subject of racist culture in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The problem considered here is one of temporality. Those black people and white people will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed in the materialized Tower of the Past. For many black persons, in other ways, disalienation will come into being through their refusal to accept the present as definitive. (1967a:226)

And the penultimate utterance of the book proclaims, “I want the world to recognize with me the open door of every consciousness” (1967a:232).

It is this idea of freedom as time—Marx called it “the space of human development” (1975:708)—not the desire for the recovery of the substantive virtues of a

vanquished native self, that informs Fanon's condemnation of the colonization of human existence and racist culture. Exemplifying the triad of "critique, norm, and utopia" (Benhabib) characteristic of visionary foundationalism as a critical enterprise, Fanon's cry is this: in the "racial polity" as Charles Mills calls it in *Blackness Visible*, in a racist world order, a being destined for infinite horizons in the company of other beings apprehends itself as "walled in," occupant of a "fixed position," prisoner of a compulsory finitude (Fanon 1967a:117, 211). In that captive space, the challenge of our human temporality—our openness to the future and the possibility of self-constitution and self-revision that accompanies it, our capacity to play what Sartre called the "circuit of selfness" (Sartre 1969:155–158)—withers away. This is the "lived experience of the black" that the entire work and, more specifically, the fifth chapter, bemoans. It is a denunciation different from the prelapsarianist version of nativism. That version's lament, to repeat, is this: the damage inflicted upon the African world by the triad of historical catastrophes—slavery, colonization, and apartheid—is damage done to native particulars in their ancestral and wondrous uniqueness, damage done to the native self in its primal unity. For Fanon, by contrast, the damage consists of an "existential deviation" (1967a:14), a deviation from the regular predicaments of human intercourse, normal prospects, and pathologies of the paths of liberty: promises and tragedies native, according to Ben Okri's book of aphorisms, to "a way of being free." That is why the chapters of *Black Skin* almost invariably open with the invocation of a human universal: the all-too-human drama of language, desire and recognition, the dialectic of body and world, or existence-for-others. That invocation functions as an anaphora prefacing anguished accounts of the peculiar laws of language, of desire and recognition, of the vicissitudes of human embodiment, and of existence-for-others in the "racial polity." It signifies the visionary ontology with reference to which we may see the specific gravity of the proscriptions demanded by racist culture in an apartheid social order.³ Regarding the consequences of those proscriptions, the protagonist of Césaire's *Notebook* says of his grandfather, figure of the "old negritude," "an evil Lord had for all eternity inscribed Thou Shall Not in his pelvic constitution" (1983:79). Fanon as protagonist announces a revolt, in the brave accents of existentialist humanism—less generously but legitimately, with the fury of offended masculinity—against every attempt to capture the horizons of a being in any case irrepressibly free:

Yet, with all my being I refuse to accept this amputation. I feel in myself a soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand without limit. I am a master and I am advised to adopt the humility of the cripple. (1967a:140)

Human liberty—in its peculiar incarnation as male puffed-up chest facing and resisting humiliation, true, yet *human* liberty all the same—speaks here, answering forcible finitude with the Great Refusal.

"Concerning Violence," the opening of *The Wretched of the Earth*, takes up the existential phenomenology of *Black Skin* and places it in a more explicitly determinate historical context. In an emblematic passage, part of a cluster of images in which domination as coercion is depicted as a spatial relation, "Concerning Violence" calls

the colonial order “this narrow world strewn with prohibitions.” The text goes on to name apartheid as the quintessence of the colonial system’s “geographical ordering” with its obdurate “system of compartments” and the “dividing line” that sets apart the spheres of existence of two collectivities in “a motionless Manicheistic world” (1968:37–38, 51).

But does this rhetoric of space do more than describe and denounce the social order of what David Theo Goldberg calls “racialized space” (1993:185), the material foundation of “a partitioned social ontology,” according to Mills’s account of the “racial polity” (1998:7)? Could it be that it gestures at something more than the “lines of force” (Fanon 1968:38)—the physics and metaphysics of the racial polity—from which the enterprise of decolonization will take its bearings? Does it call for more than a nationalist politics of repossession of power understood as reconquest of stolen space? What is the “farthest meaning” of Fanon’s rhetoric of space?

You might have guessed the answer. In that emblematic spatial metaphor—“this narrow world strewn with prohibitions”—and its cognates, it now seems to me, Fanon addresses something more grievous than the power relations of apartheid understood as the quintessence of the colonial-racial order. He speaks more profoundly of the brutally narrowed compass and categories of our moral and political argument, reasoning, and imagination, from the moment the defining feature of our being becomes our ascribed racial identity and membership. The inequities and iniquities wreaked by virtue of the racial polity’s partitioned space are no small matter. But Fanon hints at something no less grave and seldom commented on the perceptual enclosure, the restricted picture of the world that the racialization of life and thought threatens to foist on us, the severe constriction of the spaces and shapes of our moral and even political consciousness. This, in an enlarged sense, is what Fanon meant when he said that colonial domination is “total and simplifying” (1968b:236). Of the psychoexistential import of that domination—apartheid being for her but its “surface” political manifestation—Bessie Head wrote in a similar vein that it “kept everything in its place,” kept it in its obscuring and tyrannizing simplicity (1974:116). See apartheid, then, as something more than an extreme order of separation and exclusion, one made palpably manifest in social space. Call apartheid a metaphor for a certain family of obdurate habits of mind and attitudes to the world: an insistence on isolate particulars, a refusal of universals; contempt for the principle of connectedness, above all an inability or unwillingness to discern the human commonalities that, for better or worse, reside in the discrete histories and cultures of diverse and divided communities, commonalities that precede and survive the brute and odious facts of social and political separations. The most ruinous consequence of apartheid, in this view, is what Soyinka in the early postcolonial era called a “narrowness of vision” (1967:15) immured in the particularism of racial self-assertion, litigation, and vindication. A prison house of language in which the totality of our moral vocabulary risks being colonized, compulsorily diverted from any concern with the human predicament as a *human* predicament; any solicitude for the dignity of the human person as a person, as opposed to a member of a spurned and insurgent collectivity. A postapartheid moral consciousness would then be first and foremost an exercise in the retrieval of these common human dramas and predicaments.

Of the founding figures and successor thinkers in critical race theory, Fanon is the principal architect of a unique and uniquely difficult tradition. That tradition may best be defined by negation. Let me characterize it as an audacious way of thinking the racialization of the world that, with unwavering consistency, eschews both the evasion and the hypostatizing of race. See what he accomplishes in “The Lived Experience of the Black.” In the most incisive and gut-wrenching account of “existence in black” (to borrow Lewis Gordon’s term) since W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1903 “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Fanon courageously confronts and rejects the reactive temptation to fashion out of the oppressive racialization of experience a foundational race-centered social and moral ontology. Here, but also in succeeding texts such as “West Indians and Africans” and “Racism and Culture” (1967b), he not only recalls the gigantic effort on the part of Negritude and kindred discourses to breathe life, pride, and willed identity into the ordinance of race, but also relives their seductive appeal; relives his own delirious flirtation with them; reenacts, in defiance of all-knowing and imperious dialecticians, the sublime thrill of losing himself in that “night of the absolute” where the inalienable right of particularity dwells. But in the end he pulls back—ecstasy interruptus—aghast at what seems to him a tragic albeit compelling temptation to sleep with the enemy. The enemy being the willful enclosure of human reality in this motionless substance; renouncing thereby the promissory idea of the human being as a being who is free because his very being is a question. In that sense Fanon was the first to live up to the true meaning of “critical race theory.” With Fanon, critical race theory is what it should be: an exercise in visionary realism. Despite the contingent obduracy of its object, critical race theory must envision, if not its own extinction, at least its eventual subordination to the task of exploring questions and problems arguably far more central to the human condition in history. That is why Fanon, the first to name apartheid as archetype of the colonial world’s division of spheres of human existence, was also the first philosopher of a postapartheid, a truly postcolonial, moral universe. For the postapartheid is not something posterior to the epoch of formal apartheid. The postapartheid is the dissenting and ironic challenge to “racial reasoning”—a flagrant contradiction rather than an oxymoron—precisely in the epoch when it seems most incontestable. It is thus the prior and proleptic analytic of a world not indeed oblivious to the historical reality of racialization, but insistent, all the same, on the poverty of an ethics and a political morality founded on race.

Postcolonial Weapons of Criticism

A historic vision is of necessity universal and any pretense to it must first accept the demand for a total re-examination of the whole phenomenon of humanity.

—Wole Soyinka, *The Writer in a Modern African State*

The question I believe Fanon calls on us to pose is this: while we contend with ogres of the “racial polity” (Mills), with what “weapons of criticism,” in the language of the early Marx, shall we do battle with demons of the native cauldron, and to what end? How do we address questions of homeland brutality, injustice, and existential

insecurity—questions anterior and posterior to the colonial world’s “geographical ordering?”

Like today’s critical race theorists, Fanon was impressed by how an artifact, race, becomes an obdurate material social reality. Unlike some of today’s theorists, Fanon unambiguously insisted that this artifact must not be permitted to provide the final vocabulary for our self-understanding and moral reasoning. All his principal texts speak with horror, fury, and indeed sorrow of a thing that, notwithstanding the baneful efficacy with which it has reordered the world, does not deserve the place it has come to occupy in human affairs. *Black Skin* speaks of an “existential deviation” foisted on the racially subjugated—a deviation from the native problems of being human (1967a:11). In a seemingly bizarre utterance, Fanon says: “The black is not a man . . . The black is a black man” (1967a:8). This need not be read only as masculinist lament over racist culture’s emasculation of the black *male*. It is rather the protagonist’s fury at being penned to an unwilling particularity. You want to go about your business as a human being, but you are made to discover and live by your blackness: “The black,” Fanon writes, “is aiming for the universal, but on the screen his black essence, his black ‘nature’ is kept intact” (1967a:186).

“West Indians and Africans,” published three years later, not only protests that racist culture is profoundly deindividualizing, that it deprives people of “any possibility of individual expression” and that it imposes on them a false “principle of communion.” More seriously, Fanon sees the ascendancy of the very principle of race in the social world as an act of usurpation: the usurpation, in his words, by the “contingent” of the privileged place of what is “important,” what ought to be truly foundational. “The urgent thing,” he declares, “is to rediscover what is important beneath what is contingent” (1967b:17–18). And, finally, the conclusion to *The Wretched* reawakens us to the unfinished business of the human condition in history put on hold, so to speak, by this long-draining confrontation with race and racial apartheid.

Deviation, usurpation, interruption of distinctly and generically human preoccupations; closures and enclosures of the spaces of human being and human meaning; the forcible reduction of our political morality to the narrow horizons of what Fanon called the “racialization of thought” (1968:212) and Cornel West “racial reasoning” (1994:33–49); the daring injunction to go beyond this narrow world and the impoverishing history that fashioned it. Such are the terms of a resistant, visionary realism that informed Fanon’s understanding of decolonization and framed what Emmanuel Eze might have called his “idea of a postracial future.”

It is that visionary realism that leads Fanon, in “Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weakness,” to envisage a moment in the nascent postcolonial experience when our moral and political understanding undergoes a critical challenge. That account is a far cry from Mbembe’s version of the narrative of decolonization dear to “Afro-radicalism,” according to which the battle for independence is fought under the aegis of a simple understanding of the divisions of the social world and, as a consequence, by a moral knowledge seemingly blessed with a transparency of its objects. According to Fanon’s dissenting version, even before the founding ceremonies of nationhood begin, even before the new ruling class enshrines its predatory ownership of the spoils in despotic edicts, the people could already sense the imminent dusk of a fleeting dawn. They detect in the preparation for independence the seedlings of a new form

of inequity, a “national system of exploitation.” In that agonizing moment of recognition, they are rudely disabused of their erstwhile all-too-simple understanding of social evil, dictated by a racialized vision of the world. In that uncluttered vision bequeathed by the “primitive Manicheism of the colonizer,” and its “narrow world” of moral reasoning, “the bad [white] people were on one side, and the good [black] on the other.” The discovery that “the iniquitous phenomenon of exploitation” is trans-racial precipitates a new, potentially liberating understanding of the human condition in history. But the immediate consequence of that discovery is utterly unsettling. “The simple idyllic clarity of the beginning,” Fanon writes, is “followed by a *penumbra* that bewilders the senses.” Such is the nature of the perceptual world that an incipient postapartheid apprehension of good and evil, so to speak, engenders. True, the recalcitrant albeit educated rationalist in Fanon would evoke and enjoin the desperate need of the nascent postcolonial mind—the dogged and irrepressible straining of the human mind—for “rational knowledge” amidst the ruins of clarity. But that labor of reason will have to keep faith with the indelible results of a disconcerting phenomenology of political and moral experience (1968:144–145, 227). In his dialectical vision of decolonization and postcolonial being, Fanon finds this traumatic supplanting of clarity by penumbra an auspicious occurrence. Why? Because unlike that which is craved by votaries of a “black nirvana” enamored of the comforting enclosure of putative native certainties, “penumbra” signifies an infinitely enlarged albeit enigmatic existential and moral landscape.⁴ Close to the end of the same chapter, Fanon applauds the resurgence and recognition of tensions and “contradictions” that have been repressed, censored, concealed from the public sphere, thanks to the obscuring simplicity mandated by “this narrow world.” And elsewhere, with the crisis and transformation of moral authority in the family in the course of the Algerian revolution as an exemplary instance, Fanon writes that “the Revolution reopened all the problems: those of colonialism, but also those of the colonized society,” that is to say, problems native to human existence (1967c:101). According to this visionary, deontic narrative of liberation,⁵ the cardinal virtue of revolutionary action is not the conquest or the reconquest of power but the resurrection of repressed questions and the disclosure of “unexpressed values” (1967c:109). In his approving depiction of such transformations, such a renewed openness to untried possibilities, what Fanon meant by “true decolonization” may be discerned.

True decolonization, the postapartheid, in this view, is ultimately not a matter of the final dawn of interracial justice, or of “exploring,” in the words of Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (1998:9), “possibilities of ethical cross-cultural intercourse,” although that is also terribly important. For supposing colonialism and its archetype, apartheid, are, in a more ethically significant sense, not so much a matter of racial dispossession and injustice but rather an event of disruption? What then? That is certainly a textually defensible reading of Fanon’s understanding of colonial history. In effect Fanon says in a crucial paragraph in *The Wretched* that colonialism effects not only a cultural dispossession but also a “dislocation” of the moral grammar of the subjugated people (1968:236).⁶ This formulation anticipates Soyinka’s account of the colonial experience as one of “interrupted history.” Even more strikingly, Fanon’s formulation foreshadows Nigerian historian J.F.A. Ajayi’s audacious claim in an essay published forty years ago to the effect that colonialism was “an episode in

African history" (1969:497–508). When I first read that, I took it to be the daydream of a romantic nationalist historian intent on wishing away the longstanding effects of colonialism. Today I am not so sure. Just think of the profound ethical implications of that idea. Colonialism as an episode in the life of a people, a rude interruption of the rhythms and idioms that sustain their local and common humanity, a digression from the terms of their moral argument with themselves; a distraction, a hell of a major distraction, yes, but a distraction all the same.

Supposing, then, that decolonization, the postapartheid radically construed, is not a matter of reclaiming stolen legacies, patents and ownership rights; gaining recognition of equal worth for our customs and practices and beliefs; getting back our very own world and words, our gods and our shrines; getting back our title deeds to artifacts upon which others have through ruse and force affixed their names? What if it is not merely or principally a matter of moral litigation, restitution, and distributive justice between "us" and "them?" Supposing decolonization, the postapartheid, is first and foremost a resumption of interrupted history. A resumption not indeed of some original purities and essences before the Fall, but of interrupted dramas, the essential tensions of native universals; above all a resumption of our dialogue and disputation with one another, with ourselves.

This is arguably the most revolutionary moment in Fanon's portrait of decolonization, the moment when decolonization ceases to be strictly and restrictively anticolonialist. Or rather the moment when it becomes most radically anticolonialist precisely because the political and moral horizons of its protagonists cease to be fixated upon white supremacy, white ethics, in a word with the white man. True decolonization, the postapartheid, would be signaled by a reawakening of the inward eye.

Let me return to my question. With what critical vocabulary shall we then address internal tensions and predicaments of human life and historical existence? We may, of course, want to reject specific substantive features and ideals of standard (Western) ethics. But metaethically, we cannot help being universalists. Our native vernaculars regularly do that universalizing work in the ordinary languages of moral inquiry, protest, and approbation. "Is she not also a human being," someone would be heard to ask in Akan, a native Ghanaian language, at the news or sight of a victim of a morally repulsive act. Not even our dogged male supremacists, despots, and tormentors can afford to be *radical* relativists, habitually caught as they are in the performative contradiction to which all avowed relativists are prone, the moment they seek to justify their particularist claims, however nefarious.

Not only is metaethical universalism inescapable, perhaps some of the substantive moral ideals unilaterally accredited to the West, such as that of the equal dignity of every person, are also human universals. Surely the idea of the equal worth of all persons is deeply ingrained in my native tongue.⁷ It is the unfulfilled yet recalcitrant standard by virtue of which violations of human dignity, however widespread and even habitual, can be named precisely violations. It is not an exclusive doctrine of the European Enlightenment, one rendered suspect by the racist metaphysics that the Enlightenment also produced. Give the West credit for providing formal and institutional expression to some of the common intuitions and dreams of humanity, but do not award it exclusive proprietary rights over their acceptance or even gestation.

The point of that distinction is always worth pressing home, but especially so today in the post-9/11 world.⁸ I mean the point about the universality of human dreams and idioms of freedom and the equal dignity of all persons, and the West's success in giving flesh, albeit in terribly mangled shapes, to these dreams. In 1843, Marx—destined to acquire a strange reputation as the progenitor of anti-democratic politics—called democracy “the generic constitution,” the true universal of which all other forms of political association and governance are but particular instantiations, if not poor species, even travesties (1970:29). Marx would not have been surprised to see ideals of democratic freedoms invoked, albeit in variegated idioms, in every part of our human world.

By contrast, there are some rather strange friends of the party of humanity, those who would hoard and hug the universal, and assert like the famous pharmaceutical companies, exclusive patent rights over its blessings. Call them healers and humanists with borders. A notorious example of such value-protectionism masquerading as a universalism is the author of *The Defeat of the Mind*. Finkelkraut sees in every philosophy of decolonization without exception not the prefigurative postapartheid universalism I am eliciting from Fanon's vision but a ruinous, xenophobic particularism and moral relativism. This is because, according to Finkelkraut, universalist ideas like human rights, the values of individuality, and democracy are peculiar to “the spiritual foundations of Europe.” This is, if you will, a relativist account and vindication of universalism. “Europe and Europe alone” imagined, invented, and fostered this and that universal ideal (1995:106–107). So goes Finkelkraut's mantra, a kind of minor but cacophonous overture to Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*. Amazingly or perhaps I should say predictably, Fanon makes an inglorious appearance in Finkelkraut's rogues' gallery of reprehensible Third World enemies of the open society, universalism, and, above all, individuality. With unblushing dishonesty (or is it willful ignorance?) Finkelkraut yanks out of its dialectical narrative context a passage in *The Wretched* in which it is said that in the vortex of the national liberation struggle “individualism is the first to disappear” (1968:47). For Finkelkraut this passage reveals that Fanon favored “the Volk over a society of individuals” (1995:71). The passage, however, does not denounce just any “society of individuals,” but quite specifically “the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity” (1995:71). It is that atomistic individualism—the young Marx, again, called its kindred ethic the “sophistry of private interest,” sophistry because its claims make no pretense to being universalizable (1975a:244)—which is supposedly discredited by the nascent political morality of the imagined community. Finkelkraut must be unaware of the Fanon who said of colonialism's occupation of soil and soul that it is incompatible with the “independence of persons” (1967c:65), the Fanon whose principal indictment against racist culture is that it is constitutively inimical to moral individualism. Racists discriminate against us all precisely because they do not discriminate among us at all. Racists, Fanon says again, place all of us “in the same bag” (1968b:215). What then is the *raison d'être* of antiracism as a constitutive principle of postcolonial political morality if not the vindication of personhood and subjective freedom? That is exactly why, with Fanon, we are constrained by what Bessie Head called a certain “moral logic” (1974:62) to assert our individuality no less than our common humanity.⁹

Out of a critical understanding of colonial history, the work of decolonization as an answer to that history, and a vision of the human condition that is at once the premise and product of his account of both historical realities, Fanon adumbrated an idea of individuality and community central to current debates in African thought and the global public sphere. Fanon's discernible view of individuality and community, and his account of their status in the colonial context, the nascent postcolonial society and ultimately in *human* society, are, of course, subject to debate. While an Alan Finkelkraut will no doubt find Fanon's vindication of individuality surprising, to say the least, others may disapprove of it as an unfortunate legacy of his fealty to Enlightenment ideals of the West. As for Fanon's seemingly incongruous ode to the death of individualism, a Kwame Gyekye would quite likely see it as a mistaken but characteristic product of an untenable ideology fashionable in the "socialist interlude" of contemporary African history and social thought. That was the time, according to Gyekye (1997:157), when Marxists and so-called African socialists proffered "a tendentious and distorted interpretation of the traditional African socioethical communitarian system" in the service of *their* political commitments. So the substance of Fanon's views on individuality and community is, as I say, eminently contestable. But the provenance and texture of those views—their triple heritage in a critical response to the colonial experience, a certain reading of the incipient political morality forged in the vortex of decolonization, and a visionary-foundationalist image of human requirements—have, it seems to me, an emblematic significance. They point the way to overcoming the genre divisions between examinations of anticolonial thought, exercises in postcolonial theory, and critical investigations of social, political, and moral problems in the postcolonial world as local versions of human universals. For after Fanon, no one can say that questions of democratic freedoms and social justice, of human dignity and human rights, are posterior or even alien to the enterprise of decolonization; for that enterprise must be understood, with him, as the decolonization of *human* existence. After Fanon, African criticism cannot feign ignorance of history, but neither can it plead captivity to its dominion.

Half a century after his death, Fanon remains our pathfinder in that "conversation of discovery" whose mission it is to gather history's constraining consequences and lessons and humanity's transcendent dreams and hopes for the work of the critical imagination.

Notes

Versions of this chapter were presented at the Einstein Forum in Berlin (November 2001) and at the Codesria Symposium on "Canonical Works and Continuing Innovations in African Arts and Humanities" held at the University of Ghana (September 2003).

1. Mbembe can say all this with a straight face in the teeth of any number of canonical African texts, literary and philosophical, in which the "Africa versus Europe" narrative is arguably subordinate to enactments of the human condition in history in light of the metaphysics of existence. Let me cite two works of one thinker: Kwame Gyekye's (1995 [1987], 1997) works are explorations of questions in metaphysics, social ontology, ethics, and politics in their own right. They are not in any significant sense in

the business of what Mbembe (2002:263) calls “the thematics of anti-imperialism.” Even the metaphilosophical work of defining and vindicating African philosophy that has preoccupied African thinkers for some time now is here tangential to substantive philosophical investigations. And Gyekye is by no means alone in this.

2. Benita Parry (1999:215–250) offers a spirited and nuanced account of nativism’s critical resources and Fanon’s relationship to it.
3. Fanon’s habit of prefacing or interweaving or concluding illustrations of “existential deviation” with a visionary phenomenological ontology is evident in “The North African Syndrome.” There, the account of the pathology of racial profiling, the reifying orientalist lore that precedes concrete encounters between a doctor and a North African patient—“This man whom you thingify by systematically calling him Mohammed” (1967b:14)—is presaged by, and concludes with, the invocation of a universal: the idea of the human being as a question, a being not made, as Bessie Head’s kindred critique of power would say, for the tyranny of the “assertion” (1974:35, 38, 42, 47). In addition to the opening sentences of the first three chapters on language and desire, there is a paradigm case of such prefatory or interjected or concluding invocations in the fifth chapter of *Black Skin*. Fanon’s appeal to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the “corporeal schema” as the promissory frame of an open dialectic of self and world, with reference to which he is able to dramatize the ensuing tragicomedies of the “historico-racial schema” and the “racial-epidermal schema” is an exemplary instance of his critical practice at work. Of precursors in this critical tradition, the early Marx comes to mind (see in particular 1975c:210–228, 322–326). Here in strikingly proto-Fanonist fashion, Marx’s accounts of corruptions of intersubjective recognition on the part of affective and producing agents conclude with invocations of what such an essential, indeed constitutive, matrix of human being would look like were it to be unshackled, this time not from the ordinance of race, but from the usurping and alienating power of money.
4. Here Fanon the dramatist of a “penumbra” that beclouds the social and moral landscape is indeed Mbembe’s precursor, as when Mbembe says of the postcolonial condition that a “nameless eclipse” envelops the world and that “the geography of existence vacillates and loses all stability and compartmentalization” (2001:204). I explore literary evocations of this phenomenon in Sekyi-Otu 2005:247–281.
5. “Deontic” narrative as distinct from a constative narrative mode. On this see Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 196.
6. Similar locutions specifying dislocation, interception, interruption, rather than theft and dispossession, as colonialism’s original sin are the following: “Racism and Culture” speaks of the destruction of a colonized people’s “*schèmes culturelles*” and of the break-up (*brisser*) of their “*systèmes de référence*” (Fanon 1969:35; 1967b:33). And this is how the conclusion to *Les damnés* sums up the case against the triumph of Europe’s *geist* in history (*des victoires de son esprit*): “*Voici des siècles que l’Europe a stoppé la progression des autres hommes et les asservis à ses desseins et à sa gloire.*” “For centuries Europe has intercepted the progression of other human beings and subjugated them to its purposes and to its glory” (1991:371–372, my translation).
7. See in particular Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1995 and 1996).
8. For a pathetic example of post-9/11 characterizations of Fanon, see Robert Fulford “Fanon Had a Real Talent for Hate,” *National Post*, February 2, 2001. Fulford, of course, got this brilliant idea from David Macey’s bizarre description of Fanon to that effect (2000:503). Saving himself the trouble of actually reading Fanon, Fulford echoes other right-wing reviewers of Macey and their hysterical reading of the famous passage on truth in *The Wretched of the Earth*: See, for example, Anthony Daniels,

The New Criterion, May 19, 2001; and Adam Shatz, *The New York Times Book Review* September 12, 2001. In his disgraceful foreword to Richard Phicox's new translation of *Les damnés de la terre*, Homi Bhabha not only regurgitates these recent and earlier caricatures of Fanon but, in an egregious example of guilt by association, suggests that Fanon is the tutelary spirit of contemporary advocates of violence and terrorist movements. For a masterful critical look at Bhabha's misguided foreword and the translation itself, see Gibson (2007).

9. In a review article, Kwame Anthony Appiah noted "an interesting paradox," namely that social movements that may seem to be principally preoccupied with "collective identities" are a "reflection, as much as anything else, of the individual's concern for dignity and respect" (1997:35).

Chapter Four

Notes from the Underground, Fanon, Africa, and the Poetics of the Real

Miguel Mellino

The Great Removal

Since the early 1990s, in the wake of the great expansion of cultural and postcolonial studies, the work of Frantz Fanon has once again been demanding our attention. However, not all of Fanon's work has received equal attention. Postcolonial and cultural studies scholars, at least until some years ago, seemed largely to prefer *Black Skin, White Masks* to the rest of Fanon's writings (Gates 1991; Bhabha 1994; Mercer 1995; Read 1996). Within these fields, this text has become an inexhaustible source in sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic analysis of racism and antiracism. More importantly, keeping the best strand of postcolonial studies in mind, *Black Skin* has become a key text in genealogies of our present that place "colonial discourse" and "colonial violence" at the heart of Western history, as constituent features of modern ontology, knowledge, and politics. As David Macey (2000:25) has observed, *Black Skin* "is more widely read now than at any time since its publication," while the rest of Fanon's works attract little interest.

Yet the scene seems to be changing, as publications of new French (2000) and English editions of *The Wretched of the Earth* indicate. Also in Italy there is an increasing interest in the rest of Fanon's writings, after a long period of "nearly total neglect". In recent years, not only were new editions (2000; 2007) of *The Wretched* published, but also *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* and *Pour la révolution africaine* came out in completely new Italian translations. It is not difficult to understand why these texts have been neglected. The great defeat of the Third Worldist emancipatory project during the 1960s and 1970s could be considered the first reason for this oblivion. In this sense, the parabola of *The Wretched* is significant: during the effervescent 1970s it quickly became the "bible of decolonization" (Young 2003:123), but in the 1980s it disappeared almost completely from mainstream political debates.

In fact, *The Wretched* was one of the most popular political texts during the decolonization period. It was destined to become an essential theoretical point of reference for Third World militants and intellectuals involved in various struggles for national liberation, against both former colonial powers determined to retain their domination over colonial possessions and “military” or “democratic” native governments, which were mere executors of neocolonial political designs promoted by the United States to the global South since the beginning of the Cold War. This is why Fanon was as popular as Guevara in Latin America during this period of high anti-imperialism.

But the fuse lighted by Fanon penetrated to the United States itself, as his text very soon became a kind of *handbook* for revolutionary formation within groups involved in radical struggles, more precisely among students on campus in revolt (Klimke 2010), and many black activists considered *The Wretched* a key text for understanding what was at stake at that time throughout the African American antiracist struggles (Kelley 2003). Carmichael and Hamilton’s introduction to their manifesto *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1967) ends with an extensive reference to Fanon’s book. On the other hand, the notoriety of *The Wretched* in America’s campus turmoil at that time was expressed by Hannah Arendt’s (1969) anger aimed at all those black and white students “haunted by Fanon’s worst rhetorical excess” and by his “glorification of violence for violence’s sake.”

In Europe, the reception of *The Wretched* was much more complex. Alongside Sartre and de Beauvoir, the text gained enthusiastic support from Giovanni Pirelli¹ in Italy and the small French group of activists and intellectuals gathered around the Third Worldist journal *Partisans* published by Maspero, but the general attitude of the European left and most of the radical groups at that time oscillated between a “paternalistic welcome,” more sympathetic than consciously theoretical or political; deliberate neglect; and more often, frontal attack. The reasons for this “failed encounter” are not difficult to find.

It could be argued that Fanon’s existentialist, dialectic, and humanistic language and intransigent nationalism (albeit atypical and revolutionary), his idea that the European working classes were integrated into the capitalist project of domination and hence his stress on Third World peasants and urban lumpenproletariat as the only potentially revolutionary subjects, were all elements distant from the common “structures of feeling” that emerged in European radical settings of the late 1960s. Moreover, his radical critique of Europe and emphasis on armed struggle as the only means by which colonial people could gain real emancipation did nothing but nourish further skepticism toward *The Wretched* among the progressive European intelligentsia. As many critics have observed (Santoni 2005; Cherki 2006), Sartre’s preface to the book—emphasizing and justifying “native violence” in a much more “abstract” and “generalizing” way—may have played a part in the widening of this gap. In Europe, this text has always been experienced as rather alien, even during the periods of its greatest popularity.

Forty years later, these three texts still require us to confront difficult and far from outmoded questions. First of all, we must recall again the issue of violence and politics, of the politics of violence and counterviolence. As is well known, in *The Wretched*, especially, Fanon appeals to violence as the only means to overcome the “totalitarian and absolute character of colonial violence,” to heal the psychophysical damages caused

by the “epidermalization of racial inferiority.” Fanon is obviously referring to the “constituent violence” of former colonial societies, but his concern, as the essay “The North African Syndrome” shows (Fanon 1967b:3–16), is clearly with every kind of “power regime” aimed at the hierarchisation of its own citizenship or, in Foucauldian terms, engaged in a “racial management” of its own population (Foucault 2003).

Moreover, in these texts Fanon was explicitly encouraging the whole African continent to armed insurrection, not only against imperialist nations and powers, but also against African national bourgeoisies, then and now the main intermediaries for those engaged in the management of the global economy. And to conclude, we should recall other bitter arguments tackled by Fanon throughout these essays: the sentence of death pronounced against European humanism and its colonial philosophy of history—though expressed, in Said’s words, through the language of a “transgressive dialectic” (2000)—and especially Fanon’s suggestion that the only real *pharmakon* to psychical, social, and cultural alienation of colonized and racialized people will be their actual *pris de parole* (de Certeau 1997), the beginning of a process of political and material *subjectivation* (Rancière 1999), which for the “African Fanon” means chiefly self-organization, self-government, and autonomy of peasant and worker communities.

Nonetheless, I do not want to conclude, like Cedric Robinson, that to privilege *Black Skin* over *The Wretched* is a motivated political strategy that, perversely, reads Fanon backward, from “his immersion in the revolutionary consciousness of the Algerian peasantry to the ‘petit-bourgeois stink’ of the former text” (Robinson 1993; Peterson 2007). Though I partially agree with Robinson’s assumption about bourgeois and *évolués* concerns in *Black Skin*, my purpose here is different. I take as a point of departure the most political and neglected of Fanon’s writings not just to assert a more proper understanding of his work, to recapture something like his “true thinking.” I suggest focusing on these texts in order to develop a more creative relationship with Fanon’s archive and also because they speak to our postcolonial condition. Put simply, they are significant in highlighting what Stuart Hall, echoing Derrida, has called “Fanon’s spectral effect” (1996:14) in our postcolonial present. In fact, through these three texts we can “reactivate”—in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms (1985)—two significant political and intellectual threads running through Fanon’s work but largely removed from the concerns of postcolonial and cultural studies with *Black Skin*. First, the relevance of Fanon’s African experience during the years of continental struggle against European colonialism; and second, his belonging to the moment of what I shall call “revolutionary modernism.” As we see, reactivating these intellectual and political threads in Fanon’s work can shed light on crucial questions and conflicts inherent in contemporary postcolonial capitalism: for instance, recent uprisings in the French Banlieues, migrant struggles for citizenship in Europe and the United States, and the developing of radical grassroots movements for common goods in the global South.

Notes from the Underground: Fanon in Africa

Given these goals, it is worth returning to Fanon’s African experience. We should consider *The Wretched* one of the most important African political writings of the

twentieth century. It is a text written in Africa, about Africa and mainly for postcolonial Africa. Fanon was convinced that the Algerian war would liberate all its emancipatory power only in the context of a larger Pan-African revolution. Like many of the mainly Pan-African activists and leaders engaged in anticolonial struggles at that time—Padmore, N’Krumah, or Cabral—Fanon was convinced that only by developing a continental political and economic integration would African postcolonial countries be able to avoid what N’Krumah has called the “neocolonial grip” (Young 2001). More precisely, one of the main arguments of Fanon’s African political writings is that without this, newly independent African states would never be able to break their “dependency” on the world economy or gain real emancipation and autonomy, which for Fanon meant above all “re-appropriation of the common” (Hardt, Negri 2009), shared administration by popular councils of goods and needs, communitarian control of the main resources, and social and economic planning according to the needs of local populations rather than the requirements of capitalistic valorization (in its private or state form) or the world market. One of the main goals of his African writings thus was to promote this “radical Pan-Africanism” conceived of as a concrete political ideology to set against that racial or cultural “Pan-Africanism of the mind” that, superficially grounded on Césaire and Senghor’s *Négritude* or an African personality, was at that time being appropriated and disseminated through the social fabric by nationalist African bourgeoisies.

It is for this reason that Fanon agreed with N’krumah’s project to create the federation of the “United States of Africa” and seek to further the development of an “African volunteer legion,” in particular the establishment of an “African continental army whose main task would be to give support to the ongoing struggles for independence” (Fanon 1967b:165). In sum, one of the main goals of *The Wretched* and *Écrits Politiques* was to disseminate among Algerians and Africans the idea that the real end of the Algerian war must obviously be national independence, but most importantly African continental unity and freedom.

Nowadays, however, the relevance of Fanon’s African experience seems to be underestimated or even completely “removed.” It is strikingly paradoxical that Fanon’s African setting has been “silenced” in favor of his more *évolués* arguments even within postcolonial and cultural studies, particularly if we take into account the fact that Fanon’s African experience had been well discussed in most so-called first wave critical studies of his work (Gendzier 1973; Woodis 1980; Perinbam 1982; Jinadu 1986). In a sense, current postcolonial scholarship on Fanon’s work usually tackles concepts, analyses, and categories as if he had never moved away from Martinique. More precisely, I want to suggest that most contemporary theoretical work on Fanon deals with his ideas on violence, racism, colonialism, nationalism, *négritude*, dialectics, and so on without enough underlining of the “tactical dimension” of his African writings. These writings were conceived by Fanon as responses to the crises, conflicts, and contradictions he experienced in Algeria and other African countries during their difficult transition to independence (Cherki 2006:145).

As his most authoritative biographers have shown, Fanon had live experience of these African crises and conflicts, as member and spokesman of the Algerian FLN, but mainly as ambassador of the *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne*. It was by virtue of this role that he visited several sub-Saharan countries and took

part in the Conferences of the Union of African Nations (Accra 1958, Tunis 1960), in the Conference on Peace and Security in Africa (Accra 1960), in the Guinean Afro-Asian summit (Conakry 1960), and finally in the Conference of African Independent States (Ababa 1960). Indeed, during these journeys throughout Africa, Fanon met some of the most important leaders of the time, such as N'krumah, Touré, Moumié, Lumumba, Roberto, Andrade, Keita, and Nyerere.

Yet I do not want to betray the cosmopolitan dimension of Fanon's political writings, to reduce his "humanistic universal commitment" to a uniquely African setting, or to minimize his general theoretical and philosophical ambitions. It is well known that he wrote *The Wretched* with not only the African situation in mind, but also ongoing political developments in South America after the turmoil of the Cuban revolution. Besides, Fanon was deeply engaged in the most relevant psychiatric and philosophical debates of his time. So I want to suggest, without legitimizing any kind of "sociological reductionism," "psychohistory," or underestimating the strong continuities that characterize all his writings, that Fanon's material experience in Africa had a profound effect on his thought and political writing (Gibson 2003; Cherki 2006). Nonetheless it is evident that they bear a significance that far exceeds the precise conjuncture that gave birth to them.

It is as if the disruption or the stalling of time and dialectics, the mutual closing-down and ossification of colonial subjects within closed and Manichean cultural worlds, belongs almost exclusively to (what Fanon saw as) the stagnant colonial predicament of Martinique and colonial France. In fact, the epistemological premise that colonization is always equivalent to social and cultural "thingification," as Césaire puts it, could be considered as Fanon's main starting point for most of his thesis on the production of colonial and racial discourse in *Black Skin*. Conversely, in Algeria and in other African nations at the end of the fifties, what Fanon found, beyond the "classical Manichean delirium characteristic of all colonial societies" (beyond the ossification of temporalities caused by the spatialization of social life in the colonial cities), were societies clearly in motion, colonized people openly struggling against colonial powers, and the weakening of traditional structures as an effect of the anti-colonial subjectivation of thousands of men and women. According to Fanon, it was precisely through this anticolonial subjectivation that a new kind of society and new kind of (deracialized) subject were emerging: new women and new men, new postcolonial and postracial societies and subjects. The main purpose of *A Dying Colonialism* (*L'an V*) was to try to meticulously record this "society in motion."

However, Fanon was also aware that this "African transition" toward independence was not a "one-way street." In fact, *The Wretched* came precisely from this awareness of most of the perils that were at that point threatening the postcolonial future of the African nations. Very differently from *L'an V*, in which Fanon tried to communicate mainly to the French left and intellectuals that the Algerian revolution was not a process of mere violence or pure revenge (Gibson 2003:134–135), *The Wretched* was addressed exclusively, as Sartre famously pointed out in his preface, to the colonized peoples of the Third World. We could say that Fanon considered this text as a "political program" for the decolonization process, through which he could bring into focus the perils hanging over almost all the national liberation movements in Africa. According to Fanon, these threats were of different kinds: political leaders

who thought exclusively of the conquest of national sovereignty, without other explicit political goals; national bourgeoisies which, from their role of “intermediary or comprador classes,” were always ready to promote “negotiated independences” and thus to maintain unchanged colonial structures in order to appropriate the settlers’ goods, properties, and privileges; ethnicist and chauvinist ideologies disseminated through the social fabric by different fractions of the elites—the army, bureaucrats, party leaders, local chiefs, urban bourgeoisies, landowners—to strengthen their power within the emerging postcolonial states; neocolonial pressures exerted by former European powers and especially by the United States, whose political purpose in Africa was to give military and political support only to those men, groups, or regimes who appeared likely to guarantee a clear continuity with the colonial past; the handover of the postcolonial emancipatory project exclusively to the ruling classes (through the control of the state apparatuses) of the newly independent countries; the “colonial desire” to follow the European model of economic development, which would have merely been the reintroduction of the African nations into the capitalist system in a new subaltern and dependent way; the excessive influence of “native intellectuals” who, dazzled by negritude and seduced by the appeals of the “black diaspora,” did not yet realize that “to believe one can create a black culture is to forget oddly enough that ‘negroes’ are in the process of disappearing, since those who created them are witnessing the demise of their economic and cultural supremacy” (Fanon 2004:169); and finally the enduring of a deep racism and contempt in Arabic countries toward black Africa and of anti-Arab feelings in black Africa.

It is no surprise, therefore, that in *The Wretched* Fanon illustrates his ideas through the advancements and regressions of his own project, the African revolution, in particular the most significant developments in African countries during their long transition to independence: Lumumba’s ruthless assassination and the territorial secession in Congo; the mysterious murder of Cameroonian leader Felix Moumié; the authoritarian features and the “lack of any ideology” of the main FLN and African leaders; the “neocolonial normalization” experienced in some of the newly independent countries like Senghor’s Senegal and Houphouët-Boigny’s Ivory Coast; the violent opposition of European settlers and governments to independence in countries like Algeria but also Kenya, Angola, and South Africa; and the strong U.S. imperialist counteroffensive across the whole African continent, in line with its geopolitical Cold War strategies. This is the historical background to Fanon’s most famous political, theoretical, and philosophical assumptions set out in *The Wretched* and *Écrits Politiques*: the total rejection of any “peaceful or granted independence”; the insistence on revolutionary violence as the only effective option to overcome the damages provoked by the inscription of race on colonized people; the radical critique of Europe and Western humanism, of Hegelian dialectics and of bourgeois and Western philosophy of history; the frontal attack on ethnicist and nationalist ideologies, on the party form of political organization, on developmentalist ideologies and productivism; and finally the identification of the wretched as Third World peasants and urban lumpen-proletarians.

Fanon thus was clearly conscious that he was working in a predicament of “real indeterminacy,” we could also say of “immanence” (Negri 2010), that is, in a situation characterized by “a total openness.” It is, therefore, mistaken to evaluate the concepts

or political positions in *The Wretched* as “general discourses,” without taking into account Fanon’s political experience in Africa. From this point of view, proposing in a somewhat “abstract” or “epistemological” way critical studies about the relationships between Fanon’s conceptions and those of intellectual figures and political or philosophical movements that had some role in the development of his theoretical perspective would mean committing not only a severe “amputation” of his way of thinking, but also and above all a significant betrayal of the very nature of his radical anticolonialism. As Fanon himself states at the beginning of *Black Skin*, his assumptions must not be taken as “timeless truths,” as the product of a “consciousness illuminated with ultimate radiance” (1967a:7).

The Poetics of the Real

In addition to focusing on his three most “neglected” texts, I suggest a further “reading strategy” to reappropriate Fanon’s archive in a productive way while keeping the right tension between philology and politics: to reactivate Fanon’s political and cultural involvement in what I call twentieth-century “revolutionary modernism.” My principal aim in reactivating this second thread running through Fanon’s writings is to liberate Fanon’s political imaginary from the place where it has been confined, that is, from the grip of “mainstream Third Worldism mythology.” By this I do not mean the ideas and positions of Third Worldism as such, but the assumptions and self-representations of its more bourgeois and developmentalist version. It seems clear to me that this kind of Third Worldism always remained alien to Fanon’s thought, and to other Third Worldist militant figures and political movements (Prashad 2008). What I want to suggest is that Third Worldism cannot be reduced to the political program of figures such as Nehru, Nasser, or Khomeini. My purpose is not to deny Fanon’s own Third Worldism, but to assert his absolute noninvolvement in much current, bourgeois, and developmentalist mainstream Third Worldism. It is for this that I suggest a rereading of Fanon in the light of “Marxist radical modernism,” that is through critiques of historicism, progress, Hegelian dialectics, reification, ossification, power, and subjectivity developed by Lukács, Adorno, Brecht, and Marcuse, but mainly by Benjamin (especially in *On the Critique of Violence* and *Theses on the Philosophy of History*).

As many critics have shown (Jameson 1972; Lunn 1984; Frisby 1988; Harvey 1990), it was mainly through the political writings of such figures that a powerful reconfiguration of the traditional Marxist critique of capitalist societies in the light of the main ideological and cultural assumptions of modernism has emerged within critical theory. It was only in the 1920s—after the Russian revolution, the failure of the German and the disintegration of official dogmas on historical evolutionism, scientific reason and the final triumph of socialism—that a new Marxist culture saturated with typically modernist topics had come into being.

My claim is not that there was any direct influence of these intellectual figures on Fanon’s work. What I want to suggest is that Fanon’s radical humanism, even though it can be represented as a *decisive fracture* with the Eurocentric analysis and perspectives of these German thinkers (Young 1990), is intricately tied-up with the moment of so-called revolutionary modernism. Fanon’s involvement with revolutionary

modernism springs not only from his philosophical and political training, but also from his literary concerns, mainly with black modernism and the *négritude* movement. The influence of black modernism on Fanon could not only be inferred from some of his most important *Black Skin* sources and quotations, but also from its specific *montage* texture and *constructivist* mood and writing style.

Yet to better focus on what I understand as “Marxist revolutionary modernism,” it is useful to draw attention to Alain Badiou’s *The Century*, particularly to his concept of “passion for the Real” as a key notion to understanding the main political and philosophical passion of the twentieth century. Fanon’s subjectivity was certainly permeated by this “passion for the Real.” In fact, for Badiou (2007:58), this “passion for the Real” was driven by the consciousness of twentieth-century political subjects that they were on the edge of a “final clash,” a definitive, apocalyptic, and redemptive battle. It is for this that the twentieth century can be represented as “the century of the act, of the effective, of the absolute present, and not the century of portent, of the future” (Badiou 2007:58).

The Real then, in Badiou’s *political* reading of the famous Lacanian concept, embodies the moment of antagonism, but especially of decision: the moment of “active nihilism,” that is, of the Nietzschean death of god, of the weakening of grounds and values, of the dissolution of any form; it is also the moment of a “Dionysian self-affirmation,” or the time of an “absolute beginning.” To summarize, then, the Real is the moment of complete openness, of total absence of reality, of absolute freedom and indeterminacy, of contingent absoluteness, of subjectivation, of the “certainty that issuing from an event, the subjective will can realize, in the world, unheard-of possibilities” (Badiou 2007:99). In short, the moment of the Real is the moment of the “pure event,” of the “total loss,” of “pure immediacy”; it is the moment, to use Sartrean terms, of “nothingness.” In Fanon’s Sartrean words, it is the moment “where I’m the only foundation of myself.”

But we must add that this “passion for the Real” is also symptomatic of the impossibility of committing ourselves to the forces of history, since, as demonstrated by the Great 1914 War and colonial genocides, they are driving us inevitably to a great Human catastrophe. History is driven by the forces of endless and autonomous rationalization; it is nothing more than ossification, human alienation, in Benjamin’s terms “a pile of debris.” History then, as Badiou puts it, is “a big and powerful beast,” and to save ourselves we have no alternative: we have to stop it, to try to control its forces, to humanize its logic and drives. It is for this reason that the “passion for the Real” can produce only radical militants, revolutionary subjects absolutely conscious that they have been called to a kind of Real and violent new beginning. But these subjects are also absolutely conscious that between the end (the moment of destruction of the old) and the new beginning (the moment of the new *common*) there is no relationship of “dialectical necessity.” The passion for the Real, then, is the passion for the *new man*.

However, the features of the new man are not written in history or culture; they will be something wholly new, built together by human praxis. In Lacanian terms, we could say that these new men and women burst into history as “barred subjects,” that is, as subjects without nature, constitutively open to the other and to the world, always incomplete, metamorphical, the undetermined product of what Deleuze has called a “disjunctive synthesis.” This new man will be the result of a nondialectical

relationship between his past and his future. In this sense, the new man of revolutionary modernism, different from that of reactive or fascist modernisms, does not have as his main purpose the restoration of some alienated essence (of race, gender, nation, etc.). The new man will be the result of endless and real creativity, of irreducible singularity and autonomy, of the externalization of his struggle against any kind of constraint, against everything that could stand in the way of the full development of his subjectivity and skills. As Marx states in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, a statement recalled by Fanon in *Black Skin*, the new mankind of revolutionary modernism “cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future.” It is clear that for Fanon, “decolonization as an agenda of total disorder” entailed all this.

Into the Modernist Habitus: The Damned and the Angel

Fanon’s deep involvement with revolutionary modernism can be inferred from one of his most well-discussed writings: the chapter on violence in *The Wretched*. It is bizarre indeed that almost none of the best known critical studies of Fanon has focused on his apocalyptic, Manicheist, messianic, and redemptive language in these pages. One of the few exceptions is B. Marie Perinbam’s *Holy Violence* (1989), which, trying to bring into focus a theory of “divine violence” running through *The Wretched*, asserts that Fanon opted to describe the radical effects that revolutionary violence was triggering on the Algerian social fabric through metaphors highly saturated with mythical-religious meaning (cultural purification, psychosocial and existential regeneration, collective redemption, etc.). Perinbam ascribes Fanon’s decision to strategical purposes: (1) to positively describe all the unexpected changes (almost *miraculous* to Fanon’s eyes) that this collective revolutionary subjectivation was making on the Algerian society (overcoming of ethnic feuds, decolonization of the current Algerian mind, emancipation of women, strengthening of social solidarity, overcoming of social and cultural atomization, loss of fear and subjection before the colonial Master, etc.); (2) to show in a very clear way that his idea of violence had nothing to do with the mere “glorification of violence for violence’s sake”; (3) to speak to the subaltern, “manicheist, symbolic and religious” world of Algerian Muslim peasants in their own language.

However, I want to suggest that this apocalyptic, manicheist, and messianic tension running through *The Wretched* derives mainly from Fanon’s involvement with revolutionary modernism. Fanon’s modernist habitus can be inferred directly from the very figure of the *damnés* (*The Wretched*, in contrast, conveys very different meanings and has none of the messianic and apocalyptical connotations of Fanon’s French word²). *Les damnés*, in fact, recalling Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* proletariat,³ are conceived by Fanon as the only social group still having a redemptive universal mission just because they have always lived (since the birth of modern colonial capitalism) in a state of total “thingification,” a state of permanent “social death” (Patterson 1985): *les damnés* can emancipate themselves only by suppressing the very (colonial and racial) society that has produced them. Fanon is quite clear about this: *les damnés* have no identity to claim, they struggle under no flag, they are moved only by a desire to abolish themselves (their own colonial subjectivity), and to do so

they must suppress the society that has created them. It is by identifying *les damnés* with Third World dispossessed masses that Fanon seems to return to a modernist and revolutionary conception of the proletariat, but from a perspective that can be defined nowadays as “postcolonial Marxism.”

Les Damnés, therefore, this “tam tam de mains vides,” in Césaire’s famous *Cahier* phrase, come to embody the role of a (Marxian) “historical necessity,” insofar as they have become the only collective subject ready to save the whole of humanity from barbarism (which in the last pages of the book, as in Césaire’s *Discourse*, has the semblance of American postwar neocapitalism and consumerism); just because they have had the horrible privilege of touching the “bottom of pain,” of reaching that “extraordinarily sterile and arid region” from which “a genuine new departure can emerge” (Fanon 1967a:xii), only *Les damnés*, like Benjamin’s angel, can see the “debris of history” as fragments “of one single catastrophe” (as totality, as the rationality of the parts within the irrationality of the whole, to again use Lukács’ words) and hence can reach an authentic revolutionary consciousness. This is not to be interpreted as vulgar historicism, as the mere repetition of that kind of dialectical materialism disseminated all over the world by the communist dogma of the 1950s, but rather as one of the most powerful leit-motifs of revolutionary modernism: salvation, rebirth, the act of consciousness (the awakening, revolutionary subjectivation) are tightly connected to catastrophe, to the touching of that “incline stripped bare of every essential,” since “it is with their heads buried in the dunghill that dying societies utter their swan songs” (Césaire 1972:64). According to Fanon’s radical humanism, it is just in this moment of extreme “thingification” and “dehumanisation” that the blind forces of alienation begin to surrender, to give their power back to human beings.

As the conclusion to *Les damnés* clearly shows, with its powerful critique of productivism, this triumph of mankind over the forces of alienation is not inscribed at all in the *free* development of capitalist productive forces, but depends on the *messianic* intervention by the damned (the anticolonial revolution) in trying to stop them and to look elsewhere for a more human development: “Europe has gained such a mad and reckless momentum that it has lost its control and reason and is heading at dizzying speed towards the brink from which *we would be advised to remove ourselves as quickly as possible*” (Fanon 2000:236).

In this sense, the triumph of mankind—of the new humanism—will be the result of “subjective drive,” of Caliban’s “fight to the death” against Prospero’s *unhuman* modes of rule and knowledge. It exclusively depends on Caliban’s will and decision, since it can only be the consequence of his determination to fight against the Master, that is, of his unlimited desire for justice, equality, and freedom. To put it in Benjaminian terms, Fanon’s new mankind cannot be but the effect of a kind of “divine violence” unleashed by the damned against the increasing totalizing power of the “mythical violence” imposed by the Master on his “bare life” (Benjamin 1927).

Fanon’s (Post)Colonial Archive

Reactivating this “modernist” thread running through Fanon’s work, therefore, may be a suggestive starting point in understanding in a more creative way how his

writings can still speak to our present postcolonial condition. Three topics running through his work seem to me very important in trying to understand what is at stake in some of the most relevant current postcolonial conflicts and struggles.

First is his antiessentialist approach to cultural identities. It is in no way misleading to consider Fanon as an antelitteram antiessentialist. Throughout his writings, anticipating some of the most important concerns of Said's critique of *Orientalism*, Fanon is clearly suggesting that the "native world of non-Western people" or "colonial subjects" should not be seen as overdetermined by reified or completely traditional closed identities or by a timeless social world.

It was the very revolutionary subjectivation of the Algerian people that for Fanon would bring radical transformations across the social, familiar, political, and cultural structures of Algerian society. What Fanon shows in *Les damnés* and mainly in *L'an V* is that in the "colonial situation," every aspect of colonial societies is "overdetermined" by the contradictions of the "colonial relationship" and thus by an uncertain and unpredictable struggle between the colonized and the colonizer. Put simply, Fanon stressed the fact that in colonial societies, contrary to what *orientalist* statements have conveyed throughout modern sociology and anthropology, culture is always in motion. This is why we should not consider any cultural identity or social role outside its historical contingencies, that is, as cultural or historical needs, endowed with some inherent meaning or value, fixed once for ever. Each cultural value, each cultural element, each cultural attribute comes into existence exclusively as the outcome of specific struggles. Thus we can say that for Fanon a real militant or political knowledge must assume as its principle or main operative premise the "radical contingency" or the "conjunctural dimension" (Laclau, Mouffe 1985) of cultural identities. In this sense, Fanon suggests that we should approach cultures not as "forms of life" but as "forms of struggle." Therefore, his perspective on cultural identities could be very useful in efforts to cope with many of the main cultural conflicts of our postcolonial societies.

