

**Fanon Matters:**  
Relevance of Frantz Fanon's  
Intellectual and Political Work for  
Peace Studies

**Doctoral Thesis**

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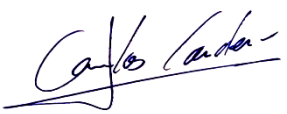



**Doctoral Programme in International Studies in Peace, Conflict and  
Development**

**Doctorate School of the Universitat Jaume I**

**Fanon Matters: Relevance of Frantz Fanon's Intellectual and  
Political Work for Peace Studies**

A dissertation submitted by Carlos Javier Cordero Pedrosa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Peace Studies at the Universitat Jaume I

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### **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the work of Frantz Fanon as a philosopher, psychiatrist, playwright, social and political theorist and anticolonial revolutionary. It is submitted to an academic program focused on peace studies to make a case for the relevance of Fanon's intellectual and political work in this field of study and its related practices.

Keywords: Fanon, decolonization, racism, colonialism, peace studies

### **ABSTRACT:**

La presente tesis propone una exploración de la obra de Frantz Fanon como filósofo, psiquiatra, dramaturgo, teórico político y social, y revolucionario anticolonial. Esta tesis se presenta a un programa académico en estudios de paz con la intención de argumentar la relevancia del trabajo intelectual y político de Fanon en dicha disciplina y las prácticas asociadas a ellas.

Palabras clave: Fanon, decolonización, racismo, colonialismo, estudios de paz

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When history is written as it ought to be written, it is the moderation and long patience of the masses at which men will wonder, not their ferocity. (C.L.R James-

*The Black Jacobins*)

Let us banish from our minds the thought that this is an unfortunate victim of injustice. The very concept of injustice rests upon a premise of equal claims, and this

boy here today makes no claim upon you. (Richard Wright- *Native Son*)

At the end of this work, we would like the reader to feel, as we, the open dimension of every consciousness. (Frantz Fanon- *Black Skin, White Masks*)

## **Introduction**

### **Aims and context**

This dissertation explores the work of Frantz Fanon as a philosopher, psychiatrist, playwright, social and political theorist and anticolonial revolutionary. It is submitted to an academic program focused on peace studies to make a case for the relevance of Fanon's intellectual and political work in this field of study and its related practices. In the field of peace studies, with few exceptions (Omar, 2006), he is mostly approached as a figure than as a thinker, reduced to a thinker of revolutionary violence, or locked in his time and context, that of independence wars in Africa in the 1960's. This is concomitant to the absence of themes that Fanon addressed in his work, such as questions of race, racism, or colonialism, not only as objects of study or as an historical period, but as informing knowledge production itself. The absence on matters of race, racism and "coloniality" in peace studies has been pointed out (Azarmandi, 2016, 2018) yet not addressed. I shall address these aspects in the detailed discussion of the various facets and strands of Fanon's work, and through the work of other thinkers who preceded him and came after him. However, it falls beyond the objectives of this thesis to delve on the debates regarding the history, the conceptualizations of race, or on the different understandings of what racism is and how it works.

Likewise, this dissertation could be situated as a response to the calls in peace studies to pay attention to the thought from the Global South. This implies considering the endemic forms of war, not in a strict military sense, but as the structural social condition experienced in the periphery and affecting the everyday lives, social relations, and subjectivities (Pureza and Cravo, 2005). In that vein, Tatiana Moura (2005) called "newest wars" to the urban conflicts, forms of

exclusion, ghettoization, and widespread different forms violence, in which the conditions of violence and peace are indistinguishable. Fanon's analysis prioritizes the everyday experience of living amidst different forms of violence, although in relation to concrete historical and social structures. In any case, the importance of the "newest war" for this dissertation may not lie in the concept or what it describes, but in the sense that it expands conventional definitions of war as armed struggle, interstate or intrastate warfare. From an anticolonial perspective, these newest wars may be not so new. In both its colonial and postcolonial manifestations, racism has been defined as a "state of war" (Gordon, 1995), enmeshed in a broader "paradigm of war" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008), a "death project" (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016) or as "necropolitics" (Mbembe, 2003). Equating racism with war does not attempt to reduce racism to direct violence. But as we will see in Chapter 1, racism normalizes the abnormal and the extraordinary is turned into the ordinary condition of everyday life (Fanon, 1964; Gordon, 1995; Maldonado-Torres, 2008). As Fanon puts it, racism turns the everyday of the black into "hellish circle", in which health, lives and forms of lives are threatened, and subjectivity, self-understanding, sexuality, family relations, the visit to the doctor, being a student or working as a doctor are vitiated, and the capacity to act in the world and in history, to generate culture, and to produce healthy human relations are thwarted (Fanon, 1952: 14; my translation<sup>1</sup>).

This dissertation could be also situated within the commitment of the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace to relieve the suffering between humans and with nature. Johan Galtung establishes a parallelism between health studies and peace studies. They both proceed from diagnosis to prognosis to therapy. Health is understood as

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<sup>1</sup> « cercle infernal. »

peace and violence as disease, whereas therapy, for Galtung, entails the restoration of a system to a previous state of well-being (1996:1).

