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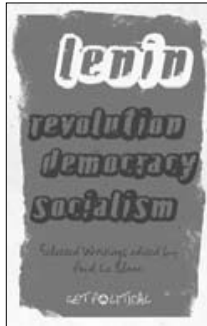
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Black Skin, White Masks

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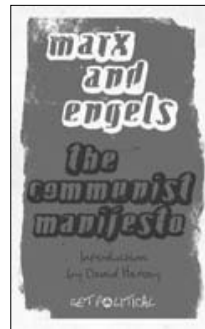
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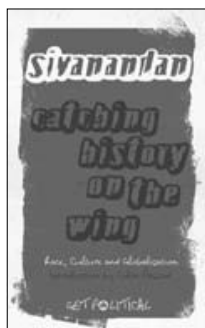
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black skin white masks

FRANTZ FANON

Translated by Charles Lam Markmann

Forewords by
Ziauddin Sardar and Homi K. Bhabha

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FOREWORD TO THE 2008 EDITION

Ziauddin Sardar

I think it would be good if certain things were said: Fanon and the epidemiology of oppression

The opening gambit of *Black Skin, White Masks* ushers us towards an imminent experience: *the explosion will not happen today*.^{*} But a type of explosion is about to unfold in the text in front of us, in the motivations it seeks, in the different world it envisages and aims to create. We are presented with a series of statements, maxims if you like, both obvious and not so obvious: *I do not come with timeless truths; fervor is the weapon of choice of the impotent; the black man wants to be white, the white man slaves to reach a human level*. We are left with little doubt we are confronting a great deal of anger. The resentment takes us to a particular place: *a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, where black is not a man, and mankind is digging into its own flesh to find meaning*.

But this not simply a historic landscape, although *Black Skin, White Masks* is a historic text, firmly located in time and place. Fanon's anger has a strong contemporary echo. It is the silent scream of all those who toil in abject poverty simply to exist in the hinterlands and vast conurbations of Africa. It is the resentment of all those marginalized and firmly located on the fringes in Asia and Latin America. It is the bitterness of those demonstrating against the Empire, the superiority complex of the neo-conservative ideology, and the banality of the "War on Terror." It is the anger of all whose cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated. This is not just any anger. It is the universal

^{*} Direct quotations from *Black Skin, White Masks* are set in italics.

fury against oppression in general, and the perpetual domination of the Western civilization in particular.

This anger is not a spontaneous phenomenon. It is no gut reaction, or some recently discovered passion for justice and equity. Rather, it is an anger borne out of grinding experience, painfully long self analysis, and even longer thought and reflection. As such, it is a guarded anger, directed at a specific, long term desire. The desire itself is grounded in self-consciousness: *when it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire—the first milestone on the road that leads to dignity*. *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a very particular definition of dignity. Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master *who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table*. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self. *Black Skin, White Masks* charts the author's own journey of discovering his dignity through an interrogation of his own Self—a journey that will not be unfamiliar to all those who have been forced to endure western civilization.

1. *I was born in the Antilles*

Frantz Omar Fanon, born on 20 July 1925 in Fort-de-France, in the French colony of Martinique, was a complex figure, with multiple selves. He was, as he tells us, from Antilles but he ended his life thinking of himself as an Algerian. His parents belonged to the middle class community of the island: father a descendant of slaves, mother of mixed French parenthood. In Fort-de-France, he studied at Lycée Schoelcher, where one of his teachers was poet and writer Aimé Césaire. Césaire's passionate denouncement of colonial racism had a major influence on the impressionable Fanon. As a young dissident, he agitated against the Vichy regime in the Antilles and traveled to Dominica to support the French resistance in the Caribbean. Soon afterwards, he found himself in France where he joined the resistance against the occupying forces

of Nazi Germany. While serving in the military, Fanon experienced racism on a daily basis. In France, he noticed that French women avoided black soldiers who were sacrificing their lives to liberate them. He was wounded; and was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery during his service in the Free French forces.

After the War, Fanon won a scholarship to study medicine and psychiatry in Lyon.

While still a student he met José Dublé, a French woman who shared his convictions against racism and colonialism. The couple married in 1952, had one son, and stayed together for the rest of their lives. Fanon also began to use psychoanalysis to study the effects of racism on individuals, particularly its impact on the self-perception of blacks themselves. During the 1950s metropolitan France was a center of revolutionary philosophy and a magnet for writers, thinkers and activists from Africa. Fanon imbibed the ideas of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre; and became friends with Octave Mannoni, French psychoanalyst and author of *Psychology of Colonization*. As a young man searching for his own identity in a racist society, Fanon identified with the African freedom fighters who came to France seeking allies against European colonialism. He began to define a new black identity; and became actively involved in the anti-colonialist struggle. So when, in 1953, he was offered a job as head of the psychiatric department of Bida-Joinville Hospital in Algiers he jumped at the opportunity.

Fanon arrived in Algeria just as the colony was on the verge of a full blown, violent struggle against the French. He was appalled by the racist treatment of Algerians and the disparity he witnessed between the living standards of the European colonizers and the indigenous Arab population. He developed a close rapport with the Algerian poor and used group therapy to help, as well as study, his patients. There was intellectual ferment too. A major event of 1954 was the publication of *Vacation de l'Islam* by the Algerian social philosopher Malek Bennabi. Published to synchronize with the outbreak of the Algerian revolution, *Vacation de l'Islam* presented the radical concept of "colonisabilité": the historical process through which Algeria, and other Muslim countries, declined culturally and intellectually to a stage

where colonialism becomes a “historical necessity.” Bennabi, who like Fanon spent most of his life struggling against French racism, distinguished between “a country simply conquered and occupied and a colonised country.”¹ The latter had lost its own cultural bearings and internalized the idea of the inherent superiority of the colonizing culture. Fanon and Bennabi never met; but it is difficult to imagine their work did not fertilize each other’s thought.

The French response to the 1954 Algerian revolt was brutal, involving torture, killing, physical abuse and barbaric repression. For two years Fanon secretly supported the revolutionaries. Then, in 1956, he resigned his post and openly joined the National Liberation Front (FLN). He moved to Tunis, where he worked for Manouba Clinic and Neuropsychiatric Center and founded the radical magazine *Moudjahid* (from Jihad, meaning freedom fighter). Soon he acquired a reputation as a leading ideologue of the Algerian revolution. He received many death threats from the French and their sympathizers—which only served to strengthen his resolve. By now, Fanon identified himself as an Algerian. He traveled throughout Africa speaking on behalf of the FLN; and even served as an ambassador to Ghana on behalf of the provisional government of Algeria.