Yet this antiessentialist approach to "cultural subjectivities" would not mean anything radical at all—since it could ambiguously recall mainstream postmodern discourses—beyond Fanon's revolutionary modernist critique of Hegelian dialectics. Through all of his writings, and in many different ways, Fanon claims that in colonial contexts the normal or current unfolding of the master-slave dialectics would produce for colonized/slaves only emptied forms of recognition, new forms of subalternity:

I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. In the same way, the slave here is in no way identifiable with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of liberation. The Negro wants to be like the master. Therefore is less independent than the Hegelian slave. (1967: 220–221)

It is by virtue of this assumption that Fanon urges colonized people not to recognize the colonial master, to refuse from the outset every kind of mediation or cooperation, to boycott every kind of exchange. For Fanon, therefore, the colonized/slave

must try to destroy the colonial machine, as he/she will never gain any kind of reciprocity or recognition from the master. What we have here is the radical reconfiguration of Hegel's dialectic in the light of "the colonial situation." As we saw before, Fanon's slave must not seek recognition from the Master, but his political annihilation (the expropriation of his world) in a final and apocalyptic "fight to the death:" "In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible" (Fanon 1967a:218). In contrast to the Hegelian slave, who accepts the rule of the Master for fear of death, Fanon's damned must face the possibility of risk, of indetermination, of death, which means determination to revolutionary violence but more precisely the will to give up the false *ontological* safety of his social world, even to the point of sacrificing loved ones (the Algerian father who proudly speaks of his "unveiled" daughter as a revolutionary subject) or of suicide itself. To sum up, for Fanon colonized liberation can be reached only via the refusal of any kind of mediation based on fear of death.

It is from this same standpoint that Fanon recalls in *Black Skin* the question of suicide and the death wish among blacks, taking a story of Richard Wright as his starting point:

When I began this book, I wanted to devote one section to a study of the death wish among Negroes. I believe it necessary because people are forever saying that Negroes never commit suicide. . . . Richard Wright, in one of his stories, has a white character say, "If I were a Negro I'd kill myself. . . ." in the sense that only a Negro could submit to such treatment without feeling drawn to suicide. (Fanon 1967a:218)

Wright's phrase and Fanon's concerns with black suicides, with black "necropolitics," adopting Mbembe's (2001) famous expression from a slightly different point of view, foreshadow the mood of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* character Margaret Garner, who kills her younger daughter and tries also to kill her other three sons just to save them from the *nonlife* of slavery. In all these cases, we face different slave appeals to death: the radical refusal to interact with the colonial master, the attempt to forestall the triggering of the dialectical chain of interdependence and mutual recognition, which, as Paul Gilroy effectively reminds us in *The Black Atlantic*, the Hegelian allegory presents as the precondition of modernity and its discourse of emancipation. Following Gilroy's assumption, we could say that

what appears to be (...) a positive preference for death rather than continued servitude can be read as a contribution towards slave discourse on the nature of freedom itself (...). The repeated choice of death rather than bondage articulates a principle of negativity that is opposed to the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave's preference for bondage rather than death. (Gilroy 1993:68)

If we take the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic as the very foundation of modern discourse, of European humanism and philosophy of history, we can read Fanon's argument as a radical critique of "modern citizenship." What Fanon seems to suggest through his critique of the Master-Slave dialectic is that European humanism is

marked by a kind of structural contradiction, of constitutive racism and colonialism, which prevents it from achieving a complete fulfillment. For this reason, the unfolding of European humanism will never produce “integral” or “universal” forms of citizenship. With this aspect of Fanon’s perspective in mind, therefore, it is more appropriate to consider modernity as a “colonial discourse” rather than a merely “philosophical discourse” (Habermas 1990). For Fanon, in fact, the “modern,” contrary to the Habermasian standpoint, is not a phenomenon already predetermined or the result of the teleological unfolding of Western or European reason, but it appears to him more like an unattainable horizon, a *common* (Hardt, Negri 2009) to be built upon political subaltern struggles for freedom and equality: “Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving” (Fanon 2000:236).

From this “postcolonial” perspective, progressive enlargement of the boundaries of citizenship, the legacy of the modern project, depends exclusively on the struggles of those who have been excluded, that is, in the words of Rancière, the endless fulfillment of citizenship depends “on the part of those who have no part,” on their political *subjection* and *pris de parole*. We have here another relevant topic if we look, again, at the main struggles and insurgencies that characterize present postcolonial societies.

The last topic I want to bring to attention has to do with Fanon’s theory of racism. In “Racism and Culture,” Fanon urges us always to locate racism within a larger system of dominance and resistance. He claims that racism should not be thought of as mere xenophobia, as a habit of the mind, a psychological complex or a normal fear of otherness. For Fanon racism has to do, above all, with material, physical, and bodily violence. More precisely, racism must be approached as the product of a larger system of exploitation structured by the dominance of certain groups over others. Racism hence is not a cause but a consequence. It is “material subservience” that always entails the cultural inferiorization of subaltern groups. It is for all these reasons that for Fanon we cannot fight against racism without bringing into question the whole system within which it grows. And this means that antiracism will become genuine and effective only by transforming itself into revolutionary or radical political action. In other words, antiracism, as theoretical criticism and political commitment, must be always conceived of as a radical practice, otherwise it does not mean anything at all.

Notes

1. Pirelli met Fanon in Tunis. He was the editor of the first Italian translation of *L’an V* (*Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina*, Torino, Einaudi, 1963) and *Écrits Politiques* (Frantz Fanon. *Opere scelte*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976), a partial selection of the French version.
2. By calling his book *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon was trying to recall not quite the first line of the International Socialist Anthem but mainly its (black) modernist ontological reinterpretation suggested by Jacques Roumain’s famous poem (1939) *Sales nègres* (see Macey 2001:177).
3. On the hypothetical influence of Lukács book on Fanon’s *The Wretched* atypical dialectics see Said (1999).

Chapter Five

Reflections on Fanon and Petrification

Douglas Ficek

Frantz Fanon died of acute leukemia in December 1961—nearly fifty years ago as of the writing of these words. He was only thirty-six years old, but he had made numerous contributions, not only to knowledge, but also—and far more importantly—to humanity itself. He was a “questioning body,”¹ to be sure, and he selflessly offered both his mind and his body to the cause of human liberation; his praxis was one of ink and blood.² Shortly before his death, for example, Fanon regretted not being able to die on the battlefield, a risk with which he was more than familiar. “Death is always with us,” he observed, “and what matters is not to know whether we can escape it but whether we have achieved the maximum for the ideas we have made our own . . . We are nothing on earth if we are not in the first place the slaves of a cause, the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and liberty” (Fanon 1961a:165).

Fanon did live to see the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*—Jean-Paul Sartre’s ferocious preface and all—which he had written earlier that spring, very much under the shadow of his cancer. Finishing this text was important to him, as “the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and liberty” was now being threatened by an unrepentant neocolonialism, which had not yet been sufficiently theorized. *The Wretched* was not about the past, nor was it about the immediate, anticolonial present, its frank diagnosis of colonial and anticolonial violence notwithstanding.³ Rather, it was about this new threat; it was about the future of the newly independent nations in Africa and across the Third World. And, according to Fanon, the future of these nascent nations was in serious danger, from *without* and from *within*. There were, he warned, “stormy days to come” (Fanon 1965:134).

Much has been written about the external and internal aspects of neocolonialism, and Fanon’s influence on this literature has been nothing less than profound. There is, however, an aspect of Fanon’s cautionary analysis of neocolonialism that has not received sufficient attention in the secondary literature, an aspect of his analysis

that is, I think, indispensable to any decolonial politics. I refer, quite simply, to his phenomenologically informed account of petrification in *The Wretched*.

* * *

Among the deleterious effects of colonialism (and neocolonialism) that are described by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, there is one that is, in my view, especially important. I refer to “petrification,”⁴ which is essentially a sociocultural stasis, a counterproductive stasis that hinders both *anticolonial* and *decolonial* efforts—and thus the project of humanization itself. In *The Wretched*, Fanon describes Algerian natives in terms of petrification, and he emphasizes the petrification of the rural peasantry. Consider the following passages:

Thus it is a diplomacy which never stops moving, a diplomacy which leaps ahead, in strange contrast to *the motionless, petrified world of colonization*. (Fanon 1965:61, emphasis added)

The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and *the petrification of the individual*. (Fanon 1965:73, emphasis added)

But if we try to understand the reasons for this mistrust on the part of the political parties with regard to the rural areas, we must remember that colonialism has often strengthened or established its domination by organizing *the petrification of the country districts*. (Fanon 1965:87, emphasis added)

In these passages, Fanon uses the terms “petrified” and “petrification” to indicate a strong—if not fundamentalist—adherence to tradition, an adherence that leads to sociocultural “immobility” (Fanon 1965:40). The native individuals and the rural peasants are petrified, and they consequently commit themselves to the old ways, to the superstitions and rituals that, however fantastic, offer outlets for their profound anger. Clinging to “terrifying myths” (Fanon 1965:43), they effectively distract themselves from the hard realities of colonialism, and this ultimately benefits the colonizers, the architects of petrification. “Believe me,” Fanon (1965:40) says, “the zombies are more terrifying than the settlers; and in consequence the problem is no longer that of keeping oneself right with the colonial world and its barbed-wire entanglements, but of considering three times before urinating, spitting or going out into the night.”

The term “petrification” is especially fitting here. After all, “petrification” derives from the Latin verb *petrificare*, which literally means “to turn something into stone.” *Petra* means “stone” in Latin, and in the physical sciences we know that petrification has occurred when organic matter has turned into stone as a result of the substitution of cellulose for silica. The organic becomes inorganic; the dynamic becomes static. In Sartrean parlance, we could say that petrified objects are entirely what they are, and no longer what they are not—which is to say that they are *unfree things* (Sartre 1992:100).⁵ In the colonial world, according to Fanon, the colonized are denied their freedom and thus relegated ontologically to the status of things—things like stones. They are denied their dynamism; they are forced violently into an unfree and inhuman “zone of nonbeing” (Fanon 1967a:8).

"Petrification" also evokes the monstrosity of colonialism. When we are terrified, horrified, or frightened, we sometimes become "petrified with fear." We cannot move; we cannot scream. Agency abandons us—or is taken from us—and for a few moments we are stuck in time. For some people, this is a unique experience and thus worth pursuing, whether in the form of extreme sports or horror films. For the colonized, however, this denial of agency and freedom is an everyday experience. Fanon (1965:73.) writes, "The settler's work is to make *even dreams of liberty* impossible for the native" (emphasis added), and this is surely monstrous work, work that evokes the Gorgons of Greek mythology. These monsters, three cursed sisters with poisonous, reptilian hair, could turn people into stone just by looking into their eyes; they could *literally* petrify their victims. In the end, is this not exactly what the *colonial* monster tries to achieve with respect to the native population, no matter how impossible?

Of course, Medusa is the most well-known Gorgon, and it is her death that has made her so well known. Medusa was mortal, after all, unlike her two sisters Stheno and Euryale, and Perseus ultimately beheaded her for the conniving King Polydectes, who secretly wanted Perseus dead. However, it is not Medusa's death that is relevant here. It is her origin and her transformation from a beautiful woman with many suitors to a dreadful monster with deadly, petrifying eyes. Boastful of her beautiful hair, Medusa apparently accused the goddess Athena of being jealous of her. Offended by such arrogance, Athena transformed Medusa into an utterly monstrous beast. "The goddess hid her face behind / her aegis—but she made Medusa pay: / she changed that Gorgon's hair to horrid snakes" (Ovid 1993:142). This was her punishment for offending Athena and trying to play goddess.⁶

Medusa was sure of herself—too sure. She falsely believed that she could compete with the goddess of wisdom, at least in terms of their respective beauty, and this was unacceptable. As Fanon observes in *The Wretched*, colonialism is also too sure of itself. And like Medusa before them, the agents of colonialism have *delusions of divinity*; they think of themselves not as flesh-and-blood human beings, but rather as disembodied—but nevertheless *white*—gods. They are not gods, however, and to convince themselves of this takes sadistic, dehumanizing work. Consider the following passages:

Although the country districts represent inexhaustible reserves of popular energy, and groups of armed men ensure that insecurity is rife there, colonialism *does not doubt* the strength of its system. It *does not feel* that it is endangered fundamentally. (Fanon 1965:102, emphasis added)

A world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaeistic world, a world of statues: the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge; a world that is sure of itself, *which crushes with its stones the backs flayed by whips*: this is the colonial world. (Fanon 1965:40, emphasis added)

In the colonial countries... the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of *rifle-butts* and *napalm* not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of *pure force*. (Fanon 1965:29, emphasis added)

Given their delusions of divinity, the colonizers speak this language for at least two reasons. First, “pure force” is necessary to maintain the colonial status quo, which is to say that it promotes the obedience of the natives.⁷ And second, it reinforces their false sense of ontological superiority. Simply put, if the colonizers can act on and overpower the natives, then they (the colonizers) must not be human beings. They must be something *more*; they must be something *divine*. Alternatively, if the natives can be acted on and overpowered, then they, too, must not be human beings. They must be something *less*; they must be something *subhuman*. And so it is that the colonizers are fundamentally *misanthropic*, their public—and tragically ironic—affirmations of humanity notwithstanding. As Fanon (1965:252) writes, “When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of *negations of man*, and an avalanche of *murders*” (emphasis added).

This interpretation is not exactly new. Sartre (1992:555) explains in *Being and Nothingness* that the “profound meaning of the myth of Medusa” can be found in our basic fear of being petrified by the Look of the Other, whose “rising up confers on the for-itself a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world *as a thing among other things*” (emphasis added). When he says this, of course, the philosophical context is the intersubjective encounter in general. He is not referring to the colonial encounter, which is unique for any number of reasons, not the least of which is its brutality. Nevertheless, Sartre recognizes the power of the Look to objectify others; he recognizes the aggressive—if not *monstrous*—nature of the Look. Expanding on his admittedly brief mention of Medusa, Hazel E. Barnes (1974:23) explains: “The Look of the Other, which reveals to me my object side, judges me, categorizes me; it identifies me with my external acts and appearances, with my self-for-others. It threatens, *by ignoring my free subjectivity*, to reduce me to the status of a thing in the world. In short, it reveals my physical and my psychic vulnerability, my fragility” (emphasis added).

Human freedom or “free subjectivity” (to use the formulation of Barnes) is ignored by the Looking Other—if not denied altogether—and this is constitutive of *mauvaise foi* or “bad faith,” which is one of the most important concepts in the philosophy of Sartre (1953). There are many examples of bad faith, not all of which are necessarily bad or morally regrettable, but they all have the same basic structure: a reflexive lie, a lie that one tells to oneself. “To be sure,” Sartre (1992:89) writes,

the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Bad faith on the contrary implies in essence the unity of a *single* consciousness. (emphasis in original)

The specific content of these reflexive “deceptions” varies greatly, and one could spend an entire lifetime cataloging them. The general content, on the other hand, is always the same. In bad faith, one denies freedom; one denies responsibility; one even denies *human reality itself*. And in the colonial world, these denials are taken to the most monstrous of extremes.

What, for example, is petrification if not the sadistic institutionalization of the *spirit of seriousness*, that pernicious form of bad faith in which people do not take responsibility for the meanings they project into and onto the world? What is petrification if not the presentation—and subsequent enforcement—of certain meanings as *necessarily true*, as *ontologically divorced* from humanity itself? In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes this unfortunate attitude in some detail, and it cannot be denied that his description is evocative of petrification and of the transformation of living tissue to dead, mere matter. “All serious thought,” he explains,

is thickened by the world; it coagulates; it is a dismissal of human reality in favor of the world. The serious man is “of the world” and has no resource in himself. He does not even imagine any longer the possibility of *getting out of* the world, for he has given to himself the type of existence of the rock, the consistency, the inertia, the opacity of being-in-the-midst-of-the-world. (Sartre 1992:741)

As before, the philosophical context here is bad faith in general, the spirit of seriousness in general. Sartre is not referring to colonialism—much less to Fanon’s account of the petrification of the rural peasantry in colonial Algeria.⁸ Thus, he describes the serious man as someone who *freely chooses* to be serious, as someone who *gives himself* the “type of existence of the rock.” For this man, freedom and responsibility are too much, especially when it comes to the meanings in the world and their institutional manifestations, to which he contributes, and from which he may even benefit, but for which he is unwilling to accept any responsibility whatsoever. The serious man loves to say, “That’s just the way things are, and there’s nothing I can do.”

Such an attitude necessarily leads to quietism—if not to *fatalism*—and it is for this reason that the colonizers foster it among the natives. Serious natives—natives who have been successfully petrified—neither question nor resist the colonial world and its meanings, institutions, and limits. Rather, they accept the colonial world and everything that it entails, which includes their own ontological inferiority. The natives thus “choose” seriousness, but they do so with boots on their necks and guns to their heads. In reality, seriousness is chosen *for them* by the colonizers, who are totally committed to the successful institutionalization of this form of bad faith. Consider the following passages:

The settler-native relationship is a mass relationship. The settler pits *brute force* against the weight of numbers. He is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native *out loud* that there he alone is master. The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism. (Fanon 1965:42, emphasis added)

The first thing which the native learns is *to stay in his place*, and *not to go beyond certain limits*. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression....During the period of colonization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning. (Fanon 1965:40, emphasis added)

In the colonial world, the natives are denied their freedom and dynamism. One telling consequence of this, according to Fanon, is that they can experience their freedom *only in their dreams*. This observation—no doubt informed by his progressive work at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital—is significant. It suggests, after all, that the colonizers, their persistent and protracted efforts notwithstanding, cannot objectify the natives completely; it suggests that “inwardly [they] can only achieve a *pseudo-petrification*” (Fanon 1965:42, emphasis added).

The colonizers would like to petrify the natives completely and to create a world so saturated with seriousness that its opposite—*playfulness*—would be nowhere to be found. The problem, of course, is that this sadistic project is contradictory to human reality and thus impossible. The natives are human beings; the natives—like the colonizers, their delusions of divinity notwithstanding—are embodied freedoms in the world. They cannot, therefore, be petrified completely. At most, they can be “pseudo-petrified,” which is to say they can be violently forced into a state of *habitual obedience*, which is simultaneously a state of *sociopolitical hibernation*. “In this way,” Fanon (1965:42) observes, “the individual accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilization acquires a *stony calm*” (emphasis added).

This attitude prevails among the rural peasants, who are the most petrified natives in the colonial world. They live their day-to-day lives under an immobile, “magical superstructure,” haunted by all sorts of “maleficent spirits” (Fanon 1965:43). They are “steeped, as we have seen, in a changeless, ever-recurring life without incident” (Fanon 1965:109). And yet, according to Fanon, they possess radical political potential—more even than the relatively privileged and largely compromised urban proletariat, which is, as a group, semi-incorporated into the economy of the colonial world and thus less committed to national independence.⁹ This revolutionary potential is rarely recognized, for the rural peasants are assumed to be petrified and “disintegrated” *completely*. However, this is not the case, and when militants from the cities are forced to seek refuge in the countryside, they encounter natives who are worthy of serious engagement—if not immediate conscription. “They discover,” Fanon writes,

that the mass of the country people have never ceased to think of the problem of their liberation except in terms of violence, in terms of taking back the land from the foreigners, in terms of national struggle, and of armed insurrection... These men discover a coherent people who go on living, as it were, *statically*, but who keep their moral values and their devotion to the nation intact. They discover a people that is generous, ready to sacrifice themselves completely, an impatient people, *with stony pride*. (1965:101, emphasis added)

These natives are the most petrified—the most “thingified” (Fanon 1967b:14; Césaire 2000:42)—and their options in the colonial world are the most severely restricted. They are also, according to Fanon, in dire need of political education. “Things must be explained to them” (Fanon 1965:112), he says in *The Wretched*, referring to the importance of long-term strategies and sociopolitical goals. Nevertheless, these natives—these “country people”—demonstrate the utter impossibility of the colonial project; their revolutionary potential exposes the colonizers as *impotent*

Gorgons, wannabe Gorgons, who are ultimately unable to turn the natives into stone-like, unfree things.

But what about independence? Is petrification not transcended as a result of the success of the anticolonial struggle? And the spirit of seriousness, too? Are the natives not revitalized as a result of their revolutionary praxis? After all, if colonialism is characterized by petrification—understood here as the institutionalization of the spirit of seriousness—then the expulsion of the settlers should free the natives from this form of bad faith and everything that it entails. In the postcolonial world, there should be an across-the-board revival of human freedom, an all-out affirmation of radical responsibility and playful engagement; the postcolonial world should be witness to the rebirth of *humanity itself* (Fanon 1965:255).¹⁰

Fanon is sympathetic to such an analysis, and he absolutely recognizes the unique potential of the newly independent nations in Africa and across the Third World. He is less sympathetic, however, to the thesis of historical inevitability or necessity—an essential thesis in orthodox Marxism. As he explains in an article originally written for *El Moudjahid*, the official organ of the FLN, “It is rigorously true that decolonization is proceeding, but it is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this is the fruit of an *objective dialectic* which more or less rapidly assumes the appearance of an *absolutely inevitable mechanism*” (Fanon 1965:170, emphasis added). In other words, decolonization—which is more than just formal independence—can neither be counted on nor naively assumed. Rather, it must be seen as a *merely potential* historical development—contingent, not necessary—one that must be *fought for* by committed human beings, who can either create a new world for themselves or allow the old one to extend into the future by its sheer inertia.

Of course, this—perhaps more than anything else—is what *The Wretched* is all about. Fanon recognizes that colonialism is nothing if not resilient, and that its meanings and institutions can survive the antithetical, anticolonial moment; he recognizes that they can survive formal independence and reappear in the supposedly postcolonial world. He also recognizes that revolutionary praxis—the cornerstone of the anticolonial struggle—can itself become petrified, and that its agents can become serious with respect to the meanings and institutions on which they have worked. Here again, there is a theoretical convergence between Fanon and Sartre, the latter of whom describes this phenomenon in his two-volume *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, a work with which Fanon was apparently quite familiar.¹¹ According to Sartre, there is an ironic tendency for the *created objects* of praxis to restrict the *creative agents* of praxis, which is to say that there is a tendency for free human beings—however revolutionary—to divorce themselves from the objects of their praxis, and to relate to them as though they (the objects) were ontologically independent, as though they were unchangeable things both *in* and *of* the world. This phenomenon is referred to as “the practico-inert,” and it is described in the following passage:

In the practical experience of successful action, the moment of objectification presents itself as a necessary end of the individual practical dialectic—which is submerged in it as *its object*—and as the appearance of a new moment. And this new moment (that of the practico-inert or of fundamental sociality) comes back to the total, translucent dialectic of individual *praxis* and constitutes it as the first

moment of a more complex dialectic. This means that in every objectified *praxis* the practico-inert field becomes *its negation* in favour of passive activity as a common structure of collectives and worked matter. (Sartre 2004:319, emphasis in original)

In this remarkably dense passage, Sartre explains that dialectical progress—the outcome of “successful action”—produces “new moments” in “more complex dialectics,” and that these “new moments” develop an inertia *of their own*, an inertia that ultimately fosters “passive activity.” Not surprisingly, this “passive activity” is characterized by the spirit of seriousness, by an irresponsible, quietistic detachment from the meanings and institutions that constitute these “new moments” in the world; it is characterized by petrification in the Fanonian sense.

The Wretched is about this phenomenon—among other things—and in it Fanon identifies two durable inertias that contribute to it, both of which, according to him, threaten the radical project of authentic decolonization. First, there is the inertia of the *colonial* meanings and institutions, which can survive formal independence and reappear—tragically and ironically—with an indigenous *dramatis personae*. And second, there is the inertia of the *anticolonial* meanings and institutions, whose petrification in the supposedly postcolonial world can lead to “hyper-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism” (Fanon 1965:125). The first of these two inertias is illustrated in the following passage, in which Fanon discusses the petrification of colonial economic inequality:

The national middle class constantly demands the nationalization of the economy and of the trading sectors. This is because, from their point of view, nationalization *does not* mean putting the whole economy at the service of the nation and deciding to satisfy the needs of the nation. For them, nationalization *does not* mean governing the state with regard to the new social relations whose growth it has been decided to encourage. To them, nationalization quite simply means *the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period*. (1965:122, emphasis added)

This is decolonization *as mere reversal*, and such an approach to decolonization is profoundly limited—if not utterly bankrupt. After all, its measure of success is not whether “those unfair advantages . . . of the colonial period” have been eliminated in favor of something better, but whether they have been effectively reproduced in an independent, postcolonial context. Fanon rejects this approach—indeed, he is disgusted by it—and he harshly admonishes national leaders for taking it. “For years on end,” he writes,

after independence has been won, we see him [the leader], incapable of urging on the people to a concrete task, unable really to open the future to them or of flinging them into the path of national reconstruction, that is to say, of their own reconstruction; we see him reassessing the history of independence and recalling the sacred unity of the struggle for liberation. The leader, because he refuses to break up the national bourgeoisie, *asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence*. The leader,

seen objectively, *brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it.* (1965:135–136, emphasis added)

This passage is about neither the petrification of the *colonial* meanings and institutions nor the *colonial* practico-inert. Rather, it is about the petrification of the *anticolonial* meanings and institutions, and the *anticolonial* practico-inert, which is, according to Fanon, one of the greatest threats to authentic decolonization. This threat is personified by the national leader, who—like the colonizers before him—becomes rather sadistic with respect to the citizens/subjects (Mamdani 1996). He fosters the spirit of seriousness among them; he fosters an attitude toward the world in which *possibility itself*—the essence of the human being—is militated against day in and day out. “During the struggle for liberation,” Fanon writes, “the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today he uses every means *to put them to sleep*” (1965:136, emphasis added).

This is neither liberation nor authentic decolonization; much less is it a rebirth of humanity itself. And why not? Because petrification survives in the postcolonial, neocolonial world, driven by the inertia of the colonial meanings and institutions on one hand, and by the inertia of the anticolonial meanings and institutions on the other. Fanon—perhaps more than anyone else—recognized this danger, and it is a danger that today must be addressed both *theoretically* and *practically*.

Notes

1. Recall the prayer that concludes *Black Skin, White Masks*: “O my body, make of me always a man who questions” (Fanon 1967:232)!
2. Fanon’s commitments often put him in physical danger. Having joined the Free French Forces in 1943, he was seriously injured by a mortar attack in the Battle of Alsace. Years later, as a member of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (or FLN), he was the victim of several assassination attempts.
3. I refer not only to the controversial and much-discussed first chapter, “Concerning Violence,” but also to the last chapter, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” which has received far less attention in the secondary literature.
4. Fanon uses *la pétrification* in the original text.
5. “We have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is” (Sartre 1992:100).
6. There are many interpretations of this myth—the Freudian to the feminist—and most of them are represented in Garber and Vickers (2003).
7. There is, of course, an obvious (and well-documented) relationship between the proportion of colonizers to natives and the severity of the methods used by colonizers to quell native resistance. Simply put, the fewer the colonizers, the more severe their methods.
8. *Being and Nothingness* and *The Wretched of the Earth* are separated by eighteen years.
9. This is hardly an orthodox position, and Fanon has been accused of drastically overestimating the political potential of both the rural peasantry and the urban lumpenproletariat. As these accusations—sometimes empirical, sometimes ideological—do not immediately bear upon the argument that I am trying to make here, I am not addressing them.

10. Recall the imperative that concludes *The Wretched*: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to step afoot a new man" (1965:255).
11. As Cherki writes in *Frantz Fanon*, "Fanon disliked talking about his illness....He was much more interested in talking about Sartre and Sartre's philosophical writings. Fanon was one of the few who had read Sartre's most recent work, *La Critique de la raison dialectique*, a book that was largely disregarded at the time of its publication" (2006:160).

Chapter Six

The Great White Error and the Great Black Mirage: Frantz Fanon's Critical Philosophy of Race

Robert Bernasconi

Given Frantz Fanon's preeminence within the burgeoning subdiscipline known as Critical Philosophy of Race, it is surprising that, with very few exceptions (e.g., Silverman 2005), little attention has been paid to his concept of race. The intense scrutiny given to his account of blacks being raced by the white gaze in *Black Skin, White Masks* seems to have distracted attention from all other aspects of his thinking about race. To be sure, Fanon himself is in part responsible for the relative silence on this subject insofar as he himself left no sustained meditation on race as such, but his caution was appropriate. He knew the danger of appearing to underwrite any of the dominant concepts of race that had been employed in the first half of the twentieth century. But I show here that he also did not underwrite the new consensus about race that was emerging in the 1950s around the UNESCO Statement on Race. That is to say, he did not abandon the concept of race altogether as so many of his contemporaries did on the grounds that it was not supported by the scientists, nor did he embrace the new anthropological notion of culture purified of any reference to race that lay at the basis of the new account of ethnicity. Finally, he also did not share the contemporary passion for individualism, because he believed that "a society of individuals where each is locked in his subjectivity" is ineffective politically (Fanon 2004:11).

Race was always for Fanon more about the future than the past and more about how to stop people from being exploited than about combating whatever theories were used to justify their exploitation. Fanon never lost sight of the fact that historically the discussion of race has always been under the sway of racism and that, if we continue to talk about race, it should only be because the struggle against racism

is far from over and that the concept of race, employed properly, was a vital tool in combating racism. In contrast with most opponents of racism, he was not looking for incremental improvements. He insisted that the struggle should be conducted under the auspices of an attempt to create a new way of thinking and a new humanity (Fanon 2004:239).

Fanon's position on race must be reconstructed from a series of isolated and sometimes conflicting remarks. We should especially be aware of relying too heavily on his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. His introduction of the verb *se racialiser* indicated that he thought of his race as, in a sense, one he adopted by racializing himself (Fanon 2008:101). But this reference is hardly conclusive because it appears as simply one moment in the chapter, "The Lived Experience of the Black," which is largely negative in its aim and offers no final resolution of the issues; it ends in the lament: "I began to weep" (Fanon 2008:119). I have elsewhere explored Fanon's use in *Black Skin* of the term "facticity" to describe race (Fanon 2008:27; Bernasconi 2008). His use of this term confirms that his approach to race took the path of a phenomenological ontology and was thus radically distinct from the scientific naturalism that has been dominant within the world of Anglo-American philosophy, but this by no means exhausts what he has to say on this subject. The closest Fanon came in *Black Skin, White Masks* to offering a prolonged meditation on the sustainability of the concept of race is at the end, but these are also among the most enigmatic pages that he ever wrote. Only a meticulous commentary on the book as a whole could establish a definitive reading of the section called "By Way of a Conclusion" because it interweaves numerous references to themes introduced earlier in the book. Even so, it is clear that he had still not resolved all the issues raised there and that he was continuing his dialogue with himself. Commentators with an agenda have isolated sentences from these concluding remarks in an effort to pin him down on a number of topics, but a brief examination of these pages would show how the text is far too complicated to allow selective quotation to do the work that only a detailed reading can accomplish persuasively.

That is why I focus here on texts that speak less ambiguously about race than *Black Skin, White Masks*, in particular Fanon's 1955 essay "West Indians and Africans (*Antillais et Africains*)" (1967b:17–27) and the chapter "On National Culture" from *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004:145–180). However, even these texts must be approached with caution. In "West Indians and Africans" he referred to the way in which Martinicans, who before World War II had thought of themselves as Negroes, but who subsequently self-identified as white, had embraced the great black mirage after having lived the great white error (Fanon 1967b:27). But this does not mean that he denied the existence of race altogether, any more than in "On National Culture" he advocated talk of culture as an alternative to talk of race. The temptation to read Fanon as making both those claims arises because the decade in which he was writing was the period when talk of race declined to be replaced by culture. However, closer attention to the debate that brought about this shift guards against misunderstanding.

It was not unusual even at the end of the nineteenth century for scientists to acknowledge that the term "race" was so imprecise and had been used in so many different ways that it was not useful for scientific purposes (e.g., Virchow 1896:1).

Nevertheless, racial divisions were enshrined in law in many countries and however bizarre some of those laws were, such as the one-drop rule in the United States in the early twentieth century, for practical purposes this system of classification was thought to be sufficient. The practical purpose was, of course, the maintenance of white privilege. Science had long lent its authority to the concept of race, but “race” was not exclusively a scientific category. Indeed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, people were more likely to look to history than biology for verification of the impact of race. This remained the dominant paradigm until the Allied Powers recognized the need to distance their racial policies from those of Nazi Germany. In the wake of World War II, UNESCO sought to formulate a new approach. In 1950, under the chairmanship of Ashley Montagu, a committee mainly of anthropologists determined that it would be better if “in popular parlance” the term “race” were dropped altogether and the phrase “ethnic groups” were employed in its place (UNESCO 1971:31).

The division between races and ethnic groups was a product of the separation of culture from race. The distinction was first advocated by Robert Lowie (1917:17), a student of Franz Boas who had broken with him, but it was eventually adopted by many of Boas’s students, including Montagu. The dogmatic separation of culture from race became institutionalized in the separation of biology from anthropology, which had until then included human biology or physical anthropology as one of its branches, and, rightly or wrongly, it has been at the heart of the dominant narrative of how the concept of race came to be abandoned (Reardon 2005:19–23). Under Montagu’s guidance, the authors of the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race acknowledged that most people used the term “race” to refer to a variety of national, religious, geographic, linguistic, and cultural groups, but they rejected this usage and privileged the application of the word to the three main biological divisions of mankind: the Mongoloid, the Negroid, and the Caucasoid (UNESCO 1971:31). This allowed them to argue more easily for the rejection of race. Having arbitrarily assigned “race” to biology, it was only necessary to have the biologists reassert publicly that the concept had no real scientific value. On this basis the UNESCO statement declared “race” to be “not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth” (UNESCO 1971:33).

There is much to applaud in the first UNESCO Statement on Race, but it did not take its starting point, as it should have done, from an analysis of the variety of different kinds of racisms. Furthermore, the overall argument was not compelling. It was adopted because of a desperate need on the part of the West to renounce racism, at least in name, in the aftermath of World War II. In fact, until the rise of the Nazis there had been little investigation on what constituted racism. Racism or race prejudice was widely defended as a legitimate pride in one’s race (Keith 1931:48–49. See also Taguieff 2001:81–109). This helps one understand why in the 1930s the negritude movement was also deeply influenced by the racism of the time (Senghor 2003:287–301; Markovitz 1969:49–58 and 287–301; Hyman 1971:71–73). It also helps to explain Fanon’s attitude to that movement. He accepted the need under the right circumstances for an “antiracist racism,” in Sartre’s famous phrase about the negritude movement (Sartre 2001:118), but that on its own it could not “nurture a war of liberation” (Fanon 2004:89). Fanon was against racism even among the colonized (2004:103).

The authors of the UNESCO statements would have benefited from Fanon's brilliant exposition of antiblack racism, which went far beyond an adoption of a Sartrean account of the white gaze, had it been available to them. It would perhaps have provoked them into doing a great deal more than arguing for a change in terminology or attitudes. For Fanon (1967b:33), racism was not simply a set of beliefs or an attitude, but "the systematized oppression of a people." He talked about "the racist structure" of South Africa and Europe (Fanon 2008:72). And it was this broader view of racism that lay behind some of the crucial differences between his thinking of race and that adopted by the UNESCO Statement.

Close scrutiny of "West Indians and Africans" shows that Fanon followed the tendency of the time to restrict the term "race" to the main divisions of humankind including a white race (1967b:16) and a Negro race of which the African is "the real representative" (1967b:21). He also agreed that "race" was "a superstructure, a mantle, an obscure ideological emanation" (Fanon 1967b:18). However, he did not argue that this was because the concept of race relied on false biology, but because it was a cloak "concealing an economic reality" (Fanon 1967b:18). This does not mean that Fanon (2008:199), any more than the workers of Martinique, adopted a straightforward Marxist analysis. Even so, in Martinique, class ties were more tenacious than racial ties: "a Negro worker will be on the side of the mulatto worker against the middle-class Negro" (Fanon 1967b:18). But Fanon knew that class did not trump race everywhere. And nor could race be reduced to class: racism, once established, develops a life of its own.

Fanon knew that the experience of Martinicans was markedly different from that of Africans. The African Negro had long suffered from discrimination: "their humanity was denied" (Fanon 1967b:26). But before World War II the Martinicans did not have to face anything parallel. There were no racial barriers, only a spectrum of colors. Indeed, according to Fanon, before the war Martinicans thought of themselves as white and adopted a white man's attitude, whereas after the war, the Martinicans thought of themselves as Negroes for three reasons: the return of Aimé Césaire who proclaimed pride in being a Negro; the racist gaze of the French sailors who arrived in Martinique after the fall of France and before whom Martinicans had to defend themselves; and the elections after the Liberation of France that produced the proletariat as "a systematized Negro" (Fanon 1968:24). But Fanon's conclusion was that the Martinicans had abandoned one falsehood only to embrace another: "after the great white error... the great black mirage" (1968:27).

This last phrase might seem to suggest that, with the addition of a focus on economics, Fanon was close to the UNESCO Statement of 1950 in the sense that he shifted attention from the main races to focus on peoples and their cultures. Fanon did not promote "national culture" because he placed "nation" on the side of culture within the race-culture dichotomy. Race and culture were not entirely divorced for him, as ethnicities were from races for the Boasian school of anthropology once they had abandoned all reference to race. Fanon (1967b:32) suspected that talk of culture in the absence of race was very often simply another way of talking about race, as he made clear when he talked about "cultural racism." There is no advantage to talking about culture, if one maintains a hierarchy of cultures that simply reflects the old hierarchy of races (Fanon 1967b:31). If he preferred the notion of "nations" it was

because he believed that it embraced more substantial connections. So he allowed that it made sense to talk of a Negro or a white race, while at the same time he rejected the idea of a Negro or a white people, because that would set up false expectations. The representatives of such a grouping might be led to believe that they have more in common than they actually did. Everyone would feel obliged—or perhaps be made to feel obliged—to conform to the idea underlying membership of that group, thereby restricting the possibility of individual expression (Fanon 1967b:17). Nevertheless, while rejecting the idea of a Negro people, because being Negro was for him a racial division, Fanon accepted the idea of an African people and a West Indian people, even while admitting that these were fictions: it was more correct to say that there was an African and a West Indian world (Fanon 1967b:18n). What is clear is that he increasingly saw “the nation” as the crucial category because he judged it to be the organ of change for Africa in its move to a postcolonial world.

The significance of this shift to the nation as the decisive historical agent is clearest in the comparison Fanon drew in “On National Culture” with the negritude movement where, particularly with Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop, but not Aimé Césaire (Bernasconi 2002:79), the focus on race had tended to be backward-looking. The most telling comment in this regard is the following: “The men of African culture, who are still fighting in the name of Negro-African culture and who have multiplied the number of congresses on the unity of this culture ought to realize today that their activity is reduced to comparing coins and sarcophagi” (Fanon 2004:168, translation modified). Because the comment appears in the first part of the chapter “On National Culture,” which was in large part his response to the papers delivered to the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists held in Rome in Spring 1959 (Fanon 1959, 2004:145–170), whereas the second part repeated all but the first three paragraphs of his paper to the same conference (Fanon 2004:170–180), it is likely that Fanon was targeting the work of Cheikh Anta Diop (1959) who addressed the congress with an essay on African Cultural Unity that was characteristically historical. It is also worth pointing out that at the same event Jean Price-Mars (1959:50–51) presented a talk on the role played by Africa in the genesis of humanity, in which he discussed the UNESCO Statement on Race of 1950 by the anthropologists and the response from the scientists of 1952. Fanon meanwhile was developing an approach to race that was neither that of the negritude movement nor that of UNESCO.

Fanon understood why the negritude movement took the form it did, but in the end he rejected it as self-defeating on a number of counts. First, it tended to ossify the people it sought to liberate: “Seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one’s people” (Fanon 2004:110). Second, the negritude movement, as a movement fostered by intellectuals, was inherently likely to be detached from the realities faced by the people themselves: “In Africa, the reasoning of the intellectual is Black-African or Arab-Islamic. It is not specifically national” (Fanon 2004:154). Third, it had the potential to cause psychological mutations: it would give rise to “individuals without an anchorage, without borders, colorless, rootless, a body of angels” (Fanon 2004:155). And, finally, and perhaps most significantly, Fanon regarded the negritude movement as largely oppositional in the way in which it set out to provide an alternative to Western culture, which presented itself as the only genuine culture.

The colonial powers alienated the colonized by distorting their history and denying them their culture: "The enterprise of deculturation turns out to be the negative of a more gigantic work of economic, and even biological, enslavement" (Fanon 1967b:31). Because this work of deculturation most often took place through an appeal to racial essentialism, it was inevitable that the first challenge to that distortion should sometimes take place in racial terms. This is what the negritude movement did when it proposed a Negro culture. Fanon (2004:150) wrote: "When a Negro, who has never been as much a Negro as he has been since he was dominated by the White man, decides to prove his culture and be cultured, he realizes that history imposes on him a definite piece of ground and indicates to him a precise path, and that it is necessary for him to exhibit the existence of a Negro culture." But the attempt was necessarily doomed to failure because it was artificial: "This historical obligation in which the men of African culture racialize their claims and speak more of African culture than national culture leads these men down a cul-de-sac" (Fanon 2004:152, translation modified).

If, for Fanon (2004:154), "every culture is first and foremost national," it was because only a culture based on the nation is in touch with actuality. The problems to be addressed first were local: "the problems for which Richard Wright or Langston Hughes had to be on the alert were fundamentally different from those faced by Léopold Senghor or Jomo Kenyatta" (Fanon 2004:154). Recalling the discussions held at the Second Congress of Negro Writers, Fanon wrote: "The only common denominator between the blacks from Chicago and the Nigerians or Tanganyikans was that they all defined themselves in relation to the whites. But once the initial comparisons had been made and subjective feelings had settled down, the black Americans realized that the objective problems were fundamentally different" (Fanon 2004:153). This line of thought was in conformity with the argument he had made in "West Indians and Africans" about Martinicans being different from Africans.

The role of a national culture in the former colonies was to contribute to the creation and survival of the nation as part of the liberation struggle (Fanon 2004:168). Fanon defined national culture as "the combination of efforts made by a people on the level of thought in order to describe, justify, and sing the action across which the people are constituted and preserve themselves" (2004:168). But he believed that the struggle could lead to the revival of racial categories albeit in a new role defined by the national liberation struggle itself. Fanon wrote: "Adherence to Negro-African culture, to the cultural unity of Africa, arises first through an unconditional support for the people's struggle for liberation" (2004:171). The use of the phrase "Negro-African" is an indication that race was still an issue, just as the reference to the title of Diop's lecture, "The Cultural Unity of Africa," is clear evidence that Fanon was continuing his polemic against the negritude movement with its backward-looking notion of race and its occasional failure to be on the right side of the wars for decolonization. In its place he was proposing a political concept of race for its strategic value. Just as, when one reads Fanon, one must distinguish different types of nationalism (Gibson 2003:179), one must distinguish different forms of universalism. Fanon (2004:97-98) was an opponent of the universalism that he equated with the "cosmopolitan mentality" and which he characterized as "neoliberal confusion." The universalism that

sought to give birth to the new way of thinking that would create a new man (Fanon 2004:239) had to pass once more through the concept of race.

That Fanon gave race a new meaning within the context of Africa's struggle to move beyond colonialism did not mean that he judged as legitimate all appeals to race by those involved in the struggle. Fanon criticized the way that the black bourgeoisie in the former colonies had appropriated the language of race and of nation but remained intent on keeping the masses in their place. They were not much better than the racist Western bourgeoisie because they relied on the same contentless phrases from the ethics and political philosophy of the West that the Western bourgeoisie had employed to maintain the pretense of democracy in their own countries (Fanon 2004:109). Even some of the African patriots from the interior, who spoke for the masses, were not immune: "These men who have praised the race, who were not ashamed of the past—its debasement and cannibalism—today find themselves, alas, heading a team that turns its back on the interior and proclaims that the vocation of the people is to fall in line, always and forever" (2004:113–114). Furthermore, and for the same reason, Fanon did not draw the decisive division between the two sides along racial lines. Even though he had in 1957 insisted that "every Frenchman in Algeria oppresses, despises, dominates" (1968:81), in *The Wretched of the Earth* he acknowledged that some of the colonialist population joined the nationalist struggle. Under these circumstances, Fanon could find a basis for saying that "The racial and racial dimension is transcended on both sides" (2004:95).

If Fanon had maintained the position often attributed to him that race is simply produced by racism, he could not have said that the Martinicans, by thinking of themselves as black, had succumbed to "the great black mirage." The racist gaze would have made them black. It would have been no mirage. But whereas he praised Sartre for the insight that the anti-Semite creates the Jew (Sartre 1976:69), Fanon with a single exception did not say that the racist created the Negro, but that the racist creates the inferiorized (2008:73). The exception is to be found in the essay "Algeria Unveiled" where he did say that the White man created the Negro, but only as a prelude to saying that the Negro created negritude (1967c:47). However, when in *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon returned to the idea of the power of whites to create blacks, he emphasized the role played by the colonial system in making this happen: "It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject. The colonist derives his validity, i.e., his wealth, from the colonial system" (2004:2). This meant that as the colonial system lost its power, whites lost their power to racialize those they oppressed. Fanon (2004:169) anticipated the decline of that power: "To imagine one can create a black culture is to forget remarkably that Negroes are in the process of disappearing, since those who created them are witnessing the demise of their economic and cultural supremacy." In a footnote, Fanon assigned the negritude movement to history: when it came to the construction of black consciousness, one should recognize that the majority of Negroes have already ceased to exist (Fanon 2004:169n). It might appear from this that race was beginning to lose its salience, because the conditions that had created it were in the process of passing.

However, Fanon was not about to declare the advent of a postracial society. As he emphasized in "Racism and Culture," his speech to the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists delivered in 1956, the way forward was not to abandon race,

to deracialize (*déracialiser*) oneself (1967b:38). This was one of the options Fanon (2008:89–119) had documented in “The Lived Experience of the Black” and found wanting. He knew that the effects of past racism remained and that, for all the exceptions, “what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to” (Fanon 2004:5). In that spirit he accepted “anti-racist racism,” the controversial phrase employed by Sartre in “Black Orpheus” to describe “the only road that will lead to the abolition of racial differences” (2001:118). It corresponds roughly to what is sometimes also called “positive discrimination” or “affirmative action.” In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon had worried about the way Sartre had looked beyond that moment, to a moment when Negritude had to destroy itself because it was not an ultimate end (Sartre 2001:137, Fanon 2008:111–117). Fanon’s discussion of “Black Orpheus” is a great deal richer and more complex than it is often taken to be (Bernasconi 2007). But it is striking to find that when in *The Wretched of the Earth* he embraced “anti-racist racism” in the context of a discussion of a war of liberation, he recognized its limitations: “one does not endure massive oppression or witness the disappearance of one’s entire family in order for hatred or racism to triumph” (Fanon 2004:89). It is for this reason that one must envisage beyond the period of struggle a “future of mankind” as such (Fanon 2004:143). Hence the book ends: “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must cast the slough, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man” (Fanon 2004:239, translation modified).

Fanon took the discussion of race to a very different place from that which UNESCO proposed to take it. That is why one should not read Fanon’s discussion of race and culture through the lens supplied by Ashley Montagu. Fanon did not model his understanding of “race” and “culture” on the division of labor between biology and anthropology respectively. For Fanon, the question of race was not primarily a biological one. Nor was it a question of finding what different groups of people allegedly shared. Race still had a place for Fanon insofar as it could contribute to the overcoming of racism, and he did not take it for granted that abandoning the notion of race is a prerequisite to leaving racism behind. It was a “thin” notion of race, but race had become more than the projection of racists. The new meaning Fanon gave to “race” was in relation to the struggle against the effects of racism that had come to be institutionalized in the division between the First and the Third Worlds.

Fanon was not against talk of race, but he was against talking about it in the wrong way. We should not be surprised if he was clearer about how the word should not be used than on what it should mean. Its proper usage arose only organically from political struggle. But he could identify misuses of the word in advance, as, for example, when he opposed its use to project a cultural unity on peoples who in fact had independent histories and culture, or its use to continue the system of exploitation that the concept of race had long sustained. In so doing he set up a model that the Critical Philosophy of Race would do well to follow more carefully: to scrutinize appeals to race for their legitimacy on the basis of an understanding of history and politics, and not, as Montagu’s UNESCO committee had proposed, on the basis of an assumption that the word “race” could be confined to a technical term whose correct usage could be determined by the division of labor between anthropology and biology.

Chapter Seven

The Times and Spaces of (De-)Colonization: Fanon's Countercolonialism, Then and Now

Stefan Kipfer

The postcolonialist treatment of “space” in Fanon has been paradoxical. Key proponents like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha applaud the stark spatial formulations in some of Fanon’s works insofar as they seem to signal a welcome move away from “historicism” and dialectical thought (Said 1999:208; Bhabha 1999:184). Bhabha goes much further than Said when he mobilizes Fanon for his notion of “third space”: the empty space of nonrepresentability that opens up between signifiers (identity and difference, self and other) in performative play (Bhabha 1994:36–37, 50). Fanon thus becomes part of a deconstructive third space, this “spatial relation between signifiers” (Bhabha 1994:36) that allows Bhabha to hybridize the fixities of black and white. It is *Bhabha’s* spatial Fanon that has been the most influential in postcolonial geographical attempts to merge the spatial with the cultural and linguistic turns in social theory. For Ed Soja and Barbara Hooper in particular, Fanon was an early thinker of “the spatialization of cultural politics” and can be understood, *pace* Bhabha, as an embryonic thinker of “third space,” that space of “hybridity” where “everything comes together” in an “all-inclusive simultaneity” (Soja 1996:96, 139, 12–14, 56–57; Pile 2000).

Mobilizing a spatial Fanon for deconstructive purposes requires that Fanon’s work be divested of its constitutive, Hegelian-Marxist and phenomenological influences and radical humanist proclivities. Fanon’s spatial formulations must appear dangerous because they point to the ostensibly essentialist and binary character of his writing. Bhabha’s deconstructive and hybridizing moves reinscribe, even eternalize Fanon’s spatial binaries, but only as elements in an indeterminable play of signifiers (Bhabha 1994:241–242, 247, 1999:191). The “spatial” aspects of Fanon’s work

are highlighted in an antidialectical and antihumanist register that runs counter to Fanon himself. Bhabha's recent selective reassessment of the spatial Fanon (2004) still disarticulates time and space in Fanon's understanding of decolonization and thus fails to grasp the dialectical movement operating in his work (Haddour 2006:xx). This failure points to a deeper deterritorializing streak in the epistemological radicalism of Bhabha (and Spivak), which, despite its "apparent suspicion of post-modern in-difference and placelessness," "can only be read as making a still more emphatic claim to a paradoxical place of *placelessness* itself" (Hallward 2001:22). There, "any carefully delineated border of periphery and metropole, colony and empire become blurred, de-territorialised, and unbounded" (Hallward 2001:22, 34). This *a priori* postcolonial commitment to blurring boundaries poses insurmountable problems for following Fanon's countercolonial project of transforming the historical and geographical contradictions of colonization.

Deconstructive radicalism has lost its hegemonic position in Fanon scholarship as well as in postcolonial discourse. As it has become common to distinguish between research on aftercolonial situations and the specificities of deconstructive postcolonialism (which only represent one set of approaches to this field) (see Lazarus 2004; McKay 2007), English-speaking Fanon scholarship has been profoundly reoriented by a new wave of contributions. These have highlighted with great precision the continuities between Fanon's phenomenology of everyday racism and his historical-materialist writing on national liberation, and thus the deeper distinction between Fanon's philosophical and political universe and the cultural, linguistic, and postmodern turns in social theory. Building on these insights, we treat Fanon's "geography" not as a precursor to postcolonialism but as a crucial contribution to a countercolonial generation represented also by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Albert Memmi, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In this context, Fanon's "geography" is not antidialectical, but infused profoundly with temporal concerns. His treatment of everyday racism (as alienating spatial relation), colonization (as spatial organization), and decolonization (as a way of appropriating spatial relations) is thoroughly both historical and geographical.

1. "French Theory II" and Colonial Social Relations

At the end of World War II, the vincibility and hypocrisy of colonial powers was glaring. Countercolonial writing reached a new intensity. In the French case, the massacres committed by French colonial authorities across the empire, the subsequent wars in Indochina and Algeria, and the protracted strike waves in West Africa reshaped the intellectual atmosphere in the diasporic circles of the hexagon. There, struggles in the colonies resonated with a new wave of colonial migrants (soldiers, intellectuals, students, and workers) as well as some European sympathizers, both of whom helped sustain proindependence organizations and underground solidarity networks. Oriented predominantly toward full-fledged decolonization rather than equality within the empire, as was often the case in the interwar period, intellectual debates crystallized in journals (*Présence Africaine*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *l'Esprit*, *Partisans*, and *Révolution Africaine*), publishing houses (*Présence Africaine*, *Maspéro*), and high-profile congresses (notably the Congress of Black Writers and

Artists held in 1956 and 1959) (*Gradhiva* 2009). Césaire, Sartre, Memmi, and Fanon helped shape the direction of many of these debates (Bouvier 2010). They influenced a new generation of activists and intellectuals, including those committed to a tricontinental perspective (Gallissot 2005).

Césaire, Sartre, Memmi, and Fanon represent most cogently a form of countercolonialism that fused open-ended Marxism with existential-phenomenological and modernist black currents. Their work remained permeated with Marxist premises even as these were undergoing rapid modification. Already in the postwar period, the black Atlantic networks forged by Jane and Paulette Nardal and Aimé and Suzanne Césaire had given rise to internationalist, comparatively nuanced, anti-assimilationist and gender-sensitive notions of blackness (*négritude*) that refracted the meaning of surrealism and Communism alike (Khalfa 2009; Césaire 1983; S. Césaire 2009; Sharpley-Whiting 2002). In the face of postwar national liberation struggles and attendant anticolonial cultural practices, Marxism could not be left to the PCF and its colonial outlier organizations in Algeria and Martinique. It needed to be revised to account for the specificities of colonization, including the subjective dimensions of the colonial experience (Césaire 1956a, 1959). On this basis, the interventions of our four authors yielded common and consistent insights, a few well-known disagreements notwithstanding. Assembled in a constellation of key texts, these insights amounted to a form of “French theory” quite distinct, even antithetical to the “French theory” that helped shape postcolonial theory and discourse (see Cusset 2005).

In countercolonial “French theory,” colonization represented a *relation of domination* linked to systems of economic superexploitation and cemented by the exercise of direct territorial rule over a majority of colonial subjects by a minority of colonial rulers, settlers, and their “indigenous” allies. This colonial relation of domination operated at multiple levels. While organized through political economies of exploitation, it was linked to daily rounds of humiliation that shaped the subjectivities of colonizer and colonized. The colonial social relation was thus treated as an “ensemble of lived *situations*” through which the broader infrastructure of colonization was experienced, enacted, and contested (Memmi 1985:43; Balandier 1951).

Racism was considered a lived “modality” of colonial domination (Fanon 1975:33). As biologically-cultural and civilizational doctrine *and* affective experience shaped by everyday gesture, speech, and look (Fanon 1967b:40; Memmi 1985:89–90), racism helped insulate colonial privilege from claims to equality and translated class relations of exploitation into people-to-people relations (Memmi 1985:60). As a racialized form of domination, the colonial relation heralded an economic and psychological type of *alienation* (Fanon 1967a:11, 112, 114). The divides enforced by racist brutality and colonial violence established a relationship of exteriority between colonizer and colonized. This relationship seemed to prevent dialectical transformation as it enclosed the colonized in a form of stasis that denied their human potential, historicity, and capacity for self-government. Life under colonial rule became “thingified” (Césaire 1955:19) or “mummified” (Memmi 1985:116). This thingification was deeply *gendered*. It imposed a double burden on colonized women, entrenching patriarchal divisions of labor and infusing imperial culture with sexualized fears and desires (Nardal cited in Sharpley-Whiting 2002:108). While complicating the search for

internationalist countercolonial practices, colonial patriarchy was also an Achilles heel of colonialism.

The dehumanizing character of the colonial relation came back to haunt imperial metropolises. The application of colonial technique and racist violence deformed the colonizer and was turned against the populations of colonizing countries (Sartre 2004:719). As our authors knew from experience, “every colonial nation carries within itself the seeds of fascist temptation” (Memmi 1985:83). The very intransigence of the colonial social relation made it unstable (Memmi 1985:136; Fanon, 1967c:120). The violent imperatives of colonization made it impossible to grant substantial reforms and extend the circles of allies widely into the colonized populations. The racialized thingification sought by colonial rule was an insurmountable obstacle to assimilating colonial subjects into colonial culture, the claims of “emancipatory” civilizers notwithstanding.