In Fanon such simile is not only metaphorical and the process from diagnostic to therapy is not straightforward. I approach Fanon as a thinker of health: of social health, and of the interconnections between mental and social health, of the interrelation between history, politics and subjectivity, of the dehumanization upon which racism and colonialism are grounded, and the predicaments of the restoration of humanity. Thinking from the intersection between the medical and the political Fanon first puts under examination the methods, theories, and disciplines with which he has to carry out the diagnostic. In other words, if he analyzed the problems of black people with the philosophical, social, political thought and psychiatric theories, which, not only did not pay attention to the black condition, but also were built upon their dehumanization, he would obtain the same result, the construction of inferior and pathological types of human. For Fanon, the social meaning of health and disease cannot be established a priori. Fanon defines racist societies as “Manichean” (1961) and for Gordon (2000, 2007, 2015), in a similar vein, are characterized by a theodicean grammar: In a racist system, *health* is not at odds with the dehumanization of the black. A society can be considered peaceful and just on the grounds of its violence against certain populations. The exploitation and dehumanization of black and colonized people were not unjust or violent; they were part of the normative understanding of normality and health. In a racist normative framework, the standards of humanity, the meaning of health and disease, the conception normality and abnormality are different for the black and for the white, for the European for the colonized. The alienated black is normal in such context. Thus, he faces the question of what it means for a black to be normal as a human, and what entails healing in a

setting of oppression. If the role of psychiatry is to adapt the patients to society, his psychiatric practices would entail the production of harmed and alienated subjects.

Achille Mbembe identifies in Fanon “three clinics of the real”, namely, Nazism, colonialism and the metropolitan France, as the encounters with violence, racism and dehumanization against which Fanon articulated his thought, crafted his language, and issued his injunction to heal. (2011:9; my translation<sup>2</sup>). There could be a fourth clinic of the real ingrained within the previous three, the psychiatric hospital. The encounter with madness and alienation, with the violence of the hospital and of psychiatry, with the suffering bodies and minds in the consultation room also shaped his political and social thought. These clinics of the real are not discrete entities; Fanon has also to be considered in motion. Fanon was also a migrant, a black Caribbean migrant. Like other black thinkers, he wrote in the movement between the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. To be more precise, his thought is nourished by childhood and adolescence in his native island of Martinique, the experience as a volunteer soldier in the World War II, his studies of psychiatry and philosophy in France, his work as a psychiatrist with Francesc Tosquelles in Saint-Alban, and later in Algeria and in Tunis, his participation in the Congresses of Black Writers in Rome and Paris, in psychiatric conferences, his involvement in the anticolonial revolution first as a doctor and then as a journalist for the FLN and as ambassador for the Algerian government in Ghana. All these vital experiences shape his thought and appear intermingled in his work.

### **Relevance**

To say that Fanon matters, and that Fanon’s matters matter, is to say that the different political and social urgencies that he faced, and the intellectual and practical

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<sup>2</sup> «trois cliniques du réel »

questions and responses that he offered call for require attention. In other words, there are political and social problems that ought to be addressed, and there are forms of knowledge that need to be known.

The vitality of Fanon's work today can be attested with the engagement of his work inside and outside academia. Without being exhaustive, Fanon is discussed today in settings as disparate and distant from his original context of enunciation such as the War on Terror (Anghie, 2004; Williams, 2010), the North African spring (Alessandrini, 2014), Black Lives Matter (Gibson 2016), South African postapartheid (More, 2017), student movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (Gibson 2016) and shackdwellers movements (Gibson, 2011), suicide bombing (Abraham, 2013) or the dilemmas of nonviolence (Alessandrini, 2014) in Palestine, developments in Gabon (Tonda, 2016) and Nigeria (Hansen and Musa, 2013), Islamophobia and torture, and new and historical forms of colonialism in the Pacific islands (Austin et. al, 2013), psychiatry and the pathologization of Māori resistance (Cohen, 2014), mental health of indigenous in Australia (Molloy and Grootjans, 2014), or the traps of recognition in the emancipation of First Nations in Canada (Coulthard, 2014), the experience of contemporary migration and its ties with colonialism (Taliani, 2012).

Since 2014 until the completion of this dissertation, twelve books have appeared exploring the work of Fanon from different theoretical angles, delving on different themes and from a variety of disciplines (Gordon, 2014; Coulthard, 2014; Bird-Pollan, 2015; Gordon, 2015; Hudis, 2015; Zeiling, 2015; Batchelor and Harding, 2017; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017; Burman, 2018; Marriott, 2018; Byrd and Miri, 2020; Turner and Neville, 2020). As recent as 2015 a collection of Fanon's unpublished work, *Écrits sur l'ailénation et la liberté*, including two stage plays, his

doctoral dissertation, his psychiatric writings and additional political texts written for the journal of the Algerian anticolonial movement were published, and its English translation, *Alienation and Freedom*, appeared in 2018. To that, it has to be added, the different special volumes in journals and conferences. There may be an intensification of engagement with Fanon's thought and expansion of the topics and the approaches, but not reappearance or retrieval. As we will see in the first chapter, Fanon's thought has been differently, although consistently, addressed and studied since the 1960's. Outside of academia Fanon appears in the circles of hip hop, in students movements in South Africa, in the movement of shack dwellers, in the global Black Lives Matters movement, notably in the UK, United States and France (Gibson, 2016), in liberation activism in Palestine (Alessandrini, 2014) or in the clinic and mental health approaches to migrants and refugees in Italy (Love, 2015, Beneduce, 2017) or Palestine (Jabr, 2016).

### **Scope of the research**

This dissertation approaches Fanon's work in his immediate historical, geographical, and political contexts, yet I do not treat them as the alpha and omega of Fanon's intellectual horizon. As it was hinted in the previous section, and will be expanded in Chapter 1, Fanon's ideas have travelled and extended from the site of his theorization to other localities. I do not treat Fanon as an individual thinker. Sociologist Randal Collins argues against the figure of the great creative thinker who generates ideas in solitude. Instead, through a sociological study of intellectual history that encompasses almost 3000 years in China, India and Greece, Collins posits that knowledge and ideas are produced through the "interaction rituals among intellectuals" forming concrete or imaginary "networks", "circles" and "chains" of intellectuals across generations. That is, intellectual work is produced in social and



intellectual conversation, including conflict, with predecessors and contemporaries, creating small, interconnected centers. For Collins, the absence of such linkages, conflicting intersections and bridges between networks leads to absence of creativity and intellectual stagnation, which in his view characterize the late twentieth century knowledge production despite its abundance (1998).