Fanon did not live to see Algeria acquire full independence. While still in Ghana he was diagnosed with leukemia. He went first to the Soviet Union for treatment; and later to the United States. He died in Washington on 6 December 1961.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Fanon was hailed as a revolutionary writer, a hero of the Third World and anti-colonial movement. He wrote his most influential book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, just before his death. Published in 1961, with a preface by Sartre, it became a key text for radical students and served as an inspiration for the Black Power movement in the United States. While its endorsement of violence is problematic, *The Wretched of the Earth* offers one of the most penetrating analyses of the social psychology of colonialism. But Fanon’s celebrity collapsed almost as quickly as the Berlin Wall and he was even forgotten in Algeria which he claimed as his own. Conservative writers have reacted against his views on violence and leftist intellectuals have

dismissed his revolutionary statements as outdated and naïve. But the arrival of postcolonial studies in the 1990s heralded a new interest in Fanon. Today, Fanon waits to be rediscovered by a new generation burning with a desire for change—the very emotion that motivated Fanon to set sail from Martinique.

2. *The architecture of this book is rooted in the temporal*

Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* when he was 27. Published in 1952, it was his first and perhaps most enduring book. And it was ignored. Its significance was recognized only after the death of the author, particularly after the publication of the English translation a decade and a half later in 1967. It was a year when anti-war campaigning was at its height; and student strikes and protests, that began at Columbia University, New York, started to spread like wildfire across the United States and Europe. Martin Luther King was leading the civil rights movement and was to be assassinated a year later. Advocates of black power were criticizing attempts to assimilate and integrate black people. The book caught the imagination of all who argued for and promoted the idea of black consciousness. It became the bible of radical students, in Paris and London, outraged at the exploitation of the Third World.

Black Skin, White Masks was the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism. It examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors. It is due to the sensitivities of Fanon, says Ashis Nandy, that “we know something about the interpersonal patterns which constituted the colonial situation, particularly in Africa.”² Fanon began a process of psychoanalytic deconstruction that was developed further first by Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* and then by Ngugi wa Thiong in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Other theorists of colonial subjectivity have followed in their footsteps.

Fanon writes from the perspective of a colonized subject. He is a subject with a direct experience of racism who has developed a

natural and intense hatred of racism. When it comes to experience, this is no ordinary subject: already the author has fought for the resistance in the Caribbean and France, has been wounded near the Swiss border, and received a citation for courage. He has a professional interest in psychoanalysis and speaks of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Carl Gustav Jung without much distinction. He is going to offer us a *psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem*, he says. But we can be sure that this is not a therapy session. Fanon is no armchair philosopher or academic theorist. He has a more urgent and pressing thing on his mind: liberation.

There is an urgency to *Black Skin, White Masks* that bursts from its pages. The text is full of discontinuities, changes in style, merging of genres, dramatic movement from analysis to pronouncements, switches from objective scientific discussion to deep subjectivity, transfers from theory to journalism, complex use of extended metaphors, and, not least, a number of apparent contradictions. As a genuine, and dare I say “old fashioned” polymath, Fanon is not afraid to use any and all the tools and methods at his disposal: Marxism, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, medical dissection, and good old aphorisms. And he is just as happy to subvert them—a livid subversion that some would see as contradiction. But above all the text has an immediacy that engages and stirs us. We can feel a soul in turmoil, hear a voice that speaks directly to us, and see the injustices described being lived in front of our eyes. This is most evident in the chapter on “The Fact of Blackness.” Here, Fanon breaks out of all convention and simply lets his stream of consciousness wash on to the paper. *All this whiteness that burns me. I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?* This directness, this simmering anger, makes us uncomfortable because “civilized society” does not like uncomfortable truths and naked honesty. But this is exactly what makes *Black Skin, White Masks* such a powerful and lasting indictment of western civilization.

There is little point, I think, in accusing Fanon of sexism and gender bias. It is indeed true, as Bart Moore-Gilbert suggests, that

Black Skin, White Masks “discriminates pointedly between the experiences of men and women of colour.”³ But who used gender neutral language in the 1950s? And yes, Fanon can be used both to attack and defend European humanism. That’s because European humanism does have a few redeeming features along with its totalizing tendencies. He is critical of European universalism yet uses the discourse of psychoanalysis to *reveal the emotional anomalies responsible for the resulting complexes* because one can distance oneself from certain varieties of universalism and get closer to certain other notions of universal thought and values. Fanon is a contextual thinker and embraces that which makes most sense to him in the context of his dilemmas.

When reading *Black Skin, White Masks* one ought to keep the time and circumstances in which it was written firmly in mind. This is a dynamic text written in the heat of an intense, and often bloody, liberation struggle. It emerged from a life-and-death struggle, an individual as well as a collective struggle, concerned with the survival of the body as well as the survival of the soul. The struggle is concerned as much with freedom from colonialism as with liberation from the suffocating embrace of Europe, and the pretensions of its civilization to be the universal destiny of all humanity. The text changes and unfolds itself as the experiences of the author transform and change him, as he suffocates, gasps, twists, struggles, and turns his *back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism*. For Fanon, the struggle is nothing less than an attempt to survive, to breathe the air of liberty.

We need to see the context. But we also need to lift our perceptions to see its global message. For we all desire what Fanon wants.

3. *What does the black man want?*

At first sight, Fanon is rather hard on the “black man.” He is supposed to be a *good nigger* who even lacks the *advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell*. But Fanon’s anger is directed not towards the “black man” but the

proposition that he is required not only to be black but *he must be black in relation to the white man*. It is the internalization, or rather as Fanon calls it *epidermalization*, of this inferiority that concerns him. When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behavior is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man. It is the dynamic of inferiority that concerns Fanon; and which ultimately he wishes to eliminate. This is the declared intention of his study: *to enable the man of color to understand ... the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Negro*.

Whiteness, Fanon asserts, has become a symbol of purity, of *Justice, Truth, Virginity*. It defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human. That is why *the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom; when he has fought for Liberty and Justice ... these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters*. Blackness represents the diametrical opposite: in the collective unconsciousness, it stands for *ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality*. Even the dictionary definition of white means clean and pure. We can find, in *Roget's Thesaurus*, over 134 synonyms for whiteness, most with positive connotations. In contrast, *Roget's Thesaurus* tells us black means dirty, prohibited and funereal. It provides 120 synonyms for black and blackness, none with positive connotation. This is why a white lie is excusable; and black lie is all that is wicked and evil. Evolution itself moves from black to white. Indeed, even the Merciful God is white, with a bushy beard and bright pink cheeks. The conclusion: *One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent*. And the corollary: *he is Negro who is immoral*. To become moral in this scheme of the universe, Fanon tells us, it is necessary to cease being a Negro, cease being true to history and himself.

