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Romanticism reconsidered: Fanon, reciprocity and revolution (on Fanon's ninetieth birthday)

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A romantic figure of "Third World" revolution and Black liberation, Frantz Fanon is often considered an advocate of violence as liberation therapy. Questioning the idea of Fanon as a romantic with an *a priori* set of ideas that he simply applied to new situations, I discuss the importance of contextualising Fanon's work historically and dialectically. In addition, I am interested in how Fanon's psychiatry papers, written while he was practising as a doctor in North Africa, provide another terrain to help elucidate Fanon's active involvement as a situational critique.

1. The Interior

The interior always fascinated him. You must get there, Fanon told Claude Lanzmann in Tunis; Tunis is rotten. The exterior was rotten. Lanzmann visited the Algerian National Liberation Army (ALN) at Ghardimaou on the Tunisian border with Algeria – the place where Fanon had lectured earlier about the pitfalls of national consciousness. The soldiers didn't know him, reported Lanzmann, who added, Fanon "was not one of them, and he knew it".

The army of the interior at the border was also not really part of the interior. So we might ask what constituted the inside?

Fanon had been close to Ramdane Abane, the National Liberation Front (FLN) leader at the time of the Battle of Algiers who, at the Soummam conference inside Algeria, had successfully argued for a political programme led by the struggle taking place inside the country not by the military or the historical leaders in exile. Abane left Algiers and Algeria soon after. Fanon left at the end of the year, expecting to meet Abane in Tunis. But Abane never made it. Blamed for the "defeat" in Algiers, he was liquidated before he made it to Tunis. Thus Fanon was already, whether he liked it or not, an insider to the revolution and its political intrigues. His name, writes David Macey, "was on a list of those who were to be eliminated in the event of violent reaction to Abane's liquidation" (Macey 2000: 356). Perhaps justifying his silence in terms of not giving any information to the enemy,[1] Fanon refused to be publicly critical of the FLN even after the murder of Abane. This he later regretted, recounted Simone De Beauvoir. But it did not mean that Fanon was isolated.[2]

A privileged insider, Fanon was also an outsider, an intellectual who became a committed revolutionary, upsetting some of his critics (see for example LeSeuer 2005, Macey 2000, Memmi 1973, and Miller 1990) when he claimed an identity with the Algerian revolution. Fanon's idea of "we Algerians" is discussed as if that "we" is a product of his utopian and delusional will and not the product of the social struggle. What Fanon means by the "we" is not a mythical identity based on essential characteristics but an idea of an Algeria in motion, open to all – a diverse and non-identical we – which, he argued, was not in "future heaven" but was

1 The FLN was a united front, that is to say united against a common enemy. In Tunis, Fanon became aware of the rivalry and power struggles among the colonels and that would become part of his analysis in *The Wretched*. When Fanon states the Marxist question (that is a question first raised by Marx after the 1848 revolutions) about skipping the bourgeois "stage" needs to be answered by practice, it was a practice informed by his stinging critique of the national middle class.

2 At Blida he had got to know the military command of Wilaya 4, and "had become close to Commandant Azzedine and Slimane Dehiles … who described themselves as Marxists" (Cherki 2006: 84). And in Tunis he "was better informed than most because of his ties to Omar Oussedik and Colonel Sadek [Dehiles]" (Cherki 2006: 124).

being brought about by the "reality of the nation" (his first title for *Year V of the Algerian Revolution*, known in English as *A Dying Colonialism*). Of course, outside that moment of revolution, heaven seems far off – a romantic's dream.

Though questioned by critics as unrealistic, it is worth noting that the radical changes taking place in Algeria were commented on by others. The Algerian writer and schoolteacher Mouloud Ferauoun, who was critical of the FLN and pessimistic about the progressive character of social change, nevertheless noted in a diary entry in 1956 that "among the Kabyles, there is a sustained enthusiasm, an essential stubbornness, an absolute belief in a better future. The thought of dying for this kind of future no longer frightens anybody" (Ferauoun 2000: 118). Another who did not support the FLN and later scoffed at Fanon, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, arrived in Algeria in October 1955 to do his military service and later got a position at the University of Algiers conducting ethnographic research on changes in rural and urban Algeria. His writings, recently collected in *Algerian Sketches*, include not only *The Algerians*, a book published in English in 1962, but also essays with titles that echo Fanon's, such as "War and Social Mutation", published in *Mediterranean Studies* in 1960, and "Revolution in the Revolution", published in *Esprit* in 1961. The latter concludes with the following statement, which, in my opinion, aligns with what Fanon was arguing in *A Dying Colonialism*. Bourdieu writes:

> A society so thoroughly overturned will force the intervention of revolutionary solutions, and mobilize the masses … by offering them a new way of living, based no longer on undisputed submission to the rules of custom … but on active participation in a common task – before all else, that is, the building of a harmonious social order (Bourdieu 2013: 103).