Following Collins structural theory of intellectual networks, in Fanon's work overlap different and varied centers in which his thought had also an effect. Namely, he was connected to, such as Pan-Africanism, anticolonial thought, Caribbean and African diasporic philosophy, Négritude, surrealism, Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, Gestalt theories, institutional psychotherapy, or ethnopsychiatry. I do not treat these as influences on his work, but as intellectual communities which Fanon was a part of, in which he critically intervenes. It falls beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive and systematic account of these. Instead, I will engage them, and extend on them when necessary, in relation to the topic at hand. At the same time, Fanon's work has become a center of intersecting and sometimes conflicting networks, as we will see in the first chapter on the secondary literature.

Concerning Fanon's writings, I have approached them by theme rather than by the different volumes. This implies delving into some questions, and leaving others outside. I have emphasized questions of philosophy of science, alienation and disalienation, history and subjectivity, language, social and political thought, and violence. I have paid special attention to his psychiatric writings for several reasons. First like his other writings, his texts are not limited to a discipline. His analysis of alienation and his elaboration of a humanistic psychiatry encompassed questions of culture, politics, economy, philosophy, sociology, and religion, among others. I have

omitted the texts that deal with pharmacological process. Second, medicine for Fanon was not only a profession or a nourishing activity. The psychiatric helped Fanon to think social and political questions, and vice versa. This does not mean that he psychologizes reality, as it is sometimes read. Instead, there is an imbrication between his social and political texts and his psychiatric thought, they nourish each other. His approach to mental disease from different angles, his attempts to transform the psychiatric hospital as a place in which human relations can be produced, his view of culture and language shed light on Fanon's thought outside of the sphere of mental health. Third, many of these psychiatric texts reflected a work in progress, full of setbacks, possible solutions, and leaving open questions. Their interest also lies in that they reflect the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of psychiatry. Fourth, these texts are relevant for the history of psychiatry and medicine (Keller, 2001; 2007).

The choice of what to include goes hand in hand with the choice of what to exclude. I had to leave aside important themes in Fanon's work such as his explorations of the links between colonialism and sexuality and race and desire, of which Fanon was a pioneer in the psychoanalytical literature (Mbembe, 2011). I have not analyzed Fanon's theater except for some concrete aspects that could be related to the topics discussed in the dissertation. Likewise, I have neglected Fanon's relation to writers such as Richard Wright and Chester Himes, who were important for his understanding of racism in the United States. I have referred only in passing to one of the questions about which Fanon was more lucid and is not yet exhausted: the problem of postcolonial leadership, elite formation, and the neocolonial economic relations. I have also omitted Fanon's internationalism and Pan-Africanism, not as ideals but grounded in the concrete emancipatory movements and realities of the

continent. Lastly, I have included Fanon's theme of love, solidarity, and the formation of a relational subjectivity, but I have not dedicated a separate attention to it under the form of a section or a subsection. Instead I have touched on while discussing other topics.

It is important to outline who the *secondary actors* would be. The first chapter explores the different readings of Fanon in the last forty years, the conflicts of interpretation and the different positions, and situates this dissertation within these debates. However it is important to acknowledge that my understanding of Fanon is notably influenced by the reading of the philosopher Lewis R. Gordon on Fanon, and by his own work, of which Fanon is an important influence. Gordon's work on questions of philosophy of science, existential phenomenology, phenomenology of the social world, his systematization of Africana philosophy, and his thought on disciplinarity have helped me to understand the possibilities that Fanon's thought offers. Likewise, the work of psychiatrist and anthropologist Roberto Beneduce occupies a special place in this dissertation, notably concerning Fanon's medical texts. Beneduce's work on Fanon, and his own work, has shed light on Fanon's clinical sensitivity in political questions, and in the intersection of psychiatry and politics.

### **Chapter outline**

There is generally a double reductionism in the assessment of Fanon in peace studies: first, as a thinker of revolutionary violence; and second, his thought on violence is reduced to some sentences of what he says in the opening chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. I have located Fanon's controversial account of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* as the last chapter of this dissertation for three main reasons: first, because the question of violence cannot be reduced to a single chapter

in Fanon, but it is analyzed and questioned in its different manifestations constantly throughout this work. Second, because what Fanon says about violence, like about other themes, in the opening chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* cannot be understood without other aspects that are also present in the rest of his work: the sociogenic analysis, the zone of nonbeing, the relation between ethics and politics, the construction of the colonized, the poetic and dramatic element in Fanon's writing and its relation to method, his writing on the psychiatric hospital as pathogenic space, his phenomenology of embodiment and oppression, and his view of humanism, among others. These aspects will be developed in the preceding chapters. Third, because Fanon's thought on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* is itself insightful. This does not mean that violence is the center of his thought or that I treat it as such. It means that Fanon did not treat violence as a substantive phenomenon that can be abstracted and isolated, but it is related to a variety of issues, that he did not approach violence from a single perspective but from different disciplines and forms of knowledge. It also means that violence, more than an always explicit object of thought was a concern that permeated his thought. With these considerations in mind, I have structured this dissertation as follows:

The first chapter offers a panoramic view of how Fanon has been read from the 1960's until today. It also outlines the silence and the late engagement with his work in certain geographical contexts, namely, Algeria, France, and Martinique. The first chapter also assesses how Fanon has been read in peace studies. In this field it has mostly been associated with revolutionary violence. This raises questions on the role and the treatment of violence in the discipline and also explores the absence of questions of race, racism and colonialism, not only as a historical period and objects of study, but also informing the constitution of European modernity, modern sciences

and disciplines. As African diasporic thinkers observe, the critique of modernity and modern science based on variations of the problem of instrumental reason, technical or scientific rationality is insufficient since it omits the underside of modern European capitalism, its racist rationality (Gordon, 1996; Henry, 2006; Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