But Fanon's anger is not directed simply at *the black man who wants to turn his race white*. He is equally dismissive of

the man who adores the Negro: he is *as "sick" as the man who abominates him*. The idealized Negro is equally a construction of the white man. He represents the flip side of the Enlightenment: he is constructed not as a real person with real history but an image. The idealized Negro, the noble savage, is the product of utopian thinkers, such as Sir Thomas More, who comes from "No place" and is in the end "No person." This Negro was born out of the need of European humanism to rescue itself from its moral purgatory and project itself, and displace, the original inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, Fanon does not look on lovers of Negros with favor.

Liberation begins by recognizing these constructions for what they are. The first impulse at the arrival of awareness is self-loathing: *as I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro*. Here, Fanon is articulating a common feeling. If all you represent—your history, your culture, your very self—is nothing but ugly, naïve and wicked, then it is not surprising that you do not see yourself in a kindly manner. But this *neurotic situation* is not the route to emancipation. There is only one solution: *to rise above the absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach out for the universal*.

So the first thing that the black man wants is to say no. *No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom*. And, above all, *no to those who attempt to build a definition of him*.

While it is understandable, Fanon asserts, that the first action of the black man is a reaction, it is necessary to go beyond. But the next step brings us face to face with a dilemma. Should the black man define himself in reaction to the white man thus confirming the white man as a measure of all things? Or should one *strive unremittingly for a concrete and ever new understanding of man*? Where is the true mode of resistance actually located? How should the black man speak for himself?

4. *To speak means ... above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization*

The black man speaks with a European language. He becomes *proportionately whiter in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language*; or indeed, any western language, nowadays most particularly English. So, almost immediately, the black man is presented with a problem: how to posit a “black self” in a language and discourse in which blackness itself is at best a figure of absence, or worse a total reversion? The problem, however, is not limited simply to the use of language. When a black man arrives in France it is not only the language that changes him. He is changed also *because it is from France that he received his knowledge of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire, but also because France gave him his physicians, his department head, his innumerable little functionaries*. At issue is thus not just language but also the civilization of the white man.

Fanon uses “white” as a generic term for *European civilization and its representatives*.

In contrast, “black” refers to the non-West in general. The question then becomes: can the non-West develop its own self-definition by using the tools and instruments of western civilization? In human sciences, Fanon detects a problem: they have *their own drama*. They have emerged from a particular cultural milieu and reflect the concerns and prejudices of that culture and worldview. If western civilization and culture are *responsible for colonial racism*, and *Europe itself has a racist structure*, then we should not be too surprised to find this racism reflected in the discourses of knowledge that emanate from this civilization and that they work to ensure that structural dominance is maintained. The seeds of inferiority of the non-West are already laid in the *first chapter of history that the others have compiled for me, the foundation of cannibalism has been made eminently plain in order that I may not lose sight of it*. But western history not only writes cannibalism in the very chromosomes of the non-West, it also writes off the history of the non-West. History, both History of the West and History as perceived by the West, is

transformed into a mighty river into which all Other histories flow and merge as mere minor and irrelevant tributaries. What Fanon detects in human sciences applies equally to social sciences. Anthropology was developed specifically to describe, manage and contain the black man. Political science places white man at the apex and is deeply Eurocentric. Science and Empire went hand in hand: the consequent racial economy of science, where its benefits accrue primarily to the rich developed nations and its negative consequences are suffered largely by the developing countries, are patently plain. What Fanon says about the comics of the 1950s, *the magazines are put together by white men for little white men*, with their white heroes and evil black villains, works just as effectively in the way disciplines are taught, discourses are promoted, and knowledge is advanced. In all these areas *there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly ... work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world*. All these disciplines and discourses are the products of a culture which sees itself hierarchically at the top of the ladder of civilization; they postulate all that the world contains and all that the world has produced and produces, is by and for the white man. This is why it is taken as an a priori given that the white man is the *predestined master of this world*.

But the dominance of western culture, and its globalization through this dominance, should not be confused with universalism. Just because a particular discipline or a discourse is accepted or practiced throughout the world, it does not mean that discipline or discourse is universally valid and applicable to all societies. After all, as I have written elsewhere,⁴ burgers and coke are eaten and drunk throughout the world but one would hardly classify them as universally embraced, healthy and acceptable food: what the presence of burgers and coke in every city and town in the world demonstrate is not their universality but the power and dominance of the culture that produced them. The same logic applies to disciplines and discourses. When Fanon talks of universalism he is not talking of the alleged universalism of western dominance which is a product of European history, emerges from western

discourses, or is the gift of liberal humanists of the Enlightenment. His thinking lies elsewhere.

So what does Fanon mean when he wants to transcend his ethnic perspectives and affiliation and wage his anti-colonial struggle in the name of universal human values? What are we to make of the fact that he also sometimes roundly denounces this universalism? Some postcolonial theorists have seen this as two different varieties of Fanon. Nicolas Harrison, for example, suggests the way to reconcile “these two distinct strains within Fanon’s writing, which is at times anti-universal and at times pro-universal (and anti-pseudo-universal) is to relativize/historicize them in terms of personal history and the changes in opinion that his experiences produced. Another would be to treat his varied claims as a writer’s rhetorical and/or strategic gestures, and to consider their efficacy in mobilizing opinion, generating solidarity, etc.”⁵ But Fanon is not anti-universal per se—he is only anti a particular kind of universalism, one based on the notion of superiority which projects that superiority as a universal discourse. His stated purpose in examining (western) universalism is clear: *I hope by analyzing it to destroy it*. There are not two contradictory but one single, unified position here. Moreover, Fanon is not concerned at all with postmodern ambiguity; it could hardly be so given the devastating dominance of the colonizer he experienced firsthand. For him, the nuances in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized are irrelevant given the fact that the colonizer is totally deaf to the political condition of the colonized and what the colonized has to say.

Fanon’s idea of universalism is based on the notions of dignity, equality and equity: on *a concrete and ever new understanding of man*. It is a universalism that does not exist as yet, it cannot emerge from the dominant discourse, and it cannot be seen as a grand narrative that privileges a particular culture and its representatives. It is the universalism we need to struggle for and build. That is why Fanon is not content simply with knowledge and criticism. He wants man—and here he does mean man as the universal person—to be *actional*. Having thought, we must prepare to act. Our prime task as humans, he asserts, is to

preserve in all our relationships *the respect for the basic values that constitute a human world*. The world is not human. Don't believe that *appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality*, Fanon asserts. If you want a different reality, a different world, you have to change the one you have.