Later, as Bourdieu moved away from his earlier views, he expressed an immense dislike of Fanon: "What Fanon says corresponds to nothing", he asserted, adding at the same time that Fanon "contributed to what Algeria became". So while Fanon amounts to nothing, Fanon is blamed for the authoritarian and repressive regime that emerged in Algeria! Bourdieu concludes the attack venomously, stating that the reader of Fanon "would have to be a megalomaniac to think you could say such nonsense" (quoted in Le Sueur 2005: 252).

While extreme, it is not uncommon to read that Fanon's opinions about liberation are a product of a romanticism born from an exilic consciousness which is often allied with a problematic psycho-biography that, as Joby Fanon puts it, "pass off his analysis of violence as the work of a psychologically troubled man" (J Fanon 2014: 31). In other words, rather than an analysis of the contending social forces in Algeria, for example, Fanon is simply dismissed as a mythmaker and

dreamer who paradoxically becomes a supporter for the counter-revolution (the idea that Fanon was a supporter of veiling women is just one unjustified example of "Fanonist Feminism").[3]

The idea of Fanon as a rootless romantic and outsider who applied general ideas *a priori* on to Algerian society was probably most popularly articulated by Albert Memmi (1973). The idea finds significant support in the writings of Mohammed Harbi (2002), and is echoed in David Macey's authoritative biography (2000). It is in fact a fair guide to Macey's reading of Fanon. For example, Macey takes Fanon's description of a tale in *Black Skin White Masks* as Fanon's generalisable singular view about therapy. Fanon speaks of a young farmer who on returning home sees a plough and asks his father what it is called. The father drops it on his foot "and his amnesia vanishes" (2008 7). "A singular form of therapy" (*singulière thérapeutique*), Fanon concludes. Macey then concludes that this singular view is found in *The Wretched* "on a grand scale" where violence has a "cleansing cathartic effect on individual and society alike" (Macey 2005: 25-26). My objection with Macey's reading is that it implies that Fanon has an unchanging view of trauma and therapy. It is a singular view, so that there is no development (or mutation) in Fanon's thought about psychiatric practice, including the importance of the talking cure, which Macey argues Fanon dismisses. Rather, Fanon is concerned with theory articulating with real lived experience. At one point, while at Charles- Nichole hospital in Tunis, he is quoted by Alice Cherki as saying that "maybe I am moving too fast" and "I am afraid that I'll end up alone" (2006: 117). Movement and connectedness mattered. Stripped of dialectical movement, Fanon's thought is reduced to ahistorical antinomies shorn of

3 A term used by Neil McMaster in *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the Emancipation of Algerian Women* (2012). He argues that Fanon reproduces a discourse that "the essential being of women in a liberated society is to fulfill her domesticated destiny of wife and mother" (2012: 341). The point is not only tendential but also historically inaccurate since it elides the many ways that women played active parts during the liberation struggle – which Fanon attempts to capture in his essays on the veil and on the family – and also the counter-revolution expressed in the many ways that the postcolonial Algerian government attempted to reduce women's activity in the "public" sphere. It was a long process. For example, though the idea of the Shari'a-based "Family Code" can be traced back to 1963 it was not until 1984 that it was enacted. Gilbert Grandguillaume has drawn a parallel between retrogressive actions towards women and towards language (some perhaps implicit in Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*). In a suggestive essay Anne-Emmanuelle Berger writes of Grandguillaume arguing that "[d]ialectal Arabic would be, then, equivalent of the unveiled women, who like their fellow Algerians, are a symbol or metonymy for 'trued Algeriannes,'" which cannot be understood as a revivalist notion "since Algeria is a modern invention. When women are [...] sent back to the home, it is the dialectal Arabic, the everyday spoken language, that is in a sense 'veiled'" (2002: 72). On "Fanon and Feminism" also see Sharpley-Whiting 1999.

empirical detail that, reproduced in the secondary literature, easily dovetails with the idea of Fanon as a romantic.

In its crude and much repeated form this idea is often based on a number of basic assumptions: First, Fanon was a romantic because, it is argued positivistically, the radical changes and agency he wrote about did not turn out to have any substance after Algerian independence. Second, Fanon's idea that the liberation war would lead to the decolonised "man" was utopian because he didn't understand Algeria and Algerians. Third, Fanon didn't understand Algeria and Algerians because he was not born there. Fanon was an outsider from the Caribbean.

Of course, there are other assumptions: Algeria and Algerian-ness is connected with indigeneity, religion and language. In contrast, we might point to Fanon's sensitivity to the Algerian Jews in *A Dying Colonialism* as Algerian minorities. Then there are the Berbers who are not Arabs. But these are set aside. The main point is that Fanon did not understand Algeria because he was an outsider.