The second chapter continues with the question of the intrinsic relation between modern science, discipline formation and racism as theorized by African diasporic thinkers, illustrated in this case by the work of Haitian lawyer and anthropologist Anténor Firmin, American philosopher, economist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. The three attempted to produce forms of knowledge and self-reflection oriented towards the emancipation of black people, and faced the question of how to theorize on the black condition with tools that are involved in the construction of the black and their pathologization. As Lewis Gordon (2008) notices, African diasporic philosophers bring to the forefront three fundamental and interrelated questions in their theorizing: what is a human being, the question of freedom, and a meta-critique of reason, that is, how to justify the previous ones including how to justify the justification itself. For Fanon, Firmin and Du Bois, this is manifested in their questioning methodological, epistemic and disciplinary presuppositions, the understanding of the human and the standard of humanity in order to discern the problems of black people and their emancipation.

The third chapter follows the trail of the previous one and addresses questions of poetics, examination of language and method in the production of knowledge. As Paget Henry points out reason and poetics occupy the same position in African philosophy (2006). This chapter deals with Fanon's theorizing of alienation through the relation between the French language and the black Caribbean and the African. It

also analyses Fanon's use of language, his connection with surrealism and Négritude, the relation between language and body, his attempts to reach the reader beyond the rational aspects, the poetics in his language, and the dramatic element playing also a methodological function.

The fourth chapter explores Fanon's first earliest medical writings, which show the first steps towards a humanistic medicine. Fanon's doctoral dissertation in psychiatry shares aspects with *Black Skin White Masks* despite the methodological and the disparity of the topics. The dissertation studies a hereditary neurodegenerative disease in order to explore questions on philosophy of psychiatry. He raises the problems of the disciplinary division between neurology and psychiatry, the mechanistic understanding of the patient devoid of the agency of the human, the problem that this entails for the diagnosis, and the relation between history, sociality and mental disease, and the. Fanon took these concerns to the clinic in "The North African Syndrome", his first published article. To the aforementioned medical problems, Fanon brings up the relation between racism and disease, and between the clinic and wider societal dynamics. Fanon's earliest concerns on the alienating character of diagnostics categories, the dehumanization at the level of treatment, the spatiality of the hospital setting and the intricacy of the clinic and the political echoed the work being carried out in the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban to which he moved. The Catalan psychiatrist Francesc Tosquelles and his circle developed in Saint-Alban what is called institutional psychotherapy, a pioneering approach to mental disease and to the psychiatric hospital out of the experience of the Spanish Civil War and the French resistance to Nazi Occupation.

The fifth chapter deals with Fanon's arrival in Algeria with the intention to implement the lessons in Saint-Alban. Despite institutional psychotherapy being

developed in situations of war, the context of Algeria upon Fanon's arrival, one and a half years before the outbreak of the war, was considerably different than the Spanish Civil War and World War II. This chapter focuses on colonial alienation, the ambivalent role of medicine in colonialism, the responses of the colonized towards medicine, and focuses on the important role of colonial psychiatry in the construction of the Arab and the African, in justifying oppression, and pathologizing resistance.

The sixth chapter explores Fanon's psychiatric effort to reconstruct psychiatry in Algeria and Tunis. Fanon's trajectory concerning the psychiatric hospital could be summarized by the movement that goes from his initial intention to heal the clinic through institutional psychotherapy to the pioneering open day psychiatric hospital as a form of healing with the clinic. That is, putting the weight of the healing process in the society. In the middle of this process, Fanon interrogates mental disease in relation to the local culture, religion, social institutions, and to the political situation, his own role of as psychiatrist in its intricacy with colonial oppression, and his role as an anticolonial militant and intellectual.

The seventh chapter focuses on Fanon's controversial account of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Rather than as a defense or justification of violence, Fanon analyzes violence as a "*problématique*", that is, violence is connected to a series of issues in the short and the long term. As stated, an ethical approach to Fanon's account of violence risks missing the point of what Fanon says, since he articulates a conception of violence beyond means and ends. Likewise it was not only a chapter on revolutionary violence, neither is violence only physical and direct, but multidimensional.

### **A note on translation**

In this dissertation I have translated the writings of Fanon's first four books: *Black Skin White Masks*, *A Dying colonialism*, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Towards the African Revolution*, instead of using the English version, at the expense of not replicating the style and losing richness of the language. For the sake of legibility and the reader I have inserted the translated quote within the body of the text and added the original in a footnote. In the occasions in which the new translation modifies substantially the English translation, I have added an explanative footnote.

The problems behind these translations have already been referred to (Judy, 1996; Gibson, 2007; Gordon, 2015; Batchelor and Harding, 2017). There are problems of philosophical terminology. As an instance, the fifth chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*, probably the most important, has been translated as "The Fact of Blackness", instead of "The lived experience of the black". The published translation eliminates the phenomenological side of the chapter and conveys a completely different meaning to how Fanon understands and uses blackness. *The Fact of Blackness* later became a volume of essays on Fanon.

