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Rereading Frantz Fanon in the light of his unpublished texts

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Abstract. Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is principally known as a great theoretician of race relations and decolonization, in particular through the two main books he published during his lifetime *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). What is less known is that he was in parallel a pioneering psychiatrist and an early and recognized theoretician of ethnopsychiatry. A volume of about a thousand pages of texts either difficult to access or presumed lost was recently published, following more than a decade of research in archives located in different parts of the world. It reveals first the importance and originality of his thought as a scientist, and secondly the importance of this dimension of his work for the understanding of his political texts. This is shown on two points: 1) the role of violence in the decolonization process, when compared with Fanon's texts on psychiatric internment, the phenomenon of agitation and the alternative model of social therapy and 2) the use of «identity» as cultural foundation for newly decolonized states, which he strongly criticised, when compared with Fanon's systematic questioning of any personal «constitution» in his psychiatric and ethnopsychiatric work.

Keywords. Decolonisation, Social Therapy, Ethnopsychiatry, Algerian War, Frantz Fanon.

Exploring archives and searching for lost works can be essential to the understanding of a writer but is also fraught with the seductions and risks of a comfortable fetishism, that of reaching the complete meaning of a work through the patient and exhaustive inventory and analysis of its corpus. When setting out to work on an edition of Frantz Fanon's unpublished or inaccessible writings my aim was rather to reveal the complexity of a body of thought of which the astonishing creativity, its freedom and its uncertainties, had been progressively masked under proliferating interpretations linked to various agendas. The point was to recreate its genesis in relation to the debates and historical events it responded to, and then evaluate its relevance to our time, which is now determined by the consciousness of a history Fanon was one of the first to conceptualise, that of decolonisation.

In his political texts, he essentially tried to imagine and defend processes of dis-alienation which entailed dispelling the mystifications linked to the idea of identity, whether this identity had been imposed as a justification for oppression or was now claimed as a ground and tool for liberation. Looking at his archives shows that this direction had in fact first inspired his psychiatric work, which focused on neurological pathologies that fixed the individual into a psychiatric syndrome and aimed to show that the gap between the neurological and the psychiatric allowed for the inventions of therapies of dis-alienation. Coherently, this work started with a reflection on the temporality and historicity at the heart of all scientific constructions of concepts, including its own. This background research shed interesting light on Fanon's well-known books, but it also revealed that this thinker of mobility and permanent *vigilance* against all reifications was astonished by the canonisation of some of his texts, which he saw as historically determined interventions. In 2015, this archival work which I led jointly with Robert JC Young resulted in the publication by Éditions La Découverte, which took over from Fanon's historical publisher, Éditions Maspero, of *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, a large volume of texts by Fanon which had been thought lost or were almost impossible to access. This volume contained literary, scientific, political and journalistic texts and has become in effect the second volume of his *Œuvres*, the single-volume publication in 2011 by La Découverte of the four books published in Fanon's lifetime or shortly after his death: *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) and, posthumously, *Pour la révolution africaine* (1964). In 2018 Bloomsbury published an English translation, *Alienation and Freedom*. In 2019 a revised paperback edition appeared in French, and we published in 2020 a revised and expanded edition of the English version. During the six years following our first publication, new documents and details had appeared, which confirmed some of our initial hypotheses, and the English translation required some revi-

sion, which made these new editions necessary. It also turned out that if the publication of these texts was initially aimed at deepening the understanding of Fanon's books, now widely read by a new generation, his literary and psychiatric work gave the reflexions on alienation and freedom a relevance to our historical context we could not have anticipated.

A large proportion of the archives we used (which are kept at the Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine, in Caen) reflect the astonishing twists of their author's life. Fanon, who was born in the French Caribbean island of Martinique in 1925 and died from leukaemia at the age of 36 at the end of 1961, and who fought in the Free French Forces during the second World War, produced all his work in the span of a decade, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-six. He did so while pursuing continuously the career of a clinician and researcher in psychiatry and, from 1954, the semi-clandestine life of a militant engaged by chance and choice in a cruel war of independence. He only suspended his psychiatric work when he became in February 1960 the ambassador at large for sub-Saharan Africa of a country, Algeria, yet to be created. In this capacity he survived several assassination attempts as well as the inner conflicts of a revolutionary movement. In such a frantically active life, writing was for him a *praxis*, a reflection on the action that was radically transforming him at the same time as an intervention that aimed at transforming the reality he was writing from, whether the matter was a complete reorganisation of psychiatric care or the transformation of a national liberation movement into a revolutionary one. The three books he published in his lifetime focused on three different transformative lived experiences, that of the black man from the Antilles when faced with the racist gaze in the *métropole*, that of a people engaged in a war of liberation, and that of a continent, Africa, forced to define its future in radically new terms. No typescript has survived of these works, which were themselves often composed of separate studies, some already published in journals, and some incorporating documents