If colonial rule was beyond reform, full decolonization required *liberating* colonized populations from all dimensions of colonial rule. Formal independence would not suffice. Base-democratic self-government and a transformation of colonial political economies were considered indispensable for countercolonial projects of liberation. As a general principle, “true decolonization will be revolutionary, or not at all” (Césaire 1959:119). The liberating horizon of countercolonialism was a *new humanism*. Contrary to false colonial humanism, this genuine humanism “concerns the whole of humanity” and wants to disalienate colonized and colonizer alike (Fanon 1967b:144; 1963:316). This can be achieved only through a transformation of the subjectivities of the dominated and the dominant. In its *transformational* quest, countercolonial humanism went far beyond the tactics of colonial mimicry, parody, and boundary shifting proposed by Bhabha and deconstructive postcolonial theory (Majumdar 2007:77; Haddour 2001:17; Turner 1996:137). It entailed a critical appropriation of “Europe” (Césaire 2005:69; Fanon 1967c:62–63, 89) and wrote anticolonial revolution into universal history (Césaire 1961:310).

2. Fanon: The Times and Spaces of (De-)Colonization

In this countercolonial context, Fanon distinguished himself with a critical modernist skepticism about culturalist anticolonialism that went beyond that of Suzanne and Aimé Césaire. He also revealed a capacity to link the everyday experience of racism and colonial life to the political and historical dynamics of (de-)colonization that was superior to Memmi’s and Sartre’s. Most important for our purposes is the particular degree to which Fanon dealt with the spatial dimensions of (de-)colonization. The “spatial” Fanon stood neither in opposition to the “historical” Fanon nor in contrast to the “dialectical” Fanon. His starkly spatial passages in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* certainly “disturbed” Hegel’s slave-master dialectic (Gidwani 2008; Turner 1996; Gibson 1999). But they did not displace his dialectical, constantly questioning “thought in movement” (Cherki 2002:15), nor did they undermine the “discourse of temporality” that suffused his work (Sekyi-Otu 1996:76). In Ato Sekyi-Otu’s most rigorous interpretation, Fanon’s spatial formulations were “dramatic speech acts in the moving body of a dramatic narrative”

that was his life's work, most strikingly in *The Wretched of the Earth*. This narrative yielded "critical normative, yes revolutionary humanist visions," and an "irrepressible openness to the universal" (1996:236, 3, 16).

Fanon's spatial representation of colonization captured the peculiarly ossified character of the colonial relation. But to take these spatial formulations as an indication of a phenomenology of violence *only* risks mobilizing Fanon for a nondialectical ontology of power.¹ Fanon underscored the contradictions of colonial rule (including that revealed by colonial violence) because he searched for opportunities to transform the colonial social relation. He not only suggested that colonialism and racism must be understood in spatial as well as historical terms; he also indicated that the transformation of (weakly hegemonic) colonial space must be understood as a historico-geographical process, a strategy of appropriating space and breaking with linear-repetitive time (Weate 2001:178). Space and geography in Fanon's work thus existed in an integral relationship to time and history. They were part of an overarching project of liberation. While inevitable under violent colonial conditions, violence can also lead to an impasse in countercolonial projects of spatiotemporal and social transformation. It is not a *necessarily* liberatory part of anticolonial response (Cherki 2006:170–184).

The Colonial as a Contradictory Spatial Relation

Fanon's phenomenology of everyday racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* was infused with spatial terminology. Fanon described racialization as being immobilized, "walled in" or "sealed" (Fanon 1967a:117, 9). Body language, gestures, looks, and physical distance established a spatial relation of separation between black and white as they met on a street corner or in a queue. This form of objectification denied the possibility of freedom, that is to say a reciprocal relation between body and the world (Gibson 2003a:133). Given the extent to which everyday racism imposed spatial confinement on colonized bodies, it was no wonder that the colonized hoped to "leap out" of the sociospatial constraints of "race" or tried to avoid "racial" objectification by "slipping into corners," of "striving for anonymity" (Fanon 1967a:116). But these attempts were futile. Being an invisible black *flâneur* in early 1950s France was out of the question. For those racialized as nonwhite, the modern city could not be experienced as a "melting pot" (Berman 1982).

For Fanon, racism in the metropole was part of the transnational circuit of imperial life, but the degree to which racism was implicated in spatial organization became most evident in the colonies: Fort-de-France, Blida, and, most notably, Algiers, that starkly "partitioned" city (Cherki 2006:40–42).² His comments suggested that the weak hegemony of colonialism was predicated on spatial separation. Through segregation in colonial cities and territorial administration of colonial empires, the colonial world was "divided into compartments" (1963:37–38). Thus divided, the colonial world appeared to forbid dialectical transformation. Colonial spatial relations were cast in a peculiar form of stasis. Colonial territorial organization "immobilizes" and "lays siege" to the "native city" (1967c:51–52). In this "world of statues" (1967c:51–52), relations between the European and the "native" zones were "not complementary";

they were “opposed,” “not in the service of a higher unity” but “following the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.” As a result, “no conciliation is possible” between the sturdy, properly serviced, well-fed, and easygoing but defensive “settlers’ town” and the ramshackle, overcrowded, hungry, and envious “native town,” “medina” or “reservation” (1967c:39). Peculiarly territorialized, colonial rule seemed devoid of contradiction; it appeared to have succeeded in its one-sided attempt to put “everyone in their place” (James 1989:45).

Colonial space was by no means restricted to conceiving and imposing violent forms of social space from the outside, however. Colonial spatial relations produced forms of homogeneity that were embedded in daily routines and the imagined spaces of the colonized. In its very dichotomies, “colonization standardizes relations” (Fanon 1967c:126). It did so through violence as well as the “emotional, affective” aspects of cultural racism (1967b:40). Not entirely repressive (Sekyi-Otu 1996:85), colonial time/space had a profound impact on the imaginary worlds and bodily experiences of the colonized. It normalized racial divides to the point of tempting the colonized to “racialize their claims” (Fanon 1963:214), or plan to escape by “jumping, swimming, running, climbing” (1963:51–52). As Fanon indicated in his critique of *Négritude* and “the misadventures of national consciousness,” such racist or assimilationist reactions to colonial time/space were difficult to avoid but could block genuine decolonization and a quest for a future beyond race (Fanon 1967a:17–18, 27, 76).

The everyday space of colonial society was peculiarly gendered. As Fanon argued in *Algeria Unveiled*, in the colonial city, colonized women faced a situation of double confinement—Assia Djebar called it imprisonment (Djebar 1985, 2002)—that fused colonial spatial organization with preexisting forms of patriarchy. The homogenization of the colonized produced by colonial apartheid reinforced the legacy of domesticity and gender division in precolonial architecture and interior design (Çelik 1996:129–130). This potent combination of “modern” and “traditional” forms of confinement had profound bodily effects. It tightly regulated women’s lives and reduced their mobility, both through domestic enclosure and through the organization of urban public space (Fanon 1967c:52). Colonization thus “strengthens traditional patterns of behaviour.” It made any prospect of women playing an active role in countercolonial struggle seem implausible (1967c:49). Veiled and confined, the Algerian woman became a symbol of colonial immobility more generally.

While it reached into the depths of colonial everyday life, the gendered organization of colonial space was profoundly contradictory. In contrast to Paris—the (imperial) capital of the nineteenth century—colonial city life was antithetical to the kind of gendered commodification Walter Benjamin describes in his passages on fashion in his *Arcades Project* (1982), a commodification that posed a constant threat to the rigidity of early modern—Victorian, Haussmannian, and Wilhelminian—patriarchy and its project to consolidate the separation of public and private space (Wilson 1991). In Algiers, the very colonial forms of separation posed the opposite threat by making it difficult for the colonizers to assimilate Algeria by “unveiling” its women and sexualizing the city by treating women as merchandise. Without the sexualized “phenomenology of encounters” the European colonizer was used to, he “reacts in an aggressive way before this limitation of his perception” (Fanon 1967c:44).

For the Orientalist colonizer, for whom the Arab or Islamic city was symbolized by the colonized woman and the Algerian house, full colonization could be achieved only by “liberating” women from the stranglehold of seclusion and assimilating them into a European model of sexualized patriarchy. Controlling Algeria thus meant unveiling its women both literally and figuratively, through architectural strategies to open up Algerian domestic spaces (courtyards, rooftops) in more transparent modernist housing blocks (Çelik 1996:130–131; 1997:21–27; Deluz-Labruyère 2004). But strategies of “unveiling” Algeria had unintended effects. The “veil” and the “native” house could become elevated to symbols of passive resistance, assimilationist colonial policies were turned against the colonial authorities by independence fighters (Sambron 2007:128–156), and the modernist projects meant to appease Algerian aspirations became hotbeds of anticolonial mobilization in the 1950s (Celik 1996:132, 138). In the colonial city, the limits of gendered commodification, while a product of “successful” confinement, also represented an Achilles heel for the colonial order. They indicated how the dual colonial strategy of separation and standardization obstructed the everyday reach of colonial rule.

Decolonization: Appropriating Space and Scale

Fanon described anticolonial struggles in spatial terms, too. In the most brilliant passages in *Algeria Unveiled*, Fanon depicted the war of national liberation as *a claim to the city* and a practice of *reappropriating—and thus transforming*—colonial space. Fanon commented on women in urban uprisings.³ After the Soummam conference in 1956 had authorized women to participate publicly in the liberation struggle, women became active in urban guerilla action on a larger scale during the Battle of Algiers (Turner 1999:371, 377–386, 399; Macey 2000:276–278; Sambron 2007:24–32). They crossed the tight controls between the European city and the Casbah of Algiers to fulfill spying, supplying, or bombing missions. They sometimes had to leave the veil at home in order to appear European and pass the checkpoint controls. Instead of symbols of colonial immobility, women became key “links” between colonized urban spaces and “the nervous system of the enemy apparatus” (Fanon 1967c:52–53). Moving from domestic to public space and leaving the segregated “Arab” city glamorized by colonial planners,⁴ the actions of revolutionary women prefigured a truly liberated postcolonial society by transgressing boundaries and reappropriating space.

Temporarily reappropriating urban streetscapes required not only confronting the European city. It also meant overcoming the “considerable number of taboos” (Fanon 1967c:51–52) caused by the peculiarly gendered forms of bodily confinement in the colonial city. Walking without the veil and not along the walls but “in the middle of the sidewalk, which in all countries in the world belongs rightfully to those who command,” the woman freedom fighter had to “overcome all timidity,” readjust her bodily movements, and acquire a “new means of muscular control” (Fanon 1967c:59; Ibrahim 2004:212–215). Appropriating space thus began to transform the relationship between body and the social order.

Fanon expected women’s revolutionary role to undermine patriarchy and lay the foundation for new gender relations in postrevolutionary Algeria. He observed that

the publicly visible role of FLN women meant that “the men’s words [in the Algerian family] were no longer law, the women were no longer silent...the woman ceased to be a complement for man, [and] *she literally forged a new place for herself by her sheer strength*” (1967c:109). Fanon thought the process of individualization that (necessarily) failed in France’s quest to “unveil” Algeria would work to break up patriarchal homogeneity in postcolonial society. He effectively posited the possibility of blurring the gendered division between public and private space *without* the patriarchal mediation of sexualized commodification so common in the advanced capitalist world. The veil, once stripped of its traditional aura, could come off on terms defined by the colonized, not the colonizer. Its further use, sometimes necessary after the French caught on to the FLN’s initial strategy and women started using the veil to conceal weapons, would be instrumental, without the weight of tradition. In light of the FLN’s long-standing political limitations and regressive developments after 1962, Fanon’s expectations about the role of women revolutionaries were too optimistic (Ibrahimi 2004; Zouligha 1999). But far from equating decolonization with “male liberation” (hooks 2000:41), Fanon saw the end of patriarchy as the ultimate goal of true independence, when “women will have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at school, and in the parliament” (Fanon 1963:202).⁵

In Algeria, the appropriation of urban space was part of an overall project of reorganizing the scalar architecture of colonial rule. For Fanon, the geography of national liberation had to rest on sociospatial alliances and patient intellectual leadership that could link the spontaneity of urban and rural uprising in an effective party organization rooted in both city and countryside. As he wrote years after the defeat of the Battle of Algiers, when the relationship between the FLN leadership in Tunis and the base organizers in Algeria was increasingly distant and the military cadres reasserted formal control over the exile leadership, two pitfalls must be avoided in the construction of these alliances. First, the widespread urban bias of nationalist parties was dangerous, for it was among the “workers, primary schoolteachers, artisans and small shopkeepers” in urban centers that one is most likely to find people who profit somewhat from the colonial setup (Fanon 1963:60). The nationalist parties tended to disregard the peasants, who “have nothing to lose and everything to gain” (1963:61) and organized them in a top-down, inorganic fashion, by “‘parachuting’” inexperienced organizers into the villages (1963:113). Such inorganic urban bias would have disastrous consequences after independence. Based on observations he made in Accra as the representative of the Algerian exile government, Fanon feared that urban bias would combine with political centralism to produce neocolonial regimes with a proclivity to camouflage economic stagnation with “grandiose buildings in the capital” (1963:165); the comprador urbanism so well captured in Ousmane Sembène films on Dakar, notably *Xala* and *Faat Kine*.

As a corrective to the urban bias of the first phase in the Algerian war of liberation, Fanon emphasized the role of peasants. In this historical conjuncture, Fanon in effect helped the FLN (a party with definite urban roots) construct a “rural” self-image after the defeat of the urban guerilla movements in 1957 (Harbi 1980:248, 251–253, 290; 2008; Turner 1996:393–394). But Fanon did not abandon his earlier insights into the urban dimensions of revolution. The second pitfall he wanted to avoid was

categorical antiurbanism. Just as the unmediated spontaneity of revolt should give rise to “practical realism” (1963:134) to move from nationalism to hegemonic “social and economic awareness” (1963:144), national liberation movements cannot bypass colonial urban centers, he thought. To complete the sociospatial dialectic of national liberation, “the rebellion must come to include the towns” (1963:128). There, Fanon had his hopes on the lumpenproletariat, “the people of the shanty towns,” where “the rebellion will find its urban spearhead” (1963:129) to recapture the more stable proletarian and petty bourgeois segments of urban life. Fanon’s position imposed itself in a social formation where industrial proletarianization was limited and urbanization was a function of agricultural restructuring rather than mass industrialization (Stora 2004:96). But his caution about unmediated spontaneity applied not only to the peasantry but also to the lumpenproletariat. Unlike Che Guevara, the theoretician of guerilla warfare, Fanon was not antiurban in principle, nor did he sanction the millenarianism that may follow such antiurbanism. He thought that to transform colonial space-time, national liberation must cross the divide of city and countryside.

For Fanon, national independence was not an end in itself, but a stepping stone toward internationalism and universal human liberation. Following his nonethnic, antitraditionalist, socialist, and protofeminist conception of liberation, Fanon hoped that independence would allow colonial subjects to master “all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society” (1963:310). Built on the nation-wide sociospatial alliances he sketched in broad strokes, this “domestic” transformation of material conditions could make it possible for international consciousness to grow (1963:247–248). The national “struggle for freedom” would not recreate an imagined national past, but would prefigure a new culture that may lead “not only to the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man” (1963:245–246). The articulation of national liberation and internationalism thus represented a scalar interface for a profound transformation of social relations, a new humanism. It could make it possible to avoid both Europe’s false colonial humanism and the comprador bourgeoisie’s narrow nationalism. Fanon’s “partisan-universal” politics of opening up “immediate knowledge” to a “progressive enlightening of consciousness” (Sekyi-Otu 1996:26, 104) thus rested on a threefold, multiscalar transformation of colonial space: the colonial city, national geographies of colonial administration, and imperial geopolitics.

3. Conclusion: Recomposing Fanon

In contrast to Aimé Césaire, longtime member of the French National Assembly and mayor of Fort-de-France, Fanon never had the chance to “get people out of their slums” in practice (Césaire cited in Louis 2004 :51). But his analyses provided profound insights into the spatial dimension of the colonial social relation. Shaped by the modality of racism, the colonial social relation was characterized by a combination of superexploitation and everyday humiliation that reduced the colonized to not-quite-human and subhistorical status. Peculiarly standardized (Fanon), thingified (Césaire), and mummified (Memmi), the colonial world seemed to defy the forces of historical transformation. Perhaps even more starkly than the relations of

exploitation obtained through wage labor, colonial social forms appeared as if they were not products of social relations at all. One of Fanon's most important contributions was to show how the standardization peculiar to colonial rule can be understood fully only when taking into account its spatial organization.

Fanon's analysis of the spatiotemporal character of colonization sharpens our understanding of abstract space, to use an expression of Henri Lefebvre (1991). To analyze the three—homogenous, fragmented, and hierarchical—dimensions of modern abstract space in a colonial context, one must take into account the particularly uncompromising brutality of state violence and the formally racialized character of commodification which obtain under these conditions. Hierarchized by state-sanctioned violence and caste-like racial categorizations, colonial space is defined by a gendered duality of homogenization (of colonizer and colonized) and separation (of these same subjects, segregated in public and private space). In colonial contexts, abstract space is riddled with particular contradictions. The hegemonic integrity of colonial abstract space must remain limited by the ruthlessly superexploitative and dispossessive character of colonial economies (which make reforms largely illusory) and by their sociospatial Manicheism (which blocks assimilationist and civilizing missions). Fanon analyzed these contradictions astutely with reference to the twin pressures of unveiling/assimilation and segregation/separation imposed on patriarchal households in Algeria.

The spatially mediated colonial relations analyzed by Fanon and his contemporaries no longer exist in their integrity. In former colonies and imperial heartlands alike, colonial legacies are "recomposed," fused with newly invented, neocolonial interventions and other aspects of social formations (Khiari 2006, 2009). These after-colonial complexities notwithstanding, Fanon need not be dissolved into the discourses and theoretical sensibilities of postcolonialism. We know this from places like South Africa and France where Fanonian insights have been reactivated under acutely politicized conditions. In these contexts, Fanon has been resurrected to oppose the hierarchical territorial relations that have recast aftercolonial social relations (see Pithouse 2008; Gibson 2009; Kipfer 2011). The highly polarizing aspects of these relations are difficult to cast through the deterritorializing lens of postcolonial epistemological radicalism (Lacoste 2010). They need to be captured in the originally *countercolonial* terms of Fanon's work, which can be enriched selectively with metropolitan Marxist insights, including some by Henri Lefebvre and Antonio Gramsci (Hart 2008; Kipfer 2009). Thus actualized, Fanon may help globalize metropolitan Marxism beyond its Eurocentric limits while "urbanizing" countercolonial legacies.

Today, Fanon's spatially mediated analysis of "colonial" social relations can be cast in an explicitly urban light. Fanon defied simplistic antiurbanism, but was still wedded to the distinction between city and countryside. Even though he called it the "*urban* spearhead" of the revolution (1963:129), Fanon tended to treat the lumpenproletariat in the shantytowns as an extension of the peasantry (1963:111). The Algerian case itself undermines the integrity of Fanon's case, however. In hindsight, the processes of agricultural destructuring Fanon witnessed there⁶ make it plausible to follow Lefebvre (2003), who, shortly after Fanon, saw the growth of shantytowns and urban guerrillas as examples of a worldwide urban explosion that undermined the assumptions of antiurban revolutionary theories (represented most sharply not

by Fanon but by Che Guevara and Régis Debray). Recent Fanon-inspired research on South Africa has corroborated this point at least in part. Current strategies of land dispossession and opposition testify not only to the continued relevance of Fanon's analysis of colonial spatial relations, but also the analytical inadequacy of his city-countryside distinction (Hart 2002; Pithouse 2008).

Fanon's insights about the spatial mediations of "colonization" thus reappear within a highly uneven, but worldwide urban field, where the historical recomposition of colonial empires can also be understood as a double process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Sayad 1991; Gallissot, Boumaza, and Clément 1994). In today's imperial heartlands, urban policies have played a major role in reorganizing the racialized terrain upon which after-colonial life is built. States have pursued spatial strategies to disperse and resegregate people of color, particularly those confined to the most stigmatized public housing districts. If not responding to outright revolt, as in France, these strategies have attempted to manage the potential political threats emanating from economically precarious working-class quarters defined by gendered, neocolonial forms of racialized exclusion, humiliation, and confinement (Lapeyronnie 2008; Kokoreff 2008; Kipfer and Petrunia 2009). After-colonial revolt and state-led reterritorialization have left "checkered" urban landscapes with highly uneven geographies and temporalities. In this context, emancipatory movements can address the neocolonial aspects of the contemporary social order in their specificity only if they are not pushed onto a uniform temporal plane of "universal" class struggle. They are in the delicate position of affirming their sociopolitical and ideological autonomy (for antiracist and antisegregationist action) while building alliances (with other, antineoliberal and anticapitalist struggles) (Khiari 2006). More clearly than the majoritarian struggles for national liberation, minoritarian countercolonial efforts in today's imperial heartlands are part of a multiplicity of temporalities and spaces of struggle that overlap only in part.

Notes

1. This is how Fanon functions predominantly in Achille Mbembe (2001:103, 174–175, 181–182, 212; 2003:8–9; 2007). Mbembe's work (including his Fanonian passages) tends to psychologize (if not ontologize) colonial violence as desire and pleasure. In this, Mbembe draws on Nietzsche, Freud, Bataille, Schmitt, and Foucault.
2. When Fanon got to know Algiers, the city had already undergone two major periods of colonial urbanism and territorial reorganization (Almi 2002; Celik 1996, 1997; Picard 1996; Hakimi 2005; Deluz-Labruyère 2004).
3. The majority of active women were involved not in urban guerrilla action but in civil resistance and the *maquis* outside the major cities and towns (Ibrahimi 2004:199–203).
4. Following the "arabophile" leanings of Napoleon III (Stora 2004:18–19), the Orientalist idolatry of the Casbah and the Algerian house as the embodiment of "Arab" or "Islamic" culture was widespread in French planning circles. From the 1930s on, it also informed policies to preserve the architectural (but not social) integrity of spaces like the Casbah (Çelik 1996:38–43; Alma 2002). This early strategy of "accommodating diversity" within the confines of the colonial order can be taken as spatial dimension

of the “humane” racism criticized by Fanon in 1956 and thus a colonial precedent of contemporary culturalist racism.

5. One can treat Fanon as a protofeminist (Sharpley-Whiting 1996, 1999) despite the fact that women’s agency recedes into the background again in *The Wretched of the Earth* (McClintock 1995:367).
6. In 1962, Algeria’s agricultural populations could no longer be described adequately as rural and peasant-like. As a result of more than a century of intermittent war, dispossession, agricultural destructuring, forced population relocation, and urban expansion, the migrant circuits linking agricultural districts with the informal settlements in and around Algeria’s towns and metropolises signaled an unsettling and transformation, not an extension of “rural” life (Bourdieu and Sayad 1964; Harbi, 1980:251, 332–323; Stora 2004:22–24, 40–46, 95–97).

Chapter Eight

Rupture and New Beginning in Fanon: Elements for a Genealogy of Postcolonial Critique

Matthieu Renault

Introduction: Conflict of Interpretations

There is no other way open, to us in the East, but to go along with this Europeanization and to go *through* it. Only through this voyage into the foreign and the strange can we win back our own self-hood; here as elsewhere, the way to what is closest to us, is the longest way *back*. (Mehta 1976:466)

These are the words of Indian philosopher Jarava Lal Mehta. They are the *translation* of Heidegger's notion of "homecoming" in postindependent India. The voyage to which Mehta refers is a "voyage of theories," a displacement and a recontextualization of doctrines born on European ground. Mehta's interpretation has influenced historians from *subaltern studies*, first and foremost Dipesh Chakrabarty, who expands upon this interpretation:

European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody's heritage and which affects us all—may be renewed for and from the margins. (Chakrabarty 2000:298)

What Mehta, Chakrabarty, or others such as Ashis Nandy—as well as many non-Indian postcolonial theorists—have shown is that one knows not how to define postcolonialism but as a double movement of *decentering* (provincialization) *and* translation, of wrenching *and* appropriation of the "gifts" of the West, as a severing *and* a renewal; a movement founded on a series of epistemological displacements and an interrogation of the politics and perspectives (places) of knowledge. In the postcolonial critique, the prefixes "dis" (dismantle, displace) and "re" (renew, resume)

are interchangeably adopted, as are *rupture* and *repetition*, beyond both “separatism” and mimicry (Said 1988).

Fanon’s reputation as a herald of the postcolonial critique owes to the recognition of the premise of such a dual structure in his works. As Nandy writes, “Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean-Paul Sartre” (1983:xii). The Fanonian critique exemplifies a will for a radical rupture that remains “informed” by Western thought, paying “forms of homage to the victors” (Nandy 1983:xii). Contrary to the relatively persistent image that Fanon “did not know or chose not to clearly distinguish what in the European impact derives from oppression and what is linked to its critique” (Bouvier 2010:174), Fanon’s ideas are based on a revival and a deepening of the “intra-European” critique of the West, on an exploration of the “subterranean foundations of the edifice of Western reason” (Said 1994:266). Robert J. C. Young states that Fanon was “the most thoroughly assimilated of Francophone colonial activists (...) He always remained intellectually centered in Paris, and never resisted European thought as such” (2001:276). However, Said argues that Fanon’s interventions are original in that he “fixes his predecessors geographically—they are *of* the West—the better to liberate their energies from the cultural matrix that produced them” (1994:267). In other words, Fanon uses the weapons of Western thought to turn them against themselves: “what he did was to translate its epistemological location” (Young 2001:276).

What threatens this interpretation is a potential loss of interest in the singular modalities of Fanon’s theoretical displacements. In 1991, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., thus questioned the forgetfulness of the “historical Fanon.” The psychiatrist from Martinique is established as a “global theorist” at the expense of overlooking all political and theoretical context. “Thus, while calling for a recognition of the *situatedness* of all discourses, the critic delivers a Fanon as a global theorist *in vacuo*” (Gates 1999:253). Fanon’s emergence in the postcolonial “pantheon” thus appears to presuppose his desituation and dehistoricization. Hence, Gates calls for a “rehistoricization.” This critique, formulated in American academic circles, is intensified with Fanon’s *return*—after years of occultation—on the European continent and particularly in France. This return occurs within a climate of defiance (tinged by a lack of understanding) before the postcolonial corpus, whose major fault (according to the critics) is to overinterpret and distort Fanonian thought, to decontextualize it from its roots in the colonial situation and the struggles for national liberation, among others.

The arguments advanced by Gates have proven to be problematic since, as he himself admitted, Fanon’s writings are “highly porous (...) wide open to interpretation” (Gates 1999:253) and containing a “malediction,” such that returning to the literal, historical Fanon can only be a perilous task. In France, the problem is different since we most often remain at the stage of the “biography” (albeit intellectual), the celebration of Fanon the “man of action,” sometimes relegating Fanon the “man of thought” to the gulf of the past. In this context, the historicization of Fanon (accompanying a critique of postcolonial interpretations) is more symptomatic than political or theoretical. An authentic, unproductive *conflict of interpretations* arises; caught in the “either...or”: between the “historical Fanon” and the “postcolonial Fanon,” no reconciliation is possible, and one must choose one’s camp.

Transcending this conflict requires thematizing the *displacement*; in other words, thinking conjointly, on the one hand, of the “place” (historical situation)—what will become the “displaced”—while restituting Fanon in his time and his place, and, on the other hand, the movement that consists of evading these coordinates, of moving toward a beyond (post), in another time and place (in the dual historical/geographic and epistemological meanings). This task is more generally situated in the *genealogy of the postcolonial critique* project, which attempts to decipher the multiple beginnings of postcolonialism within the struggles for decolonization, while challenging the divisions of the “before” and “after” of independence, of history and posthistory, of *anticolonialism* and *postcolonialism*. This chapter seeks to contribute to such a genealogy.

Confession: Truth in the Colonies

It is as a *history of truth in the colonies* that the project of a genealogy of the postcolonial critique could begin, as both a political and epistemological critique. This history would constitute not only a chapter, or an “appendix,” albeit one lacking glory, of the destiny of truth in the West; it would rather be the horizon, its limits, this other place where the (same) discourses of truth are re-proved/reproved. Yet, Fanon already alludes to this project when thematizing the mutations, among the struggles for national liberation, of the relations of the colonized subject to the values and truths of the occupier, and more generally when questioning the future of truth in the (post)colonial context.

It is, first, a “nonhistory” in the sense that, from Fanon’s perspective, colonization is precisely a standstill or an “end of history.” Caught in the Manichean delusion, the truth the civilizer delivers to the savage is “an all-white truth” and inversely, error is necessarily black (Fanon 1967a:174; 1967b:22).¹ Subject and predicate can be substituted: truth is white = the white man is truth; error is black = the black man is error. While racialized truth is the property of one race *against* another, Fanon refuses, against *negritude*, “to pose the problem of black truth” (1967a:174). Dismantling the entanglement of truth and race involves questioning the reciprocity between knowledge and power, the *politics of truth* in a colonial context. Fanon briefly initiates this task in a quasi-Foucauldian manner, by moving from the problematization of truth to the problematization of “telling the truth.” He does so in 1955, during the 53^{ème} *Congrès de Psychiatrie et Neurologie de langue française* in a paper titled “Conduites d’aveu en Afrique du Nord” (“Conduct of Confession in North Africa”), coauthored with Dr. Lacaton. What, then, is confession (in its judiciary form) if not the very act of truth production?

The problem is as follows: if the doctor in charge of psychiatric expertise must attempt to “[discover] the truth of the act that is the basis of the truth of its author,” he is confronted in the colonies with a systematic denial of the criminal act committed by the accused native: “the act is without an author” (Fanon 1955:1115). Must we then not recognize the truth of the proposition: “the North African is a liar?” Thus, we say that “the race suffers from a propensity to lie, to voluntarily dissimulate the truth, or that it is incapable from discerning truth

from lies" (Fanon 1955:1116). Lie or error, whatever the case may be, the "Algerian Muslim" cannot tell the truth. Yet, Fanon claims that this argument "rids itself of the problem without resolving it." Understanding the act of denial requires restoring its complexity and analyzing the "orchestration of the lie," refuting the rigid, nondialectic division of the "true" and the "false" since, "in any case, the liar is himself a being who constantly faces the problem of truth" (Fanon 1955:1116).

"Telling the truth" has no meaning for the colonized but to show allegiance to those who "hold him in their power": "objectivity is always directed against him" (Fanon 1965:61). In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon returns to his seminal article on confession, evoking "the overall attitude of the colonized who is hardly ever truthful before the colonizer. The colonized does not let on, does not confess himself, in the presence of the colonizer" (Fanon 1967c:105). Not as a result of primitivism or illogism, as colonial psychiatrists would have it, the mixture of "true" and "false" is the result of the colonial logic and the resistance that opposes it. "In the presence of the occupier, the occupied learns to dissemble, to resort to trickery" (Fanon 1967b:43). He learns to lie: "to the scandal of military occupation, he opposes a scandal of contact. Every contact between the occupied and the occupier is a falsehood" (Fanon 1967b:43). Truth, in a colonial context, is *scandalous*.

Fanon raises the question of confession and truth once again, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, with respect to torture—as an extreme development of colonialism rather than as an anomaly. The treatment of "Algerian patriots" with "truth serum" ("pentothal") causes a generalized (con)fusion of truth and falsehood: "everything is true and everything is false at the same time" (Fanon 1965:232). In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon was already writing that the "most important consequence [of the truth serum] has appeared to us to be a certain inability to distinguish the true from the false" (1967b:116). The colonial discourse seemed to become the very being of the colonized, as the congenital error and lie were revealed as the *effects* of colonial practices. As an *experience of limits*, torture reveals the colonial inscription of truth and knowledge (here in the medical sense) at the very core of the practices of domination: "Science depoliticized, science in the service of man, is often non-existent in the colonies" (Fanon 1967b:116).²

Dialectics of Truth: From the Digestion to the Expulsion of Europe

Fanon argues that liberation practices are the "liquidation of all [colonial] untruths" (1965:250). Anticolonial (and postcolonial) policies are (or at least should be) politics of truth, struggles reengaging a *dialectic of truth and lies* that colonialism had fixed in the racial/Manichean opposition of the "white" truth and the "black" lie/error. Before the struggle for independence, the colonized had put into place "resistances," *defense mechanisms* of "retraction of the self," translating into an endeavor to "cultivate culture" that necessarily reproduced, while inverting it, the cleavage between true and false (Fanon 1967b:41). "The past, becoming henceforth a constellation of values, becomes identified with the Truth" (1967b:79). "The truth is first of all the unchallengeable property of the elders" (1967b:105). This *counterassimilation*

(qualified as “negritude”) is a global and undifferentiated rejection of the values and techniques of the occupant (1967b:25).

Entering the struggle, “the truth, for once, eluded its traditional trustees and placed itself within reach of any seeker” (Fanon 1967b:79–80). Simultaneously, attitudes regarding the “gifts” of the colonizer change, for example, in the *radio* media. The advent of the “Voice of Fighting Algeria” and the mass appropriation of this technique by the occupied are a sign of “a radical change of valence” rather than ambivalence (1967b:68). The unequivocal “no” gives way to a no less exclusive “yes.” An abrupt qualitative change, a “dialectical progression” takes place; the Algerian “[achieves] the most modern forms of news-communication” (1967b:61). Yet this is not without challenges, as a veritable “war of waves” occurs with colonial forces relentlessly attempting to quiet the radio broadcasts celebrating the Algerian revolution. It is precisely this “enemy sabotage,” this attack on the voice of the colonized, that reveals, like a photographic negative, “the reality and the intensity of national expression” (1967b:61). In seeking to veil the voice of the colonized, the colonizer manifests its existence, *unveils* it, creating a new dialectic of the “true” and the “false”:

The “truth” of the oppressor, formerly rejected as an absolute lie, was now countered by another, an acted truth. The occupier’s lie thereby acquired greater reality, for it was now a menaced lie, put on the defensive. It was the defenses of the occupier, his reactions, his resistances, that underscored the effectiveness of a national action and made that action participate in a world of truth. The Algerian’s reaction was no longer one of pained and desperate refusal. Because it avowed its own uneasiness, the occupier’s lie became a positive aspect of the nation’s new truth. (Fanon 1967b:68)

Is the postcolonial truth not merely the fruit of the revelation and the struggle against the colonial lie? Using Hegelian and Lukácsian notions, is it not in its “falseness” that the occupant’s lie penetrates the new, “true” world of decolonization? No, Fanon never celebrates the “rejection of the occupant’s values” per se, and begrudgingly affirms that “these values would objectively be worth choosing” (1967b:40), while the “mechanical sense of detachment and mistrust of even the things that are most positive and most profitable to the population” (1967b:117) are merely a source of “uncompromising, rigid, static counter-proposals” (1967b:41). As such, the colonized finds himself “reduced, in the name of truth and reason, to saying ‘yes’ to certain innovations of the occupier” (1967b:100, 108–109). The insoluble problem resides in the fact that the colonizer’s truth always presents itself as a “truth of the French presence under its colonial form in Algeria” (1967b:101, retranslated).³ The objectivity of values is illicitly translated by the colonizer into a legitimization of domination: “the truth objectively expressed is constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial situation” (1967b:106).

It is precisely the task of the struggle for national liberation, beyond negation, to appropriate this truth while ridding it of its colonial “properties.” It is, according to Fanon, the *domestication* of an “attribute of the occupant” or a “*digestion*” (1967b:101). We should not imagine, however, that what is revealed is the pure, “naked truth.” The experience of appropriating the radio is once again paradigmatic: the scrambling of

radio waves has major repercussions on the listening and interpretation process; the voice is “fragmented, discontinued.” A collective “work of elaboration,” an “autonomous creation of information” then originates, which is only an *alteration* of truth in so much as it is the “deliberate choice (...) between the enemy’s congenital lie and the people’s own lie, which suddenly acquired a dimension of truth” (1967b:101). Fanon contemplates what he considers a “*true lie*” (1967b:101). It is a *fantomatic* (fantasmatic) truth, filled with subjectivity, that according to Merleau-Ponty conceals only in revealing and reveals only in its concealment (2000:62). The postcolonial truth can only be the product of an *invention* (i.e., both its valor and its risk) related to the “invention of the soul” that is the work of decolonization. “Insofar as mental processes are concerned, the technique had [...] to be [*quasi*] invented” (Fanon 1967b:101, retranslated).⁴ The “quasi” that Fanon frequently employs refers to an act of *re-invention* resting in a double movement of renewal and rupture with the occupant, which Fanon designates as a “new beginning” (recommencement).

The Wretched of the Earth represents a turning point in Fanon’s conception of “European truths” in the postcolonial world. The colonizer’s truth, writes Fanon, is no more than *his goods*, purely the result of expropriation and exploitation. As for the anticolonial struggle, it seemingly becomes less about overtaking the defensive positions of the colonized and more about the passage into action by virtue of which these defensive positions mutate into aggression. “When the native hears a speech about Western Culture he pulls out his knife—or at least it makes it sure it is within reach” (Fanon 1965:34).⁵ The logic behind this act is not one of quasi-invention anymore; it is a strike-back logic, inscribed in the unending cycle of violence and counter-violence. Their perfect equilibrium is also one of lie and counterlie:

The problem of truth ought also to be considered. In every age, among the people, truth is the property of the national cause. No absolute verity, no discourse on the purity of the soul can shake this position. The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood. His dealings with his fellow-national are open; they are strained and incomprehensible with regard to the settlers. Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for “them.” (1965:40)

The colonial binary is no longer subverted by the digestion of the enemy’s gifts, but is rather destroyed by the total and definitive *expulsion* of one of the terms, by the rupture of all attachments. “The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country” (1965:33). Such would now be Fanon’s conception of (re)appropriation (of lands) as an *expropriation from the expropriators*. Decolonization must have no *continuity* with Europe’s history in the colonies, be it overwhelmed by revolution: “we have precisely chosen to speak of that kind of tabula rasa which characterises at the outset all decolonization” (1965:33). Decolonization must be a new *beginning of history*. *Conserving* nothing from its antagonist, the “decolonial” dialectic is now one of *substitution*.

Rupture and New Beginning

It is in the conclusion to the *Wretched of the Earth* that the most vigorous desire to rupture ties with Europe is expressed. Fanon requests his "brothers" to "leave this Europe," to not follow this carnivorous, cynical, and violent Europe. He asks them not to seek to "catch up" Europe, to forbid themselves from imitating it, to refuse to reproduce its model, its schemes. "European achievements, European techniques and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance" (1965:253). Or again, he asks: "comrades, have we not other work to do than to create a third Europe" (1965:253)? He adds that they must *evade* the status of Europe, not envy it or be inspired by it. "So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her" (1965:253). Fanon wishes to sever all links, become impermeable to the oppressor, and become immunized against the pathologies of European civilization; these are the conditions of the *tabula rasa*.

Generally, the interpretation of this conclusion stops here. Yet, this interpretation encompasses a number of considerations that render it singularly more complex. "The West saw itself as a spiritual adventure" (1965:253). "Europe has done what she set out to do and on the whole has done it well: let us stop accusing her" (1965:253). The irony is that Europe's "successes" were founded on its crimes, while the "European spirit" is a spirit of conquest and domination. It is, however, not only so since Europe was the first to proclaim that it was "concerned only about mankind," and has not since ceased to express its concern for humanity. Fanon even writes: "all the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in European thought" (1965:253, emphasis added). How, then, can one categorically reject the "European spirit?" "It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses that Europe has put forward, but which will also remember Europe's crimes" (1965:255). Indeed, what is the meaning of *renewal* if not at once to initiate and repeat, *remake* from *nothing* (*tabula rasa*) but a common origin and concern. If, to date, Europe was designated, and failed, to embody humankind's concern, the Third World must now *re-claim* the torch.

This scheme of *renewal* contests the concept of decolonization as a pure negation and expulsion of the colonizer, of he who had been "the absolute beginning" (Fanon 1965:41). It intensifies, perhaps to the point of paradox, the double exigency of rupture *and* appropriation that defined the quasi-invention. That is why Fanon's position remains incompatible with that of the other great defender of rupture and future dictator, Sékou Touré, whose writings nonetheless echo some passages from *The Wretched of the Earth*: "As long as we reason uniquely based on acquired frames of reference, as long as we continue to judge or value ourselves based on Western values, we will not be decolonized" (1959:107). Yet, Touré speaks at length of *authenticity*, a "return to the sources," which remains absent from Fanonian thought (1968:257). As such, all mention of the "gifts" of the West is forbidden in Touré, whereas Fanon embraces a total rupture only insofar as it is founded on displacements, according to a logic of a provincialization of Europe that prefigures the postcolonial critique. It is this will

to maintain an *openness* and a dialogue within the call for rupture that has evaded the critique of two of Fanon's contemporaries: the Vietnamese Marxist Nguyen Nghe and the French Catholic intellectual Jean-Marie Domenach. Understanding their accusations against Fanon requires engaging with the genealogy of the postcolonial critique, beginning with the *resistances* to which it was opposed since its origin, beginning with his "proto-critiques."

According to Nghe, "the weakest passage of [*The Wretched of the Earth*] is its conclusion, founded in the exasperated claims of the Third World against Europe" (1963:33). Nghe's critique rests in the field of *knowledge*. Contrary to Fanon's arguments, colonialism is a "thought machine" (rather than merely "violence in its natural state") (Fanon 1965:48). If colonialism conquered, it was not only by force, but also by virtue of superior political *thought*. If we must condemn, without reserve, the imperialist politics, it is dangerous to refute European values in the Fanonian manner (or so claims Nghe) for the simple reason that they originate in Europe. It is unwise to confound the *politics* and the *knowledge* of Europe, to seek to overtake *the* science of history: "Fundamentally, from a historical perspective, the rules that regulate the evolution of societies are the same. The originality of nations and peoples does not contradict the universality of historic laws" (Nghe 1963:33). Contesting these *laws* of history, wishing to recreate history, means irrationality. "Scientific knowledge of the social dialectic" is *one*, and the "methods of thought and action that inspired Lenin or Mao Tse-Tung have a universal value" (1963:35). Believing in a melting away of history is to work against *all* historical science. Nghe recognizes, yet refutes, the postcolonial turn advanced by Fanon according to which decolonization is to be both political *and* epistemological liberation: "There is no shame in using a science even when it has been perfected by men from another continent" (1963:35). Why should we abandon or combat theoretical notions of incomparable worth "under pretext that they have been developed by Europeans" (1963:35)? In the field of knowledge, colonial domination is erased and Europe merely becomes "another continent." Rupture and theoretical displacements could only be *derationalizations*.

In turn, Domenach's essay dedicated to *The Wretched of the Earth* is centered around the following question: "decolonization, an absolute rupture?" Domenach perceives rupture and irrationality as intimately tied. He suggests that approving of reason is maintaining a link, albeit one transformed, to Europe; and severing all ties with Europe is to sever ties with all reason. Consequently, he prefers Senghor—who advocates the need for dialogue and "métissage," and argues for "neither assimilation not radical rupture"—to Fanon. He perceives Fanon's "rants against Europe," his "revolt against Europe, her techniques and her humanism" as a revolt against the universal. Domenach asks, reflecting a postcolonial concern among European intellectuals, "can we conceive of a revolution in the world, an emancipation, that is not, in some fashion or another, linked to some European core" (1962)? That is why we would be unable to "'restart the history of the world' without Europe and, if need be, against it" (1962). What *The Wretched of the Earth* and Sartre's preface for the book demonstrate is a "refusal of history." Fanon and Sartre substitute a Manichean theater to "history's dialectical continuity." The threat becomes one of "contaminating history, ruining one of the rare principles that we more or less managed to maintain: the rigor of historical explanation" (Domenach 1962). In this respect, Domenach

agrees with Nghe that if history *made by* Europe is to be condemned, *knowledge of* history is preserved of the colonial evil and is quasi-unreformable.

According to Domenach, "Europe still sets the model and the tone" (1962). What the Third World "expects from us" is to walk "side by side with it" (1962). Would it then be a purely *reciprocal* relationship? "The alliance established between the greatest European intellectuals and the oppressed poor continues to fertilize the entire world" (1962). In other words, *intelligence* (thought, knowledge) invariably remains the purview of one of the two protagonists, the other offering only misery. Domenach's position manifests an *epistemological resistance* to decolonization, and in the manner of Nghe, links the displacements of "Western thought" with its pure and simple negation, the new beginning with destruction. Both of them miss the double meaning, objective and subjective, of the genitive in Fanon's "liberation of European thought," this liberation being at once liberation *with respect* to this thought, and thought revived and *liberated* of its inscription in colonial logic.

Logos: The Voice of the Voiceless

We thus understand that the alternative was not only appropriating *or* rejecting the "gifts" of the West; it was also situated, perhaps first and foremost, at the heart of the modalities of *renewal*. If there is indeed an opposition between Fanon and Senghor, it embodies a different meaning than that proposed by Domenach. For example, both Fanon and Senghor ponder the appropriation of the French language by African peoples experiencing decolonization. Senghor perceives the *Francophonie* as an agent of *reconciliation* of European and African civilizations, beyond all hegemony, as he claims that "the Francophonie does not oppose, it is posed to cooperate" (1977:80); "the Francophonie is neither submissive to a given French imperialism nor a weapon of war against other cultural worlds" (1977:190). The *synthesis* of Europe and of Africa that Senghor summons already exists within him, resulting from a closing rift between his Christian conscience and his "Serer blood": "Today," he states, "I find my joy, my assurance to embrace, *from a Catholic perspective*, all of these complementary worlds" (1964:92). This passage reveals Senghor's singular conception of reconciliation, insofar as Catholicism is both the *term* of opposition and the *agent* of its dialectical overtaking that results less from a dynamic of contradiction than from the revelation of a power *already* contained in one of the contradictories. The same can be said of the "humanism of the Francophonie," which is a manifestation of a universal power enclosed in the French language. For Senghor, the universal remains, *is* French.

The French language thus defines, *in advance*, the modalities of reconciliation and offers itself as an organizing principle, as *logos*. Colonial discourse is covertly reintroduced in Senghor's words, insofar as colonialism sought to organize a world riddled by disorder, to *order* the savage life, to carve out and impart structure to the occupied territories. The colonial logos sought to *give reason* (for being) to *irrational beings*. Hence, Fanon writes about the "advocates of integration" in Algeria:

This thesis, on the level of language, went back to the very basis of colonialism: it is the intervention of the foreign nation that put order into the original anarchy of the

colonized country. Under these conditions, the French language, the language of the occupier, was given the role of Logos, with ontological implications within Algerian society. (1967b:69)

Fanon has another interpretation of the choice to use the French language during decolonization. The Algerian revolution signals the birth of a “new language of the nation [which] could then make itself known through multiple meaningful channels” (1967b:70). If, prior to 1954 and the beginning of war, *being Algerian* signified, for nationalist parties, *defining oneself in Arabic*, the struggle with the colonizer produced a mutation, “stripped the Arabic language of its sacred character, and the French language of its negative connotations” (1967b:70). We witness the *liberation* of the language, a language now able to transmit “messages of truth.” “The broadcasting in French of the programs of *Fighting Algeria* was to liberate the enemy language from its historic meanings” (1967b:67–68), to tear it from what unswervingly tied it to the European/White world. This conception of unification of the world is at odds with that of Senghor, as Fanon explains that “the nation’s spoken words shape the world while at the same time renewing it” (1967b:73). They become the *logos* of a new world that the revolutionary language must shape with an “ancient” language.

Fanon’s theses foreshadow the problem, which has also become a symbol (and sometimes “topos”) of the postcolonial critique, of the *voice of the voiceless*. What he thematizes is the contestation of the “voice of the oppressor, that of the enemy,” the end of the colonial *monologue*. It is the emergence of the *words* of the colonized, of this other voice “that each man feels rising within him” and that opposes itself to the muteness that was, in the counterassimilation stage, the defense strategy of the colonized subject who, still powerless to emit his own words, refused to listen to the master’s voice, to “give voice to the occupant” (to follow his “voice”). From the struggle for liberation is born a *discourse* of rupture. Jean Amrouche, Fanon’s contemporary, argues that “the affirmation of existence” of the Algerian people is *telling oneself*. “They want to speak themselves, in the first person, say *I*, we as free individuals constituting a free people” (1994:32). What is at play in the Franco-Algerian conflict is the power to name oneself by one’s own name (1994). The *subjectification* of the colonized subject in the anticolonial struggle means becoming a *subject of words*. “Bringing men towards freedom,” Jaspers argues, “is bringing them to speak themselves” (1954:195).

Conclusion: A Wartime Postcolonialism

What Fanon’s reflections reveal are the *beginnings* of postcolonialism in the anticolonial strategy/scheme of a *reversal of the colonizer’s arms against himself*. These reflections echo those put forth by Jacques Rabemananjara during the 1959 *Deuxième Congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs* in Rome. According to Rabemananjara, the threat facing black populations undergoing liberation is to become “invaded” and “contaminated” by the “categories of thought” and the “intellectual fabric” of “Western man” (1959:71). Nonetheless, he does not advocate refuting “the West in terms of the West” but rather “a certain spirit of the West.” Perpetrator of the Diaspora and the

alienation of black peoples, the West also engendered their (re)unification with the “gift” of a common language—French—that became a “rallying point” and “weapon of combat” against French domination (1959:71). The task then becomes *playing* the West against itself, using “its own recipes and (...) principles” to foil colonialism, evade the harm “the West itself taught us to diagnose” (1959:80). Fanon also refers to turning the colonizer’s weapons against himself—what Rabemananjara calls the *boomerang effect*—when writing that “the French language also becomes an instrument of liberation” (Fanon 1967b:75). Drawing upon one of Césaire’s notions, the weapons of the West are also *miraculous* in the battle against colonialism.

The heritage of Sartre’s “Orphée noir,” introduction to the 1948 *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* edited by Senghor, is indubitable. According to Sartre, the fact that the “evangelists” of negritude express themselves in French conforms with this “iron law which denies the oppressed all weapons not personally stolen from the oppressor” (1949:240). The colonized will speak the language of his enemy to destroy it: he will “auto-destroy” the language through its *de-Frenchization*. Sartre systematically argues that work *against* the West is work *on* the West (including violent works). Nearly half a century later, Said will say “that is the partial tragedy of resistance, that it must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire” (1994:210). “Paradoxical as it may appear,” writes Fanon, “it is the Algerian Revolution, it is the struggle of the Algerian people, that is facilitating the spreading of the French language in the nation” (1967b:67–68). The paradox is that it is precisely in the struggle to rupture oneself from the colonizer that the colonized adopts the former’s weapons, *opens* himself to him, to his influence, “shows himself permeable to the signs, symbols, and to a certain order of the occupant,” while in submission/counterassimilation it remained opaque to him (1967b:76). This permeability, to which the degree of subjugation is measured, becomes a struggle strategy resting in what we would like to call an *anticolonial semiotic*; “the ‘native’ almost takes charge of the language of the occupier” (1967b:68, retranslated).⁶ In “Racism and Culture,” Fanon defined *universality* as a “taking charge of the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded” (1967b:44, retranslated).⁷ In this light, a rupture with Europe is, paradoxically, *universalizing*.

The above reflections are only a prelude, a “contextualization” for a deeper study of the *epistemological displacements* occurring within Fanonian discourse. Such a study would question the repetitions and the distortions Fanon applies to Jung and Freud’s “intra-civilizational” critique of civilization; the reversal of Hobbes’ political anthropology and the concept of the *state of nature* not as preceding the political, but as its effects, as an end of history correlative with a return to a *struggle of race*; the subversion (rather than the simple negation) of primitivist theories leading to a thematization of the anticolonial struggles as *struggles for life*, and so on. Doing so would reveal that many supposed cleavages, such as that observed by Homi Bhabha between a “bad,” “Hegelian-existentialist-humanist” Fanon and a “good,” “proto-poststructuralist” (or vice versa), reflect only an incapacity to rid oneself of faulty images of the epistemological rupture conceived as polarized or alternate: Hegel *or* Lacan, Sartre *or* Foucault, and so on (Bhabha 1994). Thus, we are brought to recognize that it is not *against* Hegel that Fanon engages with what we call, for practical

purposes, a “poststructuralism,” but rather *stemming from* him and by virtue of his theoretical practices of displacements (Butler 1999:x). Is it, then, an ultimate revenge of dialectics? Whatever it may be, Fanon’s viewpoint, his “outsider’s glance,” renders possible the reinterrogation of theoretical conflict that we may have considered purely internal to the Western intellectual world. It is also in this respect that he engages the project of a postcolonial epistemology.

In conclusion, whatever the analogies of Fanon are, theoretical strategies and the contemporary postcolonial critique, one irreducible difference among them remains: Fanon’s postcolonialism is a *wartime postcolonialism* (or a *postcolonialism of war*). This renders it unique as, if postcolonial voices arose at the core of this anticolonialism, it was most frequently in rupture with the armed resistance and the violent struggle (Césaire 1956,⁸ Diop 1959⁹)—in other words, it was from a “peaceful” perspective, or at least one in which reconciliation was possible. If Fanon’s positions proved to be erroneous, they would at the least retain the merit of engaging with what we consider one of the pitfalls of the contemporary postcolonial critique: its difficulty and reticence to theorize contemporary postcolonial *wars* (beyond hegemonic struggles).

Notes

This chapter was translated by Marlène Élias.

1. “Two centuries of white truth proved [Césaire] to be wrong” (Fanon 1967b:174).
2. In the French original, Fanon refers to the “*non-sense*” of depoliticized science in the colonies.
3. In the English translation, this passage is translated rather imprecisely as “could not be separated from French colonialism in Algeria.”
4. The English translation states that the technique has “virtually to be invented.” For Fanon, this technique is (re)created spiritually, if not materially (*techno-logy*).
5. This is a revival of the famous sentence irreparably linked to Nazism: “When I hear the word culture, I take out my revolver” or of the original phrase of the national-socialist playwright Hanns Johst: “When I hear the word culture . . . I release the safety on my Browning.”
6. The English translation reads: “The ‘native’ can almost be said to assume responsibility for the language of the occupier.”
7. The English translation states: “the decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism.”
8. Césaire calls for a “Copernican revolution,” a decentering of Europe so to speak (against the will of the French Communist Party). In contrast, *Le discours sur le colonialisme* stems from an anticolonial critique “from the point of view of the West.”
9. Diop argues for a “de-Westernization.”

Chapter Nine

Fanon and the Biopolitics of Torture: Contextualizing Psychological Practices as Tools of War

Lou Turner

The chattering classes of the media pontificate from news cycle to news cycle about the dance of diplomatic and military maneuvers in which Western political powers regularly engage to “win the hearts and minds” of subjugated peoples, ignoring the raw reality that such warfare begins and ends with the breaking and disciplining of colored bodies. The fierce immediacy of black and brown bodies is the unavoidable object in the Western drive to win “hearts and minds,” whether through the reprobate materialism of development aid, the neocolonial militarism of proxy wars with surrogate (often child) armies, asymmetrical “wars on terrorism,” or the intervention of “psychological services.”

Torture is the form that the intervention takes in breaking and disciplining the bodies of subject populations of color, in colonial, neocolonial or internal colonial situations. The propaganda war against insurgent resistance is fundamentally a discourse of race and race struggles. “Historical discourse [is] no longer the discourse of sovereignty, or even race,” observed Michel Foucault (2003) in his 1975–76 lectures at the Collège de France, “but a discourse about races, about a confrontation between races, about the race struggle that goes on within nations and within laws.” Frantz Fanon, too, theorized the biopolitics of this “[h]istorical discourse,” except, as he says, at the “level of cultural anthropology,” in his critical engagement with the so-called Algiers School of colonial psychology:

The technical, generally advanced development of the social group that has thus appeared enables it to set up an organized domination. The enterprise of deculturation turns out to be the negative of a more gigantic work of economic, and even biological enslavement.

The doctrine of cultural hierarchy is thus but one aspect of a systematized hierarchization implacably pursued.

The modern theory of the absence of cortical integration of colonial peoples is the anatomic-physiological counterpart of this doctrine. (Fanon 1967b:31)

I. Racial Degeneracy in the Algiers School of Ethnopsychology

Steeped in an administrative desire to *know* the native other, the ethnopsychological epistemology of the Algiers School is itself a degeneration of the ethics of the social and behavioral sciences, and, in particular, the medical ethics of the psychological professions. From its nineteenth-century origins, France's colonial enterprise in North Africa was aided and abetted by the social scientific precursors of the Algiers School, and by its early-to-mid-twentieth century iteration propagated by the psychiatric "reforms" of Antoine Porot (Fanon 1963; Gendzier 1974; McCulloch 1983; Bulhan 1985; Lorcin 1995; Gibson 2003; Cherki 2006). Throughout, the medical and behavioral sciences, especially the psychological disciplines, lent their expertise to the violent maintenance of colonialism.