There are also problems at the level of gender in the English translations. In the original, Fanon used masculine language, and used the French *l'homme* to refer to the human, but this has been exacerbated in some English versions with confusing results. There are moments when the original "the black" has been translated as "the black man" (Gordon, 2015). The Ghanaian philosopher Ato Sekyi-Otu in a recent work proposes to translate Fanon's man as the human quoting Fanon's words: "All forms of exploitation are applied against the same 'object': the human being." (Fanon, quoted in Sekyi-Otu, 2018: 40). Sekyi-Otu writes:

I am rendering Fanon's *l'homme* in the French original as 'the human being' (rather than 'man') in fidelity to the egalitarian presuppositions of his



argument. That same fidelity to the inferential logic of Fanon's anti-racism and ours constrains US to subject to relentless criticism abominable non-racial wrongs, indeed, all forms of dehumanization in postcolonial societies, all inhumanities inflicted on women and men living while human. (2018: 40)

Although I agree with Sekyi-Otu's overall argument, I have kept Fanon's gendered language—as it was part of the discursive context in which he wrote—in the translated quotations, and have used the human being instead of man when paraphrasing him. Also following Gordon (2015), I have not translated the original term *nègre*, since its different connotations are difficult to replicate in a English term. I have also maintained the French titles of *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*) and *A Dying Colonialism* (*L'an V de la révolution algérienne*). Beyond the semantic problems in the mistranslation, the English title does not reflect the references behind the title. *Les damnés de la terre* not only refers to The Internationale, but also to a poem by the Négritude poet Jacques Roumain (Gordon, 2015). *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (literally, the year V of the Algerian revolution) captures a precise moment of the anticolonial war, and although the themes and the character of the work are different, the title could be read as a hint to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. In short, in both titles there is a reference to the socialist tradition and to traditions of African and African diasporic emancipation.

I have not translated the new collection of psychiatric, political and theatre writings appeared in French in 2015. Instead I have directly used the English translation from 2018, except for the few cases in which I have modified the translation. Such choice and the different treatment in regard to the previous works responds to the fact that the translation of the new work is more attuned to the philosophical terminology of Fanon and also addresses other problematic aspects such as the gendered language of previous translations.

## **Introducción (versión en español)**

### **Propósito y contexto**

La presente tesis propone una exploración de la obra de Frantz Fanon como filósofo, psiquiatra, dramaturgo, teórico político y social, y revolucionario anticolonial. Esta tesis se presenta a un programa académico en estudios de paz con la intención de argumentar la relevancia del trabajo intelectual y político de Fanon en dicha disciplina y las prácticas asociadas a ellas. En el campo de los estudios de paz, salvo contadas excepciones (Omar, 2006), se le suele abordar más como figura que como pensador, o es reducido a un pensador de la violencia revolucionaria, o limitado a su tiempo y su contexto, el de las guerras de independencia africanas en los años 60. Esto es acompañado por la ausencia de temas que Fanon trató en su obra, tales como cuestiones de raza, racismo o colonialismo, no solo como objetos de estudio o como periodo histórico, sino también como constituyentes de la propia producción del conocimiento. La ausencia de cuestiones de raza, racismo y “colonialidad” en los estudios de paz ha sido señalada (Azarmandi, 2016, 2018), aunque todavía no ha sido abordada. La presente tesis trata dichos aspectos como parte de la discusión detallada de las diferentes facetas de la obra de Fanon, y también de otros pensadores que le precedieron y le sucedieron. Sin embargo, una exploración detallada de la literatura y los debates respecto a la historia, la conceptualización de la raza, o la comprensión del racismo y su funcionamiento, escapan a los objetivos de esta tesis.

Igualmente, esta tesis se puede situar como respuesta a las llamadas desde los estudios de paz a prestar atención al pensamiento proveniente del Sur Global. Esto implica tomar en consideración las formas endémicas de guerra, entendida esta no en su acepción estrictamente militar, sino como condición social estructural que se experimenta en la periferia y que afecta la vida cotidiana, relaciones sociales y las

subjetividades (Pureza and Cravo, 2005). En ese sentido, Tatiana Moura (2005) ha llamado “nuevísimas guerras” al conflicto urbano, formas de exclusión, formación de guetos, y la de múltiples y diferentes formas de violencia en el Sur Global donde las condiciones de violencia y paz se vuelven indistinguibles. En cualquier caso, la importancia de la idea de “nuevísimas guerras” para esta tesis puede no residir tanto en el concepto o lo que describe, sino en el sentido que expande definiciones convencionales de guerra como lucha armada, o conflicto armado intra- o interestatal. Desde una perspectiva anticolonial, las nuevísimas guerras pueden no ser tan nuevas. Tanto en sus manifestaciones coloniales como postcoloniales, el racismo ha sido definido por diferentes autores como un “estado de guerra” (Gordon, 1995), imbricado en dentro de “paradigma de guerra” más amplio (Maldonado-Torres, 2008), un “proyecto de muerte” (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016) o como “necropolítica” (Mbembe, 2003). Equiparar al racismo con la guerra no implica reducir el racismo a la violencia directa. Como se analiza en el capítulo 1, el racismo normaliza lo anormal y lo convierte lo extraordinario en la condición ordinaria de la vida cotidiana. Como indica Fanon, el racismo convierte la cotidianidad del negro en un “círculo infernal”, en el, cual, la salud, la vida, las formas de vida son amenazadas, y vicia la subjetividad, la comprensión de una misma, la sexualidad, las relaciones familiares, la visita al doctor o el propio trabajo de doctor, y obstruye la capacidad de actuar en el mundo y en la historia, de generar cultura, y establecer relaciones humanas saludables (Fanon, 1952: 14).

Esta tesis también se puede situar dentro del compromiso de la Cátedra UNESCO de Filosofía para la Paz de aliviar el sufrimiento entre humanos y con la naturaleza. Johan Galtung establece un paralelismo entre los estudios de salud y los estudios de paz. Ambos proceden del diagnóstico al pronóstico a la terapia. La salud es

comprendida como la paz y la violencia, como la enfermedad. Para Galtung, la terapia conlleva la restauración del sistema a un estado anterior de bienestar (1996:1).