such as Fanon's own psychiatric case notes. Nevertheless, a substantial and heterogeneous archive survived. It comprises the typescripts of two of the three plays he is known to have written during his medical studies in Lyon, between 1946 and 1951; an important PhD dissertation in psychiatry defended in 1951; a significant number of editorials in the ward journals of two psychiatric hospitals, in France – Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole where he worked under a pioneer of social therapy, François Tosquelles – and, in Algeria – Blida-Joinville (now Hôpital Frantz-Fanon), where he ran two wards; scientific papers published in professional psychiatric journals and in proceedings of congresses; a few scientific notes, for instance on epistemology or on ethnopsychiatry, and notes for congress papers which became articles but where the typescript or manuscript differs from the published text; unsigned articles in clandestine journals or in group publications such as the journal of the Algerian Liberation Front, *El Moudjahid*; and a sustained correspondence in particular with his publishers.

Important also is the correspondence between his publishers that immediately followed his early death and bears on the possible publication of the surviving material: it gives precious indications as to what unpublished material was available and considered then to be undoubtedly his work. One interesting aspect of this correspondence, which helped us editorially but also philosophically, is that when Fanon answers questions on republication or translation into foreign languages, he appears not to consider his own published books as definitely set but rather as toolboxes containing chapters which could be assembled with others from previous or future volumes, as he envisaged with his Italian publisher Giovanni Pirelli, while others could be abandoned because the situation had changed and they were no longer meaningful for action as well as thought. Finally, Fanon was an avid reader and often marked or annotated his books. What remains of his library is kept at the Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques (CNRPAH) in Algiers where I copied his marginalia, which

are reproduced and commented in our edition. These *marginalia* widen his known intellectual lineage (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Sartre for instance, among many others) as well as some violent rejections – of Jung, for instance – and this gave sometimes a new dimension to some of his analyses or allowed us at least to elucidate allusions or influences in his published work.

In order to establish a meaningful edition of the work of a writer who was so engaged with the remarkable scientific transformations and historical events of his time we had to research and present in extensive introductions and notes some indispensable contextual material. That included of course the psychiatry of the period, in particular the debates between psychiatrists like Henri Ey, Jacques Lacan and François Tosquelles on the relationship between neurology and psychiatry, or between institutional psychotherapy and dis-alienation. Finding and reproducing the blueprint that presided over the construction of the Blida hospital where Fanon was to write some of his most perceptive texts on the relationships between the physical structure of internment and its alienating impact, was also enlightening. These debates and contextual information determined both Fanon's psychiatric thought and his political texts. The same background research was necessary to understand his literary work, through which we can often understand what is at stake in his descriptions of the revolutionary process and their tone. Documenting all the plays that Fanon was able to see in Lyon during his studies, from 1948 to 1951, thus revealed the influence of Claudel in addition to those of Camus, Césaire or Sartre. For the later period of his life I found diplomatic telegrams which indicated that his position had been at times quite precarious with some high ranking members of the FLN, which in turn sheds some light on remarks in his final books on the perils faced by the revolutionary process. So do lecture notes from students who attended his lectures in the same period. In the end, all this material, original documents, contextual information and scholarly apparatus, produced a volume which was considerably larger than what had been initially

anticipated, about seven hundred pages in the first edition and finally a thousand pages in the three volumes of the 2020 English edition.

It turned out that in making all this material public and understandable through a scholarly work of restitution we were not just (hopefully) dispelling some misunderstandings but also contributing to present debates. For instance Fanon had been interpreted as an advocate of political violence as a form of purification, or as a thinker of identity. Yet his texts showed that his point of view was different from such conceptions.

Since the publication of *Alienation and freedom* a wide readership has realised that Fanon, as a psychiatrist, wrote some original and significant theoretical texts in the field, which were recognised as such at the time and this in itself has led to a renewal of interest in the questions he tackled, especially when dealing with ethnopsychiatry. But when reading his psychiatric texts as a whole it is also striking how much the concepts in these texts inform his political thought and question not just the idea of a politics based on identity, but also the role of violence within a liberation struggle and more generally historical teleologies, which in turn explains Fanon's warnings about the risks of neo-colonialism.