Would we say the same about Theodor Adorno's famous critique of the cultural industry? That Adorno didn't understand America? Indeed, we could portray Adorno as the intellectual who is characterologically an outsider, an exilic critical consciousness. Perhaps this could be extended to Fanon as critic of French society – French but not French – but with Fanon it becomes a personal story.[4] Indeed, one could argue that the continued significance, indeed relevance, of Fanon – the author of *Black Skin White Masks* – is as a product of this alienation understood biographically.[5]

Nevertheless with North Africa something else happens. Writing about Bourdieu and Fanon, Michael Burawoy states that though their lives in Algeria overlapped, "they were worlds apart: the one a scientific observer from the metropolis … the other a psychiatrist from Martinique. The one attached to the university and ventured into communities as research sites, while the other worked in a psychiatric hospital before committing himself to the liberation movement." I can't help but think that there is an implicit ordering here, a privileging of the scientific observer from the metropole – the proper intellectual – attached to the university doing "objective" research over the psychiatrist from Martinique working in a hospital in search of a movement to realise his ideas.

Then there is "Islam". Often not much more is needed than the reductive formula. Fanon did not understand Arabic and thus did not understand Islam

4 Lived experience understood anecdotally rather than phenomenologically.

5 On the reduction of Africana thought to experience (and biography) see chapter two of Lewis Gordon's *Existentia Africana* (2000), "A Problem of Biography in Africana Thought".

(a criticism made for crude political reasons by the racist director of the Manouba hospital where Fanon first worked in Tunis). But Islam was also mutating. To quote the young Bourdieu again:

> Islam, by being dissociated from the magical and mythic practices and belief that anchored it to the land … has steadily changed its significance and function. In brief, the war by its very nature … has been accompanied by a radical revolution" (Bourdieu 103).[6]

In other words, even if Fanon did not analyse the ideological battles taking place under the name "Islam" and its uses as a "revolutionary ideology … to mobilize the masses" (Bourdieu 103), he was a product of the moment reflected in the FLN's 1956 Soummam Conference, which declared the aim of the struggle to be socialist, democratic, national, and non-theocratic. The critique of Fanon as a dreamy romantic suggests that this notion of the Revolution was a product of his mind disconnected from people's lives and culture. His utterances are thereby judged to be mythical and found out to be false by simply reading back from contemporary Algeria. In other words, all of the claims in *A Dying Colonialism* about changing social relations, about changing attitudes, whether about medicine, technology or clothes, language, or patriarchal authority, become part of a Fanonist imaginary. Cultural materialism takes on an almost positivistic if not determinist mode. Culture becomes the base of a crude base/superstructure model where an ahistorical and unchanging notion of culture determines consciousness. Culture is conservative, intractable and unchanging, and Fanon's notions of a changing culture romantic or purely voluntarist. This positivist outlook takes the counter-revolution in the Algerian revolution as its standpoint thereby doubly undermining Fanon, reducing the popular struggle

6 Historians often consider the idea of Algeria as a nation developing during the colonial period after the 1870s. Certainly even as late as 1936 Ferhat Abbas, who would later become an FLN leader, wrote that Algeria as a nation did not exist. At the time he saw the future as French. It was the reformist Islamic Ulama who were critical of the Islam practiced in the countryside. Working almost extensively among the urban elites, it articulated an Algerian nationalism. In contrast, among the Algerian workers in France, the North African Star became the most radical nationalist organisation, with a profound effect. Increasingly radicalised Abbas joined with Messali to draft a manifesto of the Algerian people. Demonstrations of support for the manifesto were organised on the day that victory was declared against the Nazis in Europe.

On May 8 1945 the French air force bombed Setif, a town in North East Algeria. Foreshadowing later violent asymmetries, the French reaction caused deaths of up to 45 000 Algerians (a number claimed at the time by Radio Cairo, which was widely believed and echoed by Fanon in *The Wretched*). There would be no post-war in the colonies. In June 1945, France was a signatory to the United Nations Charter of universal human rights and justice. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris.

to backwardness while eliding Fanon's theorisation of the counter-revolution articulated in the misadventures of national consciousness (2004: 97-144).

2. Making history

Fanon's ideas have retained a "reputation through their application elsewhere", argues Zaid Betahar (2009: 139), and Fanon's critique of the failure of decolonisation after independence and the seeming inevitable decline of the party of liberation into regionalism, xenophobia, racism and kleptocracy still resonates with a whole range of different situations across the African continent.