5. *What matters is not to know the world but to change it*

Fanon was not a postmodern theorist. His ideas emerged in the crucible of colonial experience, were put into practice, and used to aid the anti-colonial struggle. Indeed, by the time Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks*, he had already fought for the French resistance in the Caribbean and against the Germans in France. He had lived in a racist society and felt its dark side; he spoke with knowledge and experience. He is thus quite different from most postcolonial writers. But can we see him as the intellectual father of postcolonial studies? As Jenny Sharpe notes, Fanon and other anti-colonial writers, such as C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire, Amílcar Cabral, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Albert Memmi, "were geographically and historically removed from the institutional development of postcolonial studies. Unlike the literature of decolonization, which was bound up with Third World national liberation movements of the sixties and seventies, postcolonial studies is primarily a First World academic discourse of the eighties and nineties."⁶ Fanon did not have the luxury for theorizing for the sake of theorizing. And unlike many postcolonial texts, *Black Skin, White Masks* is not a technical manual of theory full of esoteric—but ultimately futile—jargon. Rather, it is a text full of passion, argument, analysis and anecdotes. Fanon wants to show that action does not follow automatically from understanding or theorizing. Action requires aspiration and desire. That's what he seeks to communicate; that's what he tries to promote.

A great deal has changed since Fanon's time. But the underlying structures of oppression and injustice remain the same. Empire shaped the current national identity of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. And Empire continues to play a key role in the psychological makeup, political and cultural

outlook of Africa and Asia. The old European empires have been replaced by a new Empire, a hyperpower that wants to rule and mould the world in its own image. Its “war on terror” has become a license to flout every international law and notion of human rights. Racism, both in its most blatant and incipient forms, is the foundation of Fortress Europe—as is so evident in the re-emergence of the extreme right in Germany and Holland, France and Belgium, as well as Scandinavia, and the discourse of refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers and the Muslim population of Europe. Direct colonial rule may have disappeared; but colonialism, in its many disguises as cultural, economic, political and knowledge-based oppression, lives on.

So Fanon’s voice is as important and relevant today as it was during the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, in many respects it is even more so. For Fanon, the nature and mode of operation of oppression is irrelevant. *It is utopian to try to ascertain in what ways one kind of inhuman behavior differs from another kind of inhuman behavior.* The inhumanity of today is not different from the inhumanity of yesteryears for *all sources of exploitation resemble one another; they are all applied against the same “object”: man.* We need to do much more, Fanon insists, than simply be aware of this reality: we need to take continuous action to transform and transcend this reality.

As a critique of the West, *Black Skin, White Masks* has few equals. But its true value is as a clarion call against complacency. Fanon warns us to be perpetually on guard against the European unconscious where *the most shameful desires lie dormant*; against modern society where *life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt*, and which spells death; against the idea of progress where everyone *climbs up towards whiteness and light* and is engulfed by a single, monolithic notion of what it means to be human. And, most of all, he warns us to be vigilant to the constant and perpetual refashioning of hate: *hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. Hate demands existence, and he who hates has to*

show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; in a sense, he has to become hate.

This message is as fresh today as when it was written. Fanon was far, far ahead of his time. This is why he is disliked by some. This is why he is misunderstood by others. This is exactly why you should know him and listen to what he says. And if you recognize yourself in his words, then like him, I say, you *have made a step forward*.

Notes

1. Malek Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society* (Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1987), p. 53.
2. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 30.
3. Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (London, Verso, 1997), p. 145.
4. For a more detailed discussion of this see my essay "Beyond development: an Islamic perspective," in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, edited by Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell (London, Pluto Press, 2003); and Vinay Lal, *Empire of Knowledge* (London, Pluto Press, 2002).
5. Nicolas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism* (Oxford, Polity, 2003), p. 158.
6. Jenny Sharpe, "US Multiculturalism," in *Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), p. 114.

FOREWORD TO THE 1986 EDITION

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Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!
Black Skin, White Masks

In the popular memory of English socialism the mention of Frantz Fanon stirs a dim, deceiving echo. *Black Skin, White Masks*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, *Toward the African Revolution*—these memorable titles reverberate in the self-righteous rhetoric of “resistance” whenever the English left gathers, in its narrow church or its Trotskyist camps, to deplore the immiseration of the colonized world. Repeatedly used as the idioms of simple moral outrage, Fanon’s titles emptily echo a political spirit that is far from his own; they sound the troubled conscience of a socialist vision that extends, in the main, from an ethnocentric little Englandism to a large trade union internationalism. When that laborist line of vision is challenged by the “autonomous” struggles of the politics of race and gender, or threatened by problems of human psychology or cultural representation, it can only make an empty gesture of solidarity. Whenever questions of race and sexuality make their own organizational and theoretical demands on the primacy of “class,” “state” and “party” the language of traditional socialism is quick to describe those urgent, “other” questions as symptoms of petty-bourgeois deviation, signs of the bad faith of socialist intellectuals. The ritual respect accorded to the name of Fanon, the currency of his titles in the common language of liberation, are part of the ceremony of a polite, English refusal.

There has been no substantial work on Fanon in the history of the *New Left Review*; one piece in the *New Statesman*; one essay in *Marxism Today*; one article in *Socialist Register*; one short book by an English author. Of late, the memory of Fanon has been kept alive in the activist traditions of *Race and Class*, by A. Sivanandan's stirring indictments of state racism. Edward Said, himself a scholar engage, has richly recalled the work of Fanon in his important T.S. Eliot memorial lectures, *Culture and Imperialism*. And finally, Stephan Feuchtwang's fine, far-reaching essay, "Fanon's Politics of Culture" (*Economy and Society*) examines Fanon's concept of culture with its innovatory insights for a non-deterministic political organization of the psyche. Apart from these exceptions, in Britain today Fanon's ideas are effectively "out of print."

Memories of Fanon tend to the mythical. He is either revered as the prophetic spirit of Third World Liberation or reviled as an exterminating angel, the inspiration to violence in the Black Power movement. Despite his historic participation in the Algerian revolution and the influence of his ideas on the race politics of the 1960s and 1970s, Fanon's work will not be possessed by one political moment or movement, nor can it be easily placed in a seamless narrative of liberationist history. Fanon refuses to be so completely claimed by events or eventualities. It is the sustaining irony of his work that his severe commitment to the political task in hand, never restricted the restless, inquiring movement of his thought.

It is not for the finitude of philosophical thinking nor for the finality of a political direction that we turn to Fanon. Heir to the ingenuity and artistry of Toussaint and Senghor, as well as the iconoclasm of Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre, Fanon is the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth. He may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change: from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality.