Fanon's psychiatric thought unfolds on three levels: it is first a criticism of the taxonomic essentialism of psychiatric theory so far, which projects organic categories onto mental illnesses, an organicist or a constitutionalist point of view which he refuses early on and which he will adamantly critique when dealing with colonial ethnopsychiatry. He set out to debunk it by studying a set of neurodegenerative diseases which coincide with very different mental (psychiatric) syndromes. The second level is the clinical therapeutical theory made possible by the experimental demonstration of this organo-psychiatric gap. A desirable link between the exploration of this gap and a more general theory of history was announced very early on, in Fanon's PhD:

I do not believe that a neurological trouble [...] can give rise to a determinate psychiatric syndrome clus-

ter. Instead, my aim is to show that all neurological impairment damages the personality in some way. And that this open crack within the ego becomes all the more perceptible as the neurological disorder takes the form of a rigorous and irreversible semiology. [...] We think in terms of organs and focal lesions when we ought to be thinking in terms of functions and disintegration. Our medical view is spatial, where it ought to become more and more temporal. [...] The occasion will arise, in a work that I have been undertaking for a long time, to tackle the problem of history from a psychoanalytic and ontological angle. In it, I will show that history is only the systematic valorization of collective complexes. (Fanon [2018]: 215-216, 262; [2020b]: 50-51, 94).

This gap and this new therapeutical theory, which will later on fall under the appellation of «antipsychiatry» or «institutional psychiatry» is what both his psychiatry and his politics were to be grounded on.

For Fanon a mental illness is a faulty reconstruction of personality often following an initial organic disturbance which has led to a *dissolution* of personality. Psychiatric internment only serves to solidify these faulty reconstructions, artificially «producing» its object of study, fixed categories of mental illnesses (a theme Foucault later developed in the final chapter of his *History of Madness*; see Foucault [1961]: 512-538, *The Anthropological circle*). In subsequent clinical psychiatry articles, which he wrote jointly with the revolutionary psychiatrist François Tosquelles, Fanon proposed new therapeutical methods they had developed. He also defended them in the editorials he wrote for the ward journals which were themselves written and published as part of the therapeutical treatment. The faulty reconstructions of personality needed to be dissolved by a new shock (Fanon and Tosquelles advocated shock therapies such as electro-shocks, insulin-induced comas as well as sleep cures), on the one hand, and the asylum needed to be reorganised on the other in such a way that it became through psychotherapies and social therapy what could be called a vigilant society, in that each participants, medical staff, nurses and patients were to learn to *take responsibility* at

each instant, for each of their acts, and to continuously produce their present. This implied a complete reform of the institution, in its physical and temporal organisation. Thus Fanon's editorial in the ward journal of Saint Alban, dated 27 mars 1953, was titled *Therapeutical role of commitment [engagement]* (Fanon [2018]: 290-292; [2020b]: 122-123). This is where he first defined the crucial concept of «vigilance». The terms *psychiatrie institutionnelle*, and social therapy designated such a transformation of the institution and its methods.

Now, if we reread the political texts, we realise that Fanon transposed this model to the theory of colonialism almost *verbatim* and described colonisation as producing a dissolution of the «personality» of a particular society, which then reconstructs itself in socially alienated forms similar to compulsions of repetition, deliria and the «agitation» (violence) produced by the traditional asylum. These forms are particularly visible in *religion* and associated phantasms (abundantly described in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*); *crime* and *violence* (also described in this chapter, but commented on in lectures Fanon gave in Tunis, where he spoke on Chester Himes crime fictions (Fanon [2018]: 544; [2020b]: 376-377); *imitation* of the coloniser, as in the case of his native Martinique analysed in *Black Skin, White Masks*; and its response, *negritude*. Some of these are often combined.