Experience colours *A Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, both of which are products of the revolutionary moment of the anticolonial struggles of the 1950s, and while Fanon concludes *Black Skin White Masks* stating that he does not want to be a slave of history or a product of the past (Fanon 2008: 201), it does not mean that he wholly dismissed history.[7] For Fanon, I think, Marx's notion of making history, but not in circumstances of our own choosing, runs true. For Fanon, this judgement is based on whether taking part in any action brings victory "to the dignity of the spirit" (2008: 201). It is the taking part in the action, not the immediate result (whether success or failure), that is the determinant. At the end of the section on "Hegel and the Black" in *Black Skin*, he notes that the American Blacks, who are in a constant struggle against racism, are fighting for a new life, not a new way of life (Fanon 2008: 195). And it is on the basis of this living struggle that Fanon praises bebop as a jazz form where the musician "will blow his horn to his heart's content". It is an expression of a new consciousness of struggle against a racist United States in contrast to the "white jazz specialists" who think that "jazz should only be the broken, desperate yearning of an old Negro" (Fanon 2004: 176). In other words, it is the notion of fighting culture (see Gibson 2003) – grounded in human beings' conscious action – that is a determinant of Fanon's attitude to culture rather than any *a priori*. But there is also a leap that marks the new context of *The Wretched*. Under the pressure of the Revolution, what Fanon in *Black Skin*

7 In *Black Skin* Fanon is too quick to dismiss Creole as a language of poetry. He notes that Sartre's introduction to *The Anthology of Negritude Poets* (Orphée Noir) that the Black poet's turn against the French language will not occur in Antilles. He approvingly quotes Michael Leiris that Creole is "very much a popular language [but] seems destine sooner of later to become a relic of the past once education … is widely accessible to the underprivileged" (quoted in Fanon 2008: 11). Fanon adds that in the Antilles children are "taught to treat the language with contempt. Avoid Creolisms" (2008: 4). Later in *Black Skin*, Fanon purposely uses the Creole word comparaison when writing of the Antillean's narcissistic fixation with self-dependence on the judgement of others (2008 186). It turns out that Fanon was short-sighted about Creole and poetry, but he does note an interest in Fulani and Wolof poetry and Cheikh Anta Diop's linguistic research (Fanon 2008: 11).

calls the arid zone of nonbeing, where a genuine new beginning can take place (Fanon 2008: xii), becomes in *The Wretched* the challenge of new subjectivities (and their failures) formed and fertilised in the historic epoch of the struggle against colonialism. The notion of Pan-African freedom now becomes concretely connected with land and bread.

Critical of any practices that reproduce the stability of the colonial world whether that is based in the realm of an imaginary liberation or fatalism, Fanon argues in *The Wretched* that there is a marked change of attitude during the liberation struggle with the colonised youth mocking old rituals, discovering reality through praxis and thereby changing it (Fanon: 2004 20). And later on in the chapter on national culture, he adds – quite in contrast to the idea of refusing anything connected with the past – that reclaiming a past is not only an important element in the development of a national culture but essential to the colonised psycho-affectivity (Fanon: 2004 148). This reclamation is, in short, intimately connected to a movement to change reality.

3. Culture, politics, and psycho-affectivity

There is no epistemological break between *Black Skin White Masks* with *The Wretched of the Earth* but also there is no simple correlation between one and the other (see Seyki-Otu 1996). We confront in Fanon's work both the openness of his thought and the specificity of its context. According to his biographers Fanon did not return to the books he had authored once they were published. They were interventions at a specific moment. As he puts this in the second sentence of *Black Skin White Masks*, "I do not come with timeless truths." This is one of the challenges we face reading Fanon today, and is especially true of his co-written articles published in psychiatry journals in the 1950s.

Shortly after Fanon's death, François Maspero asked Claude Lanzmann to develop a draft for Fanon's collective works that would include his clinical psychiatric writings. Though this volume never came to fruition, Fanon's psychiatry writings provide another perspective to challenge the notion that Fanon was some kind of dreamy anti-empiricist, critical of all methods, unresponsive to people's lived experience, dismissive of history, and prone to speculations about inventing a new man and new woman. The basic research undertaken in these psychiatry articles, however specific the argument and whatever the self-limiting hypothesis, do help ground Fanon contextually (limited by 1950s psychiatry) indicating a mind working with empirical cases. The papers written while he was at Blida-Joinville Hospital, which I discuss below, indicate the importance Fanon gives to local culture and also, read in conjunction with *A Dying Colonialism*, underscore how much the Algerian

revolution marked a shift in people's day-to-day thinking and consciousness. This shift included Fanon, who, we should remember, did not go to Algeria to join a revolution.