To read Fanon is to experience the sense of division that prefigures—and fissures—the emergence of a truly radical thought

that never dawns without casting an uncertain dark. His voice is most clearly heard in the subversive turn of a familiar term, in the silence of a sudden rupture: "*The Negro is not. Any more than the white man.*" The awkward division that breaks his line of thought keeps alive the dramatic and enigmatic sense of the process of change. That familiar alignment of colonial subjects—Black/White, Self/Other—is disturbed with one brief pause and the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed, whenever they are found to rest in the narcissistic myths of Negritude or White cultural supremacy. It is this palpable pressure of division and displacement that pushes Fanon's writing to the edge of things; the cutting edge that reveals no ultimate radiance but, in his words, "exposes an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born."

The psychiatric hospital at Blida-Joinville is one such place where, in the divided world of French Algeria, Fanon discovered the impossibility of his mission as a colonial psychiatrist:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization ... The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.

The extremity of this colonial alienation of the person—this end of the "idea" of the individual—produces a restless urgency in Fanon's search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation. The body of his work splits between a Hegelian–Marxist dialectic, a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the Unconscious, its turning from love to hate, mastery to servitude. In his desperate, doomed search for a dialectic of deliverance Fanon explores the edge of these modes for thought: his Hegelianism restores hope to history; his existentialist evocation of the "I" restores the presence of the marginalized; and his psychoanalytic framework illuminates the "madness" of racism, the pleasure of pain, the agonistic fantasy of political power.

As Fanon attempts such audacious, often impossible, transformations of truth and value, the jagged testimony of colonial dislocation, its displacement of time and person, its defilement of culture and territory, refuses the ambition of any “total” theory of colonial oppression. The Antillean *evolué* cut to the quick by the glancing look of a frightened, confused, White child; the stereotype of the native fixed at the shifting boundaries between barbarism and civility; the insatiable fear and desire for the Negro: “Our women are at the mercy of Negroes ... God knows how they make love”; the deep cultural fear of the Black figured in the psychic trembling of Western sexuality—it is these signs and symptoms of the colonial condition that drive Fanon from one conceptual scheme to another, while the colonial relation takes shape in the gaps between them, articulated in the intrepid engagements of his style. As Fanon’s text unfolds, the “scientific” fact comes to be aggressed by the experience of the street; sociological observations are intercut with literary artefacts, and the poetry of liberation is brought up short against the leaden, deadening prose of the colonized world ...

What is this distinctive *force* of Fanon’s vision that has been forming even as I write about the division, the displacement, the cutting edge of his thought? It comes, I believe, from the tradition of the oppressed, as Walter Benjamin suggests; it is the language of a revolutionary awareness that “the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that is in keeping with this insight.” And the state of emergency is also always a state *of emergence*. The struggle against colonial oppression changes not only the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist “idea” of time as a progressive, ordered whole. The analysis of colonial de-personalization alienates not only the Enlightenment idea of “Man,” but challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge. If the order of Western historicism is disturbed in the colonial state of emergency, even more deeply disturbed is the social and psychic representation of the human subject. For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that “naked declivity”

it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning. With a question that echoes Freud's *what does woman want?*, Fanon turns to confront the colonized world. "What does a man want?" he asks, in the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, "What does the black man want?"

To this loaded question where cultural alienation bears down on the ambivalence of psychic identification, Fanon responds with an agonizing performance of self-images:

I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema ... I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects ... I took myself far off from my own presence ... What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?

From within the metaphor of vision complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man emerges the displacement of the colonial relation. The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space for the *Socius*; its present, dismembered and dislocated, will not contain the image of identity that is questioned in the dialectic of mind/body and resolved in the epistemology of "appearance and reality." The White man's eyes break up the Black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed.

"What does the black man *want?*" Fanon insists and in privileging the psychic dimension he changes not only what we understand by a *political* demand but transforms the very means by which we recognize and identify its *human agency*. Fanon is not principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moment. He is not raising the question of colonial man in the universalist terms of the liberal-humanist ("How does colonialism deny the Rights of Man?");

nor is he posing an ontological question about Man's being ("Who is the alienated colonial man?"). Fanon's question is not addressed to such a unified notion of history nor such a unitary concept of Man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provide a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. Such a traditional sociological alignment of Self and Society or History and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon's identification of the colonial subject who is historicized as it comes to be heterogeneously inscribed in the texts of history, literature, science, myth. The colonial subject is always "overdetermined from without," Fanon writes. It is through image and fantasy—those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious—that Fanon most profoundly evokes the colonial condition.

In articulating the problem of colonial cultural alienation in the psychoanalytic language of demand and desire, Fanon radically questions the formation of both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of Social Sovereignty. The social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, the autonomy of individual consciousness assume an immediate, Utopian identity with the subjects upon whom they confer a civil status. The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will—Law or Culture—where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression—madness, self-hate, treason, violence—can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man.

For Fanon such a myth of Man and Society is fundamentally undermined in the colonial situation where everyday life exhibits a “constellation of delirium” that mediates the normal social relations of its subjects: “The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.” Fanon’s demand for a psychoanalytic explanation emerges from the perverse reflections of “civic virtue” in the alienating acts of colonial governance: the visibility of cultural “mummification” in the colonizer’s avowed ambition to civilize or modernize the native which results in “archaic inert institutions [that function] under the oppressor’s supervision like a caricature of formerly fertile institutions”; or the validity of violence in the very definition of the colonial social space; or the viability of the febrile, fantasmatic images of racial hatred that come to be absorbed and acted out in the wisdom of the West. These interpositions, indeed collaborations of political and psychic violence *within* civic virtue, alienation within identity, drive Fanon to describe the splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and society as marked by a “Manichean delirium.”

The representative figure of such a perversion, I want to suggest, is the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. This ambivalent identification of the racist world—moving on two planes without being in the least embarrassed by it, as Sartre says of the anti-Semitic consciousness—turns on the idea of Man *as* his alienated image, not Self and Other but the “Other-ness” of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity. And it is that bizarre figure of desire, which splits along the axis on which it turns, that compels Fanon to put the psychoanalytic question of the desire of the subject to the historic condition of colonial man.

“What is often called the black soul is a white man’s artefact,” Fanon writes. This transference, I’ve argued, speaks otherwise. It reveals the deep psychic uncertainty of the colonial relation itself; its split representations stage that division of “body” and

“soul” which enacts the artifice of “identity”; a division which cuts across the fragile skin – black and white—of individual and social authority. What emerges from the figurative language I have used to make such an argument are three conditions that underlie an understanding of the *process of identification* in the analytic of desire.

First: to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness, its look or locus. It is a demand that reaches outward to an external object and as J. Rose writes, “it is the relation of this demand to the place of the object it claims that becomes the basis for identification.” This process is visible in that exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal: “when their glances meet he [the settler] ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, “They want to take our place.” It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place.” It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: that is, in part, the fantasmatic space of possession” that no one subject can singly occupy which permits the dream of the inversion of roles.