As for political dis-alienation and liberation, Fanon also defines it along the lines of psychiatric social therapy, and this has crucial consequences regarding his conception of the revolutionary process, in particular the largely misunderstood role of violence, a much more complex notion in his work than is usually assumed. Violence is for him an effect of madness, which he classically defined, following Gunther Anders and Henri Ey as a «pathology of freedom». It is in fact the fight for liberation, *lutte* or *combat*, of a people, which can be therapeutical when it is part of a real revolutionary process. The reason is that in its very material constraints the collective struggle reinvents the revolutionary group's social structure and recreates an authentic social bond. This work

of re-instituting a social bond is described in the terms of the dis-alienating process of social therapy. Fanon also writes that it *detoxifies*, which does not mean «cleanses» as the current English editions translate it, as if cleansing was an inner virtue of violence. Fanon specifies that what it detoxifies from is subservience to leaders, in particular in newly decolonised countries where the local elites rush to take the place of the colonisers¹. Among the newly published texts is a pamphlet written by Fanon when he was in post in Ghana, titled *The Stoges of Imperialism*, which stresses precisely that. Looking at the *Wretched of the Earth* from the angle of the historical process and the future it harboured, which was the only perspective of interest for Fanon, the book appears as much as an indictment of colonialism as a warning about what could go wrong in the revolutionary process, how the theories of subversion proposed could turn into instruments of oppression.

Comparing a few passages from the previously published books with some of the archive reveals many echoes and analogies.

For instance, in the *Wretched of the Earth* the colonial world is described through the categories of confinement:

¹ Homi Bhabha, in his subtle preface to Richard Philcox's translation of the *Wretched of the Earth* notes that Hannah Arendt's fundamental objection to Fanon regarded not so much his supposed celebration of violence (that she sees as Sartre's interpretation of Fanon), but the idea that collective violence could engender close *political* kinship. «No body politic I know was ever founded on equality before death and its actualisation in violence», she writes (see Fanon [2004]: XXXV). This is clearly an important point, however Arendt's thought on Fanon's position might have been more nuanced had she had access to his psychiatric writings where it is clear that socialtherapy is a long and complex process and that the shocks necessary to dissolve the pathological personality inherited from the neurological trouble are just one of its preconditions. This is why Fanon devotes the majority of *The Wretched of the Earth* to the complexities of what is to follow the anticolonial struggle and the dissolution of the social «personality» inherited from the colonial system.

A world compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cock-sure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip. That is the colonial world. The colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning. (Fanon [2011]: 463; [2004]: 15)

In a 1959 text which illustrated and defended the alternative clinical model Fanon had instituted in Tunis, that of a psychiatric day care centre, this is how classical internment is described:

In any phenomenology in which the major alterations of consciousness are left aside, mental illness is presented as a veritable pathology of freedom. Illness situates the patient in a world in which his or her freedom, will and desires are constantly broken by obsessions, inhibitions, countermands, anxieties. Classical hospitalization considerably limits the patient's field of activity, prohibits all compensations, all movement, restrains him within the closed field of the hospital and condemns him to exercise his freedom in the unreal world of fantasy. So it is not surprising that the patient feels free only in his opposition to the doctor who has withheld him. (Fanon [2018]: 516; [2020b]: 349)

In the *Wretched of the Earth* colonisation produces pathologies that are described in the same terms:

The colonized's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channelled, transformed, and spirited away. The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. [...] Every-

thing is permitted in the dance circle. [...] Everything is permitted, for in fact the sole purpose of the gathering is to let the supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness spew out volcanically. Symbolic killings, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders, everything has to come out, the ill humours seep out, tumultuous as lava flows.

One step further and we find ourselves in deep possession, in actual fact, these are organized seances of possession and dispossession: vampirism, possession by djinns, by zombies, and by Legba, the illustrious god of voodoo. Such a disintegration dissolution or splitting of the personality, plays a key regulating role in ensuring the stability of the colonized world. On the way there these men and women were stamping impatiently, their nerves «on edge». On the way back, the village returns to serenity, peace, and stillness. During the struggle for liberation there is a singular loss of interest in these rituals. (Fanon [2011]: 468; [2004]: 20)

As for dis-alienation, the same terms recur in both contexts:

In fact, [in the asylum] the service itself is sadistic, repressive, rigid, non-socialized, and has castrative aspects. Consequently, the issue is less to advocate or command the suppression of straightjackets or isolation units, than to foster in the milieu the circulation of productive, de-alienating, and functional lines of force with a strong potential for differentiated demands. (Fanon [2018]: 458; [2020b]: 292)

Within the newly established society just set up, we see a mutation of the old symptomatology in its pure, desocialized state [...]. On the contrary, the patient has a need to verbalize, to explain, to explain himself, to take a position. He maintains an investment in an objectal world, which acquires a new density. Social therapy wrests patients from their fantasies and obliges them to confront reality on a new register. (Fanon [2018]: 518; [2020b]: 351)