On his arrival at Blida-Joinville Hospital, Fanon immediately undertook a programme of sociotherapy, the first to be conducted in North Africa. The results, written up by Fanon and his intern Jacques Azoulay and published in 1954 as "Sociotherapy on a Muslim Men's Ward: Methodological Difficulties", were mixed. Successful in the European women's ward (the hospital wards were strictly segregated), the programme failed in the Muslim men's ward. Among the reasons for failure, Fanon and Azoulay argued, was their inability to speak Arabic. "Aside from the need for an interpreter," they maintained, "our attitude was absolutely not adapted to the Muslim men's ward. In fact, a revolutionary attitude was essential – for we needed to move from a position where the supremacy of western culture was self-evident to one of cultural relativism" (Fanon and Azoulay, 1954: 1099)[8]. The problem, Fanon maintained, was the presuppositions of the programme itself. As Jacques Azoulay put it: "We proposed to implement a Western-based sociotherapy programme that disregarded an entire frame of reference and neglected geographic, historical, cultural, and social particularities in a pavilion of mentally ill Muslim men. Are we not guilty of having thoughtlessly embraced a policy of assimilation?" (Quoted by Cherki 2006:69) A "politics of assimilation," they said, "does not propose a reciprocity of perspectives" but rather an insistence that one "culture must disappear for the benefit of the other".

The revolutionary attitude that Fanon and Azoulay called for had to "orchestrate a major leap and ...a transmutation of values ... to move from the natural to the cultural". Written before the outbreak of the Algerian liberation war, they already recognised that "traditional Muslim society" was undergoing fragmentation and change: "this society, so often seen as fixed in its ways, is fermenting at its base from the bottom up" (Fanon and Azoulay, 1954: 1104). It is worth noting that Fanon was beginning to learn Arabic and, quite in contrast to the idea that he was dismissive of vernacular culture, he frequently spent time in local Kabylian villages learning about local customs. Some of this work is reflected in his short introductory paper titled "The Maghribi Muslim's attitude to madness" (1956) as well as the draft paper on North Africans' sexual disorders. These papers were not only critical of ethnopsychiatric generalisations about the North African, but were part of an endeavour to begin from an entirely different standpoint, as Fanon and his co-author, François Sanchez, put it, "from the inside" (Fanon and Sanchez 1956: 24). The basic research in the unpublished "An Introduction to Sexual Disorders Amongst North Africans" are field notes from ethnographic

8 The translations are by my colleague Lisa Damon.

research in Kabylia based on an informant, who was a learned man with a "good reputation in the region" but "whose explanations left us rather confused" (Fanon, Azoulay, Sanchez: 1-2). The notes don't dwell on the confusion but rather indicate Fanon's and his colleagues' desire to study the Maghribi Muslim's attitude to madness for its own sake: "On a human level however, and because it is so solidly anchored in the culture, the Maghrebi therapy has immense value that cannot be measured by its sole efficacy" (Fanon, Azoulay, Sanchez, 1956: 4). A decolonial psychiatry would not only be critical of "Western" methods and institutionalisation (a critique developed in sociotherapy) but have to be culturally sensitive and take into account local attitudes and practices the social value of which was not simply measured by efficacy.

A similar attitude can be seen in the paper on "The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) among Muslim Women" (1956). The problem with the TAT (essentially a psychological test based on the patient's interpretation of ambiguous pictures on cards) was that the images on the cards were culture-bound with the consequence that the "responses were disconnected and empty … [and] without narrative or drama the responses lacked any psychoanalytic value" (Fanon and Geronomi, 1956: 364, 366). The test was a "systematic failure", but the failure once again illuminated the importance of historical, geographic and cultural specificity to apperception. The patient's refusal and elemental resistance to cultural assimilation was far from hysterical; rather, it indicated the importance of culturally lived experience to psychodynamic situations, and Fanon and his interns shifted their research orientation not simply toward a cultural relativism but toward "the culture offered us" (Fanon and Geronomi, 1956:368). Later, reporting on the failure of some of the sociotherapy reforms at Blida-Joinville Hospital, Fanon told Charles Geronomi that sociotherapy was not about applying a method, but a commitment, owning the process that is implicitly political: "It is not simply a matter of imposing imported methods … I had to demonstrate a number of things in the process: namely that the values of Algerian culture are different from those of colonial culture; that these structuring values had to be embraced without any complexes by those to whom they pertained – the Algerian medical staff as well as Algerian patients … Psychiatry has to be political" (quoted in Cherki 2006: 71-72). Indeed, it had become clear that psychiatry was already political.

As state employees, psychiatrists were intimately connected with the process of legitimating the colonial state and its justice system. In a 1955 essay "The Conduct of Confession in North Africa," written with a colleague from Blida-Joinville hospital (probably before the outbreak of the armed struggle on November 1, 1954), and published in the French national journal of psychiatry, Fanon argued that a favourable resolution to the question of whether the accused was of sound mind while committing a criminal act "is impossible without a

pre-existing reciprocal recognition". What that accused had previously agreed to in the police station was now denied and should be understood as a rational response to an irrational situation:

> The act is no longer appropriated by the accused and therefore stands without an author, rendering any kind of criminological understanding impossible to obtain. Only the file remains" (Fanon and Lacaton 1955: 658).