Psychological services were the critical innovation of modern asymmetric warfare against guerrilla combatants strategically embedded in colonized or occupied populations. Torture of militant combatants, suspected sympathizers, and vast numbers of marginal noncombatants, such as women, youth, and the elderly, always involved medical and psychological professionals. One of the most critical and insightful inside observers of the role of medical and psychological professionals in the maintenance of colonialism and the use of torture in the propaganda war for "hearts and minds" was the black revolutionary psychiatrist Frantz Fanon.

When Fanon entered Algeria in 1953 to become chief resident physician of the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital, the Algerian Revolution was still a year off. However, evidence of Fanon's interest in the violence of colonization and the role of torture in sustaining it can be found in his 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*. We read in a long footnoted passage from the trial testimony of Malagasies tortured during the French genocidal pacification of Madagascar in 1947, in which 100,000 Malagasy were reported killed, the first of several forms of torture Fanon would elucidate in his writings over his brief, intense professional career. Torture in the Malagasy case was employed strictly to coerce interrogated subjects to confess to untrue declarations for use in anti-insurgent propaganda. As one Malagasy detainee testified, the French interrogator referred to the torture chamber as the "thinking room," a room whose floor was covered with water from waterboarding of detainees. The detainee was told by his French interrogator, "Now you'll learn to agree to what I said you should declare" (Fanon 1967a:84).

Fanon's reference to French torture in Madagascar was specific to his project of deconstructing the psychoanalytical conceptions of the so-called dependency complex postulated in Octave Mannoni's ethnopsychological work *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. Mannoni used the discourse of psychoanalysis to rationalize, and as a strategy for the liberal reform of, French colonialism. Although Mannoni's work drew from Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalysis, as well as from

French existentialism and structuralism, its genealogy intersected that of the Algiers School of psychology and psychiatry at Lucien Lévy Bruhl's notion of a so-called prelogical, primitive, African mentality (Mannoni 1963:187–188; Macey 2000:225).

The violent narrative of French torture and the French use of Senegalese torturers during France's rape of Madagascar were deployed by Fanon to deconstruct the psychoanalytical pretensions of Mannoni's construction of a so-called dependency complex in the African subconscious. In the course of an intense professional practice and committed revolutionary *praxis* that laid the theoretical foundations of liberation psychology, and over the next decade of a life shortened by leukemia, Fanon came to understand psychology's administrative, ideological, that is, instrumental, role in maintaining colonialism in terms often associated with the relationship of war to diplomacy. As war is commonly understood to represent diplomacy by other means, torture is the psychophysiological knowing of the dark other by other means. For Fanon (1967b:64–72) there were a politics, system, and philosophy of torture that were inseparable and in which the psychological professions were intimately complicit.

II. Politics of Torture: Of “Beautiful Souls” and Barbarous Civilizations

In an oblique reference to Hegel's phenomenological concept of the “beautiful soul”—intellectuals who feel corrupted by the moral hazards of having to act, in real time, on their commitment to ideas and principles—Fanon admonished French intellectuals who recoiled from revelations of the barbarity of French torture while supporting the “liberal” aims of the war. It should be recalled that until Charles de Gaulle came to power in 1958, socialists governed postwar France and prosecuted the first four years of its war in Algeria. François Mitterand, Interior Minister for the socialist Mendès-France government at the time of the outbreak of the revolution in the fall of 1954, and future socialist president of France, made the infamous colonialist declaration that “Algeria is French.” One cannot be for the war and against the means used to prosecute it. Neither wars of necessity nor wars of choice can be understood without torture, massacre, and violations of human rights. A rationalization of this position is found in Hegel's theory of the state, and in Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. The torturer, as representative of the executive, is an “executive civil servant” (1975c:44). The executive is the “business of government” with its own division of labor that includes security and intelligence. Agents of the executive demonstrate their suitability and merit by means of examinations. Torture fulfills a core requirement of such an examination for security and intelligence executive civil and military servants. In situations of military occupation, like in colonial situations, the business of government entails protecting itself from challenges to its legitimacy and sovereignty. The contradiction of so-called democratic societies engaged in occupations of other societies is that, on the one hand, democratic civil society is wholly complicit in the human rights violations that invariably come with military domination pursued in its name, while, on the other hand, democratic societies become a victim of civil liberties abuses by the

same apparatus of “executive civil servants.” Marx, following Hegel, explains this dualism as a consequence of executive civil servants being representatives of the state, “not ‘of,’ but ‘against’ ‘civil society’” (1975b:49). The complicity of democratic civil societies in the human rights atrocities of military occupations carried out in their name necessarily comes, like the proverbial chickens, home to roost. Fanon’s method of engaging the intersecting spheres of domestic privacy, the medico(il)legal privacy of the torture chamber, and the privacy of the psychiatric session was to rend the *veil* of privacy by publicizing his case studies as a revolutionary act.

III. Systems of Torture: “[O]n the Verge of the Pathological”

Systems of torture experience breakdowns and contradictions, including the psychopathological toll taken on the interrogator-torturer. Reports of military personnel inflicting severe injuries on their own family members, of professional misconduct, including fratricide, and of attempted suicides, all requiring the attention of military psychological services, are indicative of a system of torture generalized across the military theatre of engagement. So-called enhanced interrogation techniques do not only occur in detention facilities like Abu Ghraib in Iraq, Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, or at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; they occur whenever an infantry unit interrogates residents swept up in a military operation.

In his official capacity as a professional psychiatrist and “executive civil servant” of the French government, Fanon was obliged to counsel interrogator-torturers whose revolt of moral conscience led to breakdowns due to the psychological hazards of their jobs. As a matter of professional ethics and his evolving revolutionary nationalist sentiments, Fanon counseled French interrogator-torturers to transfer out of their police units, or to transfer state-side back to France. He also found that some of his “clients” simply sought the psychological means to adapt to the moral hazards of their vocation (Fanon 1963:219). The interrogator-torturer is “on the verge of the pathological,” Fanon found, because his use of torture is “in contradiction with the ‘values’ of his group and of the system he defends” (1967b:67). Consistent with this contradiction, as well as contributing to the interrogator-torturer’s psychological breakdown, are the official denials of torture issued by the government. Within the government, two policy trends are discernible. There are those agents and apologists of torture who consider it an outrage that torture should have to be legitimized, that is, that legal rationalizations should have to be fabricated. The other tendency is expressed by those who engage in denial, deception, and dissemblance.

The two arguments that Fanon discerns in French denials of torture allegations are fully operational in U.S. debates today on torture. After the denial of torture is exposed as an official lie, an escapist discourse commences, drawing its principal rationale from the militaristic politics of the “war on terrorism.” First, the claim that torture is used only in exceptional cases was found by Fanon to constitute “[t]he most serious abdication of the French intellectuals [for] having tolerated this lie” (1967b:67). Government’s claims that sanctions will be applied to a few “bad apples” while not publicly disclosing the results of criminal investigations are a ruse to escape criminal liability. With public revelations of torture cases having exposed the lie that

torture is exceptional, the government resorts to its second argument, namely that it was the work of outside elements, for example, nonmilitary intelligence agents, non-military contractors, foreign forces, and so on. This second argument is significant because it not only exposes government cynicism, but also the impossibility of the government avoiding scrutiny and getting away with a cover-up.

IV. The “Colonial Situation” and The Long-Wave History of Resistance

On what foundation does this fine superstructure of torture rest? In his excerpt notebooks on ethnography and colonialism compiled near the end of his life, Marx cites the Russian liberal democrat and sociologist Maxim Kovalevsky’s reference to the 1869 debates in the French National Assembly on the colonization of Algeria: “‘The Algerian society is founded on the principle of blood [i.e., kinship].’ By the individuation of landownership in this way the political aim [was] also attained—to destroy the foundation of this society” (Krader 1975:412). Upon such knowledge and colonial policy, France prosecuted the biopolitics of its colonial enterprise in North Africa.

Fanon’s assessment of the military-scientific character of France’s colonization of Algeria reflects Patricia Lorcin’s (1995, 2002) analysis of the history of scientific racism in French-Algerian relations. What Marx (Krader 1975) and later Fanon disclose of the colonizer’s epistemology of knowing the “native” subject that other theorists either miss or ignore is the knowing negligence of France’s colonial policy toward Arab and Kabyle customary law as a necessary means propelling the colonial enterprise. Knowing falsification of customary law for the purpose of alienating inalienable land from the indigenous population was the epistemic foundation of colonialist materialism, that is, French dissolution of indigenous land tenure and communal property relations. The biopolitics behind the scientific racialization of indigenous populations formed another branch of this genealogy of knowledge and power.

Fanon was not only uniquely situated to critically discern the biopolitical nature of French colonization, but also to observe the radicalization of the colonized subject’s anticolonial response. The radicalization that Fanon witnessed was also a century-old *anticolonization* process. He was aware that the Algerian Revolution was actually the latest in a long historical process that alternated between resistance and assimilation, and that the revolution would continue permanently in postcolonial Africa. Fanon provides this long-wave historical context, so often missed or ignored by Fanon scholars, when at the beginning of “On National Culture” in *The Wretched*, he writes:

In under-developed countries the preceding generations have both resisted the work of erosion carried on by colonialism and also helped on the maturing of the struggles of today. We must rid ourselves of the habit, now that we are in the thick of the fight, of minimizing the action of our fathers or of feigning incomprehension when considering their silence and passivity. They fought as well as they could, with the arms that they possessed then; and if the echoes of their struggle have not resounded in the international arena, we must realize that the reason for

this silence lies less in their heroism than in the fundamentally different international situation of our time. (1963:167)

The long-wave biopolitics of colonization and historical resistance to it is what Fanon also had in mind at the beginning of "Medicine and Colonialism" in *A Dying Colonialism*:

Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has always provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude. This ambivalence is in fact to be found in connection with all of the occupier's modes of presence. With medicine we come to one of the most tragic features of the colonial situation. (1967c:121)

The clue to Fanon's reference to "ambivalence" is suggested by the expression "colonial situation," which refers to what Fanon considered the theoretical contribution of Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*. Mannoni's study introduced two elements into the procedure of analyzing the possibilities of understanding (i.e., reciprocity) between two racial groups, namely, (1) the importance of the human *situation*; and (2) the human *attitudes* toward the colonial situation. The *attitude of ambivalence* of the colonized is inseparable from the *colonial situation*. Fanon develops Mannoni's original insight further, as evidenced by his chapter on "Medicine and Colonialism."

The ambivalence, which Mannoni erroneously attributed to an alleged precolonial dependency complex in the "native" psyche that predisposed Africans to colonial domination, Fanon explains as the subject's alternating attitudes of rational receptivity and resistance to Western science and technology, depending on the character of the historic moment, as well as the degree of opportunism exhibited by the colonizer's actions and attitudes. "[W]e are at the heart of the drama—that of the impossibility of finding a meeting ground in any colonial situation" (Fanon 1967c:125). As Fanon (1967c:126) observes later, "It is not possible for the colonized society and the colonizing society to agree to pay tribute, at the same time and in the same place, to a single value." This refusal to "pay tribute" or express agreement with the scientific knowledge of colonialism fosters an anticolonial biopolitics of its own, in which the "native's" body proves to be "equally rigid" (Fanon 1967c:126) before the examining gaze of Western medical science. Before the muscular rigidity and incommunicative diffidence of the colonized, a medicocolonial situation that "standardizes relations" (Fanon 1967c:126) into a Manichean biopolitics, an epistemic degeneration occurs in the mentality of doctors and nurses in which the practice of medicine becomes the practice of veterinary medicine (Fanon 1967c:127).

The biopolitics of colonialism, from its origins and in its phenomenological context, makes colonial or occupying medical personnel "a link in the colonialist network, as . . . spokesm[e]n for the occupying power" (Fanon 1967c:131). More than any other case of military colonial occupation, French medical and civil service professionals embodied the dual power of the biopolitics of colonialism and the material power of colonial landownership upon which the former rests. The latter corrupted

the professional and scientific ethics of the former. "This explains the fact that very often he [the colonial doctor] assumes the role of militia chief or organizer of 'counter-terrorist' raids. In the colonies, in normal times—that is, in the absence of the war of liberation—there is something of the cowboy and the pioneer even in the intellectual. In the period of crisis the cowboy pulls out his revolver and his instruments of torture" (Fanon 1967c:134).

V. Of Cowboy Intellectuals, Screens, and the Left

The privatization of military occupations today with corporate mercenaries has a similar corrupting effect on the values of medical professionals. We have come full circle from the militarization of private professional life and values to the privatization of military occupation and operations. Because the colonial doctor is also military personnel, "he becomes a torturer who happens to be a doctor" (Fanon 1967c:135). The *habitus* of military occupation determines the behavior of medical professionals as it relates to the ongoing insurrection against military occupation. In short, the atrocities of torture and genocide are provided a medicolegal *screen* by medical professionals who certify that the victims of these crimes died of "natural causes," at their own hands, or as a consequence of "unintended human error." These investigations are a *screen* behind which colonial occupation is made sustainable, for they are the instrumental means whence "reasonable doubt" regarding state complicity in torture and genocide is manufactured in the popular consensus of the occupying nation.

Fanon's discussion of the illegal use of so-called truth serum raises further questions concerning the criminal indictment of psychiatric professionals involved in torture interrogations by willing judges and prosecutors in countries that rigorously adhere to the Geneva Conventions and other international criminal protocols. The violent contradiction between the "rules of engagement" in wars of occupation and international laws of human rights was always already resolved, owing to the fact that the soldier or psychological services personnel who engage in torture "infringe no law": "By torturing, he manifests an exemplary loyalty [patriotism] to the system" (Fanon 1967b:71). This demonstrated to Fanon the utter degeneration of Western humanism and the moral stasis of the dialectic of history that Europe and the West fetishizes as its claim to freedom, equality, and democracy.

In the discussion of torture in *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon provides us a passing insight into his writing and theoretical agenda. In the course of his discussion of treating victims of "truth serum," he makes the telling statement that "We shall study *elsewhere* the grave consequences of these practices" (Fanon 1967c:138, emphasis added). Of course, this refers to "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *The Wretched*. What this brief reference indicates of Fanon's theoretical agenda is that as early as 1958–59 he was not only contemplating but was actually involved in compiling the studies that would constitute *The Wretched*. We already know that certain parts of *The Wretched* derive from earlier studies and presentations, for example, the concluding section of "On National Culture," entitled "Reciprocal

Bases of National Culture and the Fight for Freedom" (Fanon 1963:190–199), that Fanon presented at the 1959 Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Rome. In *A Dying Colonialism*, we have evidence that Fanon's studies on the effects of violence in colonial war were already underway as early as 1958 and were envisioned for another publication. This supports the notion that his original intention was to write another work on the Algerian Revolution. It also indicates that, even when that theoretical agenda changed with his decision to write *The Wretched*, Fanon felt strongly enough about the significance of his studies on the effects of violence and torture in the Algerian colonial war to devote a quarter of *The Wretched* to Algeria.

The now hegemonic view that Fanon was an "apostle of violence," who theorized the so-called cathartic, that is, therapeutic, effects of anticolonial violence, is stripped of any saliency when considered against Fanon's disconcerting empirical studies of "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." Chapter Five of *The Wretched* is Fanon's own response to that work's famous Chapter One, "Concerning Violence." The dialectic between chapters one and five is underscored in the first footnote to Chapter Five in which Fanon discusses the "psycho-affective consequences" of generalized homicidal violence on a whole generation of Algerians, in conjunction with his equally nonmoralizing discussion of French torture and liberal-Left condemnation of it. Noting that this discussion originally appeared in "the unpublished introduction of the first two editions of *Year Five of the Algerian Revolution* [*A Dying Colonialism*]," it is apparent that (1) this represents the conceptual structure of *The Wretched*, beginning and ending with "Concerning Violence" and "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," respectively; and (2) that Fanon's linkage of the two discourses was his way of strategically undermining the liberal-Left pitfall of assuming a moral equivalence between anticolonial and colonial violence. With disarming cool, a philosophic temper that so struck Jean-Paul Sartre that it belies the existentialist infrastructure of his Preface to *The Wretched*, Fanon argues in his footnote (1963:205n1):

Frenchmen who condemn the torture in Algeria constantly adopt a point of view which is strictly French. We do not reproach them for this; we merely point it out: they wish to protect the consciences of the actual torturers who today have full power to carry on their work; they wish at the same time to try to avoid the moral contamination of the young people of France. As far as we are concerned we are totally in accord with this attitude. Certain notes here brought together, especially in cases nos. 4 and 5 in Series A, are sad illustrations and justifications for this obsession which haunts French believers in democracy. But our purpose is in any case to show that torture, as might well be expected, upsets most profoundly the personality of the person who is tortured.

And should there be any lingering doubt as to Fanon's realist attitude to "revolutionary violence," he again contends, soberly and without moralizing, that the militant realizes that he has to "pay [a] price [for] national independence," which in Fanon's estimation "raises the question of responsibility within the revolutionary framework" (1963:206).

VI. Philosophy of Torture: A Question of Method

As important as the exposure of government attempts to cover up its *system of torture* is, Fanon believes that the need to illumine the *philosophy of torture* that provides the system with its rationalization is essential. Methods of torture correspond to their own structures of reference that are supposed to provide them with rational saliency. In what Fanon (1967b:69) refers to as the method of directed “conditioning by example,” he describes a scenario in which informant-collaborators identify an alleged member of the insurgency, who is picked up for questioning. No questions are asked of the detainee because the interrogators do not know in which direction the questioning should go, and the detainee must not suspect that his interrogators do not know. To break down his resistance, police or military personnel arbitrarily round up ten to a dozen local residents and torture five or six of them to death while the suspected insurgent observes. After several homicidal tortures, the real interrogation begins. According to this method, torture, indeed murder, is used as an agent to condition the response of a detainee and also as a ruse for the dual concealment of the official nonknowing of intelligence and the possible knowing of official nonknowing by insurgents. The sadistic dramaturgy affiliated with this method is that the tortured murder of arbitrary suspects as a show or example for a suspected insurgent relies on the logical fallacy that the elicitation of intelligence by means of murder constitutes the efficient ends of torture.

The second method of torture is affiliated with nondirected conditioning, in which a suspect is tortured without being asked any questions. The difficulty for the interrogator-torturer is “not to say anything when the tortured asks for an explanation,” making it “necessary to break down his resistance fast” (Fanon 1967b:69). The suspect undergoes multiple episodes of torture *sans* explanation and questioning. Instead, when questioning begins, the suspect is told, “we’re listening,” whereupon he is supposed to tell everything he knows. In this case, as with the previous method, questioning is deferred. According to the teleology of torture, “in which the excuse of the end tends more and more to become detached from the means,” Fanon concludes that “it is normal for torture to become its own justification” (1967b:69).

Fanon belittles the logic behind a nongovernmental agency report on torture that concluded that abuses were committed by agents in the lower echelon of the police and military due to the failure of higher authorities to monitor the conduct of subordinates, thus encouraging a system of torture. “In point of fact,” he observes, “torture is not a means of obtaining information” (Fanon 1967b:70). Torture is practiced as a matter of “sadistic perversion, . . . perverting those who become its instruments” (Fanon 1967b:70). Evidence of this perversion is supplied by a participant in the military occupation of Algeria who recalled that, when military personnel got bored with watching an on-base movie, “soldiers and officers would get up and tranquilly spend the rest of the evening in the company of the prisoners. . . . The screams were partly drowned by the music of the film” (Fanon 1967b:70).

Where, however, the conservative military officer and the liberal democrat share common ground, that is, bemoaning the perversion of French dignity and honor,

especially deploring the fact that young recruits were becoming mercenaries and “learning fascism,” Fanon (1967b:71) coolly responds:

One cannot fail to note that only the moral consequences of these crimes on the soul of the French are of concern to these humanists. The gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of French honor.

Pharmaceuticals are indispensable instruments of torture that psychiatric cowboys pull out in a crisis. As a matter of fact, “European doctors in Algeria use the ‘truth serum’ with staggering frequency” (Fanon 1967c:137). The use of sodium pentothal or “truth serum” makes its victim even hesitant to say his/her name. “Every question is first experienced as a repetition of the torturer-tortured relationship” (Fanon 1967c:138). Physicians, psychiatrists, and psychological evaluators operating in police, military, and intelligence units intervene after every session to keep the prisoner from giving the interrogation-torture team the slip, that is, dying. “Everything—heart stimulants, massive doses of vitamins—is used before, during, and after the sessions to keep the [prisoner] hovering between life and death. Ten times the doctor intervenes, ten times he gives the prisoner back to the pack of torturers” (Fanon 1967c:138).

Another psychiatric instrument of torture is electric shock treatment, which psychiatrists not only administer but take the lead in utilizing to question detainees. “When by chance these men are liberated because the doctor, despite this barbarous treatment, was able to obtain no information,” Fanon concludes, “what is brought to us is a personality in shreds” (1967c:138). Also in shreds are the personal morals and professional ethics of the psychological sciences.

VII. Torture and the Psychological Disorders of War: A Tabular Summation

Torture must be understood in the broader context of psychological disorders that manifest themselves in war, especially in asymmetrical wars in Third World countries. Born originally in the genocidal violence that accompanied the founding of a colonial state, maintained through the development of those violent means as the militarized apparatus of the “independent” neocolonial state, and resumed during the reoccupation by global military powers, asymmetrical warfare represents a return of the repressed, of the atavistic violence of Western colonial power. The so-called ungovernability of occupied societies pacified by the atavistic violence *cum* instrumental reason of global military powers produces “a constant and considerable stream of mental symptoms” (Fanon 1963:182).

Series C of Fanon’s case studies of mental disorders caused by the Algerian war, which forms Chapter Five of *The Wretched*, is limited to victims of torture. Fanon explains that he classified the cases into subgroups “because we realized that their characteristic symptoms of morbidity corresponded to different methods of torture” (1963:208). A table of these torture subgroups is instructive:

Series C Affective and Mental Changes and Emotional Disturbances after Torture

<i>Group No. 1: After the use of indiscriminate torture as a so-called precautionary measure</i>	<i>Group No. 2: After torture by electricity</i>	<i>Group No. 3: After administration of truth serum</i>	<i>Group No. 4: After brainwashing Psychiatric consequences for two categories of brainwashing victims</i>
<div>1. forced water enemas; anal penetration by bottles.</div> <div>2. forced immobility.</div> <div>3. two categories of torture victims:</div> <div>4. those who know something who may not seek psychotherapy;</div> <div>5. those who know nothing, and who are taken in for interrogation.</div> <div>Psychiatric Symptoms:</div> <div>Clinical depression</div> <div>Anorexia nervosa</div> <div>Restlessness</div> <div>Torture victims frequently experience two feelings:</div> <div>a. feelings of injustice;</div> <div>b. feelings of indifference to moral arguments for the just cause, instead feeling that only power and increased power counts</div>	<div>Psychiatric symptoms:</div> <div>1. local & somatic delusions, e.g., feelings of pins & needles throughout the body; feeling that their head is bursting, and that they are swallowing their tongue.</div> <div>2. apathy, lack of will, and motivation.</div> <div>3. phobia of electricity.</div> <div>Psychiatric symptoms:</div> <div>a. verbal stereotypy, e.g., the patient repeats phrases like "I didn't tell them anything. You have to believe me, I didn't talk."</div> <div>b. obscured mental and sensory perception, e.g., objective reality cannot be ascertained; reason is falsified.</div> <div>c. phobia of one-on-one conversations stemming from fear that he/she (the patient) can be interrogated at any time.</div> <div>d. inhibition: on guard, psychological slowing down, interrupted sentences & repetition.</div>	<div>Sodium pentothal administered by psychiatrists intravenously with the aim of breaking the political barriers to confession in the consciousness of the prisoner. "This is the medical equivalent of 'psychological warfare'" (Fanon 1963:212).</div> <div>Psychiatric symptoms:</div> <div>1. local & somatic delusions, e.g., feelings of pins & needles throughout the body; feeling that their head is bursting, and that they are swallowing their tongue.</div> <div>2. apathy, lack of will, and motivation.</div> <div>3. phobia of electricity.</div> <div>Psychiatric symptoms:</div> <div>a. phobia of one-on-one conversations stemming from fear that he/she (the patient) can be interrogated at any time.</div> <div>d. inhibition: on guard, psychological slowing down, interrupted sentences & repetition.</div>	<div>1. Intellectuals:</div> <div>a. role playing in a game in which the intellectual is convinced to play a collaborator with a dual personality.</div> <div>b. playing the game of extolling the values of French civilization; the intellectual is counseled by political advisors, psychologists, therapists, and sociologists.</div> <div>c. countering and eliminating arguments for the revolutionary struggle for the purpose of deconstructing national consciousness.</div> <div>d. intellectuals take turns giving such presentations, for which they are awarded a grade that will determine whether they will be released.</div> <div>e. intellectuals are forced to lead a pathological communal life in which they are never alone, never silent and must think out loud.</div> <div>2. Nonintellectuals:</div> <div>a. "[S]ubjectivity is no longer taken as the starting point for modifying the individual's attitude... emphasis is on the body, which is broken in the hope that the national consciousness will disintegrate" (Fanon 1963:215-16).</div> <div>b. A regime of physical brutality and rewards is implemented in tandem with:</div> <div>a. collective confessions repeatedly shouted for hours that prisoners are not members of an insurgent group.</div> <div>b. collective confessions are repeatedly shouted that prisoners are members of an insurgent group, admit that they are wrong, condemn the nationalist group, and extol the virtues of the occupying nation.</div> <div>Testimony:</div> <div>a. Case of an academic interned and subjected to months of brainwashing. After false promises that his behavior had won his release, when the prisoner is finally released he/she suffers anxiety that he/she is still playing a game in which he/she feels guilt for having not duped his captors or his comrades.</div> <div>Psychiatric symptoms:</div> <div>a. phobia of collective discussion, inhibition, mistrust & reticence to be in the company of more than two people.</div> <div>b. the subject cannot explain or defend a given viewpoint; he/she manifests an obsessive personality disorder which simultaneously affirms & denies opposing points of view with the same force.</div>

VIII. Fanonian Liberation Psychology: A New Humanism

Finally, Fanon has us confront the sociopsychological context in which an occupied people's conduct assumes or is otherwise perceived as a form of resistance. The subject's behavior is variously perceived as criminogenic, personal insolence, cultural resistance, or as political militance. For Fanon, "The duty of the colonized subject, who has not arrived at a political consciousness or a decision to reject the oppressor, is to have the slightest effort literally dragged out of him. This is where non-cooperation or at least minimal cooperation clearly materializes" (1963:220). These are not the so-called microaggressions of everyday life, but modes of conduct set at a very different level of intensity and consequence. The form of resistance that colonizers and military occupiers perceive as covert or clandestine is in fact the very life that the colonized strive defensively to maintain against the violent impositions of occupation.

It is this non- or minimal cooperation on the part of the native population that is perceived by military personnel and military psychologists alike as resistance and as part and parcel of the insurrection against foreign occupation. The ethnopsychology informing lay and professional perceptions of this noncooperative behavior is the basis for sweeping up, detaining and torturing people under military occupation. Not only does this account for the overwhelming majority of detainees imprisoned in U.S. military installations, it also accounts for the radicalization of semipolitical cohorts. This calls into question the now common media refrain that the main complaint heard in occupied communities of Iraq and Afghanistan against U.S. military forces is "lack of security" from insurgent attacks.

Fanon's meditation on torture allowed him to discern in the very depths of human degradation—where man negates what is most human in man—a *new humanism*:

As soon as you and your fellow men are cut down like dogs there is no other solution but to use every means available to reestablish your weight as a human being. You must therefore weigh as heavily as possible on your torturer's body so that his [soul], which [has] wandered off somewhere, can at last be restored to [its] human dimension.... Then there is this deathly silence—the body of course cries out—the silence that suffocates the torturer. (Fanon 1963:221, translation modified)

The theory that posits the innate criminality of the Algerian personality, that castigates "one of the three great monotheistic religions [as] a symptom or even a pathogenic agent" (Macey 2000:221), enabled the founder of the Algiers School of psychiatry, Antoine Porot, and his research team at Algiers University to systematically specify "the modes of expression [of this criminality] and [to offer] a sociological, functional and anatomical interpretation [of them]" (Fanon 1963:223, translation modified). Moreover, this essentializing theory of Algerian criminality was accepted by native Algerian psychological professionals as "scientifically proved" (Fanon 1963:223). Fanon's polemic against the Algiers School of psychiatry was aimed at analyzing the psychological bases of colonial aggression and the psychological dimensions of national liberation. It also established the foundations and contours of a counterhegemonic liberation psychology (Neville, Tynes, and Utsey 2009). Following

their description of an alleged Algerian criminogenic typology, Porot and the Algiers School resorted to the most vulgar eugenics and biologism to explain its phenomenology. In 1935, Porot defined the scientific basis of his theory in the following terms: "the North Africa native whose cortex and reflexes are poorly developed, is a primitive being whose essentially vegetative and instinctive life is primarily governed by his diencephalon" (Fanon 1963:225). To be perfectly clear about the significance of Porot's "diagnosis," Fanon brings the salient neurological principle to our attention, namely that "the characteristic which differentiates the human species from other vertebrates is the cortex. The diencephalon is one of the most primitive parts of the brain and man is above all the vertebrate governed by the cortex" (1963:225).

Surprisingly, Porot does not attempt to retreat from the ethical contradiction of his allegation, but instead plunges deeper into scientific racism by making a sharp turn towards eugenics, writing that

Primitivism is not a lack of maturity, an interrupted development of the mental psyche. It is the social condition which has reached the end of its evolution and is a logical adaptation to a life different from ours.... This primitivism is not only a condition resulting from a specific upbringing, its foundations go far deeper, and we believe its substratum must lie in a specific configuration of the architectonics, or at least of the dynamic hierarchical organization of the nervous system...

The Algerian has no cortex, or to be more exact, like the inferior vertebrates he is governed by his diencephalon. The cortical functions, if they exist, are extremely weak, virtually excluded from the brain's dynamics. There is therefore neither mystery nor paradox. The colonizer's reluctance to entrust the native with any kind of responsibility does not stem from racism or paternalism but quite simply from a scientific assessment of the colonized's limited biological possibilities. (Quoted in Fanon 1963:226)

Fanon's principle concern in dealing with the Algiers School was his sense that the theories of colonial psychologists, upon encountering the various modes of expression of anticolonial behavior,

1. pathologized native populations as criminogenic and deserving of authoritarian repression;
2. pathologized actual political revolt as "an unconscious frustration complex whose recurrence could be treated by radical psychologically appropriate methods" (Fanon 1963:227);
3. pursued a neurobiological reductionism (eugenics); which
4. necessitated the negation, in theory and in practice, of this psychological negation of human difference with a new humanism.

Consistent with the sociogenic character of his psychological perspective on modern racial alienation, Fanon reinterprets the pathologies of occupied populations, especially criminal behaviors, as stemming from the oppressive material conditions of colonialism, not as a "result of the Algerian's congenital nature nor the configuration of his nervous system" (1963:230). Although it is beyond the purview of this essay, Fanon's rather comprehensive and unrecognized theory of colonial

criminology inserts another dimension into his discourse forming the psychological contextualization of torture. Caught between the unrelenting materialism of his/her stomach and the colonial phalanx of police, military, prisons, and torture chambers, an occupied population is forced to confront itself. "Here lies [the] core of self-hatred that characterizes racial conflict in segregated societies" (Fanon 1963:232). Fanon resumes the *screens* motif in his discussion of colonial criminality: "We have demonstrated that in the colonial situation the colonized are confronted with themselves. They tend to use each as a screen. Each prevents his neighbor from seeing the national enemy" (1963:230–231). Uncannily, Fanon even captures, with his notion of screens, the internecine strife between different religious or ethnic communities during military occupations, particularly the phenomenology of suicide bombings or black-on-black violence: "that each man formed the screen for his neighbor and in reality each man committed suicide when he went for his neighbor, was to have an immense impact on... revolutionary consciousness" (1963:233, translation modified).

Occupying powers, aided and abetted by the behavioral and medical sciences, practice a theoretical substitutionism. Following the neocolonial military occupation in which the native population is deprived of its basic civil and human rights, the occupying power, enabled by the instrumental rationality of behavioral and medical science academics and professionals, contextualizes the antioccupation conduct and actions of the native populace descriptively as "criminal," "terrorist," "extremist," "anti-Western," and so on and explains their etiology as originating in the configuration of the "native's" nervous system or from special maladaptive traits of the "native personality." *Psyche* is substituted for *socius*. A eugenicist psychology is substituted for an existential psychology that begins its diagnosis with the violent maintenance of a new existential situation in the reality of the occupied subject who is transformed into *the other* in his/her own land or community.

In this context, that is, neocolonial military occupation, Fanon's existential psychology of colonization/decolonization amounts to a liberation psychology in which the subject who fights against the violent maintenance of (neo)colonial occupation also fights against the stereotype of himself theorized in the practice of Western social, behavioral and medical sciences. For no other reason, then, "Total liberation involves every facet of the personality" (Fanon 2004:233). And if there is any doubt as to the effects of torture on the consciousness of subjugated or occupied nations, especially on the youth, one should heed Fanon's parting observation as a warning: "torture or the massacre...plants more deeply the determination to win, wakes up the unwary and feeds the imagination.... This dialectic requirement explains the reticence with which adaptations...and reforms of the façade are met" (Fanon 1963:233, translation modified). This awakening, as a visceral affect of torture on the imagination, results in a winning of "hearts and minds" that military planners and their psychological services clearly did not intend.

Chapter Ten

Fanon, Fifty Years Later: Resisting the Air of Our Present Time

Alice Cherki

In this chapter, I address Fanon's presence, his work, and his thought within the Francophone landscape, fifty years after his death and the publication of his last work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. By Francophone landscape, I mean France as well as North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and some European countries: England, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, and Germany. Indeed, over the past three or four years, meetings and conferences have been organized around Fanon's name in Paris, Marseille, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Algiers. In 2004, a SILA (Salon du livre d'Algérie) was dedicated to him and more recently, in July 2009, an international conference as part of the Second Pan-African Festival. Students write theses and doctoral dissertations on him. Revues are devoted to him, notably *Les Temps Modernes* (2006:635–636) and *Sud Nord* (2008:22).

A Frantz Fanon international network has been created and was present at the interglobalist meeting in Nairobi. Two movies, less known to the English-speaking public than the one by Isaac Julien, are circulating: *Memoire d'asile*, directed at the psychiatric hospital of Blida by Addenour Zaza, and the 2001 Cheikh Djemai film *Frantz Fanon, sa vie, son oeuvre*, coproduced by RFO and Lanterne productions. His books have been republished and, in some countries, including Algeria, translated into Arabic. The 2002 edition of *Wretched of the Earth* has also been translated into Hebrew.

If I invoke this nonexhaustive state of affairs, it is indeed because—as I indicated in the preface of *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (Cherki 2006)—for nearly thirty years after 1970 Fanon was completely forgotten. There were a few courageous initiatives such as that by Marcel Manville at the Fort de France “memorial” conference in 1982, or the conference in Brazzaville in 1984, which was titled “News of Frantz Fanon” but which had little coverage, even in France. Or furthermore, the International Conference of Algiers in 1987, an event of great quality of which Christiane Chaulet-Achour, one of the principal organizers, still laments the lost recordings.

Silence about Fanon surrounded these years. Denial, even contempt of his work from some French authors and, in a general manner, ignorance of his thought, were the order of the day. "Obsolete thought," they told me, or "apologist of violence!" In the work dedicated to twentieth-century French intellectuals by historian Michel Winock (1997), Fanon's name appears only in relation to Sartre's preface to *Wretched of the Earth*. While this silence was operating, the perverse effects of economic globalization were developing, leading to growing South/North inequalities and also growing inequalities inside each European country, with the old colonized people being pushed to the peripheries. The insidious establishment of an invisible but omnipresent internal frontier, a "boundary," came to substitute the geographic "border" and, at the same time, completed that border by fabricating the "internally excluded." These are the reasons that compelled me to write *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (2000), which was translated into English in 2006. Already alarming in 2000, the world situation has only worsened. Alongside the inequality between South and North, we now face the multiplication of outcasts inside every country, the incessant renewal of humiliation, and the crushing of all those designated as "lacking"—those without any territory, the unemployed and the homeless, the illegal immigrants—in other words, those "lacking" the right to a space of speech.

In the 2002 preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, I insisted upon considering the effects and consequences of this situation, including on a subjective level. Fanon had already indicated the devastating effects of representing the Other as the incarnation of evil and oneself as the good. In line with Fanon, I wrote: "The one designated as evil, frozen under the other's gaze that negates him, experiences first a de-subjectifying shame then hate."

In Europe, the current consequence is racialization, a concept that I borrow from Didier Fassin¹ (2010:147), which is less politically correct than ethnicity but provides a more accurate account of the state of the quasi-institutionalized discrimination of those "coming from elsewhere" in modern European societies. To be black or of Northern African origin is thus a signifier that comes to supplant poverty, social inequality, or other restrictions.

At the same time, dangerous appeals to nationalism appear on both sides of the Mediterranean, using culture and moreover religion, exacerbating bogus nationalisms and excluding alterity. The worst consequences affect an individual's psychical development. Subjected to a double dictum, becoming objects and no longer subjects, summoned to enjoy the consumption of products offered by the market and financial capitalism while simultaneously suffering discrimination—when searching for employment and housing, and even when in the nightclubs—because of their physical type and their name, they, more than others, have problems building a positive self-image. They thus come up against the psychical wandering that leads to violent explosions of identifications or to imaginary recourse to an original and a prescribed, inflicted, and nonetheless glorified, identity.

Reading Fanon helps us to "resist the air of our present time" in the fields of politics, culture, and individual becoming, with his quest to join everything human, every relationship of the singular to the collective in the ordeal of alienation.

To resist the air of our present time, fifty years after Fanon's progressive ideas! This time is governed by a society of contempt, where the power of money triumphs

and is erected as a true ideology inducing fear of the other, regardless of what form it takes, from North to South. This ideology can be characterized by financial capital, corruption, subjection of the impoverished, and a culture of fearing the other, which leads to exclusion and then deportation in the name of iniquitous laws, securing an atmosphere for hegemonic, repressive, and violent statements.

This is a time for the reinforcement of an identity that excludes the heterogeneous and the stranger in himself, in the name of an “us” imposed by a theopolitical power to justify growing inequalities and clans’ privileges. In these politicoreligious alliances, all spirituality is diverted and replaced by recommendations, not to say prescriptions, of trivial rituals. Individuals are deprived of the right to free speech as citizens in the face of a power that, at times, invokes King Ubu. Culture is put behind bars while exile and displacement are given necessary room to change national culture to cause it to function as social mutation, which was, Fanon’s conception of culture.

Culture, violence, oppression of the subject: all these themes were tackled by Fanon. What is there to say about violence? In the map that I rapidly outlined, the oppressors’ violence appears not to announce itself as such but “softly” advances by invoking the rule of law and then disregarding it and flouting it daily. Fanon not only combated but also analyzed the consequences of the oppressors’ violence. He made a pertinent analysis, which continues to be disparaged, especially by those holding power, of violence exercised by oppressors, leading to a world broken into two, in which any space of mediation through speech is no longer possible.

One must not disassociate Fanon the analyzer of racism, or respondent to Mannoni’s *Psychology of Colonization* (1991), from the Fanon who reveals the irreducibility of the colonial situation’s double worlds “separated from one another,” of the duel between two antagonistic and unequal forces that reciprocally exclude and leave the colonized no choice other than submissive petrification or revolt. All one must do today to give this idea resonance is replace “colonized” with “oppressed.” Moreover, Fanon had warned us about the repetition of such mechanisms in newly independent countries. In “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” (1963:97–144), he had already written (in 1961) about the shadow of postcolonial nationalism, where the same structures of domination and confiscation of wealth by more or less autoproclaimed minorities were being reproduced. In our societies, examples can be found: closest to us, outsourced factory workers, suppressed and stifled revolts and strikes, and all other emerging forms of unexpected resistance qualified as illegal.

In the light of current conflicts, others will more specifically develop such and such a particular political point or critique based on Fanon’s writings. And here I attend to one less known aspect of his work: the relationship between trauma and history, which creates a stasis in the human psyche from one generation to another. This implies interrogating the dimension of the real and of history, of the relationship between the collective subject and culture; in other words, psychoanalysis and politics. Let us begin, however, with psychiatry.

What is the state of psychiatry that would matter to Fanon? Psychiatrists are up in arms: “We are all dangerous schizophrenics,” protesting the fate of the mentally ill sent back to the chemical straitjacket. Everywhere in Africa (with few exceptions

such as the Fann Hospital in Dakar), institutional psychotherapy is disappearing to the benefit of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. This cry of alarm against the rise of biological psychiatry and a psychiatry of antidepressant or antipsychotic drugs evacuates the entire dimension of psychopathology, and anthropological psychiatry—which is found in the very formation of psychiatry—joins with what Fanon never ceased to denounce in order to create a different alternative. Fanon wrote of the immigrant worker in “the ‘North African syndrome’” as “thingified” by medical discourse and “uprooted and separated from his ends” (1967b:14, translation modified); he fought to introduce sociotherapy to patients then called Muslim natives at the HPB (Psychiatric Hospital of Blida in Algeria); and he put into place in Tunis an avant-garde day hospital within which the patient does not interrupt contact with home and sometimes work environments, so that psychiatric symptomatology is not artificially suppressed by confinement. During confinement, unlike at the day hospital, symptoms would merely be repressed, sometimes fixed as to prevent their development, but never resolved.

This critique is again becoming a strange and burning issue. What is there to say about the nebulousness of “post-traumatic stress,” proposed immediately after every catastrophe? So many young Algerian psychiatrists were taught this concept during the dark decade of the 1990s in Algeria, and they conscientiously attempted to apply it. They returned almost more wounded than the disaster victims of whom they were supposed to take care, demanding subjective speech in the aftermath of the catastrophe. They discovered that to provide an account of inhibitions, overmedicated delirium, and patients’ actions, one must interrogate the political and historical subjective factors on the unconscious dimension of one generation to another.

One must reread “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” a chapter of *Wretched of the Earth* seldom discussed. From his experience as a clinician, Fanon invites us, in a quasi-prophetic manner, to anticipate the long-term consequences of the aftermath of war on both sides—that of the torturers and the tortured. This will be, he says, the “human heritage of France and Algeria.” After several years, actors in this tragedy (often under the pressure of their descendants and contaminated by the traumas and secrets that surround them) speak, write, and sometimes film their suffering, their somatic and psychological troubles, and the profound alteration of their personality, often in the very terms Fanon used in his clinical descriptions during the 1950s. However, this weighs little on the current sociopolitical context. In fact, everywhere, subjective speech is viewed as bothersome. Everywhere, it is recommended that the subject be a submissive and alienated object. Yet Fanon wanted to free humanity, subjectively, culturally, and politically. He incessantly repeated this assertion in his actions in psychiatry as well as in his political engagements, his thought, and his writings. He did not want the human project to become an “ever menacing death.” Yet the psychical consequences of the violence of colonial history and the silence that surrounds them are driven back from generation to generation. The traumas and the destruction of all references and genealogies make up a great part of current generations’ psychological disorders, at least in France and in Algeria.

Fanon’s progressive ideas are less visible but still present, whether it is in *Black Skin, White Masks* or in *Wretched of the Earth*. They interrogate the conditions of the individual’s psychical development from birth. Children swallow with their baby

cereal the noises as well as the silences of this world. They will draw from them their own representations, their own fictional arrangements, the psychical traces, so to speak, which will become tools for their possible future. More than theorizing these ideas, Fanon has, in an extremely prescient manner, asked questions about what hinders subjective development. He describes the effects of the loss of language, of the violence of history and its renewals from generation to generation, of rejections, of the devalorization and the exclusions of references and genealogies, of arrested traumas, all frozen in an impossible elaboration caused by denial and silencing. He indicates their clinical effects, the infinite erratic violence, the shame, the sideration, the withdrawal of a petrified body, a body in excess, upon itself.

These subjective incidents that find, in order to move, to be translated, or to be directed, neither a point of welcome nor support in the social, the political, and the cultural, haunt not only clinicians' offices and institutions of France's *banlieues*, everywhere else. Fanon insists on the reality, the necessity, and at the same time the impossibility of a scene marked by the denial of existence and memory. It renders difficult or even impossible the implementation of mechanisms for rewriting an obstructed memory—whether it is in the sideration of the black youth (him in this case) named a Negro, or a colonized subject, or any other who, trapped in the nets of violence, has not the means to rewrite the scene. Fanon set out to demonstrate the effects of sideration, returning upon speechless bodies buried in a troubled self-image of shame, dereliction, and erratic violence. And this at the time when social sciences, including psychoanalysis, were mainly confined to the ahistorical and monolingual humming of Oedipus, and where Bettelheim alone tried in vain to make people understand that shame is something well beyond unconscious oedipal culpability. Fanon was bearer of this question, which he illustrated in his psychiatric work (in particular with war traumas) and in his research for *Black Skin, White Masks* regarding subjection to the monolingualism of the other and especially the concealment of slavery in the Antilles. Even more, he delineates that what is the most traumatic “is not that this culture is destroyed, but that it does not disappear totally”—in an interminable agony, it mummifies itself, it calcifies itself. One is close to the terms that make traumas endless, the calcification, the impossibility of escaping or giving one's ancestors a sepulture. He seeks the tools that can provide an account of this subjective sideration and troubled bodily image.

Of these silences we have inherited the obstructed elaboration, the freezing of a body in excess. Our children today—and not only in France—are turning in circles between shame of oneself and shame of everything. While saying that words do not mean anything, their bodies are marked by insignias, by hieroglyphs looking to be deciphered. These are the descendants of men and women marked by historical trauma. They inherit the violence. During their teenage years, in the reality of ghettos, they tend to tie these fragments of history together. They tie these objects of memory, these returned angers or anonymous apathies, to the multiplicity of representations of how the Other is affected by the recognition of this past and its traces. Fanon sensed the existence of this process in Algerian orphans from the orphanages of Tunis, all of whom were inhabited by silence, by paralysis, by an opacity to the world and the infinite violence that overwhelmed them. In this context, for Fanon, it is a matter of giving birth to a new form of subject who is neither siderated nor

objectified, but who is living the tragedy of all mortals. Perhaps, this is what one meticulously attempts to erase today—and not only among the psychiatrists who are so addicted to pharmacology that one cannot ask whether they are not the leaders of the twenty-first century—even when some incandescent action in the world reminds us of the weight of dereliction.

Fanon also already showed, as Didier Fassin points out, that one responds to a racial designation—beyond paralysis—as a “reversal of the stigma”: “you name me a Negro, and I turn back and say: Negro, I am, and so what?” This reversal to which Didier Fassin points fifty years later, invoking Fanon, and which was also previously referenced by Althusser, shows that it is the dimension of the articulation of the real and of history that we confront today. These kernels of reality call for answers, and Fanon never stopped alerting us to this need.

Another topic of great importance to the era of the petrification of identity is one logically connected to the preceding topic: Fanon manifests an aversion to all forms of cultural incarceration of subjects. He rapidly distances himself from any logic that risks becoming a binary of “negritude/whiteitude,” and situates cultures in motion as points of access to the universal. He promotes the work of culture on itself, to which several chapters in *A Dying Colonialism* testify. Of course, it mattered to him, but it also matters to us to spot the ways in which, in the context of colonial domination, culture is trapped between two dead-ends: the rigidification of ancestral cultures into less productive stereotypical traditions and the occupier’s disturbing cultural acquisitions.

But to escape colonial domination is to render possible the mutual and reciprocal enrichment of two cultures toward the universal. Fanon hammers this out in the conclusion of his address to the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne in October 1956, an intervention written in Blida during a summer in the midst of the Algerian war: “The occupant’s spasmed and rigid culture, now liberated, opens up at last to the culture of the people who have really become brothers. The two cultures can now confront each other, and can enrich each other. Universality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures once the colonial status is irreversibly reversed” (Fanon 1967b:44). It is in fact in this sense that he responds quite cordially to Shariati on the subject of Islam. To the latter’s letter feverishly defending the idea that it is only from a return to Islam, to religious practices and values, that a new hope for the oppressed will be reborn, Fanon cordially but firmly responds that he doubts that a return to Islam would constitute the future of a new man. This debate needs to be resituated in the twenty-first century where, it seems, the major confrontation is no longer between the two blocs of the Cold War, but the current conflict between radical Islam and—to name them as such—equally radical Western values appears to be center stage. Could Fanon have underestimated the force of Islam? Perhaps, but his interest, his conception of the liberation of people, and of man, in his singularity, must still be understood today in relation to a Manichaeism that opposes, beyond the South/North confrontation, Islam (with its shadow of terrorist threat), and the West that carries so-called democratic values, yet does not hesitate to exert violence and to scorn international laws when they are not in its favor. Furthermore, the demonization of Islam as a religion and a culture is, at least in France, an integral

part of racialization, which in fact is rooted in the history of colonialism. The great majority of Muslims—not all Arabs in origin—in France are silenced and their diversity denied, including the diversity of their religious practices. The expression “moderate Muslims” flourishes as if the status of being born Muslim were evaluated on a scale of essentialist radicalism. One very rarely says “moderate Christian” or “moderate Jew.” Fanon always opposed this essentialism. In “By Way of Conclusion” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he writes:

I, the man of colour, want only this: That the tool never possess the man, that the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be. The negro is not. Any more than the white man. (1967a:231)

This is not an easy task! A simple example is that of Lilian Thuram, of Guadeloupian descent, the famous soccer player from the mythical French team that won the World Cup in 1998 and author of *My Black Stars* (2010). In France, he works for cultural diversity and Fanon is one of his stars. He cites Fanon at length, but in a purely Antillean context, and he appears to have only read *Black Skin, White Masks*. He knows nothing of the Algerian Fanon. Despite this commendable enterprise evaluated by a number of well-intentioned media pundits, the old “Antillean Fanon versus Algerian Fanon” debate still hangs over what is left unsaid. This debate is not entirely superseded, even if Fanon calls for a displacement of its origins. It certainly appears necessary today to identify oneself by the color of one’s skin, by the status of the oppressed within the same nation, but partially and not entirely as Fanon pointed out: “There is no black mission; there is no white burden” (1967a:228). It is perhaps the most difficult message to hear in a world where the petrification of identity prevails.

There again, Fanon’s cultural anthropology is formidably in advance of the current regressive return of an ethnopsychiatry that relies on a kind of culturalism that Fanon always distrusted, and against which he always defended himself. To objectify specific mentalities to such and such cultural era and, especially, to identify beforehand the subjects of a culture to which they supposedly belong, that is to say, to assign to them a preconceived, preestablished identity, is the essence of a certain current culturalism. It goes perfectly in hand with the prescription of a return to identity. Yet Fanon, the authentic cultural anthropologist, reminds us of the disastrous effects that cultural oppression dictated by a political concern to dominate has on individuals. It leads to a calcification and “a mummification” of that culture. If Fanon utilized signifying referents of that culture for the patients in his practice of social-therapy at Blida, he was always against static mentalities and cultural chains. If he was able to notice that some reference points crushed by the dominant culture must be restored in order to allow a subject to set up a symbolic space, he did not think that it was by assigning a subject to a so-called culture of origin that his liberation and healing would be accomplished. He repeatedly militated in favor of a culture in movement, continuously altered by new situations. From his critique of Mannoni, Fanon affirmed that there existed no intact traditional world. The latter is already altered and must find, in modernity, a way to appropriate for itself the site of what is truly

human and universal. Fanon's attitude is still troublesome to contemporary traditionalists and conservatives.

Too culturalist for some, too Universalist for others! In the sense of this double movement to open up points of reference and move to something that has the potential to become universal, Fanon is a child of today. He is too Universalist to those for whom it is imperative to seize back one's original identity, and too "differentialist" to others because he insisted upon the importance of cultural differences while recognizing reference points in these cultures that indicate movement, the subject's history from one generation to another. Moving from the singular—and not from individualism—to the universal is at the heart of one of the questions of our century, because this idea interrogates the bankruptcy of universals and the role of the subject as actor. Either he disappears or he acts, and this action is that of the political subject. Fanon's trajectory—from liberation of the individual to a political interrogation—is a question that has not ceased to prey on our so-called modern societies. A responsible subject who would be an acting citizen and not a subjugated subject—one rendered passive—is at the heart of today's political reflection when, of course, we do not adjudicate his total erasure. Is this a way of giving back a sense of importance to the word "democracy," which has been so devalued?

Notes

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1. "Neither race, nor racism: What racializing means" (Fassin 2010:147).

Chapter Eleven

Fanon and the Women of the Colonies against the White Man's Burden

Seloua Luste Boulbina

To make the inner voice delirious, the inner voice that is the voice of the other in us.

—Derrida, *"Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy."*

There are certain circumstances, such as "colonization," in which we speak strictly of women only because they have been raped, as if all of the violence against women finds itself concentrated in this one crime, as if they could be mentioned only in a state of passivity. However, rape—the very symbol of violence—covers over the apparatuses, particularly the colonial ones, that specifically target women. This also neglects those attacks that, in order to even be perceived, presuppose an emphasis on the fact that any colonized person has, quite simply, a personal life, affective ties, and so on. Clearly, the lack of differentiation in appearance ("all the same") is not exclusive to the colony; it is simply pushed to the extreme there. But at the same time, because colonial politics is a politics of relegation, of discrimination, indeed of segregation, its operation necessarily relies upon divisions and hierarchical organizations in which each person's fate—according to the category in which they are placed, and the interests that they serve—is meant to depend entirely upon foreign powers. These politics are achieved on the basis of sexual differentiations. Thus, the colony talks out of both sides of its mouth. In this manner, women are both largely excluded from the educational system and meant to be protected from their male compatriots. Everything happens as if, according to the age-old despotic adage, kindness were the key to colonial politics: we must protect them from their own. But how? And in what sense? In order to answer these questions, we must examine the conditions of perception for those facts that ordinary observation neglects. This allows for subjects to be reinserted into a political process and a colonial history. It also allows, after independence,

for a clarification of the contemporary languages (sometimes strictly identical with previous words) through past positions. It is also a way of extracting the lessons of anthropology and reappropriating the analysis according to which, as Maurice Godelier says, "it is impossible to understand the nature of social relations without first understanding how these relations are conceived and experienced" because "these ways of thinking, acting, and feeling make up what we call a 'culture,' which is inseparable from the social relations that lend it meaning" (2010:5).