Second: the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s *avenging* anger. “Black skins, white masks” is not, for example, a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *evolué* (an abandonment neurotic, Fanon claims) to accept the colonizer’s invitation to identity: “You’re a doctor, a writer, a student, you’re *different* you’re one of *us*.” It is precisely in that ambivalent use of “different”—to be different from those that are different makes you the same—that the Unconscious speaks of the form of Otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. It is not the Colonialist Self or the Colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the White man’s artifice inscribed on the black man’s body. It is in relation to this

impossible object that emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes.

Finally, as has already been disclosed by the rhetorical figures of my account of desire and Otherness, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an “image” of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification—that is, to be *for* an Other—entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of Otherness. Identification, as we inferred from the illustrations above, is always the return of an image of identity which bears the mark of splitting in that “Other” place from which it comes. For Fanon, like Lacan, the primary moments of such a repetition of the self lie in the desire of the look and the limits of language. The “atmosphere of certain uncertainty” that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment.

Look a Negro ... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened ... I could no longer laugh, because I already know there were legends, stories, history and above all *historicity* ... Then assailed at various points, the corporal schema crumbled its place taken by a racial epidermal schema ... It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person ... I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors.

In reading *Black Skin, White Masks* it is crucial to respect the difference between “personal identity” as an intimation of reality, or an intuition of being, and the psychoanalytic problem of identification that, in a sense, always begs the question of the subject—“What does a man want?” The emergence of the human subject as socially and psychically authenticated depends upon the *negation* of an originary narrative of fulfilment or an imaginary coincidence between individual interest or instinct and the General Will. Such binary, two-part, identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other which is confronted in the language of desire by the psychoanalytic process of identification. For identification, identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access

to an “image” of totality. The discursive conditions of this psychic image of identification will be clarified if we think of the perilous perspective of the concept of the image itself. For the image—as point of identification—marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split—it makes *present* something that is *absent*—and temporally deferred—it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition. The image is only ever an *appurtenance* to authority and identity; it must never be read mimetically as the “appearance” of a “reality.” The access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the *negation* of any sense of originality or plenitude, through the principle of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence; representation/repetition) that always renders it a liminal reality. The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss. It is precisely from this edge of meaning and being, from this shifting boundary of otherness within identity, that Fanon asks: “What does a *black* man want?”

When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire ... As soon as I desire I ask to be considered. I am not merely here and now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity—in so far as I pursue something other than life ...

I occupied space. I moved towards the other ... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea.

From that overwhelming emptiness of nausea Fanon makes his answer: the black man wants the objectifying confrontation with otherness; in the colonial psyche there is an unconscious disavowal of the negating, splitting moment of desire. The place of the Other must not be imaged as Fanon sometimes suggests as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity—cultural or psychic—that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the “cultural” to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality. If, as I have suggested, the subject of desire is

never simply a *Myself*, then the Other is never simply an *It-self*, a font of identity, truth, or misrecognition.

As a principle of identification, the Other bestows a degree of objectivity but its representation—be it the social process of the Law or the psychic process of the Oedipus—is always ambivalent, disclosing a lack. For instance, the common, conversational distinction between “the letter and spirit” of the Law displays the otherness of Law itself; the ambiguous gray area between “Justice” and judicial procedure is, quite literally, a conflict of judgment. In the language of psychoanalysis, the Law of the Father or the paternal metaphor, again, cannot be taken at its word. It is a process of substitution and exchange that inscribes a normative, normalizing place for the subject; but that metaphoric access to identity is exactly the place of prohibition and repression, precisely a conflict of authority. Identification, as it is spoken in the *desire of the Other*, is always a question of interpretation for it is the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self, the elision of person and place.

If the differentiating force of the Other is the process of the subject’s signification in language and society’s objectification in Law, then how can the Other disappear? Can desire, the moving spirit of the subject, ever evanesce?

In his more analytic mode Fanon can impede the exploration of these ambivalent, uncertain questions of colonial desire. The state of emergency from which he writes demands more insurgent answers, more immediate identifications. At times Fanon attempts too close a correspondence between the *mise-en-scène* of unconscious fantasy and the phantoms of racist fear and hate that stalk the colonial scene, he turns too hastily from the ambivalences of identification to the antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination; he is too quick to name the Other, to personalize its presence in the language of colonial racism—“the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely.” These attempts, in Fanon’s words, to restore the dream to its proper political time and cultural space, can, at times, blunt the edge of Fanon’s brilliant illustrations of the complexity of psychic projections in

the pathological colonial relation. Jean Veneuse, the Antillean *evolué*, desires not merely to be in the place of the White man but compulsively seeks to look back and down on himself from that position. The White man does not merely deny what he fears and desires by projecting it on “them”; Fanon sometimes forgets that paranoia never preserves its position of power for the compulsive identification with a persecutory “They” is always an evacuation and emptying of the “I”.

Fanon’s sociodiagnostic psychiatry tends to explain away the ambivalent turns and returns of the subject of colonial desire, its masquerade of Western Man and the “long” historical perspective. It is as if Fanon is fearful of his most radical insights: that the space of the body and its identification is a representational reality; that the politics of race will not be entirely contained within the humanist myth of man or economic necessity or historical progress, for its psychic affects questions such forms of determinism; that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are only realizable in the order of Otherness. It is as if the question of desire that emerged from the traumatic tradition of the oppressed has to be denied, at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, to make way for an existentialist humanism that is as banal as it is beatific:

Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? ... At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness.

Such a deep hunger for humanism, despite Fanon’s insight into the dark side of Man, must be an overcompensation for the closed consciousness or “dual narcissism” to which he attributes the depersonalization of colonial man: “There one lies body to body, with one’s blackness or one’s whiteness in full narcissistic cry, each sealed into his own particularity—with, it is true, now and then a flash or so.” It is this flash of “recognition”—in its Hegelian sense with its transcendental, sublimative spirit—that fails to ignite in the colonial relation where there is only narcissistic indifference: “And yet the Negro knows there is a difference. He wants it ... The former slave needs a challenge to his humanity.” In the absence of such a challenge, Fanon argues, the colonized can only imitate,

never identify, a distinction nicely made by the psychoanalyst Annie Reich: “It is imitation ... when the child holds the newspaper *like* his father. It is identification when the child learns to read.” In disavowing the culturally differentiated condition of the colonial world—in demanding *Turn White or disappear*—the colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoid identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution.