En Fanon, dicho símil no es solo metafórico. Esta tesis aborda a Fanon como un pensador de la salud: de salud social, de salud mental, y de la interconexión entre ambas. Un pensador de la interrelación entre historia, política y subjetividad, un pensador de la deshumanización sobre la que se sustentan el colonialismo y el racismo, y de la problemática de la restauración de la humanidad. Pensando desde la intersección entre la clínica y la política Fanon primero cuestiona los métodos, teorías y disciplinas con los que tiene que llevar a cabo el diagnóstico. En otras palabras, si tuviera que analizar los problemas de los negros con el pensamiento político, social y filosófico, y las teorías psiquiátricas, que no solo no prestaban atención a la condición negra, sino que también fueron co-constituidas junto a la deshumanización de los negros, obtendría los mismos resultados: la construcción de tipos de humanos patológicos e inferiores. Para Fanon qué significa la salud y la enfermedad en términos sociales no puede ser establecido a priori. En un sistema racista, la *salud* no está reñida con la deshumanización de los negros. Una sociedad puede ser considerada pacífica y justa basándose en la violencia que ejerce sobre ciertas poblaciones. La explotación y deshumanización de negros y colonizados no era injusta o violenta: era parte del marco normativo que define qué es normal y sano. En un marco normativo racista, el estándar de humanidad, el significado de salud y enfermedad, la concepción de lo normal y lo anormal son diferentes para el blanco que para el negro, para el Europeo que para el colonizado. En tal contexto, el negro alienado es normal. Entonces Fanon se plantea la cuestión qué significa para un negro ser un ser humano normal, y qué significa curar en un contexto de opresión. Si la función de la

psiquiatría es la de adaptar los pacientes a la sociedad, sus prácticas psiquiátricas conllevarían la producción de sujetos alienados.

Achille Mbembe identifica en Fanon “tres clínicas de lo real”, el nazismo, el colonialismo y la metrópolis francesa, como sus encuentros con la violencia, el racismo y la deshumanización en base a los que Fanon articuló su pensamiento, elaboró su lenguaje, y pronunció el requerimiento de curar (2011: 9). Incluida en estas tres se podría añadir una cuarta clínica de lo real, el hospital psiquiátrico. El encuentro con la locura y la alienación, con la violencia del hospital y de la clínica, con los cuerpos y mentes sufrientes en la sala de consultas también permeó su pensamiento político y social.

Estas clínicas de lo real no son entidades separadas. Fanon también debe ser considerado en movimiento. Fanon también era un migrante, negro Caribeño. Al igual que otros pensadores negros Fanon escribió en un movimiento entre el Caribe, Europa y África. Para ser más preciso, su pensamiento se nutrió por sus experiencias de infancia y adolescencia en su isla natal de Martinica, la experiencia como soldado voluntario en la Segunda Guerra Mundial, sus estudios de psiquiatría y filosofía en Francia, su trabajo como psiquiatra en junto a Francesc Tosquelles en Saint-Alban, en Argelia y en Túnez, sus participaciones en los congresos de escritores negros en Roma y Paris, los congresos médicos, su implicación en la revolución anticolonial, primero como doctor, luego como periodista para el Frente de Liberación Nacional, y como embajador del gobierno Argelino en Ghana. Todas estas experiencias conforman su pensamiento y aparecen entremezcladas en su obra.

### **Relevancia**

Decir que Fanon importa, y que las cuestiones de Fanon importan, es decir que las diferentes urgencias sociales y políticas que afrontó, y que las preguntas y respuestas

a nivel práctico e intelectual que ofreció necesitan atención. En otras palabras, hay problemas políticos y sociales que deberían tratarse, y hay formas de conocimiento que necesitan conocerse.

La vitalidad y actualidad del pensamiento de Fanon se puede atestiguar con el abordaje de su trabajo dentro y fuera de la academia. Sin ánimo de ser exhaustivo el trabajo de Fanon es discutido en contextos tan dispares y distantes de su contexto original de enunciación como la guerra contra el terror (Anghie, 2004; Williams, 2010), la primavera norteafricana (Alessandrini, 2014), Black Lives Matter, (Gibson, 2016), el post-apartheid en Sudáfrica (More, 2017), movimientos de estudiantes como #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (Gibson 2016), movimientos de habitantes de barracas en Sudáfrica (Gibson, 2011), atentados suicidas (Abraham, 2013), dilemas de la noviolencia en Palestina (Alessandrini, 2014), acontecimientos en Gabón (Tonda, 2016), Nigeria (Hansen and Musa, 2013), Islamofobia, tortura y nuevas o históricas formas de colonialismo en las islas del Pacífico (Austin et. al, 2013), psiquiatría y la patologización de la resistencia Māori (Cohen, 2014), luchas indígenas en Australia (Molloy and Grootjans, 2014), o cuestiones de emancipación de Primeras Naciones en Canadá (Coulthard, 2014), la experiencia de la migración contemporánea y sus vínculos coloniales (Taliani, 2012).