We are indebted to Frantz Fanon for having shed light on the ambivalent nature of certain realities of colonialism. As someone outside of Algerian society, but as its advocate and witness, he nonetheless comprehended it from within because he understood, to paraphrase Patrick Chamoiseau, how to think in a dominated land (1997). By seeking, through psychiatry, to give expression to the violence perpetrated in a colonized country, he interprets—gives meaning to—the conducts, behaviors, and attitudes that the looming gaze of the colonizers had relegated to irrationality, stupidity, pathology, and mental retardation. One term repeatedly flows from Fanon's pen: flesh. For him, colonial violence is like wounded flesh. The French colonies are effectively governed by a collection of measures entirely foreign to French law, the special measures incorrectly named the "native codes." But it would be erroneous to regard the colony as a "simple" situation of political domination, which allows the majority of the native peoples' social activities to continue freely. Quite to the contrary, especially in Algeria, all aspects of the country's social life are attacked to a greater or lesser degree. The colonial enterprise is essentially an enterprise of destroying the previously existing circumstances of life.¹ From this perspective one can see, as Fanon did, the invasive character of the colonial attitudes that the "right to privacy" has never managed to put an end to. In order for privacy to actually exist, there must be men, women, families, and children, since the private sphere begins with individual existence and familial life. But the colony imposes a right of inspection from which it is difficult for the native peoples to escape.²

Because Fanon is attentive to this type of phenomenon, he is able to approach the colony in a novel fashion, which goes well beyond simple anticolonialist combat and has the merit of introducing sexuation into the consideration of colonial relations. He studied the various forms of colonial violence in great detail in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. No matter the colony, symbolic violence—often accompanied by physical violence—shapes subjectivities that are, ipso facto, either partially or totally denied. In *A Dying Colonialism*, after having emphasized the similarity between two African countries—Algeria and South Africa—Fanon performs a delicate analysis of the veil as the shifting frontier between the colonizer's assaults and the passive resistance of the colonized. His analysis avoids treating the veil, as was typical then and still is today, as manifest proof of a backwardness from which only a few "evolved" natives, as they were called, had escaped. In fact, his reinterpretation of this silent confrontation constitutes a veritable Copernican revolution in its understanding. On the one hand, any inertia will be understood as a form of passive resistance, just as it was in slavery, and on the other hand, the relations between men and women will be perceived as a barrier to the enterprise of colonial transformation that the colonizers would like to impose as a form of irrefutable evidence of both

their victory and its legitimacy. "We shall see," Fanon writes, "that this veil, one of the elements of the traditional Algerian garb, was to become the bone of contention in a grandiose battle, on account of which the occupation forces were to mobilize their most powerful and most varied resources, and in the course of which the colonized were to display a surprising force of inertia" (1967c:36–37).³ Fanon understands both sides at once. On the colonizers' side, beginning in the years 1930–35, it is essentially a question of strategy that aims to act upon men *through* women, or in other words, to make use of the women in order to dominate the men. It is an opportunity to undermine and blame the men in the hope of driving them into retreat. Among the colonizers, both the men (the employers) and the women (fittingly called "social workers") were engaged in unveiling these "fatmas" (1967c:38);⁴ In this sense, Fanon points out the many ways in which a colonial politics is implemented and executed, including its seemingly well-intentioned nature. This is how pressure is exerted not only more and more forcefully, but also more and more broadly. Bosses, for example, extend invitations to both employees and their wives, thereby placing the men in an impossible situation: "If he comes with his wife, it means admitting defeat, it means 'prostituting his wife,' exhibiting her, abandoning a mode of resistance. On the other hand, going alone means refusing to give satisfaction to the boss; it means running the risk of being out of a job" (1967c:40). Abandoning the veil amounts to conceding to "attend the master's school" (1967c:42). The facts confirm this interpretation: "Servants under the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes, were brought to the public square and *symbolically* unveiled to the cries of 'Vive l'Algérie française'" (1967c:62). These women are, then, effectively blacklisted. Having begun with the colonizer's side, Fanon concludes by turning to the side of the colonized peoples. He shows their profound stakes in the colonial relationship, which is violent because it is structurally and statutorily unequal, as well as differentiated, on the basis of sexuation.

Fanon was the first to bring to light "the sadistic and perverse character of these contacts and relationships" (1967c:40) in a colonial system, and to this day we continue to overlook this character as not only a potential structuring of political power, but also as a component of social relations themselves.⁵ Therefore, it is not only in the language of politics, phenomenology, or existentialist philosophy that we come into contact with the "the tragedy of the colonial situation" (1967c:40),⁶ but also in the language of psychiatry. This truly tragic dimension cannot be expressed in the specific language of historiography, despite the fact that it is what gives full truth to the colonial situation. The language of politics is, likewise, relatively powerless in this regard because, on a practical level, it is agonistic, and on a theoretical level, it is much like the language of historiography—a neutralized language in which flesh and human life play no part. But because psychiatry, on the other hand, asserts its expertise in the subjectivity of individuals (but sometimes also, regrettably, of peoples), it is in a position to grasp that which is missing elsewhere. Thus, it is through subjectification, not objectification, that colonial violence, as with all violence, can be spoken. Subjectification? In other words, it takes subjects into consideration, as opposed to only individuals, populations, and peoples. The colonial military authorities made no mistake on this matter: they used medicine as a spearhead for their politics of "pacification." What, exactly, does it mean to take subjects into consideration? In

this case, as in all cases, it means taking the question of reciprocity into consideration. Essentially, the question of reciprocity does not strictly concern persons or individuals, and even less so peoples and populations, but it primarily and originally concerns subjects. Fanon points out the feelings of aggressivity and ambivalence that European men have toward Algerian women. "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizers. There is no reciprocity" (1967c:26).⁷ Indeed, the desubjectification of natives is part of the colonizer's ABCs. The colonial gaze prevents the colonizer from realizing the fact that he himself is being gazed upon, for this would require that he apprehend the colonized as a subject. This kind of politics can fail, however, as it does in the present instance:

The history of the French conquest of Algeria, including the overrunning of villages by the troops, the confiscation of property and the raping of women, the pillaging of a country, has contributed to the birth and crystallization of the same dynamic image. At the level of the psychological strata of the occupier, the evocation of this freedom given to the sadism of the conqueror, to his eroticism, creates faults, fertile gaps through which both dreamlike forms of behavior and, on certain occasions, criminal acts can emerge. The rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil. We here witness a double deflowering. Likewise, the woman's conduct is never one of consent or acceptance, but of abject humility. (1967c:45)

The facts are not always in accordance with the colonial fantasies, even if they may sometimes be. But the colony is such an exceptional fantasizing machine that its rules are ephemeral, its laws are extraordinary, and its regulations are ad hoc.

Taking subjects into account, then, is what drives sexual differentiation. Without subjects, there are neither men nor women, only indistinct colonists and natives, colonizers and the colonized. Without subjects, there is nothing but a collection of bodies that can be affected in one way or another. We generally emphasize, in passing, that rape is an attack specific to women, without ever remarking on the always simultaneously sexuated and sexualized character of colonial politics. It is for this reason that Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* is so important. And, what is more, Edward Said himself has paid homage to its author. Consequently, in order to truly speak about the colonial situation, we must speak about violence; and, in order to speak about violence, we must focus not only on subjects and their lives—and thus, on men and women alike—but also open up our analyses (and our eyes) to the hidden side of behaviors, choices, decisions, and politics. Violence becomes meaningful from the moment we understand the unthought and the unconscious that dwell within it. Without considering this hidden side, we can do nothing but add up the good and bad deeds. But this hidden side cannot be expressed in a rigorously "scientific" language, in the academic sense of the word. This is precisely why Fanon was not academically accepted when he presented *Black Skin, White Masks* as his thesis: his work did not seem to be scientific to the academic authorities. Certainly, the political dimension of the doctoral qualification process will not be lost on anyone. Fanon was then practically sent—even if it was of his own free will—to the gal-lows, so to speak, in a place that represented his academic death: the Blida psychiatric hospital, located in another colony. By virtue of this, he managed to be confined to

the periphery of knowledge. Fanon, therefore, is extremely well suited, in numerous respects, to comprehend the profound damages being wrought by a many-sided, but single-minded, politics.

The ability to speak about modifications in body image, subjective “breaches” (1967c:52) in colonialism, or how musculature is the last private refuge, is not within the means of just anybody. It requires being deeply involved and attentive, and it must be done in *one’s own name*. Only then can one notice those things to which most people pay no attention unless they are specifically interested in them. One must, therefore, constantly be interested. It is also necessary, as we see, to point out that to speak about subjectification is not simply to reduce the realities of colonialism to its subjective phenomena. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon attacks the “so-called dependency complex of colonized peoples” (1967a:83–108) and subjects it to the same punishment that Rousseau, in his day, inflicted on the “right of the strongest.” Octave Mannoni, originally a professor of philosophy, had undertaken the task of producing a “psychology of colonization” (1956) after having spent time first in Martinique, and then in Madagascar. Fanon criticizes him for speaking the colonizer’s language without ever, at any point, being able to utter even a few phrases or words in the language of the colonized (see Fanon 1967a:84, 86). He criticizes him as well for speaking the language of psychiatry without being able to express himself in the language of politics, since he was unfamiliar with it (see Fanon 1967a:94). Without intending to, Mannoni denies the very fact of colonialism and turns to the subjectivity of subjects in order to find an explanation that can be found only in the objectivity of the situation. In this sense, then, intellectual work in colonial and postcolonial situations is necessarily bilingual, and necessitates a constant effort of translation and interpretation. The problem is that this bilingualism is much more common among the colonized than the colonizers, simply by virtue of the colonial condition. From the colonizer’s point of view, the colonized is trapped within his “mother tongue.” And yet, it is the colonizer who is actually monolingual: he ignores the fact that the colony is a world split into two.

After having sealed the Malagasy into his own customs, after having evolved a unilateral analysis of his view of the world, after having described the Malagasy within a closed circle, after having noted that the Malagasy has a dependency relation toward his ancestors—a strong tribal characteristic—M. Mannoni, in defiance of all objectivity, applies his conclusions to a bilateral totality—deliberately ignoring the fact that, since Galliéni, the Malagasy has ceased to exist. (Fanon 1967a:94)

The colony is always a system of both symbolic and physical violence, and these two types of attacks are always directly correlated with each other. The colonized subject is presumed to be guilty—of ignorance, of being uncultured, of savagery, of irrationality. As incapable of philosophy as he is of politics, he is reputed to be incapable of speech and is reduced to the inarticulate sounds of his voice and “dialect.” But it is not only the colonial ideology that imposes this representation. That function is rooted, above all, in the colonial organization itself, which takes those who would elsewhere be equals and transforms them into subalterns. They are standardized “by” their “personality” or “color” and, at the same time, differentiated according

to their relative assimilability, their specific type of barbarism, the symbols of their backwardness, and numerous other characteristics (see Sayad 1967:208).⁸ For the strongest, contempt and arrogance have the force of law. The author of *Black Skin, White Masks* is not inexperienced in these matters. What is entirely new in Fanon's work is the erasure of the great division between the objective and the subjective, between the historical and the individual. On this point, he is extremely innovative. And if he is so innovative here, it is because he is a materialist, that is, he considers existential conditions to be determinative of the subject. In order to arrive at this, he had to distance himself from the primitive alienation of the young Antillean he used to be—black skin, and white mask—and denounce the naturalization of differences in the treatment of individuals according to their “origin,” their “color,” their “belonging,” or, as was often said in Algeria at the time, their “personality.” His undertaking consists of decolonizing psychiatric knowledge. To summarize, the psychiatric knowledge of the time was based first on a classification of humanity into distinct and hierarchized species (Caruthers 1954:291),⁹ and subsequently on an idealistic conception of subjectivity in which the mind is always, in the last instance (except for madness), in control. In that way, psychology avoided the colonial existential conditions of the subject precisely when they most needed to be taken into account. The expression of mental pathologies was consequently attributed to the difference between populations, not to their conditions. But Fanon granted that there was a subjectification of the facts. In so doing, he analyzed the historical architecture and internal politics of those subjects that he both carefully examined as a doctor, and listened to as a psychiatrist. What makes Fanon a standard postcolonial reference (see Haddour 2006:136–158) is his deconstruction of both the colonial gaze and the idealistic and racist approach taken by the psychiatry of his day. He understood decolonization, therefore, to be in opposition to a “magical operation,” a “natural shock,” or especially a “friendly understanding”: it is a battle.

Could we say, in a completely anachronistic fashion, that Fanon is the first of the “subalternists,” given his steadfast attention to discreet expressions, insignificant facts, and the weakest individuals? With Subaltern Studies, the task is a rewriting of history and the development of a national consciousness. The subalternists do not respond to the question of “who writes history?” by saying that “the elite steer the masses,” but rather that “the people are the subject of their own history.” This is to say that the people, too, are “subaltern” groups and “inferior” classes. In this perspective, their study is carried out retrospectively and, as Guha would say, against the grain. The question of gender will then be approached in the same way (see Spivak 2000:324–340).¹⁰ For the subalternists, it is important to know if that which is perceived from the outside is capable of self-expression, and thus of being understood from the inside; it is a question, in other words, of knowing if the subaltern can speak. This question, which was taken up in a spectacular essay¹¹ by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988:271–313), is approached in a way that resembles, in certain respects, the route that Fanon had taken before her. In the fourth part of her essay, Spivak begins by considering the question from a psychoanalytic perspective, making reference to Freud and Sarah Kofman (1985), in order to arrive at the construction of a problematic equation: “As a product of these considerations, I have put together the sentence ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’ in a spirit not unlike the one

to be encountered in Freud's investigations of the sentence 'A child is being beaten'" (Spivak 1988:296).¹² What, exactly, are the white men saving the brown Indian women from in 1829 (1988:287)? From the widow sacrifice, the *sati* (in Sanskrit) or *suttee* (its English transcription), which was abolished that year. From this example, the colonizers' benevolence is revealed to be a specific form of imperialism that depends on an abusive reduction of the signifier *sati* and a deep misunderstanding of the internal stakes of this ritual. First of all, *sati* is not the proper name of the widow sacrifice but means, rather, "good wife." The British are thus committing a serious "grammatical error," which gives rise to an even greater constraint than that of the injunction for the wife to immolate herself on her husband's pyre. Referring to the historian Pandurang Vaman Kane, Spivak then considers that "what the British see as poor victimized women going to the slaughter is in fact an ideological battleground" (1988:300). Without entering into the full detail of the argument, we must highlight the deep similarity between Spivak's interpretation of the British attitude toward the *sati* in India, and Fanon's discussion of the French attitude toward the wearing of the veil in Algeria. In both of these cases, the position of the colonizers, the "white men," is based on a rough understanding of the facts. They ignore the historical,¹³ social, and political dimensions of the practice precisely because, for them, it is unconditionally related to "tradition" and the "alienation" of women "of color" or the "native." But the colonizers never question, of course, the forms of alienation experienced by British or French women, nor do they consider the internal and specific forms of emancipation of women according to the society in which those women live, nor do they question the precise meanings and stakes of these two opposing positions. These two colonial examples also reveal the fact that the relations between men and women are assumed to be far better among Europeans, specifically the British and French, than among non-Europeans, the Indians, and Algerians in particular.

White men are not saving women of color, but rather defending their own position: this means that there is nothing for women of color to expect from white men, least of all being saved. In order to recognize this fact, it is better to be an author from the colonies, or a Third World postcolonial intellectual, than a transparent thinker from the First World who is blind to himself. This is Spivak's claim, and she jointly criticizes Deleuze and Foucault while, on the other hand, relying on Derrida and Lyotard. In fact, she begins by taking up the ideas defended by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, particularly his epistemological prudence. In that text, Derrida warns against the appalling persistence of ethnocentrism and the selective definition of an Other of the "European subject," which can then be entirely concealed as such beneath an outpouring of admiration (1974:80).¹⁴ Subsequently, Lyotard will provide Spivak with, or at least help to sharpen, her critical arsenal. For, in this conflict of the interpretations of freedom, "the constitution of the female subject *in life* is the place of the *différend*" (Spivak 1988:301, emphasis in the original). For her, "what Jean-François Lyotard has termed the '*différend*,' the inaccessibility of, or untranslatability from, one mode of discourse in a dispute to another, is vividly illustrated here. As the discourse of what the British perceive as heathen ritual is sublated (but not, Lyotard would argue, translated) into what the British perceive as crime, one diagnosis of female free will is substituted for another" (Spivak 1988:300). The example Spivak gives is quite revealing. What is to be thought of a woman who is prepared to

immolate herself, but turns back at the last moment? It is a guilty transgression, meriting punishment. But if the immolation should happen in the presence of a British police officer, as is sometimes the case, then it is considered a free choice. It is as if it were no longer the “internal rule” that prevailed, but the “imposed rule” of colonial power. This interpretive about-face is not limited only to the colonial situation. It can also be found in the postcolonial situation when an action, instead of being evaluated in relation to a given norm, is assessed in relation to an external gaze that is cast not on the action itself, but on the norm.

The difference, however, between the introduction of women into Spivak’s and Fanon’s texts—aside from the fact that Fanon is a contemporary of the colonial events, whereas Spivak is not a direct witness to them—stems from the fact that succession is what is at stake for Spivak, and for Fanon it is conjugality. Ever since *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon has always shown himself to be extremely attentive to the desires and expectations, in matters of sexuality and conjugality, to which the colonial situation could give rise. He is all the more attentive to this because the colony is a system of sexual segregation and endogamic prevalence. Mixed unions are rare in the colonies and, as a result, remarkable. When he comments on Mayotte Capécia’s novel *I Am a Martinican Woman*, he shows just how problematic the position of the “woman of color” in relation to the “white man” can be: “Mayotte loves a white man to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life” (Fanon 1967a:43). Fanon—who was well familiar with a society that gives a specific name to the children born of such racial mixing, mulattos, which has more to do with status than complexion—does not discover, in Algeria, the absolute separation of individuals according to whether they are European or Muslim (since Jews were classified as Europeans). He had already experienced that strict separation, but he was deepening his examination of it. Thus, rape represents, objectively, the transgression of the colonial code (the code that separates and divides) and, subjectively, it represents the colonist as the transgressive ideal (the colonial state that permits, even authorizes it). Indeed, perversion and the all-powerful are perfectly combined in a colony; in a colony, the exception is the rule. One has to think of what used to be called “*marriage à la mode du pays*” in the French colonial empire, at least in Western Africa. It meant, quite simply, that polygamy was made not quite legal, but licit, among the French themselves. The “*signares*”¹⁵ were well known in Senegal during colonial times, when the Europeans, whose wives had stayed home, chose a concubine for the duration of their time in the colony. Even if the position of these relationships was weakened with French colonization, following Faidherbe’s control of the region between 1854 and 1863 and the administrative imposition of a legal inferiority of women (established by the Napoleonic Code), their influence nonetheless did not disappear (see Bonin 2009:207–217). The custom remained. The significance for the conjugal norm, here, has nothing to do with a moral or social valorization of the norm, but stems from the equality of treatment that is presupposed whenever it is respected. The norm is a marker of social and racial differentiation, and that is what attracted Fanon’s attention. Accordingly, he puts his finger on something so well known that it is no longer even interpreted: “In the colonies, in fact, even though there is little marriage or actual sustained cohabitation between whites and blacks, the number of hybrids is amazing....The racial conflicts did not come later, they coexisted.

The fact that Algerian colonists go to bed with their fourteen-year-old housemaids in no way demonstrates a lack of racial conflicts in Algeria" (1967a:46).

Fanon's topicality, his interest in postcolonial studies, stems from the fact that he does not intend to write in the place of or represent anyone but himself.¹⁶ The fact remains that he intends, according to Deleuze's beautiful phrase, "to write for this people who are missing... ('for' means less 'in the place of' than 'for the benefit of')" (1997:4). Fanon's texts are not addressed to the omnipresent and talkative colonizers, but above all to those who are missing, the colonized peoples, who figure at best as invalid interlocutors. What Spivak had indicated in the origin of the subalternists, Fanon achieves in purpose: the written word does not replace, after the fact, a speech that is missing but, on the contrary, it entitles it ahead of time. Instead of seeking to restore this absent speech, it strives to establish it. This is the big difference between the practices of historiography and psychiatry or, more still, psychoanalysis. If the questions of gender and of speech are so intimately connected, it is because history in the feminine (in order to differentiate it from what is called "women's history") is as absent, *in theory*, as the feminine gender (the famous "second sex") is, *in theory*, silent. For this reason, the central question becomes one of theft (stolen history, stolen speech). Gender is, in a manner of speaking, unadvertised. In his reflections on a "madman," Antonin Artaud, Derrida grasped the entanglement of theft and speech quite well: "Theft is always the theft of speech or text, or a trace. [...] The theft of speech is not a theft among others; it is confused with the very possibility of theft, defining the fundamental structure of theft" (1978:175). In this chapter, dedicated to "*la parole soufflée*," Derrida does not claim that there couldn't be another theory of theft than the one that he presents. He intends simply to "establish communication" between "the essence of theft" and "the origin of discourse." It is no coincidence, then, that just as we saw earlier with Fanon, Derrida directs his attention in Artaud toward questions of dispossession, loss, division, exile, and flesh.

Notes

This chapter was translated by Michael Stanish.

1. Imagine, for example, the true meaning of the ban on craft guilds that was promulgated in Algeria in 1884. It meant, quite simply, the death of the craft industry. Nothing remains but the rugs woven by women in the ages-old style, which are, ipso facto, outside of the craft industry proper. Whereas Morocco is well-known for its adobe buildings, there has not been any earthen construction in Algeria for a long time, and the *ksars* are nearly all in ruins.
2. This concept plays a role of primary importance in taxation. As Tzvetan Todorov observes in his preface to the French edition of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, "the concept is the first weapon in the submission of others—for it transforms them into an object (whereas the subject is irreducible to the concept); defining an object such as 'the Orient' or 'the Arab' is already an act of violence" (1980:9).
3. The colonial slogan would be: "Let's win over the women and the rest will follow" (1967c:37). This strategy was substantiated by sociological studies according to which Algerian society, beneath the guise of patrilineality, was in fact a "structure of matrilineal essence" (1967c:37).

4. "We want to make the Algerian ashamed of the fate that he metes out to women" (1967c:38). "Droves of social workers and women directing charitable works descended on the Arab quarters" (1967c:38).
5. This is what we see under the banner of "harassment," especially in the workplace.
6. In Alice Cherki's book, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, she notes that, from very early on, Fanon refused to bend to the inquisitorial practices of classical psychiatry (2006:17–18).
7. We can see this same argument today surrounding the wearing of the burqa in France.
8. "One could say that it was never in the nature of colonization to ensure the emancipation of the colonized peoples, even by means of the language, schools, and culture of the colonial society.... The entire history of schooling in Algeria is marked by this hostility and, on the eve of independence, its educational structures, its status, the density of its distribution, and its general configuration were still directly dominated by the structures of colonization, especially those of land ownership. This is the only way that one can explain the curious disparities between one region of rural Algeria and the other; between, for example, the mountains, where schools are relatively numerous and colonial interests are weak, and the plains, where schools are almost completely absent but, on the other hand, the colonial interests are particularly powerful" (Sayad 1967:208).
9. "The normal African is a lobotomized European," as doctor Caruthers, an expert for the World Health Organization, put it (1954:291).
10. This why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak considers "historical" and "classical" Subaltern Studies to be uninformed by feminist theory, and thus no longer of any real use to it. On the other hand, she feels that the new determinations of subalternity elaborated from the Foucauldian concept of biopower necessitate a revision of feminist theory.
11. She answers the question firmly in the negative. No silent voice can, in effect, be restored at a distance: it cannot be dubbed over. The past is largely silent. This, it would seem, is the reason we need literature.
12. Freud presents his 1919 text, "A Child Is Being Beaten," as "A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions," and in it he discusses the difference between girls and boys with respect to this fantasy.
13. In the case of the *sati*, Spivak points out that "in certain periods and areas this exceptional rule became the general rule in a class-specific way" (1988:300).
14. "Each time that ethnocentrism is precipitately and ostentatiously reversed, some effort silently hides behind all the spectacular effects to consolidate an inside and to draw from it some domestic benefit" (1974:80).
15. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese Jews, the *Laçados* (those who throw themselves at adventure), in order to flee the inquisition, created trading posts and married the daughters of the chiefs of Serer villages. The mulatto daughters born of these unions, the *signaras* or *signares*, controlled the trade of leather, cotton, indigo, spices, and sugar. They married only other mulattos or Europeans. The Catholic Church endorsed these unions. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, these Senegalese women, in Saint-Louis or in Gorée, enjoyed a much coveted status in colonial society.
16. As he writes in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, "I do not come with timeless truths. My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances. Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said" (1967a:9).

Chapter Twelve

The Emergence of the Subject in Politics: Some Reflections on the Algerian Situation and on the Work of Frantz Fanon

Karima Lazali

Frantz Fanon is known according to three different roles: writer, activist, and clinician. He was an Antillean psychiatrist who became Algerian, actively participating in the Algerian people's struggle for liberation. His position as a political activist against the oppression and subjugation of the individual was felt not only in Algeria but also in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Fanon's entire work may be read as a profound reflection on the clinical incidence of colonial violence, both on a subjective and a social level. In this respect, Fanon is truly Freudian in his elaboration of the existing link between the individual psyche and culture or civilization. Indeed, to read Fanon is to feel, with each page, the impossibility of dissociating between the singular and the collective. *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (A Dying Colonialism) is a perceptive account with profound relevance for the subjective effects of colonial violence. According to Freud, and later to Fanon, caring for the wounds within the human psyche means understanding and taking note of the sociopolitical factors that have had an impact on how the personality of the individual subject is woven. In other words, subjectivity carries the traces of a collective history that exceeds and goes beyond it. The speaking subject resides within his speech, and within the fragmented pieces of his own individual story, which together form another, greater history. This greater history precedes the subject, yet he finds himself welcomed within it, even at the moment of being brought into the world. The subject is thus someone who never ceases to write his own "story." He writes from within a heritage that does not belong to him, of which he has no ownership, but to which he must respond. It might be said that the responsibility of the subject when faced with this history is difficult to ignore. How should one situate

oneself when faced with history? What should be done with it? Is it a question of being passively subjected to history's disasters? Or, on the contrary, of participating in the writing of history, from the position of actor-interpreter?

These are burning questions, bearing in mind that a specificity of colonial violence, and of the diverse forms of inheritance stemming from this, is the disappropriation, or worse, the destitution of that which belongs to us (language, history, and culture). This is what happened in Algeria when the autochtone was assigned the status of "native." This label marked the subject's skin, creating an effacement of the self or a process of depersonalization. From now on, the question is: what am I, beyond the label that the Other has imposed upon me? According to Fanon's thought, colonization, a phenomenon of domination and submission, consists of fabricating subjects that are distanced from the familiar within the self. These subjects are, in some respects, witnesses of their own downfall, which leaves them outside of their own selves, both in a literal and metaphorical sense.

It is a question, then, of thinking through a paradox: how might the subject, faced with the pure process of loss, humiliation, and disavowal that occurs when denied one's rightful heritage, cope? Alice Cherki names these disinherited subjects "children of the times" (2006). These children are from here, but also from elsewhere. Despite frontiers, they inherit an "expulsion from the self," which is incarnated in their use of a death-like language—a language that does not inhabit the living part of the human.

Fanon writes in *L'An V* that "French colonialism inserted itself into the very heart of the Algerian individual, and from there undertook a careful work of effacement, of expulsion from the self, of rationally pursued mutilation" (1967c:65). In such a context, how might it be possible to escape from this division between two worlds and two organizations, that of the colonized and that of the colonizer? How might it be possible for the subject to extract himself from the submissive position in which he has been placed? Fanon puts us on our guard with a strong and unquestionable appeal when he writes that it would be illusory to suppose that Algerian liberation alone would suffice to bring freedom from the servility created by colonial domination. It would be utopian to believe that independence was enough to change the position of the subject, passing directly from the submissive status of exclusion from the self, to the status of 'free' citizen involved in the act of living together with others.

I believe that Fanon's thought is fundamental to this question, and more pertinent than ever, as it testifies to a striking anticipation of what occurred in Algeria. As he writes, "The colonized people, who have been stripped bare, must lose the mental attitude that has characterised them until now" (1991:136). In other words, the liberation of an entire people, like that of the individual, can constitute an extraordinary opportunity, but can also descend into a situation of desperation. Such a shift might occur in times of anguish or destitution. Indeed, liberation (both individual and collective) is a fundamental preamble to the construction of a new place, hence a new design of intra- and intersubjective relationships. It does not, however, constitute in any respect a guarantee of identity construction. Far from it, as liberation opens the doors to a new, and this time internal, struggle—the struggle to inhabit a self that is not humiliated and with whom it is possible to live. When the identity that the Other had assigned to the self is lost, this constitutes a distressing test for that self. This founding

act may arouse great anguish, or even leave a gaping hole within the subject's "sentiment of the self," that is to say, his identity. This liberated anguish could lead to a new and creative future, but also carries the risk of a prolonged situation of domination, which is reassuring due to its familiarity, but which harks to the same thing as before. In this scenario, domination keeps its place within the self, threading the social bond by realigning the identical pursuit of servility. This diabolical assignation to the role of dominant or dominated has endured in Algeria throughout its terrifying history. The perception and observation of the world in Algeria has continued to separate (in the sense of a tear) between an "us" and a "them." In this respect, since a few years ago, in the name of religious purity and its corollary, linguistic purity, an impossible, circular game has been constructed. This division is like a wall of stone.

Moreover, the use of the signifier "hogra" (scorn) as a key word seems to illustrate the phenomenon of introjection of the oppressor. This is the sign of what Fanon calls "the impossible encounter." Indeed, this signifier, punctuating individual discourse with a collective dimension, implies the difficulty of detaching oneself from history, and more specifically of inventing a place for oneself that is not submissive or servile to an authority that is elsewhere invisible or obscure and yet continues to be present. "Hagrouna" (we have been held in contempt—"we" designating a ferocious but unidentifiable Other) dictates nonetheless a similar injunction of humiliation, of shame, and of wordless submission.

It must be added that this unidentifiable authority made a return during the years of civil war, where the famous question of who was killing whom reemerged from the shadows. Did this mean that the message remained the same, but the source of this message had become confused, because it had been internalized and now found shelter in the psyche of each individual? Had we become, then, since liberation, colonized from the inside, each person carrying within the self a divide between the colonizer and the native? This would explain the "frontier burners"—known literally as "harragas"—who leave Algeria without any precise destination in mind, just seeking to leave at any price, even risking their lives. These young Algerians, "symptom" of the times, are living witnesses to the dissolution of an experience of living together in Algeria. They say with and to their bodies that it is the "elsewhere" within the self that has been assassinated, leading to a sensation of suffocation. In psychoanalytic terms, this "elsewhere" does not fit into a romantic category; rather it makes the position of desire possible. In other words, the opacity of this "elsewhere," the sense of possibility felt in the interior of the self, is the cause of desire and, therefore, becomes for the subject a reason for living. In this context, leaving becomes a quest for this "elsewhere" that has been murdered within the self. In other words, it is a question of crossing geographic boundaries in the hope of finding a modality of the social bond, which leaves space for this "elsewhere," and for this precious unfamiliarity that the subject perceives within himself. Is this not what was barred in the fabrication of the social bond in Algeria after independence?

Indeed, the identity void left gaping after liberation led to the need to construct a so-called national identity, in response to the famous question of "so who are we?" This attempt to create the self seems to have taken into account the fantasy of rediscovering the part of the self excluded during colonialism. The illusion of recuperating a kind of loss served as guidance for the political project. It was this illusion

that led to a form of devastation, an internal war even. The political system, which was quite rightly concerned with the identity question, erred when it made the decision to place religion as the first priority. This was accompanied by the installation of classical Arabic, thus creating two linguistic systems, which could not be united but which did not take into account the linguistic origins of the subject (dialectal Arabic and Berber). Religion and language were used to resolve the painful question of belonging, and the illusion that Algeria—in an international context abounding with pledges—was part of the so-called Arab-Muslim world. However, this operation grew from a systematic exclusion of difference, disagreement, and division in the hope of reaching an all-encompassing inclusion of the subject and the social. It is no longer a question of speaking as “I,” but rather as a homogenous “we,” or even as a mass, in the Freudian sense of the term when he writes of “mass psychology and the analysis of the ego.”

The use of religion to legitimize politics occurred due to a language phenomenon based, as during the colonial era, on a dislocation of the body and the linguistic origins of the subject. The choice of designating the mother tongue to the position of sublanguage leaves the subject orphaned from his body and from the first traces that marked it. The imposition of classical Arabic reconstructed two linguistic worlds without consideration for the development of passageways between them—the world of French speakers and that of Arabic speakers. The contrary was true, as each world claims to possess a more authentic identity. Arabic speakers thought of themselves in terms of linguistic purity and a fantasy of belonging to an identifiable origin. French speakers meanwhile, attached to the French language, never cease to remind us of their role as inheritors of history, yet remain ignorant of the innovations of new generations. Experiencing an increasing sense of exile, these French speakers serve as an unbearable historical reminder for generations of Arabic speakers.

In each case, language carries with it a specific way of thinking and orienting oneself on the world stage. The first intellectuals murdered in Algeria tended moreover to be those well-versed in the French language. It seems that the development of history tried to include the murder of this language within the self. Here, however, history is written in letters of blood comparable in scale to the brutality of the war for independence. The present question should be: how might it be possible to invent a benevolent Other within the “self” that is no longer a threat or a persecutor? Such questions are concerned with issues of individuation and the creation of a symbolic Otherness within the social bond. It should be feared that, for as long as Algerian society surrounds itself with the signifiers “us” and “them,” a salutary distancing from colonial history cannot be envisaged.

L'An V is, then, also an invitation to create moments of rupture in history. These ruptures already exist, but are often buried or masked in the name of historical continuity. Does this mean that Fanon's remark takes into account the relationship between the human subject and Otherness? Or perhaps the problem is this: how might it be possible to construct a history that remains open to an unknown future? How might it be possible to create, within society, a space to negotiate for the recognition of history and its many alterations? And thus find a solution to the dilemma between those who want to wipe the slate of history clean, and those who remain fixated with historical factuality.

The question of "terrorism" in Algeria has merely been the bloody fulfillment in actions of this divide between "us" and "them." This quickly emerged onto the national stage, but it was only following the international response that the substance of the Islamic God emerged. Why did this internal divide within an ex-colony make so many waves on the international scale? Did this mean that God constituted the only possibility for Algeria to find her place in the world, positioning herself as an imagined counterpower?

September 11 was lived and proclaimed by many Muslim populations as the signature of this war of division. It is interesting to note how, a few years later, another triumphant message was sent to "us" from "them." This occurred in December 2006, the day of the Eid al-Adha, when the ritual of sacrifice is celebrated. I was in Algeria during this time and many details captured my attention. In all the market stalls in town, different grades of knives could be found for cutting the throats of sheep. Such a display seemed terrifying in a town where, only a few years earlier, it was men and women whose throats were being cut in cold blood, and in the name of God. This detail did not seem to capture anyone's attention, the display of knives indicating a return to real life that received little recognition. Was this one of the effects of terror—that it erased the potential for symbolization and, therefore, for recognition? A further detail may be added, which seems so specific to Algeria and to her relationship with history: although a celebration, on that day Algiers was dead or silent (bearing in mind the ambiguity that might occur in French between the verbs "taire/to silence" and "tuer/to kill"). There was no noise and no movement; only the sound of televisions permeated the city. I discovered that the men and women were all glued to their television screens, dividing their time between the ritual sheep sacrifice and the assassination of Saddam Hussein. A question remained with me: what message could be drawn from this collusion? How might it be possible to break free from the drive toward murder in a country where this collusion between the cutting of both animal and human throats had reigned? Indeed, to see the world from Algiers on that day was to live in terror, in the sense that this phenomenon shattered any distinctive threshold between interior and exterior, between aggressor and aggressed. What had disappeared was the fabric of this distinction, so fundamental for the subject. Worse, this lost distinction has an unmarked grave, from which it continues to knock on the door of a country where civil war is said to be over. A terror without shape, therefore, persists in influencing the bonds between individuals.

In such a situation, to read Fanon the psychiatrist is to understand how his presence is helpful in sensing the boundary between living and dead and between colonizer and colonized. Fanon's written cries bring a moving frontier into existence, at once a passageway, a game of illusions, and a distress signal. Indeed, we owe much to this politically committed thinker for never ceasing to warn us, in almost a visionary manner, of what was to come. What did we do with these warnings? How is Fanon read nowadays in Algeria? Evidently this author-activist has a larger readership in Algeria than in France. His name is mentioned by all Algerian intellectuals, yet leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Fanon is famous for having been a hero/martyr, who died fighting for the cause of the oppressed, or the "natives." However, in the light of such heroic recognition, his name becomes twice as powerful while his thought fades into the background. Fanon repeatedly warns of the risks of reproducing history, and of

sheltering within the self a submissiveness from which people had freed themselves in order to become subjects. Now this preoccupation becomes more relevant than ever, yet the fact that this is a preoccupation of the future, more so than of the past, tends to be ignored.

I settle here for unraveling in what respects and how Fanon, as a clinician, invites everyone to take part in a great construction—that of the writing or rewriting of a collective history—in order to become an (authorial) subject, no longer in a position of servility. This involves refusing the predominance of one sole version of history in favor of a more ambiguous plurality that is open to interpretation, discussion, and even to the incessant dialogue between the self and the Other.

For Fanon the psychiatrist, colonization represented an attack on the dignity of the person and on recognition of the person as a familiar figure. Indeed, a (dominant/ dominated) “us” and “them” is created within a relationship of impossible encounters and radical asymmetry (1991:132). What is excluded in a situation of colonial domination is the possibility to hold one’s own in interpersonal exchanges, or a relationship of reciprocity between the self and the Other. This worldview obeys a division between humans and *subhumans*, between citizens and *subcitizens*. Though for some an unlimited appropriation is authorized, others are subjected to emptied homes and an imposed language, and are forbidden from moving around circulating the city.

A comparative reading of Fanon’s texts leads us to think that “the impossible encounter” is a consequence of the absence of a shared language. This has manifested itself due to the creation of a linguistic hierarchy between French and Arabic. These languages are separated by a dividing line that cannot be crossed, because they cannot coexist or be used in the same context, and cannot be recognized as equally worthy.¹ It should be noted that this phenomenon has remained a source of difficulty and debate since Algerian independence.

For ex-colonies, as for the subject of the tyranny of a relative, by what implicit mechanisms does this strange sentiment of uncriticized submission last? And why is it sometimes accompanied by regret, at being abandoned by the obscene figure of the master? The richness of psychoanalysis consists of its ability to give voice to that which has been refused or excluded, so that the subject may reinvent his own language woven with rejected desires. The death of the tyrant master, dictator of an unacceptable law, does not dissolve the servile bond. Let us recall Fanon’s strikingly relevant proposals when he writes in *L’An V*:

The death of colonialism is both the death of the colonised and the death of the coloniser. New relationships are not the replacement of one type of barbarism by another, of one way of crushing a man by another. What we, Algerians, want, is to discover the man behind the coloniser; this man who is both commander and victim of a system that suffocated him and reduced him to silence. As for us, we have rehabilitated the colonised Algerian man over long months. We have torn the Algerian away from secular and implacable oppression. We have stood up and now we are moving forward. Who can put us back into servitude? (1967c:32)

Let us pause to reformulate this last question: how have we put ourselves back into servitude and excluded the foreigner? The foreigner should also be considered in

the Freudian sense of the word, so “the ego that is not master in his own home.” One should understand here the unfamiliar within the self, which manifests itself when the self can no longer be understood. It must be pointed out that being assigned to just “primitive” or “native Arab,” or to just “colonizer” or “dominant French,” is in each case a very clear demonstration of the exclusion of the unfamiliar within the self.² This is because in such situations the subject is completely and brutally reduced to the gaze of the Other upon him or her: dominated Arab, dominating French or immigrant from a third zone. It is no longer possible to move between the space where the Other places “me,” the space where “I recognise myself” as a unified “self” and the space where an intimate part of the “self” may be discovered. This intimate part of the self is unknown but I accept the possibility that this belongs to the “ego”: see the production of dreams, Freudian slips, and parapraxis (actions that I produce without my consciousness).

Fanon’s thought elaborates the effect, on subjectivity, of suppressing different manifestations of the unfamiliar within the self. However, it could be said that it is the unfamiliar within the self that makes us interpret subjectivity as a mystery and a source of creativity. The unfamiliar interprets the self according to what he or she perceives as enigmatic for that self. No sense of identity is possible without this encounter with the foreign and with the unfamiliar; on the condition that the foreign and the familiar within the self may talk, circulate, and enter into conflict with one another.

In Algeria, a recurrent complaint may be heard: the complaint of men and women who feel that they are constantly emitting a mute cry, that they are suffocating and drowning their singularity in a massive collective, known as “Arab Muslims.” The use of psychoanalysis in Algeria as the practice of individual speech is experienced as a call to leave behind a ferocious “us” in order to reunite with the unfamiliar within the self, remobilizing that which has been “silenced” and forbidden on the social stage.³ This expectation of psychoanalysis and its commitment to the solitary, intimate self meets with opposition from others. The analyzing subject asks to discover this unfamiliar within the self, to welcome it as an intimate body, while the social bond excludes this intimacy and interiority. This would lead to an independence based on a confusion of imaginary and symbolic levels of Otherness, both of the enemy and of the unfamiliar (the term also means “foreigner” here). Speech is a way of making a distinction between these two categories. The analysand must relive the experiences of a distressed child who discovers that the Other is indispensable for his or her survival. Self-sufficiency is a fantasy of being all-powerful, which is broken apart by “the reality principal” (Freud 1956). It is thus not a question of liberating oneself from the “helpful” foreigner/unfamiliar (for Freud), but rather from the position of disposable object to become a speaking and thinking subject.

The war for independence, like the individual traumatism that it caused, can be a source of new creativity only if a precise temporality is in place—what Freud calls the *Nachträglichkeit* (also known as *après-coup*).⁴ Was there an *après-coup* of the war for independence? Or are we still confronted with a problem that, despite liberation, expresses itself in Algeria via the assignation to previously fixed positions? This question continues to be raised despite endless attempts to get away from this situation: something insists and persists.

According to Fanon, the colonized may be discussed in terms of a precise modality relating to the link between language and body. He emphasizes the statement that the body of "the colonized" is immobile, almost a statue, by which he refers to what in clinical terms we call a state of fear and astonishment. A "silenced" language inhabits this body, because this language is forbidden in the city. Both body and language bear witness to a halt in the forward movement of the world, or one might say a halt in the siege by the Other. Despite liberation, however, remobilization, a sort of reanimation of the body and the psyche, is not a given. There is a kind of residue that remains of the colonial era.

We had thought that it would be simple, that the world was divided between "good" and "bad." What a deception, Fanon might say. It is not sufficient to wipe out the obstacles, as without a veritable effort toward historicization and changing positions within the social bond, one runs the risk of recreating an enemy from within. This might occur as a consequence of denying a place for the unfamiliar, therefore, recreating the divisions between leader and people, between languages, or between invisible oppressors and submissive plaintiffs. The cry of betrayal finds its origins here. As Fanon writes, "The people discover that the iniquitous phenomenon of exploitation can be either black or Arabic in appearance. They denounce this betrayal, but their cry must be corrected. The betrayal is not national, but social" (1968:145).

In psychoanalysis, a change of positioning, or situating oneself differently in the social space, may occur as a result of the discovery and circulation of the language of intimacy, that is, the individual dialect that belongs to each subject. Recognition of this dialect, a language of symptoms and desire, removes the crushing weight of internal tyranny. Analysis, therefore, makes a movement of languages possible, as well as a ceaseless work of translation between known and unknown, self and Other, familiar and unfamiliar. These different levels of interweaving between languages create the possibility of maintaining difference and distance within the "sentiment of the self" (Freud). In other words, the meeting between these different levels of language creates a playful relationship in the "self" between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Both begin to coexist fully on the same stage and no longer continue to uphold "the impossible encounter."

It is conventional to think that the imposition of classical Arabic came from the need to create a national identity in the aftermath of independence. However, this language was encountered by everyone in a relationship of unfamiliarity compared with dialectal Arabic or Berber, the linguistic context within which the subject had developed. Ahead of the times in terms of what occurred after independence, Fanon warns us of a potential misuse of the tools that might serve to construct a national identity. Reading Fanon, one might ask the following question: what was the place of classical Arabic after independence? Does this language, identified as the only language of knowledge and culture, not just take the place of the language of the oppressor? If this is so, then French speakers and Arabic speakers are the same. Only feelings of hatred can distinguish and separate them, in a context where they have forgotten to confer.

Indeed, classical Arabic, given such a position in the name of erasing Maghreb or Machrek differences, might create divisions and hierarchies between languages, as it is a language that is not accessible to the entire population. Moreover, clinical

incidences of this division may occur in the sense that thought and emotion (affect) could become disassociated. These would lead to a divide between the language of emotion, from which thought is excluded, and a language of knowledge, from which the traces of childhood (sexual and emotional thoughts) are excluded. This leaves us in a situation whereby two languages exist without a space in which they may coexist. In this case, there is no passageway between a common language, threaded throughout the body, and a language of knowledge. This necessary language phenomenon (necessary in order to create a national sentiment), may suddenly work against itself by producing two kinds of society, thus bearing witness to the traces of the past when it had been employed to eradicate them.

It is astonishing to already be able to read of this concern for the effects of "Arabization" in *Les Damnés de la terre*. Here, Fanon points to the danger of a return to the same situation as before, due to the construction of linguistic divisions making an encounter between those to whom he refers as "the people," and "the bourgeoisie," impossible. This is a crucial issue for Fanon, because these divisions mark a continuation of colonial violence. The rupture that separated the periods of before and after begins to diminish, and a sense of identity is once again split into two. In the postindependence era this can lead to the painful impression that citizenship is "an empty title," going against the hopes that led to the war for independence (1991:138). Unless it was felt that these historical repetitions were necessary in order to achieve the emancipation from domination by the Other. *Les Damnés de la terre* is a text that can be read from cover to cover as a political project to make people become aware of their responsibilities. The purpose of this project is to urgently facilitate the passage to citizenship for everyone, in order to escape from the rule of different forms of domination, and its corollary, exclusion. In this sense, the coexistence of different languages (classical Arabic/dialectal Arabic/Berber/French) opens up the possibility of exchange and discussion, of misunderstanding and discord. This may be the source of renewal and creation.

The drafting of history involves a separation with a fixed history in order to promote a sense of responsibility for one's destiny, in the Freudian sense of the term, despite what has taken place in the past. For Fanon, the only means of escape from the diabolical repetition of history is through exchange, distribution, and the sharing of responsibilities and tasks.

The passage from "native" to "citizen" marks the birth of the desiring subject and of speech where there was silence, oppression, and shame. This emergence is thus concomitant with the becoming-subject in politics. The insistent presence of historical continuity today should not block access to moments of rupture, which should be encouraged. Indeed, these are the discoveries that provide an escape from the roles assigned to us by history. Colonization determines certain positions (dominant/submissive), but this is not sufficient to explain the reasons why men and women might uphold such positions. Without this painful questioning, there is a risk of putting history at the origin once again, and therefore removing the role of the subject as actor when faced with his or her heritage.

To conclude, we return to Fanon's invitation: "The collective construction of destiny is the assumption of a responsibility that has the dimensions of history... The national government, if it wants to be national, must govern by the people and for

the people, for the disinherited and by the disinherited" (1991:198). It could be added that this is on the condition that "the disinherited" reply "yes" to their responsibility as speaking subjects. The crucial question at the crossroads between the individual and the collective is how to discard the fixed positions that history imposed without losing oneself in a vast crossing of boundaries that ends up leading nowhere. How is it possible to give back to the unfamiliar within the self a status of intimate interlocutor, when there has been a breakdown between the unfamiliar and the expropriating enemy?

Notes

1. This refers to *L'An V* and what Fanon writes regarding the double use of the TSF, between its official use that served to "not become Arabized" and to remain in the position of colonizer, and its clandestine use that was adopted by moudjahiddins and all Algerians, allowing them a real involvement within the war, via the airwaves.
2. As Fanon writes in *L'An V*, "Otherness for the black is not black, but white."
3. The term "silenced" is used by Alice Cherki (2006).
4. The term was translated to English by Strachey as "deferred action"; however, this term is no longer considered a suitable translation.

Chapter Thirteen

Wretchedness

Grant Farred

the question of political universalism depends entirely on the regime of fidelity or infidelity maintained, not to this or that doctrine, but to the French Revolution, or the Paris Commune, or October 1917, or the struggles for national liberation, May 1968.

—Alain Badiou, *Philosophy in the Present*

Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* is an argument with Frantz Fanon and Georges Sorel, to a lesser extent. Arendt's work is determined to define violence, to delineate how it should be philosophically conceptualized in order to better understand its political uses. *On Violence* responds directly to Fanon's opening chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Wretched*), a chapter that bears the same title, "On Violence." Arendt's work is an argument against the ways in which Fanon, in *Wretched*, and Sorel, in *Reflections on Violence*, understand and deploy the relationship between politics and violence, between revolution—or, the struggle against (neo)colonialism—and violence. Arendt is clear that violence and power are not interchangeable political concepts, that they must be thought of discretely, even as two forces capable of destroying each other. She is insistent and demanding in her distinction. For her it is "insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same" (Arendt 1970:56). Because violence is "by nature instrumental" (it can overthrow the colonial rulers), Arendt argues, violence is always a threat to power: "Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance" (1970:51, 56). In Fanon, of course, violence plays an entirely different role. It is central to the constitution of the identity of the colonized in the face of colonialism's radical denial of a black subjectivity. Violence is that (psychic and physical) force that allows the colonized to be and that is why, for Fanon, the violence of "decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind for another" (Fanon 2004:1). That "species" represents, in decolonizing terms, the inauguration of the postcolonial subject: the "colonized man liberates himself in and through violence" (Fanon 2004:44): through violence

the colonized man liberates himself into (sovereign) being. Fanon's claim is unambiguous: without violence, no decolonization; without violence, no subjectivation of the decolonized.

Apart from their discourse on violence, no struggle from that decades-old argument survives as provocatively as the issue of identity politics, especially as it pertains to race. The Fanon-Arendt dialogic around identity, considered within the cauldron of 1960s anticolonial and student politics, is grasped only imperfectly by Anthony Lang in his critique of *On Violence*. "Fanon is not her only, or even her main, target, in this essay," writes Lang, "she is responding to the student movement of the late sixties in the USA and Germany in particular, and the general student unrest that seemed to be shaping the political world at that time" (2007:269). While the "student movement" in her native Germany and her experience as diasporized subject in the United States is undoubtedly the focus of *On Violence*, what Lang overlooks is the theoretical possibilities that *Wretched* open up for Arendt.

It is because of her engagement with Fanon that Arendt reveals how her reading of *Wretched* informed, specifically, her critique of the Black Power and the "Negro" students' struggles of the 1960s:

In America, the student movement was been seriously radicalized wherever police and police brutality intervened in essentially nonviolent demonstrations . . . Serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black Power movement on the campuses. Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualification, regarded and organized themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the black community. Their interest was to lower academic standards. They were more cautious than the white rebels, but it was clear from the beginning (even before the incidents at Cornell University and City College in New York) that violence with them was not a matter of theory and rhetoric. (Arendt 1970:18)

There is, of course, the (not unjustified) temptation to doubt Arendt's racial sensibilities, to be critical about her jaundiced view of racial politics in America. Nowhere does she reveal her antipathy more than in her assertion that the "interest" of Negro students "was to lower academic standards."

Arendt's language in *On Violence*, "lower academic standards," "admission without academic qualification," represents a sentiment now common to conservative critics of affirmative action.¹ Arendt's position, steeped in a kind of racially "blind" universalism, pays no attention to the long history of racial inequality, discrimination, and laws that impeded the ability of blacks to gain access to institutions of higher learning in America.

Not content with this critique, Arendt shows herself to be as intolerant of the "Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualifications," as she is explicit in her essentialism—"serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black Power movement on campuses." For Arendt, black students are the prime reason for violence on campus, a judgment that does not square fully with the tempestuous tenor of the times—from the peaceful sit-in campaign conducted by black students in Greensboro, North Carolina to the violence of Kent State, from the assassination of major black figures such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to the brutal murders of the Freedom Riders in Mississippi.

As an indictment of (de)colonization, *Wretched* explicates to Arendt how the political community and processes she observes comes to be constructed, to stand as that figure of the political who can link, explicitly, Arendt's to Fanon's object of critique. "The colonized, underdeveloped man," writes Fanon, "is today a political creature in the most global sense of the term" (2004:40). The "political creature" invoked here is, naturally, that key, evocative term that Fanon bequeathed the lexicon of the anticolonial movement and its postcolonial or antiglobalization successors. Several generations of political thinkers know it as an explicitly Fanonian phrase: *les damnés de la terre*, the "wretched of the earth." Fanon's evocative phrase enables an acute understanding of those bodies "damned," to "hear" the translation of the title from French into English "directly," to "wretchedness" by the force post/colonial history; those bodies condemned, by the violence of post/colonialism, to endure immense hardship.

This "wretchedness" is a condition upon which, in measure, this essay turns as a disarticulation of the "wretched" from "wretchedness," the decolonizing struggle from its decolonized modality. Fanon, whose extreme regard for the "wretched" derives, more than anything, from his commitment to the rural colonized, "these restless, instinctively rebellious masses," sees in this constituency a group bound together by alienation from the urban polis (both colonized and colonizer), though/because of both geography and radical political sensibility. Following Fanon's description of how the urban colonized intellectual encounters his rural peers (always as a male intellectual), we might name it a romanticized political construction: "Everything is simple. These men [urban colonized] discover a people who survive in a kind of petrified state, but keep intact their moral values and their attachment to the nation. They discover a generous people, prepared to make sacrifices, willing to give all they have, impatient, with an indestructible pride" (2004:79). It is in this constituency, given to self-sacrifice, "impatient with an indestructible pride," that Fanon places his political faith. According to Fanon, it is only these "generous people" who can transform the urbanized anticolonial intellectual into a radical actor for (true) national liberation; it is only those with an "indestructible pride" who can restore—or, maybe, inaugurate—the urban intellectual to his true national Self. For her part, Arendt (on the other side of the Atlantic) is profoundly critical of such a relation to this idealized Fanonian community. However, while essentializing "black students" as constitutively canny political operators—"violence with them was not a matter of theory and rhetoric," what *Wretched* has compelled Arendt to address is the issue of how communities oppressed on the grounds of race and the kind of politics can produce such filiations.

However, as this essay argues, these two critics of the black political often evince a similar hesitation, equivocation, about how race functions as an element of the political; Arendt and Fanon's equivocation emerges, in resonant ways, from a deeply shared distrust about how race is deployed as an essentialist political category. Instead, then, of reading Arendt against Fanon, what is required is a dialogic thinking of *Wretched* and *On Violence*. It is necessary to understand both these thinkers as wary, Arendt explicitly, Fanon both explicitly and implicitly, about political alliances grounded too readily, too uncritically, in race. It is, in truth, an odd dance engaged in here between Arendt and Fanon. In their confrontation and their complicated

maneuvers, these two thinkers alternately incline toward and move away from each other. As is appropriate in such an encounter, they end in a place marked by nothing so much as provocation. Arendt and Fanon, demanding that in our readings of *On Violence* and *Wretched*, we think them apart, together, in tentative agreement, at loggerheads with each other, philosophical dance partners now in step, now out of step, with each other.

Affiliation, The Incipient Dis-Affiliation

On the one hand, I was deeply wounded by anti-Semitism. And this wound has never completely healed. At the same time, paradoxically, I could not tolerate being “integrated” into this Jewish school, this homogeneous milieu that’s reproduced and in a certain way countersigned—in a reactive and vaguely specular fashion, at once forced (by the outside threat) and compulsive—the terrible violence that had been done to it. This reactive self-defense was certainly natural and legitimate, even irreproachable. But I must have sensed that it was a drive [*pulsion*], a gregarious compulsion that responded too symmetrically, that *corresponded* in truth to an *expulsion*. (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004)

In its nationalist formation, identity politics can only function if it follows the path of “moral” indictment. Identity politics can only retain its claim to a politics of the “Self” if it reminds the transgressors, repeatedly, in any number of ways (the more public, the better), of the wrongs it committed. In sum, movements organized around nationalist identity (“nationalism,” as it is colloquially known), is always a politics of indictment. Nationalism works to immobilize its opponents by, preferably, holding them accountable for historic injustices (colonialism, racism) and, through this strategy, disabling its critics—reducing them to (public) silence. *On Violence* is remarkable for, in this regard, its in-tolerance of the politics of indictment, Arendt’s willingness to, in Rei Terrada’s terms, issue “judgments.” (Terrada 2004:840)

It has become rather fashionable among white liberals to react to Negro grievances with the cry, “We are all guilty,” and Black Power has proved only too happy to take advantage of this ‘confession’ to instigate irrational ‘black rage.’ Where all are guilty, no one is; confessions of collective guilt are the best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits, and the very magnitude of the crime the best excuse for doing nothing. (Arendt 1970:65)

The salience of Arendt’s indictment is that it is not restricted to race-based nationalism or its nationalist proponents. (What is at stake is not the expediency or radical opportunism of “Black Power” advocates, however one might adjudicate this issue; whatever one’s views on the gains, or lack thereof, achieved by black nationalists.) Nor is it the fact of Arendt taking aim, squarely, at white liberal guilt—“We are all guilty.” Rather, the resonance of Arendt’s critique, its ability to disturb, to arrest us in our thinking of identity politics, is its thinking politically. *On Violence* stands as a critical intervention into the politics of nationalist identity because it offers an argument about how to think against collective (white) indictment because of its political inefficacy. As a philosophical response to the problem of nationalist politics, *On Violence*

is a problem for radical thought. Arendt's work offers a genuinely radical challenge to thought about race, and politics; that is, thought impatient with rote denunciations or dismissals that all too often mark politics conducted in the name of race; a politics that, unlike Arendt, lacks the philosophical integrity to take up the difficult work of "judgment." In Terrada's terms, Arendt's thought represents a rebuke to those who, when judgment is called for, "blink" rather than "admit" the centrality—the absolute necessity, in truth—of judgment to politics.