However Fanon’s Hegelian dream for a human reality *in-itself-for itself* is ironized, even mocked, by his view of the Manichean structure of colonial consciousness and its non-dialectical division. What he says in *The Wretched of the Earth* of the demography of the colonial city reflects his view of the psychic structure of the colonial relation. The native and settler zones, like the juxtaposition of black and white bodies, are opposed, but not in the service of “a higher unity.” No conciliation is possible, he concludes, for of the two terms one is superfluous.

No, there can be no reconciliation, no Hegelian “recognition,” no simple, sentimental promise of a humanistic “world of the You.” Can there be life without transcendence? Politics without the dream of perfectibility? Unlike Fanon, I think the *non-dialectical* moment of Manicheanism suggests an answer. By following the trajectory of colonial desire—in the company of that bizarre colonial figure, the tethered shadow—it becomes possible to cross, even to shift the Manichean boundaries. Where there is no human *nature* hope can hardly spring eternal; but it emerges surely and surreptitiously in the strategic return of that difference that informs and deforms the image of identity, in the margin of Otherness that displays identification. There may be no Hegelian negation but Fanon must sometimes be reminded that the disavowal of the Other always exacerbates the “edge” of identification, reveals that dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned. For denial is always a retroactive process; a *half* acknowledgment of that Otherness which has left its traumatic mark. In that uncertainty lurks the white masked black man; and from such ambivalent identification—black skin, white masks—it is possible, I believe, to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion. We cannot agree

with Fanon that “since the racial drama is played out in the open the black man has no time to make it unconscious,” but that is a provocative thought. In occupying two places at once—or three in Fanon’s case—the depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects. For the strategy of colonial desire is to stage the drama of identity at the point at which the black mask *slips* to reveal the white skin. At that edge, in between the black body and the white body, there is a tension of meaning and being, or some would say demand and desire, which is the psychic counterpart to that “muscular tension” that inhabits the native body:

The symbols of social order—the police, the bugle calls in the barracks, military parades and the waving flags—are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message “Don’t dare to budge”; rather, they cry out “Get ready to attack”.

It is from that tension—both psychic and political—that a strategy of subversion emerges. It is a mode of negation that seeks not to unveil the fullness of Man but to manipulate his representation. It is a form of power that is exercised at the very limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image; it is the lesson taught by the veiled Algerian woman in the course of the Revolution as she crossed the Manichean lines to claim her liberty. In Fanon’s essay *Algeria Unveiled* the colonizer’s attempt to unveil the Algerian woman does not simply turn the veil into a symbol of resistance; it becomes a technique of camouflage, a means of struggle—the veil conceals bombs. The veil that once secured the boundary of the home—the limits of woman—now masks the woman in her revolutionary activity, linking the Arab city and the French quarter, transgressing the familial and colonial boundary. As the “veil” is liberated in the public sphere, circulating between and beyond cultural and social norms and spaces, it becomes the object of paranoid surveillance and interrogation. Every veiled woman, writes Fanon, became suspect. And when the veil is shed in order to penetrate deeper into the European quarter, the colonial police see everything and

nothing. An Algerian woman is only, after all, a woman. But the Algerian *fidai* is an arsenal and in her handbag she carries her hand-grenades.

Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation. Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-mem-bering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. It is such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity, that Fanon reveals with greater profundity and poetry than any other writer. What he achieves, I believe, is something far greater: for in seeing the phobic image of the Negro, the native, the colonized, deeply woven into the psychic pattern of the West, he offers the master and slave a deeper reflection of their interpositions, as well as the hope of a difficult, even dangerous, freedom: "It is through the 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." Nobody writes with more honesty and insight of this lasting tension of freedom in which the self—the peremptory self of the present—disavows an image of itself as an ordinary past or an ideal future and confronts the paradox of its own making.

For Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, there is the intricate irony of turning the European existentialist and psychoanalytic traditions to face the history of the Negro which they had never contemplated, to face the reality of Fanon himself. This leads to a meditation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation—psychic and social—which speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who have to live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference. In shifting the focus of cultural racism from the politics of nationalism to the politics of narcissism, Fanon opens up a margin of interrogation that causes a subversive slippage of identity and authority. Nowhere is this slippage more visible than in his work itself where a range of texts and traditions—from the classical repertoire to the quotidien, conversational culture of racism—vie to utter that last word which remains unspoken.

Nowhere is this slippage more significantly experienced than in the impossibility of inferring from the texts of Fanon a pacific image of “society” or the “state” as a homogeneous philosophical or representational unity. The “social” is always an unresolved ensemble of antagonistic interlocutions between positions of power and poverty, knowledge and oppression, history and fantasy, surveillance and subversion. It is for this reason—above all else—in the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, that we should turn to Fanon.

In Britain, today, as a range of culturally and racially marginalized groups readily assume the mask of the Black not to deny their diversity but to audaciously announce the important artifice of cultural identity and its difference, the need for Fanon becomes urgent. As political groups from different directions gather under the banner of the Black, not to homogenize their oppression but to make of it a common cause, a public image of the identity of otherness, the need for Fanon becomes urgent. Urgent, in order to remind us of that crucial engagement between mask and identity, image and identification, from which comes the lasting tension of our freedom and the lasting impression of ourselves as others.

In the case of display ... the play of combat in the form of intimidation, the being gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield. It is through this separated form of himself that the being comes into play in his effects of life and death. [Jacques Lacan]

The time has come to return to Fanon; as always, I believe, with a question: How can the human world live its difference? how can a human being live Other-wise?

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Note

Fanon’s use of the word “man” usually connotes a phenomenological quality of humanness, inclusive of man and woman and, for that very reason, ignores the question of gender difference. The problem stems from Fanon’s desire to site the question of

sexual difference within the problematic of cultural difference—to give them a shared origin—which is suggestive, but often simplifies the question of sexuality. His portrayals of white women often collude with their cultural stereotypes and reduce the “desire” of sexuality to the desire for sex, leaving unexplored the elusive function of the “object” of desire. In chapter 6 he attempts a somewhat more complex reading of masochism but in making the Negro the “*predestined*” depository of this aggression” [my emphasis] he again pre-empts a fuller psychoanalytic discussion of the production of psychic aggressivity in identification and its relation to cultural difference, by citing the cultural stereotype as the predestined aim of the sexual drive. Of the woman of color he has very little to say. “I know nothing about her,” he writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*. This crucial issue requires an order of psychoanalytic argument that goes well beyond the scope of my foreword. I have therefore chosen to note the importance of the problem rather than to elide it in a facile charge of “sexism.”

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—C.L.M.

INTRODUCTION

I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.

—Aimé Césaire, Discours sur le Colonialisme

The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon . . . or too late.

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.