In other words, there is nothing there. Only the file – the official discourse – remains. As Fanon would insist in his presentations to the 1956 and 1959 Black Writers' Congresses, there can be no universality without mutual reciprocity. Rehabilitation is an illusion because there is "no belonging to begin with". Late colonial society, in other words, produces only files – the official version of the colonised – masked in the discourse of ethno-psychiatry, whether that be the Arab mind, or the North African syndrome, reflecting a dehumanising system.

4. Nodal points

Fanon's resignation from Blida-Joinville hospital in 1956 coincided with decisive shifts in French counter-insurgency tactics. The defeat of the FLN in Algiers under the leadership of General Massu was considered a great success and became the "model for further French warfare in Algeria" (Klose 117). Propaganda and psychological warfare (with torture as its centre point) were used to separate the population from the FLN through the militarisation of society with priority given to the intelligence services. The physical removal of the population was connected with supposed re-education through resettlement, internment and detention. Central to the counter-insurgency were psychological programmes to create files – subjugated bodies, hearts and minds. Fanon's depiction of colonialism in *The Wretched* as totalitarian is far from rhetorical. As a French colonel put it, "Call me a fascist if you want … but we have to bring the population to heel. Each step a person takes has to be controlled" (quoted in Klose 2013: 115). Retaliations were standard practice and made no distinction between fighter and civilian. Whether part of a "resettlement" campaign or not, villages would be arbitrarily burnt down and inhabitants terrorised. Alongside psychological warfare, the regime used all the modern methods available to it including chemical weapons and phosphorous, that became widely used by the US in Vietnam, as well as toxic crop spraying, and even atomic waste (see Klose 2013 149-152).[9] And just

9 It should not be forgotten that Félix Moumié from Cameroon was murdered by the French secret services using Thallium in 1960. It is quite possible that Fanon's leukaemia was a result of such poisoning. French veterans of the Algerian war reported of "of a radioactive substance woven into the linings of certain jackets that brought on leukaemia in several FLN officials" (J. Fanon 2014: 107).

as General Bugeaud had done in the "pacification" of Algeria, 100 years earlier, scorched earth was followed by incendiary bombs in order to "smoke out" those who had fled to the caves. The resulting asphyxiation included the mass gassing of women and children. The continuities between Bugeaud's anti-insurgency warfare and the practices of the French army after 1954 were not lost on Fanon. Areas would be deliberately depopulated and anyone who remained would be considered an enemy combatant and shot on sight. Those taken prisoner or tortured were often killed rather than imprisoned. In addition to the massive military presence, thousands of Europeans were directly involved in the torture and murder of Algerians. So when Fanon uses the word violence over and over in the chapter, "On Violence," it is not to fetishise it but the only way to avoid, by fear and abstention, contributing to the normalisation of "devaluing human reality" (Fanon 1967b 3).

5. The politics of violence

Fanon's resignation from Blida-Joinville hospital, sent to the Resident Minister in December 1956, was written in the context of the Battle of Algiers. The police report attached to the resignation letter (that is deposited in the "overseas departments archive" at Aix-en-Provence) speaks of Fanon's support of the May 7, 1956 strike, which, it says, "explains why the highest percentage of strike followers was recorded at the Reynaud Pavilion under Dr Fanon's authority". "Under a military operation that brought about the death of a French-Muslim subject," the report continues, Fanon "systematically and with no concern for objectivity took a position contrary to the real version of events".

A society that systematically dehumanises the human being, Fanon wrote, "is a non-viable one, a society to be replaced" (1967b: 53). Objectivity was always a question for Fanon, intimately connected with subjectivity and freedom. Rather than a postmodern perspectivism, there is an absolute truth: there is no possibility of reciprocity without the end of colonial society. Critical of liberal intellectuals, Fanon insisted that there was no neutral position. Indeed, a neutral position was *a priori* taking a side. The letter marks a shift and a commitment. For some, it is a shift from the psycho-cultural to the political marked by an advocacy of violence. As the social theorist Eli Zaretsky puts it, "only violence [can] remediate the psychical damage done by colonialism," (2005: 191) or, as the postcolonial theorist Françoise Vergès contends (1991: 139), Fanon believes that only violence can cure trauma. This causality can end up caricaturing Fanon as somebody who gives up social psychiatry for violence. But rather than making this jump, we should first note that Fanon's support of violent action, as a product of the Algerian reaction to French brutality and intransigence, is also immediately strategic and political,

and it emerges as a critique of the dominant discourse of Pan-Africanism (see Young: 2005). At the time, the notion of supporting a struggle that engaged in violence, such as in Algeria, was a highly charged political issue.