The war of liberation was described as follows in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

In the liberation struggle, however, these people who were once relegated to the realm of the imagination, victims of unspeakable terrors, but content to

lose themselves in hallucinatory dreams, are thrown into disarray, reform, and amid blood and tears give birth to very real and urgent issues. Giving food to the mujahideen, stationing lookouts, helping deprived families and taking over from the slain or imprisoned husband – such are the practical tasks the people are asked to undertake in the liberation struggle. (Fanon [2011]: 467; [2004]: 19)

At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force [la violence désintoxique]. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that the liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader. Hence their aggressive tendency to distrust the system of protocol that young governments are quick to establish. When they have used violence to achieve national liberation, the masses allow nobody to come forward as «liberator». [...] Any attempt at mystification in the long term becomes virtually impossible. (Fanon [2011]: 496; [2004]: 51)

This process of dis-alienation that effective revolutions carry through is the object of an empirical study by Fanon, *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne*, also known as *Sociologie d'une révolution* and strangely translated as *A Dying Colonialism*, while it is clear that Fanon was interested in what was in germs in this revolution, rather than in the colonial past. What *Year V of the Algerian Revolution* does is to show that even though independence is still far away, the revolution has already done its psychotherapeutical work, and this can be seen through the people's transformation in their relationship to material culture. Whatever was inert before has become alive now (each chapter concerns a change of attitude towards material and social culture: veil, transistor radio, organisation of family life, medical care). In each case, what had been solidified into an inert block of culture takes on a new meaning. Those who were spectators of their own objecthood and

lived in separation, like patients in the old asylums, have now become actors as Fanon went on to write in the opening of the *Wretched of the Earth*.

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it bears on being and fundamentally alters being, it transforms spectators crushed by their inessentiality into privileged actors, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It brings a natural rhythm into being, introduced by new men, a new language, a new humanity. 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 a man through the very process by which it frees itself. (Fanon [2011]: 452; [2004]: 2)

Such a critique of this society of the spectacle that the alienated colonial society is – not just a society of fascination for objects and images, or phantasms (Fanon wrote on religion and on cinema in this context), but one where human beings are separated from the products of their creation as well as the creative process, and see their cultures and themselves as things –, this is a conception that inhabits Sartre's rereading of Marx in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which Fanon read as soon as it was published. From this point of view, dis-alienation can never come from some authority (a leader) or some historical teleological necessity behind the event (the supposedly cleansing virtue of violence), it must be a process of self-creation, which by its nature will contradict oppression. For Fanon it is not an easy process. Changing structures is not enough, an extreme vigilance must be maintained at all times if these structures are not to become empty shells and the independence process another form of alienation. The whole purpose of the *Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1960-1961 when it was clear that the decolonisation process was unstoppable could be read as such a warning.

Fanon's theatre, written in 1948, anticipated this dilemma of a promethean revolutionary process producing its opposite. One of his plays *Parallel Hands*, is a tragedy which portrays the

moment when the negation of the past and the subjugation of the present to a projected future leads to the destruction of an island society. In a premonitory text on violence the hero of the play, Épithalos, said to his beloved:

*Audaline on reaching the volcanic extremes speech makes itself act!
A language haunted by exhilarating perception!
To look at the sun head-on
To integrate the world's beat into my existence
To take the breathing of cursorial clouds with tireless feet in my hands...
Perpendicularly I make my way!
A rhythm of rupture bathes my thoughts
Abruptly I compose incendiary scales
On a single theme I want to develop
The streaming chords of my ascent.
A language haunted by exhilarating perception!²
(Fanon [2018]: 133; [2020a]: 131-132)*

Fanon is still in dialogue here with Césaire, who described poetry as volcanic, but the conclusion of the play is catastrophic violence and a return to alienation.

Another debated notion in Fanon's work is that of identity. From his first published book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon doubted that political action or ethical obligation could be grounded on any sense of identity, be it based on race, ethnicity or even rationality:

² Audaline la parole parvenue aux extrêmes volcaniques s'érige en acte!
Un langage hanté d'exaltante perception!
Le soleil à regarder en face
La pulsation du monde à intégrer à mon existence
La respiration des nuages coureurs à pieds infatigables à prendre dans mes mains...
C'est perpendiculairement que je m'achemine!
Un rythme de rupture baigne mes pensées
Abruptement je compose des gammes incendiaires
C'est sur un thème unique que je veux développer
Les ruiselants accords de mon ascension.
Un langage hanté d'exaltante perception!