Desde el 2014 hasta la finalización de esta tesis han sido publicados doce libros explorando el trabajo de Fanon desde diferentes ángulos teóricos, abordando o profundizando en distintos temas, y desde una variedad de disciplinas (Gordon, 2014; Coulthard, 2014; Bird-Pollan, 2015; Gordon, 2015; Hudis, 2015; Zeiling, 2015; Batchelor and Harding, 2017; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017; Burman, 2018; Marriott, 2018; Byrd and Miri, 2020; Turner and Neville, 2020). En 2015 se publicó *Écrits sur l'ailénation et la liberté*, una colección de escritos de Fanon, muchos de ellos inéditos

hasta la fecha que incluyen dos obras de teatro, su tesis doctoral, escritos psiquiátricos y textos políticos escritos para el periódico del movimiento anticolonial argelino. En 2018 se publicó la traducción inglesa, *Alienation and Freedom*. A ello se le podría añadir los diferentes números especiales en revistas especializadas y conferencias. Esto puede tratarse como un momento de intensificación de la interacción con la obra de Fanon y de la ampliación de los temas y los enfoques, pero no se trata de una reaparición o un rescate. Como veremos en el primer capítulo, el pensamiento de Fanon ha sido abordado de forma diferente pero consistente desde los años 60. Fuera de los círculos académicos Fanon aparece en el ámbito de hip hop en Francia Sudáfrica y el mundo Árabe, en movimientos descolonizadores de estudiantes sudafricanos, en el movimiento global de Black Lives Matters, especialmente en Europa y Estados Unidos, en el activismo en Palestina (Alessandrini, 2014) o en la clínica y los enfoques de salud mental con personas migrantes y refugiadas (Love, 2015; Beneduce, 2017) o en Palestina (Jabr, 2016).

### **Ámbito de investigación**

Esta tesis aborda el trabajo de Fanon en su contexto histórico, geográfico y político inmediato. Sin embargo no trato dichos contextos como el alfa y el omega del horizonte intelectual de Fanon. Como apunté en la sección anterior y expandiré en el primer capítulo, las ideas de Fanon han viajado y se han extendido desde su lugar de origen a otras localidades. Al mismo tiempo, no abordó a Fanon como un pensador individual. El sociólogo Randal Collins ofrece argumentos en contra de la figura del pensador creativo y aislado que produce ideas desde la soledad. En su lugar, mediante un estudio sociológico de la historia intelectual de los últimos 3000 años que incluye China, India y Grecia, Collins argumenta que el conocimiento y las ideas se producen a través “rituales de interacción entre intelectuales” formando “redes”, “círculos”,

“cadenas” concretas o imaginarias, a través de generaciones. Es decir, la producción intelectual es social, incluyendo el conflicto, y abarca la creación de pequeños centros interconectados que incluye predecesores y contemporáneos. Para Collins, la ausencia de tales nexos, intersecciones conflictivas, y puentes entre redes lleva a la ausencia de creatividad y el estancamiento intelectual, que, según su argumentación, caracteriza la producción de conocimiento de finales del siglo veinte, pese a su abundancia (1998).

Siguiendo la teoría estructural de las redes de conocimiento de Collins, en el trabajo de Fanon se solapan diferentes centros en los cuales su trabajo también tuvo efecto. Concretamente, Fanon estaba conectado círculos de Panafricanismo, pensamiento anticolonial, filosofía Caribeña y de la diáspora africana, Négritude, surrealismo, marxismo, existencialismo, fenomenología, psicoterapia institucional o etnopsiquiatría. No trato estos círculos como influencias en su trabajo sino como comunidades intelectuales de los que Fanon formaba parte y en las que interviene críticamente. Escapa a los objetivos de esta tesis el ofrecer una consideración exhaustiva y sistemática de estas. En su lugar, las abordaré. Y me extenderé cuando sea necesario, en relación al tema a tratar. Al mismo tiempo, el trabajo de Fanon se ha convertido en el centro de redes que se entrecruzan, y a veces colisionan, como se verá en el primer capítulo de esta tesis.

Respecto a los textos de Fanon, los he abordado por temas en vez de centrarme en los diferentes volúmenes por separado. Esto conlleva profundizar en algunas cuestiones y dejar otras fuera. Concretamente he prestado especial atención a aspectos de filosofía de la ciencia, alienación y desalienación, historia y subjetividad, lenguaje, pensamiento social y político y violencia. He prestado especial atención a los escritos médicos por distintas razones. Primero, como el resto de sus escritos, los escritos psiquiátricos no están enmarcados dentro de una sola disciplina. Su análisis de la



alienación y su esfuerzo por construir una psiquiatría humanista abarcaba cuestiones de cultura, política, economía, filosofía, sociología o religión, entre otros. He omitido los textos que tratan sobre procesos farmacológicos. Segundo, la medicina para Fanon no era solo una profesión o una actividad alimenticia. La psiquiatría permitía a Fanon pensar lo político y lo social, y viceversa. Esto no significa la psicologización de la realidad, como es leído en ocasiones, sino que hay una imbricación entre su pensamiento político, social y médico, unos aspectos nutren a los otros. Su acercamiento a la enfermedad mental desde diferentes ángulos, el intento de transformar el hospital psiquiátrico como un lugar en el que se puedan establecer relaciones humanas, su visión de la cultura y el lenguaje, arrojan luz en su pensamiento más allá del ámbito de la salud mental. Tres, muchos de estos textos reflejan un trabajo en curso, con sus obstáculos, contratiempos soluciones y dejando cuestiones abiertas. El interés reside también en que reflejan un proceso de deconstrucción y reconstrucción de la psiquiatría. Cuarto, estos textos son relevantes para la historia de la psiquiatría y de la medicina (Keller, 2001; 2007).

La elección de qué incluir va de la mano con la elección de qué excluir. He tenido que dejar de lado temas importantes en la obra de Fanon como la exploración de la relación entre colonialismo y sexualidad, raza y deseo, de la que Fanon fue pionera en la literatura psicoanalítica (Mbembe, 2011). No he analizado las obras de teatro a excepción de aspectos concretos que pudieran ilustrar temas tratados en la tesis. También he desatendido la relación de Fanon con escritores como Richard Wright y Chester Himes, que fueron importantes para su comprensión del racismo en Estados Unidos y de la alienación. Me he referido de soslayo a uno de los temas que no está cerrado y sobre los que es reconocido: los problemas de liderazgo y totalitarismo en la nación postcolonial, la formación de una elite política y económica y la relaciones

económicas neocoloniales. También he omitido la visión internacionalista y panafricanista de Fanon, no como ideales sino basada en los movimientos concretos de emancipación y las realidades del continente. Finalmente, he incluido el tema del amor, la solidaridad y el enfoque de una subjetividad relacional, pero no les he dedicado una atención especial en forma de sección o apartado. En su lugar, lo he abordado al tratar otros temas.