Fanon travelled to Accra as part of the Algerian delegation to the 1958 All African People's Congress. Ghana had just become independent and Nkrumah, who was seen as the popular leader of Pan-Africanism, promoted the idea of a United States of Africa. Fanon's speech at the congress caused a stir. *The Times* (of London) reported a certain F Omar who received an ovation when, in contrast to the official line supporting non-violent action, he had argued for violence as a legitimate strategy. It was based, as I have argued, on the conditions in Algeria. In the settler colonies – Algeria, Kenya, and South Africa – Fanon wrote there was unanimity that only armed struggle would bring about the defeat of colonialism (Fanon 1967b: 156).

Algeria was involved in an armed struggle, just as the British were suppressing the Land and Freedom movement in Kenya. The inclusion of South Africa is interesting because in 1958 the ANC did not at all advocate armed struggle. The Pan Africanist Congress was founded in 1959 and in March 1960 it organised demonstrations against the pass laws that resulted in 69 people being massacred at Sharpeville. It was in the wake of this massacre that the PAC organised the Azanian People's Liberation army and the ANC organised Umkhonto weSizwe.

According to Macey, Fanon's presentation in Accra had gone against the "general ethos of the congress". And "to make matters worse," he continues, "it was well known that Nkrumah himself was a non believer in violence and that his theory of 'positive action' emphasised non-violent means of struggle" (Macey 2000: 368). But rather than being concerned with conference protocols, Fanon was interested in giving practical content to the idea of Pan African solidarity, raising the question about the relationship of the external to the internal: how could the struggle inside Algeria be aided? Out of the congress came a proposal to create an African Legion[10] and in a report on the conference, Fanon wrote of popular meetings with hundreds of people "pledging to aid their Algerian or South African-African brothers whenever they ask for it" (Fanon: 1967b 157 translation altered). These gestures should not be dismissed as romantic. Indeed, Fanon's experiences in Ghana – becoming the Algerian Provisional Government's Ambassador to Africa based in Accra in April 1960 and meeting anticolonial movements from across the continent – became central to his critique of nationalist political leaders in *The Wretched*[11] as he sharply considered the

10 Fanon's 1960 notebooks (1967b 177-190) written in the field during Fanon's trip to West Africa should be seen in this context.

11 See CLR James' reflections on his experiences in Ghana.

"reality" behind Pan-Africanism. Once it took off its mask, he argued, there was nothing there but a hollow shell of nationalism (see Fanon 1968: 159, 2004: 106). It is in this context that Fanon warned that the great threat to decolonisation was the lack of a unifying liberatory ideology (1967b 186). At the same time he made it clear that violence was not a political programme (see Fanon: 1968 139-140; 2008: 89-90). And without a political programme built from the bottom up, the struggle would degenerate into brutality.[12]

But let us go back to late 1958 and 1959 simply to put paid to the idea that for Fanon psychological questions could only be answered by violence. In Tunis in 1958 and 1959, Fanon continued to work as a psychiatrist. And it was there that he developed what became the first day hospital in North Africa.

If Fanon's critique of sociotherapy at Blida-Joinville Hospital in 1954 was based on presupposed cultural universals, and the resignation from Blida-Joinville in December 1956 marked the impossibility of psychiatry in colonial Algeria, his clinical work in Tunis indicates his continued critical commitment to sociotherapy. Indeed, the idea of day hospitalisation was in part a critique of a neo-society created within the hospital that had been advanced by sociotherapy. Fanon was thinking therapeutically, treating FLN combatants, Algerians who were fleeing violence as well as poor Tunisians, while pondering how psychoanalytic treatment, and issues of transference and counter-transference, could work in a day hospital setting as part of an eclectic range of treatments in the therapeutic community. Alice Cherki writes of Fanon's "return" to Freud with Fanon running discussion groups on Freud's case studies with his colleagues. The turn to Freud[13] was emboldened by Fanon's practical work in the hospital. Thus we get another perspective from which to consider violence. Any discussion about Fanon and violence must include not only political strategy but also the continuing effects and after-effects of violence that Fanon was treating clinically. Fanon did not engage in the psychoanalytical debates of the time but in "Day Hospitalisation," he did note that "Melanie Klein

12 It is in such a context then that Fanon's idea about violence as liberating becomes important. In short, after his death Fanon positioned as an advocate of Guevarist focoism. Indeed the cover of the 1965 French edition of Toward the African Revolution is a picture of Guevarist fighters in the Congo. Indeed even this notion of focoism is read back into *The Wretched*. To claim Fanon with this is popular though problematic. Castro had first declared that the revolution "With its thesis of humanism and social justice … will solve Cuba's problems, because this revolution is not red, this revolution is olive green" (Castro quoted in Padraza 2007: 60). And Fanon notes in *The Wretched* just two years later, how it was being drawn into the vortex of a cold war whose very centre of the convulsion is the Third World (2004 36).