These things I am going to say, not shout. For it is a long time since shouting has gone out of my life.

So very long. . . .

Why write this book? No one has asked me for it.

Especially those to whom it is directed.

Well? Well, I reply quite calmly that there are too many idiots in this world. And having said it, I have the burden of proving it.

Toward a new humanism. . . .

Understanding among men. . . .

Our colored brothers. . . .

Mankind, I believe in you. . . .

Race prejudice. . . .

To understand and to love. . . .

From all sides dozens and hundreds of pages assail me and try to impose their wills on me. But a single line would be enough. Supply a single answer and the color problem would be stripped of all its importance.

What does a man want?

What does the black man want?

At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man.

There is 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 man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell

Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see too that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding. Man is a *yes* that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexists with him.

The black is a black man; that is, as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated.

The problem is important. I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself. We shall go very slowly, for there are two camps: the white and the black.

Stubbornly we shall investigate both metaphysics and we shall find that they are often quite fluid.

We shall have no mercy for the former governors, the former missionaries. To us, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him.

Conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites.

In the absolute, the black is no more to be loved than the Czech, and truly what is to be done is to set man free.

This book should have been written three years ago. . . . But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned. These truths do not have to be hurled in men's faces. They are not intended to ignite fervor. I do not trust fervor.

Every time it has burst out somewhere, it has brought fire, famine, misery. . . . And contempt for man.

Fervor is the weapon of choice of the impotent.

Of those who heat the iron in order to shape it at once. I should prefer to warm man's body and leave him. We might reach this result: mankind retaining this fire through self-combustion.

Mankind set free of the trampoline that is the resistance of others, and digging into its own flesh to find a meaning.

Only a few of those who read this book will understand the problems that were encountered in its composition.

In an age when skeptical doubt has taken root in the world, when in the words of a gang of *salauds* it is no longer possible to find the sense of non-sense, it becomes harder to penetrate to a level where the categories of sense and non-sense are not yet invoked.

The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level.

In the course of this essay we shall observe the development of an effort to understand the black-white relation.

The white man is sealed in his whiteness.

The black man in his blackness.

We shall seek to ascertain the directions of this dual narcissism and the motivations that inspire it.

At the beginning of my speculations it seems inappropriate to elaborate the conclusions that the reader will find.

Concern with the elimination of a vicious circle has been the only guide-line for my efforts.

There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.

There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.

How do we extricate ourselves?

A moment ago I spoke of narcissism. Indeed, I believe that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex. I shall attempt a complete lysis of this morbid body. I believe that the individual should tend to take on the universality inherent in the human condition. And when I say this, I am thinking impartially of men like Gobineau or women like Mayotte Capécia. But, in order to arrive at this judgment, it is imperative to eliminate a whole set of defects left over from childhood.

Man's tragedy, Nietzsche said, is that he was once a child. None the less, we cannot afford to forget that, as Charles Odier has shown us, the neurotic's fate remains in his own hands.

However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.

Before beginning the case, I have to say certain things. The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- primarily, economic;
- subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority.

Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny. In one sense, conforming to the view of Leconte and Damey,¹ let us say that this is a question of a sociodiagnostic.

What is the prognosis?

But society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure.

The black man must wage his war on both levels: Since historically they influence each other, any unilateral liberation is incomplete, and the gravest mistake would be to believe in their automatic interdependence. Besides, such a systematic tendency is contrary to the facts. This will be proved.

Reality, for once, requires a total understanding. On the objective level as on the subjective level, a solution has to be supplied.

1. M. Leconte and A. Damey, *Essai critique des nosographies psychiatriques actuelles*.

And to declare in the tone of “it’s-all-my-fault” that what matters is the salvation of the soul is not worth the effort.

There will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places.

It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves.

I should like to start from there. I shall try to discover the various attitudes that the Negro adopts in contact with white civilization.

The “jungle savage” is not what I have in mind. That is because for him certain factors have not yet acquired importance.

I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it.

Many Negroes will not find themselves in what follows.

This is equally true of many whites.

But the fact that I feel a foreigner in the worlds of the schizophrenic or the sexual cripple in no way diminishes their reality.

The attitudes that I propose to describe are real. I have encountered them innumerable times.

Among students, among workers, among the pimps of Pigalle or Marseille, I have been able to isolate the same components of aggressiveness and passivity.

This book is a clinical study. Those who recognize themselves in it, I think, will have made a step forward. I seriously hope to persuade my brother, whether black or white, to tear off with all his strength the shameful livery put together by centuries of incomprehension.

The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time. Ideally, the present will always contribute to the building of the future.

And this future is not the future of the cosmos but rather the future of my century, my country, my existence. In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the world that will come later. I belong irreducibly to my time.

And it is for my own time that I should live. The future should be an edifice supported by living men. This structure is connected to the present to the extent that I consider the present in terms of something to be exceeded.

The first three chapters deal with the modern Negro. I take the black man of today and I try to establish his attitudes in the white world. The last two chapters are devoted to an attempt at a psychopathological and philosophical explanation of the *state of being* a Negro.

The analysis is, above all, regressive.

The fourth and fifth chapters rest on a fundamentally different basis.

In the fourth chapter I examine a work² that in my opinion is dangerous. The author, O. Mannoni, is, moreover, aware of the ambiguity of his position. That perhaps is one of the merits of his evidence. He has tried to account for a situation. It is our right to say that we are not satisfied. It is our duty to show the author how we differ from him.

The fifth chapter, which I have called *The Fact of Blackness*, is important for more than one reason. It portrays the Negro face to face with his race. It will be observed that there is no common link between the Negro of this chapter and the Negro who wants to go to bed with a white woman. In the latter there is clearly a wish to be white. A lust for revenge, in any case. Here, in contrast, we observe the desperate struggles of a Negro who is driven to discover the meaning of black identity. White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro. I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact.

2. [Dominique] O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (New York, Praeger, 1964). Originally *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1950).

The educated Negro, slave of the spontaneous and cosmic Negro myth, feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him.

Or that he no longer understands it.

Then he congratulates himself on this, and enlarging the difference, the incomprehension, the disharmony, he finds in them the meaning of his real humanity. Or more rarely he wants to belong to his people. And it is with rage in his mouth and abandon in his heart that he buries himself in the vast black abyss. We shall see that this attitude, so heroically absolute, renounces the present and the future in the name of a mystical past.

Since I was born in the Antilles, my observations and my conclusions are valid only for the Antilles—at least concerning the black man *at home*. Another book could be dedicated to explaining the differences that separate the Negro of the Antilles from the Negro of Africa. Perhaps one day I shall write it. Perhaps too it will no longer be necessary—a fact for which we could only congratulate ourselves.