In identifying the absence of judgment as a problem, Arendt exposes the philosophical limits of a race politics that installs thought as the impermissible. In its nonthought, nationalism disables effective political action against the historic transgressor(s). Its "universal" approbation makes a proper political accounting impossible: "Where all are guilty, no one is," reveals the vacuity of a politics of condemnation because it is the "best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits." Because the politics of blanket indictment does not think, it offers universal immunity, if not absolution. In its "all"-encompassing charge, that everyone has committed a transgression or a crime, nationalist sanction does not consider how—or, whether—its strategy of shared complicity will achieve redress. There is a necessary, founding relation between One and the All, between Self and Other, in any indictment. However, *On Violence* demonstrates that the universal—"all are guilty"—precludes the event of incrimination and punishment. To name the "guilty One," to do the work of specifying, verifying, and sustaining the indictment against a particular individual, mitigates against the rhetorical resonance—the easily mobilizable militancy—of the un-thought universal—"all are guilty." What is the political, or, for that matter, the "moral," value of "guilt" if it is distributed without exception? It is hardly possible, as Arendt shows she knows only too well in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, to indict everyone. It almost guarantees that nothing will be done. The crime must, in order for it to be dealt with properly, that is, justly, be identified so that it might be prosecuted. Indicting "all" inoculates that self-same "all"; indicting the One demands judgment; a universal charge requires little but grand rhetorical flourish.

In her insistence upon judgment, Arendt's recommendation reveals the value of thought as such. No judgment can be rendered until (unless) the "culprits" are discovered and brought to book. Rather than perpetuate the propensity for communal indictment or accept (white) "confession," at once an easy and an immensely difficult act to perform, what "Black Power" should really seek to achieve is an itemized account of (white) transgressions. "Black Power" must refuse the temptation to assign the injustices done to it to what Derrida names, in the act of his own uneasy dis/affiliation with the "Jewish school," a "homogeneous milieu." But this is, of course, no easy task. The (historic) injuries of race, ethnic discrimination (anti-Semitism), and gender are, simultaneously, both individual and collective in perpetration and suffering. How is redress to be achieved? By itself, both the universalist indictment and the (provoked, requisite?) confession reveal the gestural grandeur and structural inefficacy of nationalist politics—the "confession" that must, under the pressure of the "all," be, sooner rather than later, reduced to the rote and the meaningless. The slogan "all are guilty" is rhetorically powerful—its universality spares no one, not a single offender—but the result of its (repeated) invocation renders it inconsequential.

It accomplishes, at best, very little, because it provides, through its own articulation and circulation, as Arendt so bitinglly puts it, the “best excuse for doing nothing.” If “all are guilty” it is more than likely that “all” will, in truth, achieve either an indifference to the indictment or “all” will effectively proceed as though “guilt” is indistinguishable from “innocence.” How can “guilt” or “innocence” matter if there is no penalty for the former?

Here Arendt’s critique of the putative gains of violence during the student protests is instructive. It is “likely, as was recently the case in the United States, that the established power will yield to nonsensical and obviously damaging demands...if only such ‘reforms’ can be made effective with respect to the relatively long-term objective of structural change” (Arendt 1970:79). Arendt’s old bugbear, the capitulation of “established power” to “nonsensical and obviously damaging demands,” remains in full view, but even more prominent is her keen political sense. “Structural change” depends upon political discrimination. What power “yields to” (“nonsensical and obviously damaging demands”—although Arendt is never specific about whom these “demands” are “damaging”) is a matter for skepticism and reflection. Any concession is, because of the condition of its occurrence, first and foremost a political decision that demands interrogation and scrutiny. (What is the history of the terms under which the concession, the decision to “yield,” is being made?) The integrity and the political intent of the concession must always be thought: against itself, as though it constituted, by itself, a politics of questionable, if not bad, faith. Why, Arendt asks, does “no one question or examine what is obvious to all” (Arendt 1970:8)? Shouldn’t what is, and why it is, “obvious” be the first question(s)?

It is possible to do politics with any measure of effect, Arendt demonstrates, only if it is thought, if politics is approached as a philosophical problem, if there is the refusal to engage in the very alluring act, as Derrida warns, of “countersigning” the “terrible violence.” “Countersigning,” the act of putting one’s name, making one’s name legible in relation to a document, aligning oneself with the act in question, is itself first a form of agreement. It is certainly a form of culpable participation in the violence after the “terrible violence”; and yet it may be, this countersigning, “natural and legitimate, even irreproachable.” However, the “irreproachability” of the “countersignature,” the decision to make a mark of assent, is, by itself, no adequate defense—or sustainable indictment—against the interpellative powers of the “confession.” It is also, to countersign, to sign against, to invite the risk of erasing both the “original” and the secondary (might one say, “supplementary?”) signatures. To countersign the name makes it possible to, at once, make the subject’s identity both legible and illegible, such is the power of an “overwriting” that is also a substantiation; to countersign is intended to bind both parties, but it can also make the signatories inscrutable, and therefore (distinctly) culpable, to each other.

More than erasure, however, can take place because of the “countersigning.” It also enhances the risk that repression can take place under the sign of “confession,” premised as it is upon a form of debt (and, possibly, death), the countersigning bears closely upon a form of self-indictment. Such a self-indictment can easily stand as a public speaking that, finally, makes itself liable to nothing beyond that single, spectacular, “specular” act—the reflection upon the self that also functions, for all its injunctive force, as the end of the act, if not as an “absolution” as such. (And, what

is “absolution” itself but the anticipation of, the necessary preparation for, death?) In the countersignature is inscribed always a certain hopelessness: the countersignature functions as a promissory note against the future, a risk that the future can deliver, that the risk will prove worth it. There is always balanced against this act of political courage the fear that the countersignature itself will be made to mean nothing; that the force of the signature will reveal the futility of the mark (the signature “proper”) that stands, at once, with and against it; that one form of politics will triumph over, even supersede, another.

Because humans are inherently political beings, Arendt raises the effects of actions, by themselves, for and in themselves, as a question: “What makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises that would never enter his mind, let alone the desires of his heart, had he not been given this gift—to embark upon something new” (Arendt 1970:82). However, the political question is much more urgent, and Arendt, in this instance, fails to address it: what to act for since the struggle against colonization or the history of racism (in the United States) will not, by itself, suffice? And, following the history of colonialism, the Holocaust and ongoing racism, what to act as? In whose name, the self, the nation, the cause of liberation, national socialism, or antiracism, to act? This is, in reading Arendt with Fanon, the question that *Wretched* provokes; the question leads, in all probability, to the demand that thinking politically guarantee, at the very least, a certain interrogative efficacy; the question must give political substance to the demand for interrogative integrity. If the “question” is to have political resonance, it must demand more of/as itself. It is only upon these terms, as Alain Badiou puts it, that philosophy can “intervene in the present” (Badiou and Žižek 2009:1).

The efficacy of Arendt’s critique of nationalists derives as much from her incisive delineation of its philosophical limits as it does from her recognition of how “Black Power’s” shortcomings insulate “white liberals” against structural demands. Because the nationalist indictment lacks specificity (which does not invalidate the injurious past), it stands, finally, as a mode of repressive tolerance. It makes the universalist charge of, say, racism, audible (it can be repeated, in a range of political registers), but it is precisely that tolerance for the indictment that denudes the indictment of any efficacy. The lack of specificity, the (repeated) charge against the metonymic, metaphoric “All,” allows the (white) structure of power to, when all is said (since little, if anything, is done; little of worth is said), repress the charge into historic inefficacy. Therein, as Arendt recognizes, resides the real political crime of nationalism: it is both enamored of (hence the easily repeated invocation of the transgression or injustice) and overwhelmed by the “magnitude of the crime.” “Liberalism,” in its capacious ability to encompass all, in its preparedness to “absorb” (and, not censure or even interrogate) “guilt” as a mobilizing force, is not a very effective antidote to charges lacking in specificity.

The crime has, conceptually phrased, rhetorically evanescent form, but no political substance. The crime cannot bring the perpetrators to account because it does not know (properly, given un-imaginable enormity of the transgression) how to iterate the names of the perpetrators. (Or, it iterates the names without appending, to each, the specific crime, the specificity of the crime. How can it offer those names now, in

this moment that the perpetrators and victims alike have disappeared into history, except, that is, as the phantasm of a haunted history?) The crime has a perpetrator, a proper name, "All" ("We are all guilty"), that is, inappropriate for the task of redress. The noun is not, as it were, proper because it too is collective; the noun is vague and even transitory, lacking that Eichmannian specificity. "All" must be broken down into intensely proper nouns, audible, individual names; it must be denied its desired status—that of "terrible violence." The "magnitude of the crime" is such that it could only have been committed by the many.

The crime can be prosecuted only if the constitutive "many," the "All," can be appended proper names. Failing that, all those names, and therewith the crime itself, can be repressed—relativized, inconsequenced—into history. The "proper name" alone is capable of standing as an explicit critique of the anodyne "All." The proper name, if it is to take its rightful place in the thinking of an event, cannot be made pallid. In Arendt's thinking the proper name ensures against the reduction of political critique to the status of racialized, self-indicting "guilt." (Too often the lesson of truth commissions is that when an affect such as guilt is accorded political standing, it becomes possible to hide the many in history.)

Such is the political danger of "repressive tolerance," so relentlessly demonstrated in Herbert Marcuse's impatience with liberalism's willingness to endure, among others, what he so memorably names the "persuasive force of the negative." It is because of the "passivity" of the political, another Marcusean insight, that the "All" accedes to the terms of nationalist indictment. This is, Derrida argues, the "terrible violence" that might be done in the name of a tolerance whose repressive core and propensities go unremarked upon, or worse, unthought. As Arendt's critique of state violence makes clear, "The trouble is not that they are cold-blooded enough to 'think the unthinkable,' but that they do not *think*" (Arendt 1970:6). The work of philosophy is to ensure that "thinking" does take place; that the "unthinkable" is thought so that the (catastrophic) event might be apprehended; or, better (an impossibility), avoided because of thought. At the very least, that because of thinking the imperative question(s) stands as the first articulation of thought.

It is Fanon's gift that, like Derrida (fellow Algerians, after a manner of speaking), he never enjoyed the "pleasure" of full "integration." According to his biographer, David Macey, Fanon has not been honored properly in his native Martinique, in France where he trained as a psychiatrist, or even in Algeria, where he fought for the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), because none of these places has really sought to claim him. Does the philosopher need a nation? Or, in this instance, does the philosopher need to identify with (black) nationalism? The latter question matters especially because, as Macey argues, contra Stokely Carmichael's (and H. Rapp Brown's and Eldrige Cleaver's) appropriation of him, Fanon "was simply not a black nationalist" (Macey 2000:24). There are, of course, those who would contradict Macey's representation of Fanon but, in truth, the strength of *Wretched* resides in Fanon's ability to inflect, often in unexpected and sometimes jarring moments, the revolution—the revolutionary—with complexity. *Wretched* achieves an Arendtian judiciousness when Fanon puts the project of anticolonial nationalism under philosophical pressure.

Always in the foreground, however, is Fanon's revolutionary romanticism, his belief in the radical propensities of the rural masses, his advocacy of the lumpenproletariat:

In a state of genuine collective ecstasy rival families decide to wipe the slate clean and forget the past. Reconciliations abound. Deep-buried, traditional hatreds are dug up, the better to root them out. Faith in the nation furthers political consciousness. National unity begins with the unity of the group, the settling of old scores, and the elimination once and for all of any resentment. Those indigenous elements who have dishonored the country by their activities and their complicity with the occupier are also included in the cleansing process. Traitors and mercenaries, however, are judged and punished. (Fanon 2004:83)

The postcolonial nation to come is "cleansed," purified in a ritual of "slate cleanings," reconciliations and the "rooting out" of "traditional hatreds." "National unity" follows because all "resentments" have been "eliminated"; the new nation has found a way to distinguish between those who "dishonored the country" and those "mercenaries" who betrayed the incipient nation. In making these critical distinctions, history itself can guide the new nation as to how it might most sapiently mete out the proper retribution. Clearly, then, not even in the ecstatic moment of reconciliation does the nation achieve the status of a "homogeneous milieu." Already, in the very act of "forgetting the past," there is the specter of the nation splintering, dividing, turning against itself—its very existence already stands as a question.

Fanon's critique of the nation is distinct from, although all too often overwhelmed by, the resonance of his grand pronouncements, located in the occasional hesitation, the tendency toward qualification, which marks his entrée to the concept of the nation. Encoded in the Fanonian declarative is a philosophical uncertainty that enriches *Wretched*. Committed, as he always is, to the "restless, instinctively rebellious masses," it seems proper—and yet not—that in the "initial phase the cult of spontaneity is triumphant" (Fanon 2004:82). There is a temporal limit and political horizon that Fanon would like to impose upon the "initial phase" that is the founding of the sovereign Third World nation. Beyond a certain moment, "spontaneity," in its anticolonial articulation, cannot have the same place that it does in the political arsenal of the now decolonized nation. Fanon's concern is that this delimitation, this calling "spontaneity" into political question, is neither shared nor articulated as a new political problem by the recently decolonized. Fanon is not explicit about this delimitation so that his concern, his hesitation, about the afterlife of "spontaneity" assumes no philosophical shape, and becomes a mainly temporal issue—at what moment is "spontaneity" no longer tolerable?—and as a lack of critical facility—"spontaneity" is not reasoned, it is a "cult." (For Fanon, as is discussed later, involvement in the liberation movement is an uplifting, reasoned experience; an experience entirely removed from the—apparent—unthinkingness of a "cult," which possesses its own logic, follows its own telos.)

Remarkable is Fanon's economy of critique. Every Fanonian reservation about "spontaneity" resides in three words: "initial phase," "cult." The "phase" after the founding of the sovereign Third World state cannot be governed by such a "cult."

Nor should the “initial” tendencies be extended into the new moment. Quite clearly, then, the new moment requires something more than “spontaneity.” To be infinitely “spontaneous,” to continue to adhere to “cultish” behavior would be to, following Arendt, give up thought. In this adroit, small gesture, Fanon not only argues for a postcolonial politics that is distinct in form and content from its anticolonial predecessor, but he undermines, unintentionally, claims of “genuine collective ecstasy” and the “elimination once and for all of any resentment.” He opens this terrain, a valued and hallowed one for him, to interrogation for a singular reason. After the “cult” and the “initial phase” comes the resonant question: can “ecstasy” and “eliminated resentment” have a sovereign afterlife? What will their use be in the decolonized state? The political is always, as Fanon knew from his days as an FLN operative, a matter of and for governance. Can “ecstasy” and “eliminated resentment” ever be commensurate with governance?

As a mode of critique, subtlety is an uneven aspect of Fanon’s work, hardly his primary way of thinking. Fanon is apt to, if not contradict himself, undermine his capacity for deftness. However, his subtle moments reveal not only an intellectual nuance but articulate as a provocative uncertainty. In its more powerful enunciations, subtlety in Fanon is nothing if not a precondition for thought, especially in the moment of decolonization, where thought alone stands as the political and philosophical guarantor of the decolonized nation. Subtlety is a bulwark against “ecstasy”:

In spite of those within the movement, who sometimes are inclined to think that any nuance constitutes a danger and threatens popular solidarity, the leadership stands by the principles worked out in the national struggle and in the universal fight conducted by man for his liberation. There is a brutality and contempt for subtleties and individual cases which is typically revolutionary, but there is another type of brutality with surprising resemblances to the first one which is typically counterrevolutionary, adventurist, and anarchist. If this pure, total brutality is not immediately contained it will, without fail, bring down the movement within a few weeks. (Fanon 2004:95)

While he may be able to understand the political logic of those who stand, first and foremost, for “popular solidarity,” Fanon is against those who practice “brutality” and have “contempt for subtleties.” He will not abide this politics, not even when it is “typically revolutionary.” In fact, Fanon goes so far as to critique the revolutionary—a difficult political moment for him, no doubt—when he articulates the “brutality” of the “counterrevolutionary, adventurist and anarchist” to the archeology of the “typical revolutionary.” Because his insights prohibit him from offering an apology for the “counter/revolutionary,” Fanon can issue, with a historic authority, a dire warning: no “movement” that countenances “pure, total brutality” can survive politically. To this end, Fanon advocates complexity as the first mode of political defense. Rather than eschewing it, “nuanced” thought is the only way in which fidelity to the “principles” of the “national struggle” can be ensured. Cast into this political role, “nuance” must take on the arduous (deemed “treacherous” by some) work of standing as a “danger” and “threat” to “popular solidarity.” At work here is a bold rather than surreptitious Fanon, sure in his belief in that the transition from anticolonial struggle to decolonized sovereignty demands different forms of thought.

What binds these two modes of thinking is their commitment to ratiocinative subtlety—implicit or explicit. This reasoned, dexterous, and “nuanced” thought not only stands in sharp contrast to the declarative, the magniloquent Fanon, but it threatens to undo—or undermine—his romantic propensities; such is the unsettling philosophical power of subtlety within Fanonian thought. Fanon’s subtlety offers political thought as demanding of integrity and a particular set of responsibilities, among which prevarication—in the sense that thought moves from side to side rather in the sense of evading the truth—is not the least important ideological quality: “Consciousness stumbles upon partial, finite, and shifting truths. All this, one can guess, is extremely difficult. The task of bringing the people to maturity is facilitated by rigorous organization as well as the ideological level of their leaders” (2004:95). If political “truth” is, as is the case here for Fanon, at once “partial, finite and shifting,” then the work of the anticolonial campaign or the revolution is always conditional, always a matter of the decision—having to adjudicate, because there can be no politics without the decision, no matter can be presumed to have been resolved simply by the fact of decolonization. Politics, as always, begins with the decision, but that is all, just the first step in an always contingent process.

It is in regard to this internal dialectic, this thinking, at once, the “partial,” the “finite,” and the “shifting,” that Sartre’s declamation is most useful (because it is so incommensurate with Sartre’s train of thought): “Fanon hides nothing. In order to wage the struggle against us, the former colony must wage a struggle against itself” (2004:xlvi). Fanon begins with nothing less than interrogating the Self. It is not that “Fanon hides nothing,” but that his thought is more uncertain, more in struggle with itself, than Sartre can acknowledge. (Sartre’s “Preface” is full of invective and dire warning, reading as though it were the European analogue to Richard Wright’s essay, “White Man Listen!”) Where Arendt directly attacks Sartre in *On Violence*,² Fanon is able to reveal a depth of self-consciousness about the anticolonial/decolonized dialectic that is as yet “hidden” from (both him and) his champion Sartre. Unlike Fanon, Sartre is brimful of political certainty, sure that Europe is at an end. Standing against Sartre is a Fanonian declarative undercut by “nuance.” It is clear, then, why Fanon would warn that “[n]obody has a monopoly on truth, neither the leader nor the militant” (2004:138)—he, like the “leader” and the “militant,” must work toward the truth, unable to assume that he can know it simply by virtue of his (or anyone’s) standing as radical or revolutionary. Fanon’s position here contrasts sharply with his ontological declaration that the rural colonized subject is the “truth.”

When Fanon suggests, tentatively, “Perhaps everything needs to be started over again” (2004:56), there can be no better place to begin than with his thinking on the relation between the colonized and the colonizer. The political allure—and power—of the binary must be dispensed with in order to map the trajectory of the people’s thought from popular, racially specific (or, indiscriminate) opposition to finer, ideologically rather than racially based political distinctions:

The people who in the early days of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manicheism of the colonizer—Black versus White, Arab versus Infidel—realize en route that some blacks can be whiter than whites, and that the prospect of a

national flag of independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population giving up their privileges and their interests. (Fanon 2004:93)

This is, of course, Fanon's famous critique of the national bourgeoisie, girded now by his teleological account of the political—transitioning from the “early days” to the achievement of what he frames as an “ideologically mature” citizenry. However, complicating this fundamental disagreement with the new elite is the key recognition: for Fanon there is something liberating, necessary, and positive about the “nationalism” of the liberation movement, about contributing to and being shaped by a reasoned political force. It is reasoned because, unlike a Manichean nationalism pathologically certain about its divisions (Self and Other; black and white), it bears no trace of the unthinking passions of a “cult.” Fanonian “nationalism,” “wretched nationalism,” we might call it, is about the subject-making power of the (violent) process, the fact of political accomplishment through struggle. Articulated felicitously, Fanonian nationalism is a struggle that constructs a (geographically) bounded political entity that is not based (only) upon pigmentation—“some blacks can be whiter than whites” is Fanon's antiphenotypical critique against the propensity to conflate race with a radical, humanist national consciousness.³

Fanon's is a critical form of nationalism, of political affiliation, a national-ist imaginary inexplicable and inconceivable to Arendt. His is a mode of being that she cannot think in *On Violence*, a work remarkable for its metropolitan provincialism. She can move confidently between the United States and Germany. However, nowhere in *On Violence* does Arendt, for all her direct, engagement with Fanon, do more than mention “Algeria,” the very basis for Fanon's thought in *Wretched*. (There are only three references to “Algeria,” none of them anything other than desultory.) The work of thinking the metropolitan-peripheral conjuncture (to the extent that such terms retain any usability) is done by Fanon (in both *Wretched* and *Black Skin, White Masks*); the work of thinking the relation between the “Negro struggle” and the anticolonial one is the project of the Black Panthers, among other resident U.S. groups—and, Fanon himself, of course.

As always, however, for Fanon this turns on a complex political reasoning that is never gainsaid by simple political commitment. More than anything, the decolonized citizenry must not be returned to what Fanon names “this wretchedness of the people” (2004:113). Critical as Fanon is of this “dissolute enrichment of the bourgeois caste,” he is no more tolerant of the “people's” (not-so) residual Manicheanism, the afterlife of the violent “Black versus White, Arab versus Infidel” binaries. There is in this rich, evocative phrase (invoking the title of his own book), a haunting, contradictory critique. The “wretched” of the anticolonial struggle has, it seems, mutated into the “wretchedness” of the decolonized state. Whereas the “wretched” constituted a cadre of political radicals intent on overthrowing the colonial regime, Fanon's recalling of that term—that arresting transition from noun to adjective—iterates a profound political concern: “wretchedness” is a regressive, reactionary tendency. “Wretchedness” is that state where the “people's consciousness remains rudimentary, primary and opaque” (Fanon 2004:135).

This “rudimentary consciousness” can be mobilized as a racist or a nationalist (“cultist?”) formation against the “Infidel” or the “Arab,” against other “blacks” or,

more easily even, against colonial “whites.” Only if the new national consciousness is willing to, and capable of, addressing itself to the “partial” and the “finite” with equal reservation and alacrity, can “wretchedness” be countered. Failing that, Fanon predicts the “most heinous and virulent type of chauvinism”; “From Senegalese chauvinism to Wolof tribalism,” he warns, “is but one small step” (2004:105). The nation, and nationalism, is always a potentially “wretched” political articulation. So “wretched” that it might be deemed Hobbesian: “bleak,” narrow, “chauvinistic,” provincial, and, of course, almost invariably violent. What, after all, would it mean to transition from the “wretched” to “wretchedness?” From victim to perpetrator?

Echoing in “wretchedness” is a more profound political disturbance. “Wretchedness” suggests not only the failure of the decolonizing project, but also a kind of criminal abjection. The Self giving itself, unthinkingly, to a violence that it would not countenance against itself. “Wretchedness” stands, before itself, as an inescapable indictment of nationalism. Fanon sketches this scene—traceable from Kenya to Uganda, from Zimbabwe to (postapartheid) South Africa—of familiar violence: “We have switched from nationalism to ultranationalism, chauvinism, and racism. There is a general call for these foreigners to leave, their shops are burned, their market booths torn down and some are lynched” (Fanon 2004:103). They have names, these “foreigners,” “Asians,” “Ndbele,” the “amakweri-kweri.” (It is telling that, in the case of postapartheid South Africa, for all the ruling African National Congress’ Youth’s anti-“settler,” that is, whites, grandstanding, political violence is aimed mainly at other blacks from Africa.) In Fanon’s political calculus, nationalism can deepen into one of two articulations. On the one hand, a xenophobic Manicheanism, the kind of brutality against the Other that only a short few years ago saw black South Africans⁴ committing brutalities against (black) Africans from neighboring countries. Fanon’s name for this is, “ultranationalism,” entirely indistinct from that form encountered in repressive, xenophobic European states intent on expelling the Other. On the other hand, a deepening nationalism can achieve a critical humanist consciousness that for Fanon is commensurate with a “national consciousness, which is not nationalism,” which is “alone capable of giving us an international dimension” (2004:179). A “national consciousness” retains its “wretched” radical possibility if it is, for Fanon, deepened by humanism, if it can see outside its nationalist self, if it understands that the black comprador—who is “whiter than whites”—is a political type that also exists at the level of the (decolonized) nation-state—“nationalism”—that lacks an “international dimension.” Always, “wretched” must do battle against “wretchedness.”

The cost of the community or nation is, as Derrida reminisces, always considerable, and can always end only with the act of “*expulsion*.” There is a “*gregariousness*” in violence, in the act of tearing down booths and lynching the foreigner, a violence that knows, as it were, how to enjoy itself, how to take pleasure in the attack on the Other. Violence is constitutive in the act of making this “wretchedness.” What is disturbing, and, finally, intolerable to Derrida is the “*correspondence*” between what Fanon names the “wretched” and “wretchedness,” a “symmetry” in which the “original” act of violence (colonialism, anti-Semitism) approximates too neatly either the violence of “reactive self-defense” or “ultranationalism.” Any politics founded ontologically upon a nationalist identity will not only “expel” from its own ranks those who insist on the interrogative and “nuanced partiality,” but will, as Fanon correctly

anticipated, commit “brutality” against both dissidents and the Other. The “future remains bleak” not only, but especially, when “wretchedness” prevails. What is there to do but follow Derrida’s example and refuse, despite the force of the historic wound, “integration”? It becomes necessary to heed Arendt’s call for the interruption that is judgment, because, should it not be given proper attention, “wretchedness” will not only proceed “automatically” and “predictably,” but with a “compulsive, symmetrical” violence.

The “wretchedness” against which Fanon struggled, in his “invention of new problems,” has been lost in the periphrasis of the proper name that is both associated with it and has, in the course of the last half century, overwhelmed it: *damnés de la terre*. If Fanon, himself an instance of periphrasis, is to function as a genuine rather than a symbolic political interlocutor (as he is not often made to do) for our moment, then the imperative of the now is simple. “Wretchedness,” judgment, and thought must be restored to *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Notes

My thanks Ben Carrington, Jane Juffer, Richard Pithouse, and Olfemi Taiwo for their suggestions. This essay is dedicated to Matthew Abraham, Tom Lockwood, and Debbie Stumpo: friends who offer without hesitation in the moment of record.

1. In her essay, “Thinking for Oneself: Realism and Defiance in Arendt,” Rei Terrada’s explication of how judgment works for Fanon offers an insight that is useful in considering Arendt’s critique of U.S. race politics in *On Violence*. “This vague sense of ‘world’ remains up for judgment in ordinary life,” writes Terrada, “Arendt is among the few people who do not blink at admitting this” (Terrada 2004:847).
2. In one such moment, Arendt writes: “Sartre with his great facility with words has given expression to a new faith. ‘Violence,’ he now believes on the strength of Fanon’s book, ‘like Achilles’ lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted.’” (Arendt 1970:20)
3. A great deal has been made of Fanon’s invocation of “We Algerians” in *The Wretched of the Earth*. However, it is clear from *A Dying Colonialism* that Fanon considers “Algeria” and “Algerians” as the products of political history, rather than the consequence of an unproblematic indigeneity.
4. For all the African National Congress Youth League and the South African Communist Party’s rhetoric, xenophobia in South Africa is aimed not at whites but at other black Africans—Zimbabweans, Nigerians, Somalis, and so on.

Chapter Fourteen

Fanon and the Land Question in (Post)Apartheid South Africa

Mabogo Percy More

For the colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land; the land which will bring them bread and above all, dignity.

—Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

One of the most famous and prophetic chapters of *The Wretched of the Earth* is the one variously translated as the “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” or “On the Misadventures of National Consciousness.” It has been fifty years since Fanon made his predictions about the future of postindependent African states, and despite the existing evidence of their almost correctness and precision, South Africa, being the last African state liberated from the clutches of apartheid colonialism, has failed to learn from Fanon and avoid the pitfalls of the national bourgeoisie of postindependent African states. Consequently, almost the entire diagnosis Fanon makes about postindependent African states in this chapter applies with stunning exactness to postapartheid South Africa, precisely because, as Fanon observes, the national bourgeoisie “is incapable of learning its lesson” (1968:67). Indeed it seems as though Fanon wrote this chapter with postapartheid “New South Africa” in mind. I argue, in this chapter, that the problem for South Africa can fundamentally be traced to the distinction Fanon consistently makes in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Toward the African Revolution* and later in *The Wretched of the Earth*—the distinction between “pseudo-independence” or “flag-independence” and “real-independence,” in other words, between decolonization and sovereign independence. For Fanon, “pseudo-” or “flag” independence is the product of a negotiated settlement between the nationalist leaders of the colonized and the colonizers, whereas “real” or authentic independence emerges not from a negotiated settlement but from the reappropriation of power and the land through violent struggle.

Flag Freedom

In the chapter "The Negro and Recognition" of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon utilizes the Hegelian master-slave paradigm to articulate the difference between abstract freedom and true freedom, which in political terms would translate to what he calls "flag" or "pseudo-" and "genuine" or "real" independence, respectively. Recognition, as Hegel argued, requires reciprocal recognition in order to affirm cooperation, mutual respect and dignity between two self-consciousnesses. Before this can be achieved, there must be conflict, a battle, and a life-and-death struggle. In situations such as some colonial world or apartheid South Africa, where a violent revolution has not occurred in its full expression, neoslavery takes over. In such a world, Fanon writes: "There is not an open conflict between white and black" (1967a:217). Anticipating what came to be known as the South African "miracle" transition from apartheid to democracy, Fanon adds that within such a racist colonial ideology and culture, "the black man is not a man." This means that for Fanon, Hegel's master-slave dialectic does not completely apply to the white master and the black slave of the colonial situation. Black humanity is not fought for by the black person but is conferred upon him/her through the mercy and generosity of the white master. As Fanon puts it, "One day the white master, without conflict, recognized the Negro slave" (1967a:217). In a situation where recognition is given without conflict, the master's recognition amounts to nothing more than a simple gesture, for it still leaves the slave in bondage, albeit being upgraded to the status of a human being. The gift of humanity without a struggle still constitutes the slave as a slave since he/she has not attained independent self-consciousness and thus remains dominated by the master. During a serious meeting of the masters, one of them, Fanon supposes, courageously says to his peers: "Let's be nice to the niggers" (1967a:220). After a lengthy argument the other masters finally "decided to promote the machine-animal men to the supreme rank of *men*" (1967a:220). Through the very fact that the masters "decided to promote," that is, made a concession to the blacks, they invariably continued to retain their superiority and masterhood by other means.

This decision, Fanon declares, is then followed by a legal declaration of emancipation, a proclamation of independence. In his capacity *qua* master, the white master declares to the black person, "From now on you are free" (1967a:220). The news of liberty causes a stir of jubilation among the slaves. But this occurrence, this development, this freedom emerges from without and not from within the slave. External liberation, Fanon argues, in no way leads to genuine liberation. The slave has been acted upon rather than acting:

The upheaval reached the Negroes from without. The black man was acted upon. Values that had been created by his actions, values that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a hued whirl round him. The upheaval did not make a difference in the Negro. He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another. (1967a:220)

The resonance of these predictive insights with the events immediately prior to and after Nelson Mandela's release from Victor Verster Prison in 1990 is stunning

in many respects. Indeed, pressured by internal and external demands and resistance, the apartheid regime decided to recognize the black person, "to promote the machine-animal men to the supreme rank of *men*." Just as Fanon imagined, the reaction of the other masters to the suggestion of being "nice to the niggers," when de Klerk presented his negotiation settlement plan with the ANC to his cabinet for ratification, was that of outrage. It is reported that one incensed Minister shouted at de Klerk: "What have you done?! You have given South Africa away" (cited in Giliomee 1996:16, 18)!

In their capacity qua masters, de Klerk and his Nationalist party then declared, not only to Mandela alone but to the whole black population: "From now on you are free." The news of Mandela's release from prison and what it implied for the future caused pandemonium. Commenting about the mayhem and the jubilant crowds of black people who awaited him at the gates of the prison and at Cape Town's Grand Parade where he delivered his first speech, Mandela wrote in *Long Walk to Freedom*: "I was astounded and a little bit alarmed. I had truly not expected such a scene... I walked out on the balcony and saw a great sea of people before me" (1994:673). More jubilation was to follow with "the declaration of emancipation" in April 1994 during the first general democratic elections. President de Klerk had sprung a surprise on Mandela and almost all South Africa by first unbanning all previously banned political parties, releasing Mandela and "declaring emancipation for the 'machine-men.'" Mandela admits that his release "came as a surprise to me." It is evident that Mandela and black people were all acted upon by de Klerk, that is, their freedom emerged from without and not within themselves.

It should be remembered here that Fanon makes a distinction between external freedom and internal freedom. The upheaval, as Fanon indicates, since it was an upheaval from without, does make an external difference to the situation of the slave. However, it does not internally free the slave from his or her slavish consciousness. Though freed, the slave retains a slave consciousness precisely because this freedom is not a consequence of a struggle for liberation but a result of being acted upon by the master. What Fanon suggests here is that freedom is more than the absence of external limitation or obstacles. Anticipating Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement, freedom for Fanon involves a liberated consciousness; without freedom from within, freedom from without means virtually nothing.

Many critics and interpreters of Fanon fail to make the distinction between freedom (internal freedom) and liberty (external freedom), in other words, Isaiah Berlin's notion of freedom "to" and freedom "from."¹ Liberty *from* or external freedom is what one is able to do without constraints, that is, the presence or absence of limitation or obstacles, while freedom *to* involves the way in which an individual makes choices and assumes responsibility for those choices. What this distinction points to is that one can be free where there is no liberty at all or alternatively one can enjoy liberty without being free. The one does not necessarily entail the other. Hence Fanon contends, "The liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation. An authentic national liberation exists only to the degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation" (1967b:103). For Fanon, therefore, decolonization qua liberation occurs at two levels: (1) the physical level as an act of freeing the land from the colonizer; (2) the psychological level as an act of freeing

the consciousness of the colonized from the fear of the master, inferiority complex, and self-hate.

Fanon echoes the belief long held by some black antiracist, anticolonialist, and antislavery thinkers; that black people need to free themselves psychologically before they can succeed at liberating themselves politically. James Cone puts the matter in these terms: "Freedom is what happens to a man on the inside; it is what happens to a man's being. It has nothing to do with voting, matching, picketing or rioting, though all may be manifestations of it. No man can give me freedom or help me get it" (1969:28). This idea resonates with the view of many black thinkers who also believed that the oppressed must realize that freedom is not another's to give or bestow; it must be taken. Formal liberation is meaningless: true freedom—substantive freedom—cannot be conferred upon a people who are not willing to work or struggle, if need be to sacrifice in order to attain it. In the words of Paulo Freire, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (1985:31). Frederick Douglass understood what this means when he stated that without struggle there can be no freedom.

Indeed, Fanon echoes Douglass when he asserts that in a racist, colonial, or oppressive world, "we can be sure that nothing is going to be given free" (1967a:221). Fanon understood that since colonialism is predicated and grounded on violence, this is all the more reason why decolonization must be a violent phenomenon, precisely because it has (1) to accomplish the total replacement of one "species" of human beings by another; (2) to give birth to "new men, new language, new humanity" (1968:35); and (3) finally to give concrete meaning to the injunction, "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last" by transforming the colonized from "machine-animal men" to the "human." Whilst Fanon acknowledges that in certain exceptional cases decolonization can be achieved peacefully, he, however, insists that such independence is a prelude to neocolonialism or merely a sham (flag) independence. On the contrary, a violent liberation struggle leads to a higher, purer, or truer form of independence.

In the chapter "Decolonization and Independence" of *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon revisits the problem of phantom independence or "pseudo-independence" vis-à-vis "true liberation," which he identifies as decolonization and independence respectively. True liberation, Fanon concludes, is not simply decolonization but it involves "the total destruction of the colonial system" (1967b:105). This theme is further pursued in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he argues that the reason why postindependent African states fail is not only because of the inefficiency and incapability of the national bourgeoisie, but also and more importantly because they are products of a decolonization process that is achieved through negotiated settlements imbued with compromises between the national political parties and the colonial masters. The "idea of compromise is very important in the phenomenon of decolonization... Compromise involves the colonial system and the young nationalist bourgeoisie" (Fanon 1968:62).² A "pseudo-" or "flag" independent state, for Fanon, therefore, means that "there's nothing save a minimum of re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving, and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the middle ages, endlessly marking time" (1968). This kind of independence signals the emergence and birth of neocolonialism that, as Tsenay Serequeberhan observes, "is nothing more than the *de facto* renegotiation of the colonial status" (1994:82).

The Compromise

Fanon laments the fact that “flag independence” does not in any way affect the life-chances of the peasants and the urban proletariats, nor transform their condition to a more dignified one. They, Fanon declares, “do not manage, in spite of public holidays and flags, new and brightly colored though they may be, to convince themselves that anything has really changed in their lives” (1968:169). This state of affairs leads to a situation of massive discontent among the hungry unrecognized masses, who begin to sulk. At the root of this tragic situation is the political, social, and economic compromise that the national political parties reached with the settler regime. In the first place, the national political parties during the colonial era are merely concerned with electoral type action and never with total armed conflict. They proclaim abstract principles of a philosophical-political nature such as “the rights of people to self-determination, the rights of man to freedom from hunger, and human dignity, and the increasing affirmation of the principle; ‘One Man one Vote’” (Fanon 1968:59). The national political parties, Fanon continues, afraid of the perceived military might of the colonizer, avoid or half-heartedly engage in an armed struggle. This avoidance or half-heartedness toward an armed revolution is caused simply by the fact that they never intended to radically overthrow the system in the first place. In fact most of the leaders, Fanon asserts, are fundamentally pacifists and legalists. Afraid of the fire power of the colonialists, they preach nonviolence as a viable solution to the political problems they face; hence the negotiated settlement and the compromise and betrayal of the revolution.

What then does Fanon suggest? Given the fact that colonialism is always a violent phenomenon, and that the oppressed have realized that “colonialism never gives anything away for nothing,” they understand that true liberation can be possible through their own effort. In other words, “it is the colonial peoples who must liberate themselves from colonial domination” (Fanon 1967b:105). The colonial people, Fanon insists, must make a distinction between the “true liberation” of unfettered freedom and a “pseudo-independence” whose economy is dominated by colonizers. Unlike the latter, true liberation means the total destruction of the colonial system. Describing what true liberation means, Fanon writes in the first pages of *The Wretched*: “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. At whatever level we study it . . . decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and an absolute substitution” (1968:35–36).

This process of substituting one “species” of people for another, of transforming the “narrow world strewn with prohibitions” (Fanon 1968:37), can be achieved through absolute violence precisely because no one expects colonialism to commit suicide. True liberation for Fanon can be achieved only when one fights for it. False liberation, on the contrary, occurs where “freedom” is granted or ceded by those in power. Unlike the FLN, which in seeking true liberation swept away all mystifying phrases such as “the new Algeria” or “the unique historic case,” which refused to negotiate with the French on behalf of the Algerian people but instead insisted that France would have to restore the whole country or the land to the Algerian people,

the ANC negotiated a “pseudo-independence” that excluded the restoration of the land to the African people yet embraced mystifying oppressors’ expressions such as “Miracle settlement” or “the new South Africa.” Indeed, as Fanon reminds us, the people and the ANC ought to have known “that historical law which lays down that certain concessions are the cloak for a tighter rein.” Yet it is still astonishing, Fanon continues, to see “with what complacency the leaders of certain political parties enter into undefined compromises with the former colonialists” (1968:142).

The South African Negotiated “Miracle” Democracy

Economic, sports, or cultural sanctions, together with the initial negotiations between the Afrikaner intellectuals on the one hand and the ANC in exile on the other hand, pressured the apartheid regime into agreeing to negotiate with the ANC structures. Ravaged by inflation, shrinking, or rare foreign investments, disinvestment campaigns, trade sanctions, the oil embargo, heavy government foreign debts, the absence of real economic growth per capita, rapidly growing unemployment, cultural and sporting boycotts, technological sanctions, high rates of inflation, the ever-weakening currency, shortage of skilled labor force, fledgling and militant trade unionism accompanied by growing labor unrests, big business—what Moeletsi Mbeki calls the “economic oligarchy,” the handful of white businessmen and their families who control the commanding heights of the country’s economy, such as mining and its associated chemical and engineering industries and finance (2009:66)—the apartheid regime started calling for and engaging in covert negotiations with an equally anxious and willing negotiation partner, the ANC. Furthermore, worried by the possibility that the intransigence of the apartheid regime, with its far-reaching oppressive and repressive military and police power, would create favorable conditions for anticapitalist revolution both in the country and the larger Southern African region, the economic oligarchy (Gavin Relly et al.) together with United States, British, West Germany, and Japanese foreign capital, pressed for a negotiated settlement with the ANC for the sole purpose of effecting a move from racial capitalism to liberal capitalism.

Responding to these pressures, Pretoria also began engaging in what Goldberg refers to as the politics of pragmatic containment, a strategy that involves careful management of what the government thinks it can give away to blacks without surrendering affective hegemony and economic power (1986:86). This politics of pragmatic containment cleverly transformed Nelson Mandela, on his release, into an icon, a saint and a world citizen by showering him with numerous awards, honorary doctorates, and a Nobel Peace Prize with the intention to elicit “reasonableness” from him and his comrades. Having declared immediately after his release from Victor Verster Prison on February 11, 1990, that the ANC would nationalize the land and all the key industries in line with the tenets of its Freedom Charter of 1955, Mandela and the ANC, within two weeks, revoked and abandoned that main principle of the movement. Besides, the powerful Afrikaner political and military elite had strong reasons of self-interest, linked with privilege and power, to resist any change unless certain that its interests and concerns were satisfied. This meant that any settlement

had a necessity to accommodate them and their concerns; otherwise they were not prepared to give up and lose everything, as long as they had the military and economic strength and power to resist. The Congress for Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was thus instituted to achieve certain changes that would de jure dismantle the apartheid system. These changes entailed equal legal and political rights for all, which effectively meant “one person, one vote.”

Fanon correctly points out that on independence, the colonizers, through certain strategies, ensure the economic dependency of the new independent nation. Thus, despite the fact that de jure apartheid was abolished, liberal capitalism and the extensive white economic, social, and cultural power structures that went with it ensured a de facto continuance of white supremacy. The “historic compromise,” while it handed out political power to the ANC, left economic power in the hands of the corporate white elite. This negotiated South African settlement affirmed Fanon’s view that “in the negotiations on independence, the first matters at issue were the economic interest: banks, monetary areas, research permits, commercial concessions, *inviolability of properties stolen from the peasants at the time of the conquest, etc*” (1967b:121, emphasis added). As Thabo Mbeki, admitting to Nkrumah’s classic slogan “Seek ye first the political kingdom,” confirmed, “We had to make the most significant compromises in order to attain power peacefully” (cited in Pilger 1999:606). This “compromise” virtually brought about the Fanonian “pseudo-,” phantom independence for black people, which is incapable of delivering the fullest achievement of liberation and equality possible. In other words, negotiations foreclosed the revolutionary seizure of the state such that property relations remained untransformed, proscribed by the terms of the settlement. The untransformed property relations also entailed that the land question remained unresolved. Pilger, alluding to Mbeki’s “significant compromise,” remarks: “Whenever the ANC’s fine, liberal constitution is invoked, there is seldom mention of the fact that it guarantees the existing property rights of white farmers, whose disproportionate control of the land has its roots in the Land Act of 1913 which established captive labor force and apartheid in all but name” (1999:604–605). What this “historic compromise” effectively came to was that the land that black people were dispossessed of prior to 1913, the very base of independence, as Malcolm X declares, was not given back, and even the land that had been appropriated from them after 1913 was going to be returned only on a “willing buyer-willing seller” principle, that is, more than 80 percent of the prime agricultural land still remains the property of white farmers who can sell some of it at inflated prices to the government on the “willing buyer, willing seller” principle.

The Land Question

In the Lockean state of nature, peaceful as it is assumed to be, occasional conflicts are caused by infringements on the land of one person by another. Fanon similarly contends that the land remains the fundamental object of colonial-racial conflict and violence. Colonialism, he argues, is “the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people” (Fanon 1967b:81). The politics of genuine independence thus necessarily becomes the politics of land. Since this is the case, then every program of true

liberation must have as its fundamental objective putting an end to colonial occupation by restoring the land back to its original owners (the natives). For, as the epigraph above indicates, land is the most essential requirement for life. What this means is that liberation from colonial oppression can make sense only if the land problem is resolved by its return to the indigenous people from whom it has been violently seized.

Arguably, the most controversial issue in the Southern African region for the past two or more decades has been the land question in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Namibia. The same issue has also been the bone of serious political contention since the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The region's political leaders are caught up between the legitimate demands of the land-hungry black masses and the minority white farmers' possession of the land acquired through colonial conquest. As Lilian Patel, Malawi's former Foreign Minister in her capacity as Chairperson on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Ministerial Task Force on Development in Zimbabwe, pointed out, "All over the world, land is a sensitive and critical issue because societies are built on the basis of land" (cited in Beregu 2002:8). I argue, following Fanon, that true independence results from reappropriation of land by the colonized from the colonizers and consequently that South Africa's recent independence, because it failed to deliver the land back to its original owners, the indigenous African people, amounts to a phantom independence or what Fanon calls "pseudo-" or "flag" independence.

First and foremost, South Africa was founded on conquest. Conquest qua project has as its primary objective the seizure of land. The history of colonization in Southern Africa is thus one of land appropriation by the colonizers through violent conquest and African resistance to this expropriation.³ Put differently, the story of South Africa is thus "the progressive concentration of European land ownership" (Sartre 2001:34–35) at the expense of African ownership. Colonial occupation in 1652 constitutes the beginning of a phase in the history of black South Africa that would be characterized by a brutal, violent, and relentless dispossession of African land by the British and Dutch settler colonialists.

The importance of the land question relates to and is the fundamental issue of discourse about human rights precisely because it must always be related to the primary human right, namely, the right to life. Land gives life and bread, and as Fanon rightly pointed out, for the colonized, it is "the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land; the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity" (1968:44). For this reason, anyone who coercively denies another of ownership or access to land in actual fact denies that individual access to life, thus violating that individual's most fundamental right, the right to life. This violation becomes even greater if the one denied of access to land is in fact historically the original owner of the land, as is the case presently in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

But we now know that this is precisely what the wars of colonial conquest have done: unjustly taking away the means of livelihood of the colonized and thus condemning them to death by poverty. Again, Sartre's "Colonialism is a System," with his usual dramatic fashion, is worth citing:

Nothing demonstrates better the increasing rigor of the colonial system: you begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the former owners at

starvation rates. Then, with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive. You finish up taking from the natives their very right to work. All that is left for the [Natives] to do, *in their own land*, at a time of great prosperity, is to die of starvation. (Sartre 2001:39)

If, as I have indicated, land gives life to human beings, then there is an inextricable organic connection between land and life. If colonialism, as Fanon counsels us, is indeed “the conquest of *national territory* and the oppression of a people” (1967b:81), and if conquest in colonial situations occurs through violence, then the forcible expropriation of land from and the consequent denial of reasonable access to land to the rightful owner is equivalent to a denial and refusal to recognize the right to life of the dispossessed. But if one’s right to life is threatened, then morality, politics, and law all agree about Fanon’s appeal to violence as a form of justifiable self-defense. In other words, as Ramose (1999a) argues, no single individual is constrained to assert and defend his or her life by way of self-defense that, if need be—that is, upon just cause—might result in the death of another.⁴

From Apartheid to Democracy

Given the disparity in land ownership, property, citizenship, voting rights, and so on that came with the oppressive apartheid regime, we need to ask the question: Was there any significant transformation after Mandela became president on April 27, 1994? I think the initial appropriate question to be asked in order to put things into proper perspective is: What kind of means led to Mandela’s presidency? It is well known that the transition from apartheid to Mandela came about not through a revolutionary break or complete discontinuity with the past, but through a negotiated settlement commonly dubbed the “South African Miracle.” Indeed it is still astonishing, as Fanon reminds us, that leaders ignore “that historical law which lays down that certain concessions are the cloak for a tighter rein” and they then “enter into undefined compromises with the former colonialist” (1968). This means that only a government succession occurred instead of state succession. Therefore, the answer to the first question is: yes and no. Yes, there was a significant transformation after Mandela because a constitutional democracy and a bill of rights were put in place that, for the first time since 1913, guaranteed citizenship, land, and property rights to black folks. As former cabinet minister Kader Asmal puts it, “Under apartheid blacks were dispossessed while whites had possessions . . . Only now, in the new South Africa, is a regime of property rights dawning for the first time” (1997:141). But the “dawning” of property rights has not been the transfer of the land to the dispossessed masses. Put differently, the new constitution restored black people’s right to own land, but not the land itself.⁵ No, there was no significant transformation after Mandela because the land issue was compromised at the negotiation table and, therefore, not justly resolved. The constitutional settlement offered black people the right and not the means to own land while it simultaneously entrenched white ownership of the unjustly appropriated land. It took with the one hand what it gave with the other. The consequence is that despite the fact that the *Native’s Land Act* was de jure

abolished, it is de facto still operative. The further question is: Why does such a state of affairs exist?

Following on Rantete's distinction, I want to suggest that there are two contending but not necessarily contradictory liberation paradigms about the nature of a postapartheid state, namely, *democratization* or *independence*.⁶ I say complementary precisely because they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, each in and by itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition for total liberation from colonial oppression. Democratization stands for processes of representation; equality before the law; a bill of rights; participation in public affairs by everyone, especially the masses, and so on, all of which should be achieved without regard to race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Central to the modern concept of democracy, therefore, is a process not merely of achieving legitimate decisions but also of asserting the human dignity and worth of individuals through an enforceable bill of rights. In Fanon's view, this is exactly how democrats conceive of decolonization in a colonial context: "This is why, as conceived by these democrats, the contrary of colonialism is not the recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination, but the necessity, on an individual level, for less racist, more open, more liberal types of behavior" (1967b:81). Having observed the political developments in Africa, the ANC leadership and its negotiating partners—in the same manner described by Fanon—pressurized by the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, the World Bank, and IMF, among others, and obsessed by an intense desire to destroy racial apartheid, opted for a nonracial liberal democratic model but not for true independence.

The reappropriation of land and the nationalization of the main industries project that Mandela announced when he walked free from Victor Verster Prison in February 1990 was abandoned during the negotiations. Restitutions, reparations, and the reappropriation of the confiscated land from the whites were abandoned in favor of a policy of economic growth as a prerequisite for the redistribution of resources. This model, with its liberal emphasis on individual human rights, in particular the right to property, entitled the right of whites to ownership of 87 percent of the total land surface of the country, acquired through the *Natives Land Act* of 1910. To put it in a Rousseauian manner, the ANC constitution converted usurpation into an unalterable right for a few individuals. In addition, a "willing seller, willing buyer" constitutional clause on land acquisition, similar to the one unwillingly agreed upon by President Mugabe during the Lancaster House Agreement and forced on the Kenyans by the British government, was added at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiated settlement. This means that the ANC government must purchase land from the willing white seller for its land redistribution program. The price of the land was to be determined either by the seller or by the current market value. Like the Lancaster House Agreement of Zimbabwe, the South African negotiated settlement imposed the duty upon black people and the ANC government to purchase back their own land for which they were paid nothing as compensation when it was taken away. This democratic model transformed the country into what Fanon describes so vividly in *The Wretched* as a neocolonialist state under the dictatorship of the national bourgeoisie, led by Thabo Mbeki, his acknowledgment of Fanon's warnings and advises to the national bourgeoisie notwithstanding.⁷

Genuine independence, on the other hand, speaks to the restoration of sovereignty to the native people through the return of the land. In terms of this paradigm, the settler colonialist must renounce in principle and expressly the title to the land and sovereignty over it. In this way, the settler's South Africa would be dissolved and a completely new state—not new government—would emerge. Indeed, it was precisely the difference between the democratization model and the decolonization model that distinguished the ruling ANC (African National Congress) from the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). The latter had issued a warning against compromising the most important liberation goal at the negotiations. Echoing Frederick Douglass, the PAC (1990) argued that “what had not been won on the battlefield will never be won at the negotiation table. Negotiation from a position of weakness opens the way to unacceptable compromises.” Its policy was clear: “Return of the land to its original owners, the African people.” As the secretary general of the party, Benny Alexander, put it, “We have identified the South African social formation as a settler colonialist one. Hence, fundamental to the PAC is the return of the land in order to have self-determination and national liberation” (cited in Van Staden 1990). If colonialism, as Fanon says, is not a type of individual relations but the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people, then decolonization entails the reappropriation and return of national territory (country) to its original indigenous people and freedom from an oppressive regime. Without decolonization in the form of land reparation, reconciliation is impossible.

The fact that the chief negotiating liberation movement, the ANC, had initially since its inception made constitutional inclusion rather than the reappropriation of the land its primary liberation objective does not necessarily mean that the land question was not on the consciousness of most African people. The Pan-Africanist Congress's slogan “Mali Buye Izwe lethu!” (Return our land!) represented the aspirations of the silent majority. The emergence of numerous Landless People's Movements (e.g., *Abahlali baseMjondolo*: The dwellers of Squatter Camps⁸) clamoring for a land summit and threatening land occupation in the manner in which it was done in Zimbabwe bears testimony to the importance of the land question. The social movements or organizations arising from these *Mjondolos* have as one of their slogans “No land, no home, no vote,” affirming once more the correctness of Fanon's observation “Once the hours of effusion and enthusiasm before the spectacle of the national flag floating in the wind are past.” Fanon warns: “the people rediscovers the first dimension of its requirement: bread, clothing and shelter” (1967b:122).

Conclusion

By opting for a negotiated settlement, the ANC compromised the most essential objective of liberation struggles, the very basis of all independence, freedom, justice, and equality: land. The more than four-centuries-old struggle for justice understood as repossession of land was “transformed (perverted) into a crusade for peace and democracy... Form took the place of essence and content” (Baregu 2002:5). This failure at resolving the burning land question has consequently generated the emergence and proliferation of land activism throughout the country whose militancy

might surpass the Zimbabwe land struggle,⁹ as demonstrated recently in the public endorsement of President Robert Mugabe's land redistribution program by the defiant ANC Youth League president, Julius Malema.

Indeed, unless there is serious, significant, and committed state intervention in land redistribution in South Africa, Fanon's "the second phase of total liberation," the one that "is bound to be hard and waged with iron determination" (1967b:126), will be inevitable. Before concerning itself with international prestige such as the FIFA Soccer World Cup event, Fanon warns, the national government "ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens" (1968:205). Reform of whatever nature or kind cannot deliver true liberation, and a negotiated settlement cannot achieve this precisely because internal to the notion of negotiation is compromise. How much one is able to achieve in a compromise context depends entirely on existing power relations between the negotiating groups.