13 "Return" gives an impression that Fanon had already been a Freudian and is too much an echo of Lacan's return to Freud in the early 1950s.

and Sandor Ferenczi amongst others have sufficiently signalled the importance of taking care of one's own body as a means of avoiding anxiety". And it was the everyday that interested him. He suggests that such care would include relaxation and breathing and "one's dress, [and] haircut but above all, holding on to the secret of a whole portion of the day spent outside the hospital" (Fanon and Geronomi 1959: 1125). The patient is given support in the day hospital to continue relationships outside it. In other words, since the therapeutic community is also located outside the day hospital, the day hospital is not the sole focus. Indeed Fanon's notion of day hospitalisation could be considered another step toward sociotherapy's disalienation. And in Fanon's mind the material basis of "avoiding anxiety" also includes the liberation of the body and the freedom of the body in space and the notion of establishing autonomy, as well as the importance of the non-institutionalised (and non-invasive) "secret" portion of the day.

If there is an elision of the psycho-cultural by Fanon, the advocate of violence, does it then come after his work on day hospitalisation? Fanon's presentation to the second congress of Black Writers in Rome in 1959, which is included in *The Wretched,* and contemplates the struggle for freedom and the "reciprocal basis for national culture and the fight for freedom" seems to suggest not. Violence is only mentioned once in that paper and then it is a reference to "florid writing".

Additionally, it is not coincidental that *The Wretched* that begins with "On Violence" is bookended by "On Colonial War and Mental Disorders", which helps to contextualise Fanon's questioning of a politics based on violence throughout the book (from the release of muscular tension in chapter one, to the limitations of spontaneity in chapter two and the importance of political education in chapter three). And Fanon reminds us in the "Misadventure [Pitfalls] of National Consciousness" that the emphasis is on liberation being the "business of all" not a few leaders, an army or a terrorist cell. To avoid what Patrick Taylor calls the "tragic circularity that would turn the new nation into a regime of terror", Fanon emphasises the intimate relationship between the building of the new nation and the development of a radical democracy from the bottom up. Essential to this development is "an education process that is concretely related to the reality of the struggle [through which] the people come to an awareness of their mutual responsibility to each other" (Taylor 1989: 91-92). Thus, when Fanon famously writes in "On Violence" that violence is a disintoxicating force that frees the colonised from inferiority complexes (see Fanon 1968: 94), it was not a cure-all for all psychological ills (see Miller 1990: 49).

"Colonial War and Mental Disorders" is part of a logbook of how the war itself creates tragic cases. But these case studies should not be taken as an

exhaustive account of mental disorders nor a general theory of trauma.[14] Fanon charts psychiatric symptoms produced by various forms of violence and torture, and rather than being framed by an ethical question, he introduces the chapter wondering whether the reader will find "these notes on psychiatry out of place or untimely in a book like this"? By including them, he clearly thinks they are absolutely essential to "a book like this" (titled "*Les damnés de la terre*"). At the end of the chapter, he again returns to the question of the Algerian's criminality theorised by the Algiers School (of ethnopsychiatry). He insists that the notion of the Algerian personality, the idea of an innately criminal and impulsive North African, is not a result of an organic degeneration, nervous condition, or special character trait but of the colonial condition. In this, he is also saying something about the malleability not only of personality, which, produced by social relations, has been fragmented by colonialism. For Fanon rebuilding the personality begins by fostering the new social relationships emerging out of the anticolonial struggle. "We cannot say that a child is egocentric and does not see the outside world," he argues in his lectures at the University of Orain in 1960, adding that the social environment is a constant presence. In other words, the child is conceived as living in the world where there are other relations and that these relations and their failures is one place to begin to understand Fanon's clinical and political work.

The Irish revolutionary James Connolly once stated, "Revolution is never practical – until the hour of the Revolution strikes." He added, polemicising with those who thought the struggle for liberation was a romantic dream, that then the revolution "is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromisers become the most futile and visionary of human imaginings". For Fanon colonial society was futile and nonviable, and, in the context of the Algerian liberation struggle, overturning it became an immediate and practical matter. Over 50 years after his death the importance of contextualising Fanon's *oeuvre* can provide a critical standpoint which, rather than exhausting his thought, might encourage a productive relationship to new situations.

14 Macey points out that most of Fanon's patients in France were suffering from effects of trauma, as Fanon explains in the "North African Syndrome," adding that when Fanon writes of the "lived experience of the Black" in *Black Skin White Masks*, it is a traumatic one: "A chance encounter with a child who has learned to recognize 'a black man' reactivates the original trauma of her encounter with the blue eyes of the white man with blond hair, the eyes that burn" (Macey 2005: 22).

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