If the question once arose for me about showing effective solidarity with a given past, it was only to the extent that I have committed, to myself and my fellow man, to fight with all my life and all my strength so that never again would a people on the earth be enslaved.

It is not the black world that governs my behaviour. My black skin is not a repository for specific values. The starry sky that left Kant in awe has long revealed its secrets to us. And moral law has doubts about itself. (Fanon [2011]: 248; [2008]: 202)

In that too Fanon was Sartrean. Values can only derive from an act, not the act from values, that would thus have been inherited:

Sartre has shown that the past, along the lines of an inauthentic mode of being, «takes» en masse [congeals], and, once solidly structured, then gives form to the individual. This is the past turned into value. But, I can also revise my past, valorise it, or condemn it through my successive choices. [...]

One duty alone. That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices.

I do not want to be the victim of the Ruse of a black world.

My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values. (Fanon [2011]: 248, 250; [2008]: 202, 204)

Even though he abundantly quoted anti-colonial passages in Césaire's writings, Fanon derided the metaphysics of negritude. Much later on, in the famous travel diary he kept in Mali while exploring the routes an African legion could take to support the Algerian struggle, he advocated spreading Algeria to Africa, that is revolution to nationalisms, and Africa to Algeria, that is diversity to the revolution. Strikingly, he showed no interest for some cultural or metaphysical African identity. The continent was to be assembled or created, not inherited (Khalifa [2017]: 262-263). In *The Wretched of the Earth* all the remarks on national culture essentially refused the idea that national culture could derive from an identity, a view he had described as the essence of colonial anthropology.

Compared to his description of colonialism and the alienation induced by the racist gaze,

or his analyses of the Algerian war of independence or the conditions for an effective decolonisation after independence, these anti-essentialist positions, especially on the idea of negritude have often been neglected or perceived as a puzzle. But when looking at Fanon's ethnopsychiatric texts, which fundamentally question all psychiatric «constitutionalism» equating racial and cultural differences, it is clear that Fanon could only be suspicious of such an idea³. Debates on his position can now be settled simply by looking at the correspondence between Fanon and his main publisher, François Maspero. In a letter to Maspero of 27 July 1960, Fanon described the content of *The Wretched of the Earth* in these terms:

Subject: starting from an armed revolution in the Maghreb, the development of a consciousness and a national struggle in the rest of Africa.

Titre: Algiers – Cape town. (Fanon [2018]: 683; [2020c]: 152)⁴

This is followed by the draft of a table of content where the final chapter is entitled *Negritude and negro-african civilisations – a mystification*. Fanon did not have the time to write this chapter as a separate text, and by then its content probably only made sense for him within the more general framework of a criticism of the new nationalism which he developed in what became the chapter on national culture. But in Fanon's vocabulary «mystification» is an important word. He often describes religions as mystifications, the fascination of the powerless for an imaginary power they could master or which might protect them⁵.

³ See in particular *Social therapy in a ward of Muslim men: Methodological difficulties* and *Ethnopsychiatric considerations* (Fanon [2018]: 366 ff., 422 ff.; [2020b]: 195 ff., 251 ff.).

⁴ In a letter of 20 July 1960, Fanon asked Maspero to convey to Sartre his enthusiasm for his latest book – *Critique de la raison dialectique. Théorie des ensembles pratiques, précédé de Questions de méthode* (1960) – which, he says, found in him an «exceptional echo».

⁵ This is why in a letter on Islam sent to the Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati, Fanon seriously doubts the capacity of any religion to foster a revolutionary transfor-

Colonialism creates a world of phantasms where alienation is grounded on a mystification about one's identity and that of the other, and produces the fetishism of an essence or a mask. In his late work Fanon, who knew he had little time left, was rushing to leave a legacy for the future decolonised world (some of the correspondence with Maspero reveals that he had considered switching publisher to *Présence Africaine* in the hope of reaching a wider public in Africa). Had he survived and lived after independence, he might have just gone back to his work as a revolutionary clinician and experimental researcher and focus, as he had announced in his PhD, on a philosophical reflexion on the relation between history and psychopathology. He might also have been murdered or forced into exile again. But it is clear now that when they are read together all his texts, literary, psychiatric, or political, share a unique vigilance towards the essentialisation produced not just through the alienation process but also through attempts at fighting it. From this perspective the work of Fanon's editors must lie in our own vigilance in dispelling the mystifications that have haunted his legacy.

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