Notes

1. For an informative distinction between freedom "from" and freedom "to," see Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of liberty" in his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
2. As Stuart Hall mentions in Isaac Julien's film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* (1996), "In a way, he was opposed to decolonization which was the term used, you know, when the colonial power gave it away. He was interested in independence which is the seizure of liberty by the oppressed people and he thought that there was something liberating by the very act of armed seizure, of defeating the enemy, and the self respect which would arise from an autonomous struggle of that kind."
3. For a historical account of the African resistance to settler land invasion and seizure, see Harsch (1986:31ff.).
4. For a detailed discussion of the right of self-defense in an unjust war, see Ramose (2001).
5. For a detailed critique of the property clause in the South African Constitution, see Lungisile Ntsebeza, "Land Distribution in South Africa: The Property Clause Revisited." Lungisile Ntsebeza and Hall, *The Land Question in South Africa* (20).
6. For this distinction see Rantete (1998).
7. In a speech delivered in Ottawa (1978) and published in *Sechaba* (1979) Mbeki wrote: "Consider the circumstances in which we might position 'black capitalism' as the antithesis to 'white capitalism.' Fortunately, Fanon has already warned us that one of the results of imperialist domination is that in the colonial middle class 'the dynamic pioneer aspect, the characteristics of the inventor and the discoverer of new worlds which are found in all national bourgeoisie are lamentably absent.'"
8. For more on *Abahlali baseMjondolo* see Richard Pithouse, "The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo" (*Voices of Resistance from Occupied London*). Available at <http://abahlali.org/node/2814>; "Struggle Is a School: The Rise of a Shack Dwellers' Movement in Durban, South Africa," *Monthly Review* 2006; and Nigel Gibson (2008) "Upright and Free: Fanon in South Africa, from Biko to the Durban Shack Dwellers," "Is Fanon Relevant? Transitions, the Postcolonial Imagination and the Second Stage of Total Liberation," Paper presented at Temple University, November 28, 2006; and a Special Issue of the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* on Shantytowns Struggles (2008),

with articles by Nigel Gibson, Jacob Byrant, Marie Huchzermeyer, Raj Patel, and Richard Pithouse.

9. A number of NGOs and civil organizations fighting for land have emerged since 1994. Among these we can count Landless People's organization, Western Cape Anti-eviction Campaign, Abahlali baseMjondolo. Indeed, the Landless People Movement launched a number of campaigns against the land reform status quo. Responding to an accusation by government officials that they are a Third Force, the leader of the Abahlali baseMjondolo described his organization as a Fourth Force. "Fourth Force," he declared, "is land, housing, water, electricity, health care, education and work" (cited in Gibson, 2006, p. 8).

Chapter Fifteen

The Nation and Its Politics: Fanon, Emancipatory Nationalism, and Political Sequences

Michael Neocosmos

The colonized's challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute.

—*Fanon*, *The Wretched of the Earth*

To make a period illegible is much more than to simply condemn it. One of the effects of illegibility is to make it impossible to find in the period in question the very principles capable of remedying its impasses. If the period is declared to be pathological, nothing can be extracted from it for the sake of orientation, and the conclusion, whose pernicious effects confront us every day, is that one must resign oneself to disorientation as a lesser evil.

—*Badiou*, *The Courage of the Present*

Introduction

In order to make our period legible, it is important to also make earlier periods legible. The sequence of national liberation struggles in Africa that cohered around a particular set of political subjectivities emphasizing freedom, justice, equality, and the affirmation of a total humanity has now ended and consequently it has become more difficult to orient our thoughts around issues of emancipatory politics and their possible forms. The absence of emancipatory thinking today has nefarious consequences, as it is currently difficult to imagine an idea of an alternative future in which the youth in particular, but not exclusively, could identify with a more humane society in which massive poverty and powerlessness were not considered inevitable features of life on our continent.

Sequences refer to (often discontinuous) historical periods understood as purely subjective. Political sequences are governed by modes of thought, discourses, and names that are hegemonic and more or less contested. Sometimes these sequences are equivalent to and defined by specific modes of politics constructed beyond the state, and at other times and more commonly these sequences are simply defined by and altered at the level of the state itself. For example, we can see the 1950s and 1960s in Africa as forming a hegemonic subjective sequence in which questions of freedom, liberation, independence, Pan-Africanism, and equality dominated political discourse with categories such as nation, class, and socialism orienting political thought; this sequence was not exclusively focused on the state as the core of political consciousness. In the 1960s and 1970s, politics were governed by terms such as development, industrialization, dependence, class, nation-building, and neocolonialism, while in the 1980s and 1965s, the hegemonic political sequence was now structured by names such as democracy, civil society, governance, deregulation, basic needs, and human rights. The latter two were overwhelmingly statist sequences (Neocosmos 2010b). It can be noted then that the subjectivity of sequences is shaped by categories proper to it, which are, of course, themselves shaped by historical and social context, and by state, foreign, and critical discourses of various types emanating from various sectors of society. There is nothing within a sequence that implies a coherent totality with an essence; a sequence may be contradictory, incoherent, disorienting, illegible.

Each new sequence indicates within hegemonic modes of thought how political problems and solutions—that is, political subjectivities—are organized in thought and deployed in practice. At times sequences may have a depth such that they name a particular form of state, at other times not. For example, the sequence covering the 1960s and 1970s in Africa was characterized by a “developmental state” by virtue of the centrality of the name development to state politics of whatever ideological persuasion. Today one can no longer qualify the state in such terms (Neocosmos 2010). Delineating sequences in this manner (of course, their precise dating is always open to debate) enables one to understand how thought is oriented or disoriented within a sequence. A sequence becomes legible and understandable in its own terms so that its problems and impasses can be understood from the vantage point of its own categories. In this way any political sequence need not be seen as a success or failure—which implies a judgment from beyond its categories—but rather simply as exhausting itself through a process of what Lazarus (1996) calls “saturation.” For example, the end of the sequence 1960–80 (the dates are approximate) in Africa need not be seen as one of the “failures of nationalism” due to the supposed necessity of all nationalism to lead inexorably to authoritarianism, but as one of the saturations of the politics of national liberation and their gradual exhaustion as pure politics, as a pure political affirmation. In particular, such saturation is reflected in the transformation of political subjectivities from an emancipatory affirmation of the nation into a statist form of politics, or in other words in the inability to sustain a purely political-affirmative conception of the nation. In similar ways, what Badiou (2008) has called the *Idea of Communism* can also be understood as traversing a number of sequences, only one of which was founded on “the party” as the model for organizing political activity. The exhaustion of the party form of the communist hypothesis does not imply for Badiou the exhaustion of the communist idea as such; similarly, the collapse of the

emancipatory idea of national liberation due to its equation with the politics of the nation-state does not necessarily exhaust the emancipatory content of nationalism, particularly within a period of globalization in which Empire has simply taken on new forms but has in no way disappeared (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2001).

To maintain that nationalism in Africa has failed—or more subtly that it has deployed disastrous state politics that coerce particular interests, as does Chipkin (2007), for example—in current conditions when imperial domination and its attendant ideologies are still prevalent, and when these have altered their political form to stress a “democratizing mission” and humanitarianism, is simply to make it impossible to think of new forms of nationalism, new forms of Pan-Africanism and consequently to think of new forms of emancipatory politics on the continent. It means either a resignation to the propaganda of liberal democracy and to the idea of the end of history along with the final admission that “capitalo-parliamentarianism” with its massive levels of poverty and oppression and its constant need for war is the best of all possible worlds with no possibility of change in sight, or a simple retreat into dogmatism, which can reduce nationalism only to its statist variety. In reality, however, we need to constantly bear in mind that “we will never understand what constrains us and tries to make us despair, if we do not constantly return to the fact that ours is not a world of democracy but a world of imperial conservatism using democratic phraseology” (Badiou 2006a:137). For those of us who live in Africa and in the countries of what has become known as “the South,” there is no path to emancipation that does not confront the power of Empire in whatever form it may take, which is only another way of saying that nationalism is not an obsolete emancipatory conception—far from it. The point is to distinguish it analytically and politically from the state itself.

But to affirm this is not sufficient. It is also important to analyze the character of the past sequence for which national liberation was the defining category in order to bring out the singularity of its politics and to understand its limits and decline in terms of its own categories; to make sense of why it became saturated and, therefore, why the Idea of freedom-in-the-nation lost its original emancipatory content. This requires more than what is possible to do here, but what I argue below is that one reason for the saturation of a nationalist politics in Africa was the fact that it was not able to sustain an affirmative conception of the nation and that the latter gradually came to refer to a social category in the thought of politics as it unfolded over time. From a universal notion of national emancipation concerning humanity, which is in Badiou’s terms “anobjective,” an “incalculable emergence rather than a describable structure” (Badiou 2009b:26, 28), we gradually arrive at the notion of the nation founded on indigeneity according to state political criteria. It is through a discussion of the nation in Fanon’s work that this transformation of politics can be established at its clearest, as he was, with the possible exception of Amílcar Cabral, the most accurate observer and theorist of this sequence on the African continent from within its own subjectivity.

Fanon and the Nation

What is significant regarding Fanon’s three books on the Algerian struggle for national liberation—which he refers to as a revolution—is that they were written

from within the subjectivities of the sequence, as Fanon was a direct participant in the emancipatory struggle—a mass struggle—in which he was totally immersed personally, intellectually and politically;¹ Fanon then writes as an activist, a militant of struggle. His approach is, therefore, not an academic one asking what the essence (definition) of nationalism or the nation is, but rather confronting the much more political question of who constitutes the nation. In fact his work takes three related forms: first, sociological analyses of the process of struggle and the transformation of popular consciousness (Fanon 1989); second, political analysis and publicism for his journalistic work (Fanon 1967); and, third, his critical reflections on liberation and its outcomes in his deservedly most well-known text (Fanon 1965).² In all three cases the dominant theme concerns the change in subjectivity among the masses, the nationalist party, the state, and intellectuals both in Algeria and in France. In particular it is a popular conception of the nation, which he sees as arising as ordinary people acquire the confidence of their power, of control over their destinies, which lies at the core of this work. It is this point that is made again and again in remarks such as the following:

The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent and enlightened praxis of men and women. The collective construction of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on a historical scale. (1965:165, translation modified)

We have here, therefore, the twin idea that the nation is produced, not simply given, and that it is made—“imagined,” to use Anderson’s well-known term—from the actions of men and women, of people in general and not by any structural developments (markets, print capitalism, etc.) or for that matter by any bourgeois intellectual narratives (Chatterjee 1986). This process that Fanon sees as people “making themselves” as they make the nation, refers in Badiou’s terms to a “subjective becoming.” It amounts to a clear excess over what exists, over the simply extant; this process in Badiou’s ontology is an event for politics simply because it is “the appearing of that which is not there... [which] is the origin of every real subjective power” (Badiou 2006b:3)! Subjectivity is thus transformed in hitherto unimaginable ways. Something appears that had not previously existed (Badiou 2006a:285). That which appears for Fanon is precisely the nation.

For Fanon then, the nation is constructed in practice, in political struggle by people themselves. We could say that it is simply “presented” as a prescriptive affirmation and that it does not “represent” anything outside itself. There is no given colonial subject; subjectivation is a political process of becoming. However, the construction of this subjectivity is not a spontaneous occurrence for Fanon, but a revolution in thought. What is spontaneous is rather the Manichean dualism of the good embodied in the native versus the evil embodied in the settler. But the nation is not simply to be equated with a social category of the native. In fact many settlers “reveal themselves to be much, much closer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation” (1965:116) while many natives are to be found on the side of colonial power; “consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited and unstable” (117). It is primarily militants who have found themselves thrown among the people

of the countryside who gradually both learn from and teach the rural masses the construction of a nation in action: "these politics are national, revolutionary and social and these new facts which the colonized will now come to know exist only in action" (117, translation modified). In this manner the nation is constructed through agency and is not reflective of social entities such as indigeneity, ethnicity, or race. It is a nation that is made up solely of those who fight for freedom; it is a uniquely political conception. Here the subject is actually created by an "excessive" subjectivity, by the practice of liberation at all levels, collective, individual, social; hence Fanon's studies of changes in the family, of the veil, of the effect of the radio and so on:

An underdeveloped people must prove, by its fighting power, its ability to set itself up as a nation, and by the purity of every one of its acts, that it is, even to the smallest detail, the most lucid, the most self-controlled people. But this is all very hard... The thesis that men change at the same time as they change the world has never been so manifest as it is now in Algeria. (Fanon 1989:24, 30)

Yet the role of the leader, of the "honest intellectual" is not to impose a "party line" or his supposedly superior knowledge but to be faithful to a politics of "confidence in the masses":

To be a leader in an underdeveloped country is to know that in the end everything depends on the education of the masses, on raising the level of thought, on what is sometimes too quickly called "politicisation"... To politicise the masses... is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to make the masses understand that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is also due to them, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man responsible for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. (1965:159, translation modified)

When Fanon refers to "we Algerians" or to "we Africans" as he does on many occasions (e.g., 1965:159; 1989:32), it is clear that he is referring to a conception of the nation that is not based on "nationality" as commonly understood. As noted already, we are not in the presence here of a notion of the nation founded on indigeneity, nor is it one founded on "race." Fanon was a foreigner and a non-Arab as well as not an African. Yet I think it is important to point out that his biographer is quite mistaken to search for the source of this view in Sartrean existentialist theory and thus to maintain that "for Fanon, the nation is a product of the will, and a form of consciousness which is not to be defined in ethnic terms; in his view, being Algerian was a matter of willing oneself to be Algerian rather than of being born in a country called Algeria" (Macey 2000:377–378). I think this position constitutes a misunderstanding because it fundamentally depoliticizes the question by reducing it to Fanon's psychology. This view was not simply Fanon's; it was also that of the people involved in a struggle for national liberation in which "the women, the family, the children, the aged—everybody participates," as Adolpho Gilly puts it in his introduction to Fanon (1989:8); while continuing by noting that those who risked their lives for independence "were not only Frenchmen or Arabs; they were also Spaniards,

Italians, Greeks—the entire Mediterranean supported an Algeria in arms” (15). This subjectivity then did not belong to the subject Fanon alone, but was the subjectivity of the sequence; it was that which was “obvious” because its obviousness had been produced by the politics of the situation. In any case, this identity (Algerian) is not just chosen by Fanon; it also refers to how others saw him and the other “foreigners” who were activists in the struggle. It is in fact a purely political identity. For Fanon then the conception of the nation is not a matter of a psychological act of will; it is rather a question of a collective subject being produced by a fidelity to the subjective politics of the (emancipatory) situation.

To further clarify this point, it needs to be emphasized that the idea of equating politics with the will has a history; it is not “natural.” It is an argument that was, in fact, foreign to ancient Greek thought and originated only with the Christian doctrines of Augustine in the late Roman Empire. In a very important essay, Hannah Arendt (2006) shows that—in the Western philosophical tradition—the depoliticization of politics originates precisely in the equating of freedom with the will and hence in seeing political subjectivity as a question of psychology, an idea that was first actualized through the divorcing of freedom from agency and attaching it to simple consciousness. It was primarily Augustine who substituted the Christian “free interiority” of the individual for the classical Greek understanding of freedom as human agency, a view that has persisted into democratic liberalism today.³ For this notion, a subject can be totally politically passive and apathetic and still be an agent exercising her “freedom” as the latter is a matter of will.⁴ One must, therefore, detach the subject from its idealist underpinnings. As a result, the subject must be depsychologized; this can be done, it seems to me, by seeing subjects (individual or collective) as the products of specific subjectivities and not as given by their mere biological and conscious existence; individuals can then become “militants of truth,” to use Badiou’s language.⁵

In sum, the point is to recognize that politics exists beyond identity and that it cannot, therefore, be reduced to the psychology of individuals. Such a politics consists fundamentally of a politics of affirmation that is at the core of all emancipatory politics and is both singular and universal in nature. In fact it is only on this subjective basis that an inclusive society can be built; only a politics of affirmation can effectuate a conception of the nation that breaks completely from notions of indigeneity, and thus “we want an Algeria open to all, in which every kind of genius may grow... *in the new society that is being built, there are only Algerians. From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian*” (Fanon 1989:32, 152, *emphasis in original*).

Returning to Fanon’s politics, it is apparent that for him national liberation was a universal politics concerning humanity as a whole and not a matter of the attaining of independence in a particular country; unsurprisingly national liberation could only be Pan-African in its vision and this Pan-Africanism could only be popularly based:

The optimism that prevails today in Africa is not an optimism born of the spectacle of the forces of nature that are at last favourable to Africans. Nor is the optimism due to the discovery in the former oppressor of a less inhuman and more

kindly state of mind. Optimism in Africa is the direct product of the revolutionary action of the masses... The enemy of the African under French domination is not colonialism insofar as it exerts itself within the strict limits of his nation, but it is the form of colonialism, it is the manifestations of colonialism, whatever be the flag under which it asserts itself. (1967b:171)

In this affirmation regarding the universality of national liberation and freedom, one is reminded of a remark by Toussaint Louverture during an earlier sequence of emancipatory politics. Responding in 1801 to a concession from the French to put insignia on the regimental flags of Saint Domingue denoting the freeing of slaves, Toussaint retorts:

It is not a circumstantial freedom given as a concession to us alone which we require, but the adoption of the absolute principle that any man born red, black or white cannot be the property of his fellow man. We are free today because we are the stronger. The consul [Bonaparte] maintains slavery in Martinique and in Bourbon; we shall therefore be slaves when he is the stronger. (cit. Césaire 1981:278, my translation)

This similarity between Toussaint and Fanon is not surprising; after all, we are, in both cases, in the presence of an excess over the extant and hence of the (re)assertion of a universal truth. But Fanon's thinking on the formation of the nation is not reducible to that of the formation of a state, and freedom for him is not synonymous with the simple fact of independent statehood. Rather, following Rousseau, the people are not considered as given as in various "populist" positions, but have to first be constituted as a collective political subject.⁶ For Fanon the core process in national construction is held to be precisely the formation of a people as the effectuation of a state is premised on this process. It is this that founds the universality of the human. For Fanon then, in Algeria, as had been the case in Haiti, it was people (*les gens*) who constituted the nation by constituting themselves as a people (*un peuple*), not the state. And the people did so through a form of politics that, while not opposed to the state as such (but only to a particular kind of state, the colonial state), distinguished itself fundamentally from state subjectivity; it is in this sense then that any emancipatory politics can be said to always exist, in Lazarus' (1996) formulation, "at a distance" from the state.

Yet at the same time as affirming a political universality of the human, Fanon's nationalism is precisely one that is founded on a category of the people as well as being closely linked to one of class; this creates a difficulty for politics, for both are conceived as circulating categories—as sociological groupings as well as political subjects—with the result that we have a reductive relationship between the objective and the subjective. This becomes apparent when immediately after independence, a class whom he refers to as the "national bourgeoisie" is seen as not able to contribute to the making of the nation as its interests link it closely to colonial power. In fact the "national bourgeoisie" excludes itself from the nation, from the people as it is

only a sort of greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This

get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature... The national bourgeoisie... must not be opposed because it threatens to slow down the total, harmonious development of the nation. It must be stoutly opposed because, literally, it is good for nothing. (1965:141)

It should be apparent here that the national bourgeoisie refers to a social category as well as to a political category. "It" is a socioeconomic entity that acts politically coherently; it is a political subject. It is this circulating notion of class—a category circulating between political economy on the one hand and the thought of politics on the other—that enables Fanon to analyze the decline of the emancipatory politics of the people-nation and their replacement by state politics, by the politics of the nation-state: "nationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed" (163). It is then clearly—as Lazarus (1996:207) makes absolutely plain—not the advent of a state politics that destroys emancipatory politics, but the saturation of emancipatory politics that makes statism possible, for "the return of a state logic is a consequence of the termination of a political sequence, not its cause. Defeat is not the essence of effectuation" (my translation). To understand the way Fanon analyzes this process we have to look first at the role the category of class plays in his argument and then at his understanding of the party. Both the categories show the limits of Fanon's emancipatory thought and more especially the subjective political impasse faced by the national liberation struggle mode of politics itself.

The collapse of nationalism into a statist project of neocolonial reaction is accounted for by Fanon with reference primarily to the transformation of liberatory Pan-Africanism into a vulgar xenophobic chauvinism after independence: "we observe a permanent see-saw between African unity which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form" (1965:126). The reason for this process is to be found for Fanon primarily (but not exclusively) in the economic interests of the national bourgeoisie who wish to move into the posts and the businesses vacated by the departing Europeans. As a result, they assert a form of nationalism based on race and indigeneity in order to exclude; their concern is with access to resources, and a claim to indigeneity is, from their perspective, the only legitimate way of privately accessing such resources. Fanon notes that "the racial prejudice of the young national bourgeoisie is a racism of defence, based on fear" (131). In any case, whether the concern is accumulation or whether it is asserting a "narrow [racially-based] nationalism" (131), 'the sole slogan of the bourgeoisie is "Replace the foreigner"' (127, translation modified). As a result,

the working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, the small artisans and craftsmen for their part line up behind this nationalist attitude; but in all justice let it be said, they only follow in the steps of their bourgeoisie. If the national bourgeoisie goes into competition with the Europeans, the artisans and craftsmen start a fight against non-national Africans... the foreigners are called to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked. (125)

The nation now refers to something other than a purely subjective affirmation; it refers to a social category founded on indigeneity. Who is and who is not an Algerian, a Ghanaian, an Ivorian, now becomes defined in terms of a state politics founded on asserting indigeneity: birth, history, race, or ethnicity. We can note then that it is not simply a class politics that is at stake here, one representing economic interest, but more broadly a politics associated with ascribing the nation to an objective social category of the indigenous, a politics concerned with maintaining divisions, hierarchies, and boundaries: in sum, a state politics. It is thus the state that defines the nation in social terms and is unable to sustain a purely affirmative politics. The nation is now a representation, no longer a presentation. At the same time, it becomes apparent that this statist way of defining the nation is gradually naturalized in thought, as given by history and communitarian "belonging" (birth, descent, etc.). Yet it should be abundantly clear not only that it is the effect of a state form of politics, but that such naturalization is made possible by its social imbeddedness; for it is impossible to naturalize the purely subjective without first locating it in the social, without objectifying it. Moreover, of course, as is well known, the state also technicizes as it depoliticizes, something that Fanon deplores, emphasizing that "if the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then the bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat" (1965:162). Harsh words; Fanon's difficulty consists then in not being able to imagine a more appropriate political response to the technicism of the state, as faced with the decline of popular mobilization and the exclusive offer of technical solutions in the form of "development," people will arguably think it better to have a bridge than none at all.

Fanon is thus fully aware of the collapse of a politics of popular affirmation into statist subjectivities, yet what he sees as the way out of this problem is limited precisely by his understanding of class politics and the role of political parties. His difficulty, though, is no more than that of the politics of the national liberation struggle mode. I have outlined some of the fundamental features of this mode elsewhere (Neocomos 2009); here it is only necessary to note that its categorical features are such as to locate it squarely within twentieth-century ways of conceiving politics. Broadly speaking, this mode is one that must be understood as following that century's conception that saw parties as the core term of politics (in the nineteenth century it had been insurrection and movements). Inaugurated and theorized by Lenin's text *What Is to Be Done?* of 1902, the party was seen by all shades of opinion throughout the century as "representing" socioeconomic classes and groupings in the political arena (Lazarus 2001, 2007). Parties were understood as the link between the social and the political domain structured around the state, and recruited their members from throughout the population. Their class character was thus determined less by the social origins of their membership than by their ideological positions said to "reflect" class in political subjectivity. Mass parties of this type developed often in Europe as a reaction to the Paris Commune of 1871. For some social democratic parties, it was a matter of organizing the working class to avoid a similar disaster; for others, it was about drawing workers into their organizations so as to enable the control of bureaucracy and elites.⁷ Of course, the objective of the party is for its leadership to "capture" state power. Radical left-wing parties thus began with a contradictory character, one that

exhibited a certain antistate or mass "revolutionary" content, along with an ambition to control the power of the state through which social programs of various sorts could be technically effectuated.

Similar contradictions characterized the party in Africa founded upon and ultimately leading the disparate organizations of interests making up the "national liberation movement." In an African context, nationalist political parties were recognized (e.g., by the United Nations) as the sole "genuine representatives" of the nation often long before independence itself, as colonial regimes and nationalist movements battled for legitimacy. It was through the party that freedom was to be actualized; both in the form of political independence and in the form of socioeconomic development, which was to provide the much-needed economic independence from the West to the benefit of all in the nation. As Kwame Nkrumah's famous biblical aphorism says, "seek ye first the political kingdom and all shall be given unto thee." Freedom in the National Liberation Struggle mode could be attained only through control of the state, as it was only the state that could drive the process of "catching up" economically with the West, which was the only guarantee of full independence in the long term. For Fanon, the party was a problematic but necessary form of organization. Popular politics like class politics could be effectuated only through a party; the people or the class could become a political subject only through the medium of a party, and thus the nation could become the agent of its own liberation only through the state.

The party of nationalism for Fanon was highly problematic as it had gradually evolved at independence from an organization that enabled popular expression to an apparatus of control: "The party which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for the full expression of the people's will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control hastens to send the people back to their caves" (1965:147). It "controls the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline" (146). In addition, it seems clear to Fanon that the party itself becomes the vehicle for private enrichment, which itself is both the cause and effect of the formation of a "national bourgeoisie" that chooses the option of a one-party state. Thus he notes: "the bourgeoisie chooses the solution that seems to it, the easiest, that of the single party" (132) while "the party is becoming a means of private advancement" (138). The party thus gradually becomes a vehicle for representing the interests of this new bourgeoisie rather than those of the people.

On the other hand, the necessity of the party is proclaimed through adhering to the view that solutions to political problems are never thought of outside the party conception of politics itself. Thus "the party should be the direct expression of the masses... [and] the masses should know that the government and the party are at their service" (1965:151, 160). To actualize this situation and to curb the power of the "national bourgeoisie" it is still a party form of politics that is being invoked: "the combined effort of the masses led by a party, and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie" (140, translation modified). The notion of the party is at the core of the problem in his thought, as is that of the masses/the people. Broadly

speaking, Fanon's politics conforms to the prevalent view of the twentieth century that "the people" are to be understood as the subject of history and that they effectuate their agency by being represented in the political arena by a party. For him, the party must represent the people accurately and after independence the state-party must have a humanist program to enable a transformation of society in the people's interests; it cannot be a simple vehicle of enrichment: "In fact there must be an idea of man and of the future of humanity; that is to say that no demagogic formula and no collusion with the former occupying power can take the place of a programme" (164).

The problem with Fanon's politics here is its inability to politically transcend the limits of the party-state, despite Fanon's extremely accurate observations regarding its bureaucratic and controlling functions. In fact, as Lazarus (2001) has observed, the party has the effect of fusing popular consciousness with that of the state as it is maintained in party discourse that popular consciousness can be realized only in practice through the party and its control of state power. In this way the party enables the fusion of the subjectivity of politics with the subjectivity of the state, meaning that the liberation of the people is to take place via the control of a set of institutions, which cannot conceive liberation/freedom as their existence is premised on the reproduction of hierarchies of power and the social division of labor. It is this—the ideological fusing capacity of the party—that makes possible the transition from the nation as political affirmation to the nation as social category; which, in other words, makes possible the party-state and the nation-state, the latter being nothing but the final objective form of this subjective fusion. Whether there is one party or several here is of little significance; neither would it change anything to replace "party" with "movement" as both are said to represent the social. Rather, what is of importance is the subjective conception that maintains that politics can only be effectuated via the (party-)state.

Subjectively, then, state politics is a reaction to what might be called, following Badiou (2009a), the "event" of the popular emancipatory sequence; it is this reaction that makes neocolonialism possible. Fanon himself probably provides the best example of the subject whose fidelity to the event enables it to become a truth: "The true is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonial regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation" (Fanon 1965:39, translation modified). On the other hand, the reactive subject embodied in the state's political subjectivity is one that maintains that, although it did enable the formation of a newly independent state, the emancipatory sequence was little more than mindless violence. In Badiou's terms, "the reactive subjective is all which orients the conservation of previous economic and political forms... in the conditions of existence of the new body" that is constituted precisely by the popular upsurge orientated by emancipatory politics (2009b:108). Yet this is not all; Badiou also refers to an "obscure subject," also resulting from the same event. Here he maintains: "the obscure subject wants the death of the new body" (109), by which he means that for this subjectivity, any trace of change must be obliterated. In the realm of politics, Badiou associates this conception with fascism, although in the context of Africa it more accurately refers to the neocolonial discursive powers of occlusion: the specificity of colonized formations does not exist, colonialism is now over and was beneficial anyway, independence was granted by the

ex-colonial power, and so on. In this way the stage is set for the regular antagonism between state nationalism and neocolonial oppression, as well as for the contradictory character of nationalism itself, partly critic and partly adherent of colonial and neocolonial discourses (Chatterjee 1986).

We can see the reactive and obscure subjects unfolding in subjectivity in the post-colonial period relatively clearly. In particular, the project of “nation-building” understood as a state subjectivity, constituted in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, amounts to a state reaction to the idea of the nation as subjective becoming outlined so clearly by Fanon and which he wished to extend into a humanist project (Gibson 2003). Fanon’s humanist project that depended precisely on human agency ends up being replaced by a “nation-building” project founded on a technicist—technicist because statist—project of national “development” (Neocosmos 2010b). Concurrently during the same sequence, the shift to xenophobic nationalism noted and deplored by Fanon is an indication of the rise of communitarian politics as obscurity is allowed to descend on a purely political conception of the nation. The nation now is modeled by a politics of exclusion itself founded on social indigeneity (Neocosmos 2010a). Yet in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, such xenophobia was limited in its extent by a number of intervening conceptions in state politics such as a kind of recast statist Pan-Africanism, a statist nationalism that did, however, suggest a certain independence from neocolonial prescriptions, and a conception of national development along with its frequent requirement for foreign migrant labor. Post-1980, these restraints are no longer present. The old statist idea of the nation has been largely undermined in a neoliberal context where nationalism as a unifying project has been largely evacuated from thought. As a result an obscure subject of the nation has come much more prominently to the foreground in Africa, producing a simulacrum of Fanon’s conception.

Concluding Remarks

Politics as thought in practice—emancipatory politics—must exist “in excess” of social relations and of the social division of labor, otherwise any change from the extant cannot possibly be the object of thought; it cannot, therefore, be understood as a “reflection” of existing social groupings, divisions, and hierarchies. Without this “excessive” character, politics is simply conflated with “the political,” with party, state, and political community in an intellectual process whereby political subjectivities become related (usually in expressive way) to social categories. This has been precisely the problem of national emancipatory politics in Africa, a problem that identifies its limits. Emancipatory politics and hence the nation, therefore, can be understood only “in excess” of state politics. As soon as such politics is “objectified” and related to social categories, we become situated within a politics which is state-focused (e.g., through the medium of a party or a movement) and which contributes to making a sequence illegible. While in the immediate postcolonial period reactive state politics proposed at least a national project, today the disappearance of any genuinely inclusive conception of the nation, even at the level of the state itself, has allowed for the development of a communitarianism that feeds on the kind of free-for-all that the new forms of neocolonial domination have enabled. Recent ethnic

and xenophobic violence in Kenya (2007), South Africa (2008), and Nigeria (2009, 2010) inter alia illustrate this rise in communitarian politics. It is in this context that what used to be known as the “national question” is crying to be (re)addressed; it is within this same context that nationalism today must be given new forms in order to recover the kind of subjective becoming that Fanon had extolled in the Algerian people’s struggle for freedom.

Notes

I am grateful to Richard Pithouse for important comments and suggestions. Any errors are my responsibility.

1. Whereas in his first major work Fanon (2008) took an existentialist orientation in which a concept of “blackness” was affirmed, this perspective is largely absent from his work on Algeria except insofar as individual identity is now explicitly linked to collective affirmation in political freedom through the nation.
2. The version of *The Wretched of the Earth* referred to here is the 1965 Penguin edition translated by Constance Farrington. Where I have judged that the translation is not particularly accurate, I myself have translated from the French edition (Fanon 2002). In such cases my translation or modification is indicated.
3. Moses Finley cites Pericles (from Thucydides) as saying this: “we consider anyone who does not share in the life of the citizen not as minding his own business but as useless” (1985:30), a remark that illustrates clearly the Greek conception of politics as agency. Fanon’s equivalent is that “every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor” (1965: 161).
4. The similarity with the idea of “market freedom” where the subject is said to exercise her freedom by being a passive consumer should here be clearly apparent.
5. This argument has been developed at length in the work of Badiou and Lazarus and is of central importance if one wishes to avoid an idealist conception of the subject; importantly the idea of subject is not restricted to individuals. See in particular Badiou (2009a) and Lazarus (1996).
6. “[B]efore considering the act by which a people submits to a king, we ought to scrutinize the act by which people become a people, for that act, being necessarily antecedent to the other, is the real foundation of society” (Rousseau, 1979: 59, emphasis in original).
7. See Beetham (1974, especially chapter 4) on Max Weber’s conception of politics, for example.

Chapter Sixteen

Of Force, Power, and Will: Rousseau and Fanon on Democratic Legitimacy

Jane Anna Gordon

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. He who believes himself the master of others does not escape being more of a slave than they. How did this change take place? I do not know. What can render it legitimate? I believe I can answer this question” (Rousseau 1987:141). So opens Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract* and his meditations on the ways in which restraints on liberty can, under particular arrangements, enhance the freedom of individuals. The discussion, a portrait of the fragile possibility of “legitimate and sure rule of administration in the civil order,” turns on two points: that the “right of the strongest” can be meant only ironically and that the possibility of communities in which disagreements are resolved politically requires a set of conditions that are difficult to create or sustain, but that turn indispensably on an orientation toward differences that, while not aiming to subsume them, assumes that they may be meaningfully negotiated rather than treated as sedimented lines of battle and impossibility.

Fanon’s account of political illegitimacy and the forging of an unfinished alternative are oriented around these same crucial insights. The striking difference is that, while informed by a sober grappling with political challenges, Rousseau’s reflections remain rather formal and addressed to other Europeans. They offer a rigorous conceptual reconciliation of principle and possibility that do not hide their own paradoxes and limitations but, to sustain claims to natural individual freedom, rest in an account of the state of nature that treats our ahistorical and unnatural isolation as a point of origin. Fanon, by contrast, does not only argue that legitimate governance must emerge in and through political life; he demonstrates this claim in the very way that it is advanced.¹ It is in waging a collective, dangerous, and unpredictable battle against one’s exclusion from the realm of political life that a more fully democratic community emerges with a will and national consciousness. Any limitations to full

incorporation in this fight are not merely a strategic oversight. They will have lamentable and lasting consequences that pose ongoing obstacles to approximating a fully represented and representative people.

Rousseau says that force is a physical power to which people surrender, not out of duty or an act of will, but with prudence. One can use force to coerce obedience as long as others lack it. As soon as they have it, the roles reverse. It can secure nothing permanent on its own account unless it is used to create a compelling right that moves us of our own will to obey. In the absence of this, one shakes it off as soon as one can (Rousseau 1987:143).

Fanon's discussion begins with just such a predicament—now neither hypothetical nor individualized, however, it is the description of the very project of maintaining a colonial society, one that aims literally to divide a world into two. Particularly noteworthy is that unlike the European societies that are Rousseau's primary focus, where institutional investments are made in shaping the aesthetic and moral character of those who do not benefit from the arrangement of life opportunities, the chains of the colonized are laid bare. Apart from a tiny fraction that makes up an urban colonized pseudo-bourgeoisie, there is no effort to shape the character of the colonized, to manufacture or elicit what Antonio Gramsci termed "spontaneous consent." Rather than teachers and ministers, the police and the army mediate between the world of the colonizers and the colonized. In an ironic turn comparable to the notion of the "right of the strongest," Fanon writes, "It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force" (Fanon 1968:38). The realm of politics, classically understood, is one dominated by discursive negotiations of disagreement and power; language and persuasion can dominate where physical coercion and conflict recede.

Force extends beyond the mere ubiquity of weapons and bloodshed, however. Rousseau, challenging Aristotle, argues that there are no natural slaves, but there are people who, unable to escape their predicament, become habituated to their servitude.² For Fanon the unqualified brandishing of the use of force—including the statues commemorating settlers' heroes as those there by dint of bayonets—betrays such a project of "dehumanization," the only way through which systematized (in)human relations are normalized. The effort to create a neatly Manichean world, one divided into two noncomplementary compartments, in fundamentally opposed spheres that cannot be reconciled in a higher unity, does not only decimate former economic and material relations, but social and cultural forms as well. Writes Fanon, "The settler's work is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the native... The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals" (Fanon 1968:93). The absence of any effort to deal with the colonized as potential givers of consent illustrates unambiguously that they are outside and beneath the relations of ruler and ruled on which discussions of political legitimacy typically turn. Any response of the colonized to this situation, save appreciative affirmation, is deemed violent, since any other reaction betokens a challenge to a status quo premised upon their unquestioned unfreedom.

Fanon faces a challenge, absent in the writing of Rousseau, of convincing readers of the conclusion drawn by those struggling for liberation that the ongoing unmasked

force cannot be considered legitimate but is instead worthy of the designation "violence." Doing so challenges what constitutes "collective critical support," "legitimate representatives," and "the people," and the forging of an alternative hegemony within which colonial endeavors, and the practices of enslavement and colonization on which they turn, are challenged as a legitimate mode of economic development. The official narrative of French settlement, after all, is familiar to everyone implicated: the settler makes history, is an absolute beginning and unceasing cause (51)—if he leaves, the country will be lost amidst antediluvian plagues and customs.

In the absence of a clearly formulated rejection of such renderings of colonial history, the anger and counterforce of the colonized that should have been directed at an immediate "shaking off" of the once-stronger instead is directed at one's own community in a seeming affirmation of the lines between friend and enemy established by colonization. Part of the immobilization of the agency of colonized people, their structurally induced collective pathology of liberty, is that they can exist as human beings only among themselves, but see sites of illegitimacy in each other and in elements of their own selves. In efforts to act with freedom within forcefully constrained conditions, they do so in ways that do not challenge the coordinates of their condition; they instead reenlive feuds that preexisted the arrival of the colonists and ancestral spirits that are far more powerful than any Frenchman. "By throwing himself with all his force into the vendetta," writes Fanon (1968:54), "the native tries to persuade himself that colonialism does not exist, that everything is going on as before, that history continues."

Redirecting potential targets of force, ceasing to commit collective suicide, requires an outright challenge to the force of settler as violence. Enrique Dussel (2008:104–105) emphasizes that the struggle for new rights "creates a new legitimacy framing prior legitimate compulsion as illegitimate and as violence." In so doing, the colonized assert themselves as political subjects capable of normative assessments guided by their own trajectory of legitimacy and freedom.

Dehumanization turns on a refusal to see in other people human beings. Although Fanon acknowledges that the settlers know that the colonized view their living conditions with resentment and envy, they respond with shock at a reaction to them on the part of the colonized, on the turn to violent methods, a move made ordinarily by European countries faced by threats to their sovereignty. Initially, as with Rousseau, the response to physical coercion is little more than an attempt to break free using the same methods and means that have been imposed on one. At first, in the colonial setting, the use of violence follows the same Manichean logic imposed by the Europeans, but with the values inverted. "The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood... Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for 'them'" (Fanon 1968:50).

But this response alone is only the beginning, for ultimately the decision to end the position of Algeria as defined solely by the history of colonization is also to bring the nation into being in and through political life. This builds upon a nascent sense that while the colonized had been overpowered, they had not been tamed; they had

imbibed the settler's account of themselves and the values they exemplified, but had not fully digested them. Fanon (1968:43) writes, "In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up."

Rousseau introduces the figure of the lawgiver, a foreign founder, who enables a blind citizenry habituated to corrupt and arbitrary rule to become the people who could together articulate good law, for example, who could both be moved by and enunciate the content and direction of the general will. He must rid them of the problem of emergence—of how they could, before the existence of good law, be the people who could create it—by "transform[ing] each individual (who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole), into a part of a larger whole form which this individual receives, in a sense his life and his being... In a word, he must deny man his own forces in order to give him forces that he cannot make use of without the help of others. The more durable are the acquired forces, the more too is the institution solid and perfect" (Rousseau 1987:163). Bonnie Honig has stressed the significance of the founder's foreignness as a resource in responding to dilemmas at the center of democratic life, that being from elsewhere "secures for him the distance and impartiality needed... because he is not one of the people, his lawgiving does not disturb the equality of the people before the law... [he has no] known genealogy [that] demystified his charismatic authority" and there appears to be some assurance that he will, after founding, leave (Honig 2001:21, 23).

In Fanon, the equivalent political transformation necessarily grows out of the struggle for liberation. The emergent nation, he writes, "requires that each individual perform an irrevocable action... You could be sure of a new recruit when he could no longer go back into the colonial system" (Fanon 1968:85). Each man and woman literally brought the nation to life in his or her action by pledging to ensure triumph in his or her locality. Where he or she was, so was the nation. It widened as new tribes entered the scene, linking their village into a larger chain of national and international action. The beginnings of solidarity are nurtured by strikes at a shared enemy. Fighting the war and entering politics became one and the same thing (1968:132). The onward march of resistance is that of growing sovereignty.

These do require and extend multiple forms of estrangement: after describing the Manicheanism of the colonial world and the eradication of heterogeneity through armed struggle, Fanon differentiates among variably positioned members of colonized society. In particular, there is an indispensable role to be played by native intellectuals who leave the urban center, and with it most of their European training, to live among the peasantry who are prepared for dangerous action but need help in "being educated": the marginalization of members of political parties by an organizational politics too ready for reconciliatory promises builds from these institutional inadequacies a different relation to the readiness, strengths, and weaknesses of sectors of the population who have been treated as irrelevant to strategizing; the transvaluation of the *lumpenproletariat* who have left the impoverished countryside only to swell the urban periphery; and, crucially, a palpable forging of relations among colonized nations seeing in each other related dimensions of a global conflict. And, of course, there is Fanon himself, who connects instances of racialization between

Africa and its diaspora, bringing psychological and philosophical resources to participation in a struggle that enables him to develop a praxis that contends adequately with societal madness, with which he has dealt in individual patients, who articulates within Algeria and for the world the dream of a nation seeking to model the highest aspirations of humanism. In other words, out of the species of "the native," none is left unchanged. All are touched by a *telos* that draws their specific, indispensable experience and resources into a larger, organic, moving unity.

But such progress, always imperfect and incomplete, with consequences for the future nation, cannot be sustained by hatred alone. It if were, it would entail an ongoing reliance, dependence even, on one's enemy and would leave a recently awoken people easily manipulated and cheaply bought off. "The native is so starved for anything, anything at all that will turn him into a human being, any bone of humanity flung to him, that his hunger is incoercible, and these poor scraps of charity may, here and there, overwhelm him" (Fanon 1968:140). These scraps of civility, Fanon emphasizes, are not sudden acts of voluntary good will. They have instead been extorted through effective resistance that has put settlers on the defensive. Suddenly, the colonial elite reaches out to those they perceive to be their counterpart among the colonized, asking that they *reason* with the rest of the people. This is not spontaneous recognition of the willing capacities of Algerians—acknowledgment of consent is made only when it is violently withheld. To move from an indiscriminating nationalism to one that identifies new iterations of lines of antagonism is indispensable to economic and social awareness. Among the colonized are those whose resistance was little more than a Nietzschean will to power, a resentful and reactive attack on those who ruled, based in little more than a desire to usurp them. They seek particular and private interests that collide with those of the nation, for ultimately, as Paulo Freire put it, they do not seek a genuine decolonization or ridding the world of relations of oppressor and oppressed. They simply want to switch positions and leave the structure of the roles intact. Doing so defines one brand of nationalism, one given by colonial powers with qualified sovereignty. This alternative is a "minimum of readaption," a few reforms above and beneath an undifferentiated mass. It relies upon the halting of political education and new possibilities born from reflective action, the receding of speech and reflection and the reintroduction, if now in African uniforms, of the police and army.

This route, most clearly embodied in the local pseudo-bourgeoisie, is economically and socially bankrupt, uninterested in the cultivation of resources to develop a local economy. They imagine themselves replacing the colonial middle class and see their role as that of intermediary between the outside world, particularly its corporations, and the newly independent nation. They only imitate and so repeat, in exaggerated form, the insults of former colonists. Worse, they often aim to create a single-party system, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which in actuality could offer nothing beyond some minor individual advancement. Fanon declares that this class is literally good for nothing (Fanon 1968:176). They exemplify what Enrique Dussel has called the fetishizing of power, or those instances in which individual representatives exercise power in favor of some and, therefore, cannot rest on the strength of the people, but instead need the help of imperial powers to produce obedience. He writes, "a political actor who fails to fulfill the normative principles of politics is not only (subjectively) unjust, but also *contributes to the weakening and rotting of power*

[of the] institutions through which he or she seeks to govern" (Dussel 2008: 57). Rousseau also warned of such usurpations in the formation of the illegitimate social contract with which *The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* ends. Force is replaced with obligating law, but it was only a small, guiding sector of the new polity that understood the abuses that collective consent would thereby sanction. They were the few who had already calculated how to profit from them (Rousseau 1987:70).

For Fanon, the ending of colonialism means the creation of a different set of relations, specifically, politically legitimate ones. It is in outlining the substance of these that Fanon articulates national consciousness, effectively historicizing and reworking Rousseau's notion of the general will as the shrinking of norms of rule and force through the sovereign people seeking the conditions of their shared lives. "Independence," writes Fanon, "is not a word which can be used as an exorcism, but an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society" (1968:310).³ It must move from a negative liberty or freedom from abuses of others toward securing the conditions to forge a new set of human relations. Rousseau describes this political project in the following lines: "For if the opposition of private interests made necessary the establishment of societies, it is the accord of these same interests that made it possible. It is what these different interests have in common that forms the social bond, and, were there no point of agreement among all these interests, no society could exist. For it is utterly on the basis of this common interest that society ought to be governed" (1987:153). It will not be possible for the private wills of individuals always to comply with the general will, since the former tends toward preferences and the latter toward equality. The former when aggregated is the will of all (or will in general) while the latter, which considers only what can be shown to be right for all affected, is the general will.

While taking active part in national liberation shapes a fundamental orientation against pacification, mystification, and a cultish reliance on leaders (Fanon 1968:95), the transition from "the status of a colonized person to that of a self-governing citizen of an independent nation" is not immediate. His consciousness has not kept pace with the effectiveness of his individual role within a larger organized force (Fanon 1968:138). Bringing direction, understanding, and reflection is a battle against those within the movement who would win now and educate later and who would see the discussion necessary to the formation of shared public opinion as potentially divisive. Fanon warns without qualification: "There exists a brutality of thought and a mistrust of subtlety which are typical of revolutions . . . if not immediately combated, [they] invariably [lead] to the defeat of the movement within a few weeks" (Fanon 1968:147). For the movement of sovereignty, of the nation, and of emergent political relations is the movement of the formerly colonized toward self-governance.

Success does not only entail the initial throwing off of force, but also the involvement of the colonized in political life that can better secure their freedom from domination and that makes the reality of a distinctive domain of politics real and living. This itself is a major investment that departs from understandings of development as resting upon populations of enslaved and colonized people. In this instance, the nation can develop only as the people do. Therefore "efficiency," if it refers only to

the quick carrying out of business, would be a value discredited along with the narrow individualism that was unsustainable during violent liberatory struggle. In this instance, public business is necessarily the business of the public. Any other approach would quickly undercut the message of postcolonialism: of the formerly colonized "realiz[ing] that finally everything depends on them and their salvation lies in their own cohesion, in the true understanding of their interests, and in knowing who their enemies are" (Fanon 1968:191).

While many have challenged the interpretation of Rousseau as an advocate of participatory democracy, since he so feared that articulating difference would collapse into corrosive factions and because he described the process of voting for the general will as listening, in silence, to the inner voice of G-d, rather than the potentially manipulative and misleading arguments of others, he also disparaged easy declarations of what was politically possible and impossible. Emphasizing that the people's sovereignty rests in legislative power that must remain active through their ongoing assembly, he writes, "The boundaries of what is possible in moral matters are less narrow than we think. It is our weaknesses, our vices and our prejudices that shrink them. Base souls do not believe in great men; vile slaves smile with an air of mockery at the word liberty" (Rousseau 1987:195). The last census of the Roman Republic, Rousseau states, counted 400,000 citizens bearing arms and an empire of 4 million citizens, and yet people were called together regularly to deal with public business.

This process offered ongoing opportunities for practice, constant, unforgettable reminders of being part of a larger collectivity and a vision, in the case of Fanon's Algeria, of the role of political parties that far exceeds the progressive function fulfilled early on in articulating dreams of the emergent nation. Fanon writes:

The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves, and to put forward new ideas. The branch meeting and the committee meeting are liturgical acts. They are privileged occasions given to a human being to listen and to speak. At each meeting, the brain increases its means of participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity. (Fanon 1968:195)

Crucial is rendering the totality of the nation a reality for each citizen, making its history part of the personal experience of all. If national, such experience would "cease to be individual, limited, and shrunken and...open out into the truth of the nation and of the world" (Fanon 1968:200). Just as the fortune of the nation was in the hands of each fighter within the armed struggle, "the period of national construction each citizen ought to continue in his real, everyday activity to associate himself with the whole of the nation and to will the triumph of man in his completeness here and now" (Fanon 1968:200).

A national government must encourage those private aims and aspirations that are pursuable alongside the well-being of others, pushing a model of societal, evenly distributed development as indispensable to constructing an inhabitable political world. Fanon writes, "The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women. The collective building up of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale" (Fanon 1968:204). The national government must be for and by the people,

and Fanon adds, also for and including the outcasts. No leader can be a substitute for a popular will. A future for politics, rather than the reintroduction of relations managed by force that enable the uninterrupted profiteering for some, requires a people who recognize themselves as essential to its operation and health. As soon as they are made dispensable to ruling, normalized force, defending a partial hegemony, reenters. Sustaining a countervision is one that requires framing the growth of people as citizens as the guiding *telos* and priority. When politics is understood as not generating human resources and relations but only as the administration of scarce resources among antagonistic parties, it cements, rather than rendering fluid, dividing lines enshrined by previous battles.

Shortcomings in countering rural/urban suspicions fostered in the colonial period create obstacles in the moment of independence. Writes Fanon (1968:117), "The country dwellers are slow to take up the structural reforms proposed by the government; and equally slow in following their social reforms, even though they may be very progressive if viewed objectively, precisely because the people now at the head of affairs did not explain to the people as a whole during the colonial period what were the aims of the party, the national trends, or the problems of international politics." What Fanon (1968:114) terms laziness in movement strategy and minimizing the project of political education now takes its toll in tribalism and narrow regionalisms. In other words, for it to be apparent what "the differences have in common," they must together form a society that shares in prosperity and despair that is meaningfully bound by a common destiny. A generality that incorporates all of the smaller parts is not simply a function of will but also of active or failing policy.

Rather than addressing the limitations of the liberation movement, those who come to power exacerbate them. As Dussel (2008:80) has emphasized, even the noblest commitment to symmetrical, democratic participation and legitimacy will be imperfect and relative, but to treat this as a challenge rather than a justificatory excuse turns on the constant reinvention of the institutions through which the power of communities is exercised. Settling for mechanisms that fail to fulfill their purpose of responding to demonstrated needs is one of the clearest marks of the usurpation and then abandonment of forging an alternative model of nationalism, one based in a national consciousness. In other words, the resurgence of ethnic, religious, and regional lines as those only of nonnegotiable difference is a direct reflection of the deliberate shutting down of the project of forging a heterogeneous political culture in favor of relations that enable the enrichment of a small few, the national bourgeoisie, over and against others. This is a clear abandonment of what Rousseau termed "generality" and the national consciousness that Fanon sought to nurture.

Grappling with the stagnation following the independence period in Ghana, Kwame Gyekye treats the relationship of force to legitimacy as a living question fundamentally intertwined with the forging of viable multinational states. He too affirms that the absence of fluid and dynamic cultures out of which a shared metanation might form is an unmistakable consequence of abandoning a vision of the state, first and foremost as aiming through redistributive measures to forge a coherent, diverse political community. Continuing the project of setting the material and moral conditions for national consciousness, therefore, requires prioritizing the formidable challenge posed by ethnic and religious group identity lines, some preexisting, others reified by colonialism.

Gyekye emphasizes that many internal groups are "nations" in the sense of minority cultures that are not coterminous with a state. They share cultural and linguistic homogeneity, life worlds structured around values and mundane feelings of loyalty, solidarity, and belonging. The challenge in multinational states is emulating these living senses of community in larger units, transferring thick allegiances to a larger and seemingly more abstract whole. In an absence of fairness in the distribution of resources and opportunities, just as Fanon said of elements of the peasantry, constituent groups are suspicious of a government that appears to be a removed instrument wielded by some over and against others. If, by contrast, it were associated with the provision of roads, schools, and medicine that, in enfranchising some, connected them with others, perhaps what is deemed politically possible would be rather different. In other words, according to Gyekye, the seemingly unshakable lines of loyalty and allegiance as cultural, ethnic, and religious are not preordained, but a function of an absence of sustained political will to forge an alternative locus of belonging. Gyekye stresses that the combining of parts into a cohesive whole creates a creolized product. He compares the envisioned metanational state with the construction of a political home: "But the structure, that is, the house, that results from the composition is a unity; but not only that: it is also a new thing, which is neither a stone nor sand nor wood" (Gyekye 1997:85). The metanational community that he is advocating seems artificial because, while a human community, it must be purposively built, drawing on cultural and linguistic resources rather than reproducing them uncritically. But all efforts to nurture human growth require care and reflection. Ethnicism, here like Fanon's narrow nationalism, has discouraged the personal and official recognition of the actual existence of shared cultures that have emerged out of the ongoing practice of living together. A metanational culture is not a pluralism that aggregates and multiplies internal differences; it provides an umbrella for these, while seeking to forge a shared hegemonic culture by identifying underlying affinities of potential value and discouraging those that seed nonnegotiable lines of division.

Much like Dussel's "analogical hegemony," which, through dialogue and translation, builds from criticisms of prevailing national identities articulated by coextensive social movements, seeking to reveal their relations to each other while retaining the distinctiveness of each, the aim is "a world in which all worlds fit," in which distinctiveness sustains rather than erodes unities. Such a vision turns on at least two stipulations. The first is that in deliberately forging an alternative modernism, one that does not rely on dehumanization, there are elements of cultures and traditions that will be lost. Most of the time, these are ways of acting and thinking that refer to elements of social worlds that no longer exist. But they are, in addition, those that privilege some at a cost to most others without a liberating cause.

While advancing a compelling case for new models and definitions of individual and collective development, Fanon stressed making one's polity its own center but not a conservative localism that would suggest that independence must come from the work of the formerly colonized alone. To leave the colonized with their own bootstraps, even if it were the formal demand of decolonization, would represent a failure of precisely the alternative hegemony that it sought to sustain. To convince the world of the violence of colonization would require more than a steady retreat of French men and women; it also would need a reinterpretation of the restitution

owed. Fanon (1968:100) wrote, "If conditions of work are not modified, centuries will be needed to humanize this world which has been forced down to animal level by imperial power."

Methods used by agents of capitalism to increase their wealth and power included deportation, massacres, forced labor, slavery—the strategies of war criminals. Actually valuing black and brown individual and collective lives as one did those of Europeans would entail the kinds of demands made of Nazis for their treatment of other parts of Europe.⁴ The moral reparation or symbolic power of national independence could not blind or feed the recently liberated. "The wealth of the imperial countries is our wealth too . . . Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples" (Fanon 1968:102). To continue as if nothing were due, as if there were not in fact a reversed relation of indebtedness of France to Algeria, is to continue within an imperial hegemony that would treat the legacies of colonialism borne out in such material discrepancies as a lamentable inevitability, a consequence of compulsions of economic growth.

One can diagnose illegitimacy by active indications of the indispensability of dehumanization to the maintenance of a given order. The degree to which an alternative is legitimate is measured by the extent to which people have seized and are then able to set conditions in place to shape through action the contours of their collective lives. This process is necessarily set in motion by untidy struggles within history against those who would treat their will, agency, and even hatred as irrelevant. These mollify former dividing lines as people, facing great potential losses, ally to throw off the structures that violently shape their lives. But anger and resentment alone cannot sustain the battle—this requires a constructive project, the forging of a positive, analogical hegemony, one in which what is right and consented to coheres in what the permeable differences have in common. The content and form of such unities can grow only out of a dialectical movement between the shared and the different—the formulation of the latter pushes the former toward greater rigor while refusing that the latter collapses entirely. This involves the expansion of the discursive domain in a deliberate effort to curb unnecessary recourses to violence that by definition shut sectors of the population outside of and beneath politics. Doing so reminds us of the actual meaning of power and requires that all people can remain awake and occupy a shared time. Within it, no one remains the undivided mass, marking time (Fanon 1968:147).

Rousseau has been canonized within French society—the source of the legitimating language of the very project of the French Republic. Fanon, by contrast, is much studied, but by those who occupy positions of alterity. The response to recent challenges to the inadequacy of the hegemony that sustains the identity of the French nation has largely been discredited as sowing divisions that would destroy a shared political community. In such rhetoric, 1789 is invoked, now conservatively. A more viable and political response would be to call for the creolizing of Rousseau's general will, drawing on the ample resources offered by Fanon. Such an approach would seek out the debates through which difference could move from an abstract principle to lines of disagreement fostered by the unequal reach and provision of the French state.

This would, of course, require the historicizing of the political community as one that did not emerge out of a hypothetical state of nature of isolated individuals, but instead from political and communal relations that have enlarged the freedom and wealth of some through the dehumanization and rendering irrelevant of others. It is in identifying such limitations and in struggling against them that a diverse, French (meta)national consciousness or the general will is made less imperfect.

Some form of democratic governance has now become synonymous with political legitimacy itself, and indeed the study and development of democratic theory has become mainstream, even hegemonic. These discussions have advanced more as strategies of management and securing of neoliberal, capitalist order rather than a concern with liberatory struggles aimed at securing conditions for collective self-determination. We would do well, in celebrating Fanon's rich memory, to distinguish those forms that represent the continuation of social worlds premised upon violent dehumanization from those that aim at nothing less than making of we human beings an open, interminable question.

Notes

1. For a related discussion from which I have learned a great deal, see Paget Henry's "C.L.R. James, Political Philosophy, and the Creolizing of Rousseau and Marx." He advances the view that Rousseau's "general will," an effort to honor and realize the values and aspirations of the public self of the nation that alone can sustain legitimate governance, is rearticulated by C.L.R. James in a proletarian or postbourgeois form as the creative self-movements of the majority classes of workers and farmers in Trinidad and England.
2. Rousseau is here referring to people who are literally enslaved. He uses them as metaphors, however, for people who are not chattel but who accept ways of organizing human societies that shrink their freedom.
3. Recall that for Fanon, racism is not a cause but an effect of radically unequal relations. One society cannot draw its substance from the exploitation of another without offering some justificatory account. To move beyond rationalizations that actively denigrate the social forms and existence of other groups, they must be meaningfully enfranchised in the collective life.
4. Fanon writes, "for all the speeches about the equality of human beings—these cannot hide the commonplace fact that seven Frenchmen killed or wounded kindles indignation of civilized consciousness while massacre of whole populations is treated as unimportant" (1968:89). He notes as well that after seven years of crime in Algeria, not a single Frenchman had been indicted in a French court of justice for the murder of an Algerian (1968:92).

Chapter Seventeen

Fanon and Political Will

Peter Hallward

Fifty years after his death, what remains most alive in Frantz Fanon's political theory and general philosophy? The categories that defined the immediate context of his last publications and of the last years of his life—decolonization, emancipatory nationalism, redemptive violence—belong primarily to an historical era that ended, in the 1970s, with the last victorious wars of national liberation. The central notion at work in these categories, however, is both much older than this historical sequence and much “younger” than its still-limited set of political consequences. Although its opponents had already sought to consign this notion to the dustbin of conceptual history well before Fanon himself came to rework it, its real significance is still oriented toward the future.

What is this familiar notion that has become almost unrecognizable in our ultracapitalist age marked by absolute commodification and ethicohumanitarian imperialism? It is the notion of autonomous political will. More precisely, it is the theory and practice of a militant “will of the people” conceived in terms that enable it to be both decisive and inclusive.

This is the notion that Rousseau and the Jacobins put at the divisive center of modern politics. It is the practice that, after Hegel and Marx, Lenin confirmed as the central element of modern revolutionary experience;¹ the practice that Fanon's own revolutionary contemporaries (Mao, Castro, Guevara, Giap, Mandela) preserved as their guiding frame of reference. It is also the notion most thoroughly forgotten if not repressed, in both theory and practice, by the discipline that in recent decades has largely appropriated Fanon's legacy: postcolonial studies. A preliminary requirement of any “return to Fanon” worthy of the name must involve the forgetting of this forgetting, in order to remember a much older confrontation between the mobilization of popular political will and the myriad forces that seek to pacify and “devoluntarize” the people.

This confrontation between active volition and imposed resignation stages the central drama of Fanon's work. Connecting his early existentialist account of individual freedom with his later emphasis on patriotic duty and commitment, *will* is

the term that links his psychological and political work. Mobilization of the will of the people is the guiding priority of what we might call his “political psychology.” It integrates his strategic defense of “terror” with his affirmation of a fully and concretely “universal humanism.” It connects his French republican inheritance and his subsequent internationalism. Mobilized and united, the will of the people explains the triumph of the Algerian revolution and anticipates its Pan-African expansion; demobilized and dispersed, it yields in the face of neocolonial reaction. The same alternatives define the terms of anti-imperialist struggle to this day. Fanon should be read, in short, as one of the most insightful and uncompromising political voluntarists of the twentieth century.²

A glance through the formulations that recur in the texts that Fanon wrote on behalf of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in the 1950s lends this characterization some initial plausibility. Collected posthumously in *Toward the African Revolution*, these articles are peppered with references to the “will of the people” and the “national will of the oppressed peoples,” their “will to independence,” their “will to break with exploitation and contempt,” and so on (1967b:159, 113). First and foremost, the Algerian revolution “testifies to the people’s will,” and the resulting situation is defined above all in terms of “the armed encounter of the national will of the Algerian people and of the will to colonialist oppression of the French governments” (1967b:64, 130). Any consideration of revolutionary Algeria as Fanon describes it in the late 1950s must recognize “the will of twelve million men; that is the only reality” (1967b:74). As this will to independence advances toward realization of its purpose, affirmation of “a national will opposed to foreign domination” has become and will remain the “common ideology” of the African liberation movement as a whole (1967b:153).

Fanon’s voluntarism is hardly less emphatic in the approach to psychology he begins to develop in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. If as Fanon observes, “the tragedy of the man is that he was once a child,” if the beginning of every life is always “drowned in contingency,” then it is through the deliberate and laborious “effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom, that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world” (1967a:180–181). There are no “objective” factors—no ethnic or cultural inheritance, no racial essence, no historical mission—that should determine the course of such scrutiny and creation. Fanon’s goal here, after Sartre, is to “teach people to become aware of the potentials they have forbidden themselves, of the passivity they have paraded in just those situations in which what is needed is to hold oneself, like a sliver, to the heart of the world, to interrupt if necessary the rhythm of the world, to upset, if necessary, the chain of command, but in any case, and most assuredly, to stand up to the world” (1967a:57).

In the ancient philosophical struggle that pits will versus intellect as rivals for primary faculty of the mind, Fanon’s allegiance is clear. The role of an engaged intellectual or artist, first and foremost, is “to interpret the manifest will of the people” (1968:247). The effort to understand what is the case is secondary in relation to a determination to prescribe (and then realize) what ought to be the case. “In every age, among the people, truth is the property of the national cause. No absolute verity, no

discourse on the purity of the soul, can shake this position. [...] Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation' in its freedom and autonomy" (1968:50).

I

Needless to say, like any consistent voluntarist, Fanon is critical of distorted conceptions of will that turn it into one of its several opposites—instinctive reflex, unthinking "fervor," "blind" impulse. Fanon condemns a "blind will toward freedom" (1968:59; cf. 1967a:2), for instance, precisely because he recognizes the minimal requirements of a consequential voluntarism. These requirements are easily derived from the concept itself (and most were anticipated by the first philosopher to grapple with the problem of a popular or "general" will, Rousseau).

A consistent voluntarism requires, first, that political will indeed be considered as a matter of volition or *will*, rather than compulsion, coercion, or "instinct." Voluntary action is a matter of free deliberation and prescription. Political will is thought through: it subsumes a "spontaneous" enthusiasm or rebellion in an organized mobilization or disciplined campaign. It affirms the primacy of a conscious decision and commitment, independent of any "deeper" (i.e., unconscious) determination, be it instinctual, historical, technological.

Second, a fully or universally emancipatory account of political will—that is, a "humanist" account in Fanon's sense of the word—just as obviously requires that this be the will of the *people* as such, not of a group whose privileges or interests set them apart from the people.

Third, will is not just opposed to reflex or impulse: it is equally opposed to mere imagination or wish. Political will persists to the degree that it is able to realize or "actualize" its prescription, that is, to overcome the resistance of those opposed to that prescription. Will is a matter of victory or defeat. Victory requires the assembly and unity of the people, and mobilization of a force capable of vanquishing the enemies of the people. Like any kind of will, political will is a matter of determination and struggle, one that either continues and prevails or else slackens and fails. The work of "total liberation" that Fanon anticipates "is bound to be hard and waged with iron determination [...]. The colonial peoples must redouble their vigilance and their vigor. A new humanism can be achieved only at this price" (1967b:126). Under the pressure of anticolonial war, Fanon rediscovers the strategic principle that guided Robespierre, Lenin, and Mao as they waged their own wars to end war: a truly inclusive or universal "humanism" will be achieved only through resolute struggle with its adversaries, not through an extension of existing forms of tolerance, "recognition" or "respect," not through more appropriate or sensitive forms of representation, acknowledgment, concern, management, and so on.³

The rest of this essay works through Fanon's approach to these general requirements of political will, starting with the last: as his every reader knows, a version of this third requirement was forced on Fanon the moment he became aware of the color of his skin.

II

There are two general ways of extinguishing the will of a people. The most reliable method is to lull them into a deferential passivity, such that the possibility of a voluntary insurgency never arises. Under suitable conditions, this sort of “hegemonic” approach may only require manipulation of those ideological apparatuses—education, the media, consumption, entertainment—required to guarantee the “manufacture of consent.” The alternative is more direct and abrasive, and involves the use of whatever force is required to disperse, divide, or pacify a group of people; the “primitive accumulation” of imperial power, no less than what Marx called the primitive accumulation of capital, has almost invariably involved reliance on such force. The colonialism that Fanon devoted his life to dismantling combines both strategies. “The colonised have this in common, that their right to constitute a people is challenged” (1967b:145), through a combination of coercion and deference.

Conquest alone allows colonialism to begin. Colonialism can continue, however, only through colonization of the mind and the consolidation of a far-reaching “inferiority complex.” Colonialism “holds a people in its grip” by controlling its future and distorting and destroying its past, and by “emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (1968:210). Once established in its position of military superiority, the colonial culture produces, through a whole range of media, an unending “series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs” (1967a:118). Successful colonization leads the oppressed to identify with the worldview of the oppressed. Since the colonial cultural machine leads one to believe that “one is a Negro to the degree to which one is wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual,” encouraged on all sides to identify with what is white, I come to “distrust what is black in me, that is, the whole of my being.” “Voluntary” internalization of this distrust completes the colonial project, and reestablishes a form of slavery on a more robust footing. “The black Antillean is the slave of this cultural imposition. After having been the slave of the white man, he enslaves himself” (1967a:148-149).

Colonialism thus takes hold of a territory to the degree that it encourages “passivity” and “despair,” if not “resignation” or “fatalism” among its indigenous inhabitants (1967c:82, 84). As doctor Fanon diagnoses it, colonialism is first and foremost a massive project to break the will of the colonized people, and it is no accident that the dominant theme of colonial characterizations of the colonized is an insistence on their apparent lack of volition and self-control. Colonial racism is a systematic effort to represent the indigenous people as “the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces.” The “native” is a being of pure instinct, dangerous reflexes, and depraved impulses (1968:41; cf. 250; 1967a:147). Confronted with the native or black, colonialism sees a merely “natural” rather than social or civilized being, and concludes “you can’t get away from nature” (1967c:26). The political response to such a characterization is predictable, and little different from the response recommended by classical (i.e., racist) European liberalism, from Locke through Burke to Tocqueville and Mill.

The will of the people can become the basis of a revolutionary or emancipatory political practice, however, only to the degree that the one term informs the other:

the “people” become a political category insofar as they come to share a will to independence, and such a will is emancipatory insofar as it embraces the whole of an oppressed people. The only genuine emancipation is deliberate or voluntary self-emancipation. Fanon knows as well as Marx that “it is the oppressed peoples who must liberate themselves” (1967b:105; cf. Marx 1975–2005:441). (By the same token, he knows that people whose liberation is thrust upon them—as with the figure of the slave in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*—remain unfree [1967a:171–172]). Decolonization is precisely this, the conversion of an involuntary passivity into a possessed or assumed activity. Decolonization “transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlights upon them [...]. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself” (1968:36–37).

III

Committed to their revolution, Fanon has confidence in the people. The people are adequate to the task of self-emancipation. This is both an “article of faith,” the presupposition of a revolutionary commitment, and a lesson learned from militant experience. On the one hand, Fanon is confident that “everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand” (1968:189). Understanding fosters autonomy. “The more the people understand, the more watchful they become, and the more they come to realize that finally everything depends on them and their salvation lies in their own cohesion, in the true understanding of their interests, and in knowing who their enemies are” (1968:191). On the other hand, under the extraordinary pressure of events, “in Algeria we have realized that the masses are equal to the problems which confront them” (1968:193). No less than Rousseau, Fanon is confident that if the people are free to deliberate and settle on their own course of action, then sooner or later they will solve the problems they face (or in Rousseau’s more emphatic terms, if the circumstances allow for a universal or general will, if a group is indeed able to sustain a single and undivided will, then such willing will never err [1979:1:7, 2:3]). Algeria’s experience proves, Fanon notes, “that the important thing is not that three hundred people form a plan and decide upon carrying it out, but that the whole people plan and decide even if it takes them twice or three times as long” (1968:193–194).

For Fanon, then—and this is where he is most distant from Lenin or Mao—the people rather than its leaders or party is the only adequate subject of political will. A party has its role to play, but

the party should be the direct expression of the masses. The party is not an administration responsible for transmitting government orders; it is the energetic spokesman and the incorruptible defender of the masses. In order to arrive at this conception of the party, we must above all rid ourselves of the very Western, very bourgeois and therefore contemptuous attitude that the masses are incapable of governing themselves. In fact, experience proves that the masses understand perfectly the most complicated problems. (1968:188)

For Lenin it is the party that guides the industrial proletariat who in turn guide the working classes and laboring people as a whole; the party provides the theoretical framework through which the people will “spontaneously” learn the lessons of their own experience (cf. Lenin 1978:154–155; Lih 2007:284–287). Carried by his commitment to the Algerian revolution, Fanon effectively inverts the order of priority. “While in many colonial countries it is the independence acquired by a party that progressively informs the infused national consciousness of the people, in Algeria it is the national consciousness, the collective sufferings and terrors that make it inevitable that the people must take its destiny into its own hands” (1967c:16).

Nevertheless, Fanon remains very close to Lenin (and then Mao) in his insistence on the primacy of determination itself as the decisive element of politics: what matters is the popular *will*, rather than popular opinions, habits or culture. For Lenin, the priority is always “achieving unanimity of will among the vanguard of the proletariat as the fundamental condition for the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat,” itself the condition of genuine popular empowerment and democracy (1921:626; cf. 1917:324–325). Given the actual balance of class forces, “victory over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate life-and-death struggle which calls for tenacity, discipline, and a single and inflexible will” (1920:514). For Mao, likewise, political initiative belongs to those whose “unshaken conviction” and “unceasing perseverance” enables them to “move mountains” (1961–1977:322). The goal is, first, to unify, concentrate and intensify the people’s “will to fight” against their oppressors, then to establish a form of government that will most “fully express the will of all the revolutionary people,” if not “the unanimous will of the nation” (Mao 1961–77:352, 322).

In keeping with Rousseau’s fundamental distinction between the general will of the people and the mere “will of all” (1979:2, 3), what matters is a collective capacity to identify and will the general interest as such, rather than the aggregate interest or opinion of all individuals as individuals. Lenin privileges the party because (as he sees it) it is the subject most capable of willing and acting with the clarity, unity, and “iron determination” that political struggle requires; the proletariat, further, is that class whose economic circumstances and conditions of work (their coordination as employees of a large scale enterprise, their lack of any privately owned means of production) confront them with the truth of capitalist exploitation in its most unadulterated form, while freeing them from the “vacillation” characteristic of small landowners and the petty bourgeoisie. The proletariat is in a position to see clearly what they are up against, in conditions that foster solidarity, discipline, and resolve while discouraging compromise and reform; suitably led, they are positioned, in short, to act as the vanguard for laboring people as a whole.

Inverting Lenin’s distribution of roles, Fanon privileges the peasantry for much the same reasons: in the colonial situation, the peasantry is that sector of the wider population most capable of sustaining a revolutionary will. In Fanon’s Algeria rather like Mao’s Hunan, it is the peasantry who are best placed to “smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation” (Mao 1961–77:23–24). In the colonies it is the urban working class that tends to vacillate under the pressure of anticolonial struggle. Modern towns emerge here like “little islands of the mother country” (1968:121), and “in the colonial territories the proletariat is the nucleus of

the colonized population which has been most pampered by the colonial regime" (1968:108). The peasant farmers, by contrast, are the first to confront the full reality of colonial oppression and draw the unavoidable consequences. "The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength" (1968:61).

Fanon's confidence in the people, then, is not unconditional: he is confident in the people insofar as they actively will and determine the course of their own political destiny. In the case of an oppressed or colonized people, this means that affirmation of the category of the people is inseparable from participation in their will to self-emancipation. If the measure of successful decolonization is given by the fact that "a whole social structure is being changed from the bottom up," the "extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded" (1968:35–36). No other kind of change has any chance of success. Fanon knows as well as Lenin that you cannot "turn society upside down [...] if you have not decided from the very beginning [...] to overcome all the obstacles that you will come across in so doing" (1968:37).

In Algeria, of course, determination of the will of the people took on the particular form required by the obstacle it faced. Everything turns, here, on the moment "when a decisive confrontation brought the will to national independence of the people and the dominant power face to face" (1967c:74). In Algeria and other European settler colonies, victory in this confrontation depended foremost on a willingness to overcome the main basis of this power—ruthless, systematic political violence—on its own terms. Given what he's up against, "the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (1968:86). Educated by fruitless decades of negotiated "reforms," "it is the intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force" (1968:73). The Algerian revolutionaries are obliged to resort to terror for the same reason as the Jacobins in 1793 or the Bolsheviks in 1918: by 1956, "the revolutionary leadership found that if it wanted to prevent the people from being gripped by terror it had no choice but to adopt forms of terror which until then it had rejected" (1967c:40). Since "colonialism is not a thinking machine nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties," since "it is violence in its natural state," the partisans of the national liberation struggles concluded that "it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (1968:61).

IV

Fanon and his contemporaries came to this conclusion at a time when colonial violence was both far more brutal than anticolonial violence (as epitomized in the gruesome massacres carried out at Sétif, Moramanga, Sharpeville, etc. [1968:72; cf. 89]) and far from invincible (as indicated by the victories won in the 1950s by "people's war" in Vietnam, Cuba, and Algeria itself). Fanon reached his conclusions at a time when he was still confident that "there is no colonial power today which is capable of adopting the only form of contest which has a chance of succeeding, namely, the prolonged establishment of large forces of occupation" (1968:74). It would be a mistake

to generalize Fanon's specific strategic emphasis here. Several familiar components of his account of the national liberation struggle apply more broadly, however, to an account of voluntarist political practice in general.

First of all, of course, political will proceeds through struggle against an enemy, a difficulty, or an injustice. By definition, there is no will in the absence of constraint or resistance. Like it or not, I find myself thrown into a world structured in dominance and oppression, "in which I am summoned into battle; a world in which it is always a question of annihilation or triumph" (1967a:178). A decision to participate in the struggle against colonial oppression already marks a critical stage in the process that "expels the fear, the trembling, the inferiority complex, from the flesh of the colonised" (1967b:151).⁴ Commitment to the struggle allows Fanon to conform to a basic Leninist prescription—wherever possible, "to go on the offensive" (1967b:179tm). For those engaged in armed struggle, the only pertinent imperative, as Sartre puts it, is "to thrust out colonialism by *every* means in their power" (1968:21). Confronted by a colonial power, "we must cut off all her avenues of escape, asphyxiate her without pity, kill in her every attempt at domination" (1967b:130). In such a situation, appeals to "peaceful negotiation" and "international mediation" are only so many attempts to confuse the issue.

More importantly, participation in struggle unites its participants and thus constitutes them as *a* people. The goal of anticolonial struggle is not reformation or improvement of colonial situation but its elimination through "the grandiose effort of a people, which had been mummified, to rediscover its own genius, to reassume its history and assert its sovereignty" (1967b:83–84). Victory in such a struggle "not only consecrates the triumph of the people's rights; it also gives to that people consistency, coherence, and homogeneity" (1968:292).

This capacity to assemble and to form voluntary, cohesive associations is a central feature in any account of political will, and a large part of the anticolonial project involves determination of "the precise points at which the peoples, the men and the women, could meet, help one another, build in common" (1967b:178). As a rule, "the masses should be able to meet together, discuss, propose, and receive directions"—insofar as they help energize a general will to deliberate and act, "the branch meeting and the committee meeting are liturgical acts" (1968:195). Everything from the distribution of radio sets across to the countryside to the development of suitably patriotic forms of art and literature should contribute to "the assembling of the people, a summoning together for a precise purpose. Everything works together to awaken the native's sensibility and to make unreal and unacceptable the contemplative attitude, or the acceptance of defeat" (1968:243; cf. 1967c:68). "The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history" (1968:93).

National liberation is to be achieved by the people as a whole. Fanon has no more sympathy than Lenin himself for merely "terroristic" or "ultra-leftist" acts undertaken by a neo-Blanquist clique, but he knows better than Lenin that "an unceasing battle must be waged to prevent the party from ever becoming a willing tool in the hands of a leader" (1968:184). Whatever is decided, "the success of the decision which is adopted depends upon the coordinated, conscious effort of the whole of the

people" (1968:199): leaders and organizers exist to facilitate and clarify the process of making a decision, but not to make it themselves. "No leader, however valuable he may be, can substitute himself for the popular will" (1968:205). The popular struggle is not to be "saluted as an act of heroism but as a continuous, sustained action, constantly being reinforced" (1967b:151).

Collective participation in violent struggle, however, certainly does involve crossing a point of no-return. In a situation where "almost all the men who called on the people to join in the national struggle were condemned to death or searched for by the French police, confidence was proportional to the hopelessness of each case. You could be sure of a new recruit when he could no longer go back into the colonial system" (1968:85). As Saint-Just and Robespierre learned in their own way, there is no more secure a basis for a patriotic or "general will" than participation in a war of collective salvation in which the only possible outcome is victory or death. "The armed struggle mobilizes the people; that is to say, it throws them in one way and in one direction" (1968:93) and "henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact *everyone* will be discovered by the troops, *everyone* will be massacred—or *everyone* will be saved. The motto 'look out for yourself,' the atheist's method of salvation, is in this context forbidden" (1968:47).

What is imperative, instead, is to rely on *ourselves*. Since "a will cannot be represented," as Rousseau explained, so then "sovereignty, being nothing more than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated [and...] can only be represented by itself; power can indeed be transferred but not will" (1979:2, 1; cf. 3:15). There is no representative who might take the place of the people themselves—this is a lesson that Lumumba learned at the end of his own life-and-death struggle, when he made the fatal mistake of making an appeal to the United Nations (an institution that serves to "crush the will to independence of people") rather than to his own loyal partisans, or to allies established through a genuine "friendship of combat" (1967b:195–196).

Such self-reliance points to another basic feature of a voluntarist approach: its commitment to the here and now, to decisive action in the present moment, and its consequent rejection of terms that proceed through deferral, "reform" or "development." What is at stake is a claim to that "independence which will allow the Algerian people to take its destiny wholly in hand" (1967b:101), all at once, without waiting for recognition or approval from the colonial master. The goal is not to reform the colonial situation but to abolish it, not to improve a situation of partial dependence but to escape it. For the FLN, "bargaining of any kind is unthinkable" (1967b:62), and "this refusal of progressive solutions, this contempt for the 'stages' that break the revolutionary torrent and cause the people to unlearn the unshakable will to take everything into their hands at once in order that everything may change, constitutes the fundamental characteristic of the struggle of the Algerian people" (1967b:103). In keeping with Fanon's neo-Jacobin logic, the will of the people not only demands but incarnates an immediate and unconditional sovereignty.

In this respect at least, Fanon's position is as much neo-Jacobin as it is neo-Bolshevik, if not more so: for Fanon, compared with Lenin, the exercise of political will is more fully independent of an "objective" historical development, of the so-called laws or stages of economic development. Yes, says Fanon, "decolonisation is proceeding, but it is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this decolonisation is the

fruit of an objective dialectic which more or less rapidly assumes the appearance of an absolutely inevitable mechanism." Revolutionary optimism here is not a response to an objective assessment of the situation: rather, "optimism in Africa is the direct product of the revolutionary action of the African masses" (1967b:170–171), pure and simple. Ultimately, there is nothing "beneath" the will of the people that might guide its course, no historical or economic laws to which it must conform. Fanon offers no excuse or alibi: "sooner or later a people gets the government it deserves" (1968:198). Everything depends on us, and on "the firmness of our commitment" (1967b:172).

This means, finally, that the self-determination of the will is itself a sufficient guide to action and the consequences of action. Considered in isolation and on its own terms, to will involves a "total" and "sincere" commitment to one's experience, without reserve, without second-guessing, without reflection upon unconscious or ulterior motives, mitigating circumstances, and so on. This is the real reason for Fanon's famous objection, in *Black Skin*, to Sartre's interpretation of negritude as a merely transitional moment in a dialectic that subsumes it. Sartre forgets that "a consciousness committed to experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and the determinations of its being," at least if the latter are to be understood as providing a rationale for that experience that is deeper than its own conscious self-determination (1967a:102–103). On either the individual or the collective level, such "willful ignorance" is indeed an irreducible aspect of the practical primacy of the will. On either level, "nothing is more unwelcome than the commonplace: 'You'll change, my boy; I was like that too when I was young... you'll see, it will all pass.' The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself" (1967a:103), just as submission to the logic of historical or economic "development" drives the newly liberated nation back into the coils of necessity. Rather than submit to what is feasible, to what circumstances permit, the first duty of revolutionary activists is to commit to their vision and their will to achieve it—in Fanon's case, "to turn the absurd and the impossible inside out and hurl a continent against the last ramparts of colonial power" (1967b:181).

In keeping with this voluntarist logic, the central sections of *Wretched of the Earth* are best read, I think, as an outline of the basic steps involved in the constitution of a general or political will, that is, the assertion and assumption of a disciplined collective project. The constitution of such a project begins with an initial moment of voluntary association and commitment, the "spontaneous" assertion of national solidarity (1968:131–132), with its attendant limitations. A second stage, the moment of organization and discipline, is required to convert local and immediate liberation to national and lasting independence (1968:134–135). If they are sufficiently organized and disciplined, the people may be able to cope with the inevitable betrayals that may subsequently accompany victory over the immediate enemy. For Fanon no less than Rousseau or Robespierre, a popular or general will faces only one genuinely lethal threat: the private interests of the rich and privileged. More often than not the post-colonial bourgeoisie betrays its nation rather than its class, and "just steps into the shoes of the former European settlement" (1968:152). The only solution is a return to Lenin's point of departure: "the combined effort of the masses led by a party and

of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle class" (1968:175), and thereby guarantee, by all means necessary, "restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people" (1968:166). On the eve of anticolonial victory in 1961, Fanon thus rediscovers a lesson learned by Lenin in the wake an anticapitalist victory in 1917: in order to sustain a truly inclusive will of the people, in order to establish the rule of genuine democracy, the people must first smash its bourgeois simulacrum.

* * *

As anyone can see, fifty years after Fanon's death, a struggle that fears or fails to count on such support is sure to lose out to the neocolonial forces that continue to shape our world.⁵ Fanon's account of political will is limited, no doubt, by the peculiar circumstances under which it was devised. To some extent, at least, these circumstances encouraged Fanon to qualify (rather than exaggerate) the voluntarist orientation of his approach. Under the pressure of a "Manichean" struggle, Fanon sometimes yielded to the temptation of conceiving decolonization in terms of an abrupt replacement (a "total, complete, and absolute substitution" [1968:35]) rather than a deliberate transformation. So long as the oppressor can be conceived as a "stranger in our midst," it might seem that his mere "removal" or "abolition" will eliminate oppression itself (1968:40–41). Again like Lenin, Fanon's insistence on the "invincible" will power of the people risks converting affirmation of this power into its opposite—a quasi-automatic reflex, precisely, the guarantee of an "inevitable" or "definite" victory (1967a:19; 1967b:169; 1968:84, 88). So long as Fanon conceives of oppression in simplified or "undifferentiated" terms, grounded on the model of foreign military conquest (1967b:81), the solution he proposes will suffer from symmetrical limitations. Fanon's strategic emphasis on armed struggle, in particular, risks the reduction of action to reaction, the determination of a solution by the nature of the problem it aims to solve. If during the liberation war this solution helps foster "the holy and colossal energy that keeps a whole people at the boiling point" (1967c:17), it is poorly equipped to limit the eventual evaporation of such energy.

Of course, Fanon was the first to understand that "in an initial phase, it is the action, the plans of the occupier that determine the centres of resistance around which a people's will to survive becomes organised" (1967c:32). We have since entered a different phase. Fanon was wrong to believe that, as a general rule, "between oppressors and oppressed everything can be solved by force" (1968:72), but he was and remains right to remind us that imperial and neoimperial relations are founded in violence, and to insist that, in the end, only the determined and united will of the people offers any means of overcoming such violence. If we've learned anything in the fifty years since Fanon's death, however, we've learned that the will to transform these relations needn't be bound by an obligation to fight on their terms, or by their means. Confronted with the legacy and persistence of colonial domination and capitalist exploitation, the fundamental political question remains: are there, or are there not, "enough people on this earth resolved to impose reason on this unreason" (1967c:18)?

Notes

1. Fanon rarely (if ever) cites Rousseau, Lenin, or Mao, and his knowledge of Marx is notoriously superficial: reference to these thinkers here is justified on the basis of analogy, not influence.
2. The most pointed critique of Fanon's voluntarism, written from the perspective of the people's war in Vietnam, probably remains Nguyen Nghe (1963:23–26, cf. Lazarus 1990:8–17). More sympathetic recent readings of this aspect of Fanon's work include Gibson (2003:181, 202) and Ato Sekyi-Otu (1996:171).
3. As Richard Pithouse argues, "*Black Skin, White Masks* is a book about the futility of the politics of recognition," in which Fanon demonstrates that "reason walks out of the room when a black body walks in." Rather than continue to pursue an elusive recognition, Fanon's account dramatizes "the necessity of action" (Pithouse, letter to the author, October 7, 2010; cf. Pithouse's contribution to the present volume).
4. Once this step has been taken, whatever happens on the battlefield, "the inferiority complex, the fear and the despair of the past" can no longer be "reimplanted in the consciousness of the people" (1967c:19).
5. There can be no arguing with Fanon when he insists that, faced with the blackmail of neoliberal "modernization," "we should flatly refuse the situation to which the Western countries wish to condemn us. Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories. For centuries the capitalists have behaved in the underdeveloped world like nothing more than war criminals. Deportations, massacres, forced labor, and slavery have been the main methods used by capitalism to increase its wealth, its gold or diamond reserves, and to establish its power." The formerly colonized peoples need to remember what they are entitled to, what they are "due"—and the colonizing capitalist powers need to remember "that in fact *they must pay*" (1968:100–103).

Chapter Eighteen

Fidelity to Fanon

Richard Pithouse

Some days ago we saw a sunset that turned the robe of heaven a bright violet.
Today it is a very hard red that the eye encounters.

—*Frantz Fanon*, Towards the African Revolution

In the logbook that he kept while doing reconnaissance work in Mali in 1960, Fanon recounted his arrival at the airport in Accra without, as expected, his comrade, the Cameroonian militant Félix Moumié. Moumié had failed to keep an appointment in Rome before traveling on to Accra. “His father,” Fanon wrote, “standing at the arrival in Accra saw me coming, alone, and a great sadness settled on his face” (1967b:180). Two days later they discovered that Moumié had been murdered, poisoned, by the French secret service in Geneva.

Fifty years after Fanon’s death, he continues to arrive in Accra and in Dakar, in Johannesburg and Paris and Sao Paulo. But the militant intellectual who proposed and then achieved real collective action, who became “an element of that popular energy” (1965:166) calling forth the freedom and progress of Africa, continues to arrive alone.

Of course, we read him with his contemporary interlocutors, with Ato Sekyi-Otu, Lewis Gordon, Nigel Gibson, and Denean Sharpley-Whiting. We read of him in the elegiac lyricism of Alice Cherki. We see his radical humanism put to work in theory, struggle, and the arts. But he still arrives alone.

In 1952, dictating his words to Josie Dublé in Lyon, he concluded *Peau noire, masques blancs* with, among other declarations, the assertion that he was willing “to face the possibility of annihilation in order that two or three truths may cast their eternal brilliance over the world” (1967a:228). Almost sixty years on, the truths that he wrought from a militant engagement with his world now illuminate ours. But Fanon aspired to be more than a haunting presence in a future still structured by domination. In 1961, when he concluded *Les Damnés de la Terre*, dictating his final statement to Alice Cherki in Tunis, he asserted that

What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, *in the company of all men*. The caravan should not be stretched out, for in

that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer recognize each other meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less. (1965:254, emphasis added)

The language is of its time. Fanon celebrated the public assumption of political female agency in the Algerian Revolution and affirmed, in the plainest language, the danger “of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine” (1965:202).

Fanon arrives alone because, while revolutionary nationalism defeated colonialism, it has failed to create a human prospect. The caravan has been so stretched out that those in the front hardly recognize the humanity of those in the back. New lines of force, many policed with violence, separate those who count from those who don’t, and those who are in from those who are out. The Africa still to come is further away than it was fifty years ago.

Fanon is a revolutionary, an avatar of the militancy in the spirit of what Alain Badiou (2010) calls the communist invariant—an affirmation of absolute equality, an orientation to all of humanity, a commitment to the self-management of property held in common. He is a philosopher of human freedom who understood us to be endlessly creating ourselves, and the world, as we travel through it. He is a philosopher of popular political empowerment—of the will of the people, of a “deliberate, emancipatory and inclusive process of collective self determination” (Hallward 2009:17). His militancy is not dogmatic or authoritarian. It is not an alibi for paranoia or a ruthless will to power. Fanon’s warnings about parties aiming to “erect a framework around the people that follows an *a priori* schedule” (1965:89) and intellectuals deciding to “come down into the common paths of real life” with formulas that are “sterile in the extreme” (1965:177–178) apply with as much force to any attempt to develop rigid Fanonian formulas as to any other attempt to impose fixed ideas on the lived experience of struggle. Fanon aspires to be part of the collective motion and mutation of struggle, not to command it from outside. He wishes to be a subject among subjects, not a subject directing objects. He rejects any assumption that the human being is “a mere mechanism” (1967a:23), including those that see social change as the “fruit of an objective dialectic” (1967b:170). But while the direction of that collective motion and mutation, and the strategy and tactics it will decide on, must be worked out in concrete situations, Fanon is committed to certain axioms for thought and practice that are rooted in a set of ontological ideas about what it means to be human and which, therefore, hold true across space and time. These axioms include an insistence on the need to recognize “the open door of every consciousness” (1967a:232), on the right of every person to be a person among other people, to come into a shared world and to “help to build it together” (1967a:3), and the need to always question and affirm a “refusal to accept the present as definitive” (1967a:225).

For Fanon, the vocation of the militant intellectual is to be present in the real movements that abolish the present state of things—to be present in the “zone of occult instability where the people dwell” (1965:183), in the “seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge” (1965:181) and, there, to “collaborate on the physical plane” (1965:187). He is clear that the university-trained intellectual must avoid both the inability to “carry on a two-sided discussion,” to engage in genuine

dialogue, and its obverse, becoming “a sort of yes man who nods assent at every word coming from the people” (1965:38). Against this, he recommends “the inclusion of the intellectual in the upward surge of the masses” (1965:38) with a view toward achieving “a mutual current of enlightenment and enrichment” (1965:143).

Fanon insists that praxis must be rooted in the temporal, that each generation must confront the living reality of its own situation, accept its own call to battle, gather its own weapons, and, in the vortex of struggle, from within the collective mutation of popular political empowerment, produce its own truths. But while we do confront each situation straddling infinity, with its prospects for new secrets to be revealed, and nothingness, which condemns us to absolute responsibility for our choices in the face of the void, we do not step into that situation from nowhere. The contribution made by our ancestors in struggle is part of what makes us, and it provides us with some of our weapons. And for Fanon, whose radical humanism is strictly universal, the specificity of situations does not demarcate their absolute and encased singularity (Hallward 2001). He rejects any attempt to encase being, recognizes that there are women and men who search in every part of the world and affirm his solidarity with every contribution to the victory of the human spirit and every refusal of subjugation. We cannot ask Fanon to script our analysis and resistance but we can, certainly, draw on the illuminating power of his work as we live our own drama and try to “see clearly, to think clearly, that is—dangerously” (Césaire 2000:32).

Fifty years after Fanon died in the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, there are many ways in which his work speaks directly and with tremendous illuminating power to the current situation in South Africa. One of the many aspects of our situation to which we can summon Fanon’s illumination is the need for us to affirm politics, a living politics (Zikode 2009) of ordinary women and men, against Thermidor.

Revolutionary upheavals are usually followed by a period of reaction once the new elite has consolidated its power. It is not just new forms of popular innovation challenging the revolution from the left—the Diggers on St George’s Hill, the *sans-culottes* in Paris or the sailors in Kronstadt—that are attacked. Often the very forms of popular mobilization that enabled the revolution in the first place are rendered unacceptable. Alain Badiou calls this the moment of Thermidor, after the constitution in the third year of the French Revolution “in which it becomes apparent that virtue has been replaced by a statist mechanism upholding the authority of the wealthy, which amounts to reinstalling corruption in the heart of the state” (2005:125). He stresses that “the maxims of repression... expressly targeted every kind of popular declaration that situates itself at distance from the state” (2005:125).

Fanon witnessed the first years of the African Thermidor, the moment when the “liberating lava” (1967b:178) of the great anticolonial struggles was diverted as the people were expelled from history (1965:137), “sent back to their caves” (1965:147) by leaders who “instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontentment” and the “free flow of ideas” (1965:147), “proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey and to go on obeying” (1965:135). He wrote his last words to summon that liberating lava back out of the caves and into battle. But if he could imagine how quickly it would cool and solidify, or for how long, he did not confront this prospect head on. This is our task.

For Fanon the colonial world, of which apartheid was a paradigmatic case, is a world “of barbed wire entanglements” (1965:43), “a world divided into compartments,” “a world cut in two,” “a narrow world strewn with violence” (1965:29). He provided a clear and spatial measure for decolonization and argued that the ordering of the colonial world, its geographic layout, must be examined in order to “reveal the lines of force it implies” that “will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized” (1965:29). In Fanon’s view, an authentic decolonization requires a decisive end to a situation in which “this world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by different species” (1965:30).

We can, following Fanon, read the production and regulation of space as a material instantiation of broader social relations. Postapartheid society came into being with three main types of space. On the one hand, there were the state-created and -regulated spaces—what Henri Lefebvre (1991) calls strategic spaces, spaces that sort and classify—which were broadly divided into black spaces and white spaces. On the other hand, there were the autonomous spaces created and regulated by popular power, some of which was democratic and some of which was not. The late apartheid state had been forced, by its lack of popular legitimacy and the power of popular resistance, to seek an accommodation with autonomous space. That took the form of the withdrawal of the threat of eviction and the provision of basic services. But the postapartheid state has largely used its legitimacy to pursue two projects—the deracialization of formerly white space, the commodification of formerly black space, and the eradication of autonomous space. The destruction of autonomous space has taken the form of creating new ghettos that are often clearly worse than the apartheid township. South Africa is, again, being built as a society of opposed zones inhabited by people with, in practice if not in principle, very different levels of rights to assert their full humanity to the state and civil society.

In the zones inhabited by the poor, the combination of political subordination with economic exploitation (or in some cases outright abandonment) and enforced spatial marginalization is invariably legitimated by and productive of intense social stigma. For the police, the media and many in the political elite, including, most emphatically, some left projects, these are often still “places of ill fame peopled by women and men of evil repute” (Fanon 1965:30). In this view, the agency of the poor can be recognized but it is generally seen as perverse—threatening, criminal, violent. For the World Bank and the host of donors, NGOs and academics in its orbit, poverty is neither historicized nor politicized. The poor suffer an ontological lack and should be pitied and helped to accommodate themselves to the system rather than feared. This view is often incapable of recognizing the independent agency of poor people, who are reduced to their material situation and show up as suffering bodies, not as people who always think and sometimes organize in the midst of material deprivation. It is not unusual for the same individuals or organizations to oscillate between these two views, with the good poor being those who can be contained in the latter paradigm and the dangerous poor being those who cannot. As Lewis Gordon (2006) observes, elites generally assume that the system is ultimately good, so the people who disrupt its smooth functioning must be problem people—even monsters. At the points where South Africa connects to transnational civil society, this often becomes distinctly racialized via the enduring colonial tropes of good and bad natives.

In their recent meditation on monstrosity, Lewis and Jane Gordon argue that in antiblack societies black people are rendered monstrous “when they attempt to live and participate in the wider civil society and engage in processes of governing among whites... Their presence in society generally constitutes crime” (2009:42). In contemporary South Africa the political poor, who affirm their right to think from material deprivation, very often have a similar relation to civil society. S’bu Zikode, president of the South African shack dweller’s movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, made this point after he was driven from his home by a state-backed armed mob:

[T]echnocratic thinking will be supported with violence when ordinary men and women insist on their right to speak and to be heard on the matters that concern their daily lives. On the one side there is a consultant with a laptop. On the other side there is a drunk young man with a bush knife or a gun. As much as they might look very different they serve the same system—a system in which ordinary men and women must be good boys and girls and know that their place is not to think and speak for themselves. (2009)

As a general rule, problem people are dealt with either by violence or remedial education. If you turn the ghetto into a commune, or if you exit it collectively and politically—wearing a red shirt rather than, say, the uniform of a domestic worker or a security guard—you are likely to discover that the rules of civil society do not apply to you. In fact you are very likely to be met with violence. In Durban the local political elites have never willingly granted *Abahlali baseMjondolo* the right to march into the city—a right guaranteed to everyone under the South African constitution—and have often responded to protests in elite spaces with gratuitous violence. The paranoid desire to exclude shack dwellers, as an independent and explicitly political force, from civil society trumps the law every time. On the whole this does not scandalize bourgeois civil society, some of which, on the contrary, joined the state in its rush to declare *Abahlali baseMjondolo* as violent when the movement announced its intention to nonviolently business as usual in Cape Town by blockading roads. The exclusion of the organized poor from civil society is not a mere question of armed force backing up the physical exclusion from elite spaces; it is also accompanied by a symbolic violence that takes the form of a fundamental refusal on the part of elites to accept that shack dwellers could organize themselves. This refusal to recognize subaltern political consciousness and agency, which has passed seamlessly from apartheid to parliamentary democracy, is hardly unique to South Africa. And in South Africa, as is the case elsewhere, it is not the sole preserve of the state. On the contrary, it is endemic among some of the leading figures of the middle-class left (much of which is white and some of which is expatriate) to the point that the state and many of its critics among the middle-class left adopt precisely the same discourses of malevolent external manipulation and criminality to explain away, and thereby symbolically annihilate, the emergence of a politics of the poor outside of their control. In fact the exclusion of the organized poor from civil society, premised on the sometimes hysterical denial of the possibility of a subaltern political consciousness and capacity, of what *Abahlali baseMjondolo* have called a politics of the poor, has been policed with the most consistent, paranoid, and ruthless vigor by this left. At

times this vigor has collapsed into outright authoritarianism and even a kind of madness in the face of a subject who reasons and acts politically in the elite public sphere while being poor and black. The refusal of this subject to appear on the scene in a way that can be accommodated into a preexisting framework has led to simple assertions, in total disregard of empirical reality, that, when it comes down to it, the grassroots militant (Quadrelli 2007) is insincere, criminal, inconsequential, even a simulator and a liar. A version of North African Syndrome continues to fester in South Africa after apartheid

In his introduction to *Proletarian Nights*, Jacques Rancière asks an important question that retains an urgent contemporary currency:

Why has the philosophy of the intelligentsia or activists always needed to blame some evil third party (petty bourgeoisie, ideologist or master thinker) for the shadows and obscurities that get in the way of the harmonious relationship between their own self-consciousness and the self-identity of their popular objects of study? Was this evil party contrived to spirit away another more fearsome threat: that of seeing the thinkers of the night invade the territory of philosophy? (2002:249)

In contemporary South Africa, we need to think this question together with Fanon's point about the inability of the racist white gaze to recognize a person as simultaneously black and reasonable—"when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer" (1967a:119–120). Race and class have fused in a manner in which the black poor, moving out of the physical and symbolic places to which they are supposed to keep, can only be understood in some influential quarters in the language of external manipulation, conspiracy, criminality, and threat.

Fanon wrote three of his four books in dialogue with national liberation movements. But the moment when popular power calls everything into question has passed. Where does the intellectual turn after Thermidor? In Fanon's story about the postcolony there is, slowly but inevitably, a return to popular struggle. The state responds with violent intolerance. But because the new struggles are social rather than national, there is a real opportunity to develop new ideas and elaborate new principles with the hope of transforming the state by subordinating it to society. Of course, in South Africa where the deracialization of some institutions and the decolonization of some social relations, such as those pertaining to rural land, remain urgent, things are more complex than a simple opposition between national and social struggles. But a distinction between popular and elite nationalism can be useful to avoid a situation where the demands of elite nationalism are used against popular demands.

But Fanon's call for a return to popular struggle is not the most widely accepted aspect of his work. Some time ago, Mahmood Mamdani observed that "whether in government, or outside it, intellectuals have tended to see themselves as actual or potential managers of the state" (1994:249) and warned that "one does not need to be inside the state to articulate a statist conception" (1994:254). Mamdani saw the statism of African academics as a "profoundly anti-democratic orientation... basically summed up in the widely shared perspective that African societies need to be transformed from above" (1994:252–253). Fanon may have called this statism a new

“technocratic paternalism” (1967a:88). These days many university-trained intellectuals continue to orientate themselves to the state, but many others now orientate themselves to international institutions, donors, and NGOs working above or beneath the national state. But the antidemocratic orientation inherent in the assumption that progressive change will come from above has remained constant. The discourse of human rights and civil society may mask this, but a turn to donor-funded professional “activism” certainly does not change it in practice.

The elitist nature of mainstream civil society is widely recognized.¹ For instance, Harry Englund’s ethnographic work in Malawi shows that “NGO and project personnel maintain the same distinctions towards ‘ordinary’ subjects as elites” and that “their practice of activism actually contributes to maintaining inequalities” (2006:157). Peter Hallward argues, quoting Nicolas Gilhot, that NGO politics is a “quasi-‘aristocratic’ approach to politics” (2007:180). In his study of Haiti, Hallward does not shy away from the degree to which this paternalism is racialized. He remarks that “the provision of white enlightened charity to destitute and allegedly ‘superstitious’ blacks is part and parcel of an all too familiar neo-colonial pattern” (2007:180). Julie Hearn, citing Julius Nyang’oro, argues that African NGOs have become “local managers of foreign aid money, not managers of local African development processes” (2007:1108).

Popular challenges to NGO elitism are not often welcomed. Civil society organizations are generally given their authority by donors. In order to redeem the faith invested in them from above, they have to deliver a constituency from below. In this situation a challenge from below, no matter how sincerely and politely articulated, is almost inevitably read as a serious threat by the NGO. In South Africa, well-known NGOs in the orbit of both the World Bank and the World Social Forum have resorted to outright slander, including baseless but vicious public allegations of criminality, when questioned by grassroots activists. A leading left NGO has engaged in a number of outright attempts, all failed, to censor academic work that gives some voice to grassroots activists critical of that NGO. This is not entirely unusual. When the Sangtin Writers (2006) in Uttar Pradesh began to publish their own writing, including carefully reasoned critiques of NGO practice, the NGO for which they had been working censored them.

But civil society is not just criticized for its elitism and the tendency, in some cases, to resort to authoritarian strategies to protect that elitism. It has been argued that NGO-based civil society is often fundamentally unable or unwilling to recognize popular agency. Iran Asef Bayat has argued that “the current focus on the notion of ‘civil society’ tends to belittle or totally ignore the vast array of often uninstitutionalized and hybrid social activities—street politics—that have dominated urban politics in many developing countries” (1997:161). Englund reports that in Malawi, NGOs operate in such a way that “dissent... must take a prescribed form before it is recognised” (2006:4). In South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo* assert that “some of the NGOs are always denying and undermining the knowledge of the people” (2010:27). The official modes in which dissent can be recognized are, precisely, those in which NGOs are structurally strong and poor people’s organizations are structurally weak. It has also been argued that NGO- and donor-based civil society often “channels” dissent in ways that remove it from the popular realm.

Englund reports that in Malawi, the idea of popular empowerment is routinely reduced, via NGO mediation, to “service delivery” (2006:97) with all the passivity that is inherent in such a technocratic conception of social progress. In South Africa, *Abahlali baseMjondolo* have argued that “our ideas about freedom go much further and deeper than the way our struggles are presented when they are described as ‘service delivery protests’” (2010:89). They insist, against the stunted and antipolitical language of the NGOs and human rights organizations, on the right to define their own struggle and to do so in explicitly political terms. Englund concludes his study with the view that NGOs are part of a system of transnational governance in which “African activists and the foreign donors together deprive freedom, democracy and human rights of substantive meaning” (2006:8).

Despite the rhetoric about democratization, civil society is, almost invariably, an exclusionary project. Dylan Rodriguez argues that when “racially pathologized bodies take on political activities critical of US state violence” they are “defined as criminals” and presented as “*essentially opportunistic, misled, apolitical or even amoral social actors*” (2007:26). In other parts of the world, a clear distinction is made between civil society and terrorism or, ironically, given that most civil society is dependent on foreign funding, between (good) civil society and (bad) popular organizations alleged to be instigated and directed by foreign manipulation. In South Africa, the ruling party, often with the enthusiastic support of the authoritarian (and mostly white) edge of the middle class left, routinely presents popular politics outside of civil society control through the lenses of various forms of conspiracy, ranging from foreign or white manipulation to Machiavellian political opportunism and witchcraft. In 2006, *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, which at that time was entirely self-funded, was informed by ANC senior leaders that their intelligence had revealed that the movement was driven by a malevolent white agent of foreign powers and would have to federate to the transnational donor-funded NGO (Shack Dwellers International) [SDI] or its leaders would face arrest (*Abahlali baseMjondolo* 2007). *Abahlali baseMjondolo*’s refusal to join SDI, announced on radio, led to the immediate arrest and torture of the two most prominent leaders of the movement.

The exclusionary nature of the idea of civil society is not just a corruption of its ideal form by racism, anxieties around class or political paranoia. Partha Chatterjee has shown that its exclusionary nature is fundamental to its project. He notes that many people in India, “often organized into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work... [but] make a claim to habitation and livelihood as a matter of right” (2004:40). He argues that while the formal structures and commitments of the state recognize all citizens as members of civil society in India, and he suggests, “most of the world,” most citizens “are only tenuously, and even them ambiguously and contextually, rights bearing citizens in the manner imagined by the Constitution” (2004:38). He concludes that civil society is, in practice, the preserve of a small group of elites who see themselves as the “high ground of modernity” but find, when they must descend to the people, that “modernity is facing an unexpected rival in the form of democracy” (2004:41).

NGOs are not, of course, all the same, but it is important to remember that left NGOs remain NGOs and not popular movements. Indeed the experience in South Africa has often been that the more left the NGO, the more likely it is to seek to

co-opt radical movements of the poor by excluding critical voices and buying off compliant leaders with a view to subordinating them to the imperatives of the NGO with the objective of staking apparently credible claims for its own power in spaces like the World Social Forum. The power that a Third World NGO attains in the global civil society networks often has much more to do with what those NGOs can deliver to those networks, especially in terms of delivering the appearance of a fully global support for *their* campaigns, than what those networks can deliver to popular struggles in the global South. The same is true of the way in which radical academic engagement from North to South is often mediated by Northern-funded NGOs and research institutes in the South.

The movement of many aspirant left vanguards from the party form into the donor backed NGO form is an undertheorized but important phenomenon. One consequence of this development is that middle-class left vanguards can now attain some power over the representation and international mediation of popular politics through donor rather than popular support. One of the problems arising from this situation is that, as Hallward shows with reference to Haiti, “NGO administrators and left-leaning academics are often uneasy with what they see as a merely populist deviation” (2008:137–138). In both Haiti and South Africa, NGOs, especially left NGOs, have, with all their resources, consistently failed to mobilize people in any significant way. Yet when people have mobilized themselves, the NGO response is often one of anxiety or even outright hostility and slander. In S’bu Zikode’s estimation, “It is very sad that some academics and NGOs continue to think that it is their natural right to dominate instead of to support the struggles of the poor... [For them] the work of the intellectual is to determine our intelligence by trying to undermine our intelligence” (2008).

Hallward’s study of the Haitian experience captures the fundamental issue:

Indignant talk about the (uncontroversial) economic evils of neo-liberalism amounts...to little more than hot air...the real question, the divisive question, concerns the *political* empowerment of the people. (2007:9)

He also shows that in Haiti, the grassroots left terms the left NGOs the “useless left” (2007:186) because they work in the name of, rather than with, the people. But perhaps the most controversial aspect of his study is that he concludes that in Haiti there was a “need to nourish ideological support for regime change not only on the right but also on the left of the political spectrum” (2007:177) and argues that the left NGOs have been directly complicit with imperial machinations. This is not surprising from a South African perspective, where some left NGOs have, since the emergence of a genuine grassroots politics, kept in lockstep with the state as both have attacked it in the same language—with the party sometimes drawing on the NGO slander to justify repression.

There are very rare instances of NGOs that have thought seriously about praxis, but it remains the exception rather than the rule to find an NGO or donor willing to (1) genuinely orientate its self to popular grassroots struggles rather than the professional left in the global North and (2) to become a subject among subjects rather than a subject among objects.

In his 1956 letter of resignation from the French Communist Party, Aimé Césaire wrote that “what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the services of Marxism and communism” (2010:150). Today the same point could and certainly should be made to global civil society, as well as to the global justice movement, from the perspective of popular struggles in South Africa.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of popular protest anywhere in the world and some innovative and tenacious, although invariably localized and vulnerable, movements have emerged out of this ferment. But it has become clear that for much of the middle-class left, whether in the academy or NGOs, it is simply impossible to accept that there is a grassroots left. It is often assumed with the same fanaticism one finds in the ruling party that the poor can offer their allegiance only upward. Real politics, it is assumed, is inevitably a contestation between the ideas of competing elites that each seek to develop and use to rally their own constituency.

But Fanon insisted that we should not lose sight of the real. The reality is that there are still political moments and spaces in which life is lived at an “impossibly high temperature” (1965:105); there is “spectacular generosity” and people organize in a manner “evocative of a confraternity, a church” (1965:106). The occult zone is still alive with struggle and any fidelity to Fanon still requires that we move from and not on the occult zone. The hope that these scattered struggles tender may be uneven, delicate, “a fragile moth wing unsure in the winter sun” (Abani 2000:101). But what else is there to do, really, other than to keep going, to keep the free flow of ideas circulating, to keep on singing, squinting into the hard red?

Note

1. Parts of this essay draw on a paper presented at a conference on *The Transnationality of Cities* at the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Order in December 2009 and an essay published in Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale’s *Re-imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique and Post-Apartheid Knowledge* in the same year.

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