Puede ser importante subrayar los *actores secundarios* de la tesis. El primer capítulo trata sobre las lecturas de Fanon en los últimos cuarenta años, los conflictos de interpretación, las diferentes posiciones teóricas, y sitúa con más detalle esta tesis entre estos debates. Sin embargo, es importante identificar la influencia del filósofo Lewis R. Gordon en mi lectura de Fanon. Esta no se ciñe a la interpretación que Gordon ofrece de Fanon sino al propio trabajo de Gordon, a partir de Fanon entre otros, sobre cuestiones de filosofía de la ciencia, existencialismo y fenomenología, filosofía de la diáspora africana y su pensamiento sobre la disciplinabilidad, racismo, opresión y colonialismo. Asimismo, el trabajo intelectual y médico del antropólogo y psiquiatra Roberto Beneduce ocupa un lugar especial en esta tesis, especialmente en relación a los textos médicos de Fanon. Al igual que Gordon, las lecturas de Beneduce de Fanon y su propio trabajo clarifican la sensibilidad clínico-política en la intersección entre la política y la psiquiatría.

### **Estructura**

Hay, en general un doble reduccionismo en las lecturas de Fanon en los estudios de paz, aunque también en otros ámbitos: primero, como pensador de la violencia revolucionaria; segundo, su pensamiento sobre la violencia se reduce al capítulo inicial de *Los condenados de la tierra*. He dedicado el último capítulo de esta tesis al controvertido análisis de Fanon en los *Los condenados de la tierra* por tres motivos.

Primero, porque la cuestión de la violencia no se puede reducir a un único capítulo del trabajo de Fanon, sino que es constantemente analizada e interrogada en sus diferentes manifestaciones constantemente en su obra. Segundo, porque lo Fanon dice sobre la violencia en el capítulo inicial de *Los condenados de la tierra*, al igual que el resto de temas que aborda, no puede entenderse sin otros temas y enfoques que están presentes en el resto de su trabajo: el análisis sociogénico, la zona de no ser, la relación entre la ética y la política en el contexto colonial, la construcción del colonizado, el elemento poético y dramático en sus textos y sus implicaciones teóricas y metodológicas, su trabajo sobre el hospital psiquiátrico como lugar patogénico, la fenomenología del cuerpo histórico y la opresión, y su visión del humanismo, entre otros. Estos aspectos se desarrollaran en el resto de capítulos. Tercero, porque el pensamiento de Fanon sobre la violencia en *Los condenados de la tierra* es, en mi tratamiento en esta disertación, útil y perspicaz más allá de su propio contexto de enunciación. Teniendo en cuenta estas consideraciones, he estructurado la tesis de la siguiente manera:

El primer capítulo ofrece una visión panorámica de las lecturas de Fanon desde los años 60 hasta hoy. También subraya los silencios y la llegada tardía de Fanon en ciertos contextos, concretamente Argelia, Francia y Martinica. Este primer capítulo también analiza las lecturas de Fanon en los estudios de paz. En este campo Fanon ha sido generalmente asociado con la violencia revolucionaria. Esto suscita cuestiones sobre el papel y el tratamiento de la violencia en la disciplina y también permite explorar otras ausencias relacionadas con el tratamiento de racismo y colonialismo, no solo como objetos de estudio o periodos históricos, sino también como constitutivos de la modernidad Europea, y las ciencias y disciplinas modernas. Como observan pensadores de la diáspora africana, la crítica de la ciencia moderna en sus

variaciones del problema de la razón instrumental, o la racionalidad técnica o científica es insuficiente ya que omite el lado de debajo del capitalismo Europeo moderno, una racionalidad racista (Gordon, 1996; Henry, 2006; Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

El segunda capítulo continúa con la cuestión de la relación de co-constitución entre la ciencia moderna, la formación de disciplinas y el racismo y colonialismo, desde la perspectiva de teóricos de la diáspora africana. Concretamente, según es teorizada por el abogado y antropólogo haitiano Anténor Firmin, el historiador, filósofo y economista estadounidense W.E.B. Du Bois, y Frantz Fanon. Los tres se esforzaron en producir formas de conocimiento y reflexión orientadas a la emancipación de los negros y afrontaron la pregunta de cómo teorizar sobre a condición negra con las herramientas que están implicadas en la construcción de la figura del negro y de su patologización. Esto conlleva el cuestionamiento de los presuposiciones del pensamiento y sus fundamentos de la producción de conocimiento, las asunciones metodológicas, epistémicas y disciplinares junto a la interrogación sobre qué es un ser humano y cuál es el estándar del ser humano.

El tercer capítulo sigue la pista del anterior y aborda la cuestión de la dimensión estética y poética en relación a la metodológica y el papel del lenguaje en su trabajo. Paget Henry señala que en la filosofía de la diáspora africana la razón comparte el mismo nivel con la dimensión poética. En este capítulo se aborda el análisis de la alienación en Fanon a partir de la relación del caribeño y el africano con la lengua francesa. También el uso de la lengua en Fanon, su relación con el surrealismo y la Négritude, la relación entre lengua y cuerpo, su intención de alcanzar al lector más allá de la parte racional, y el elemento dramático también están imbricados en la dimensión metodológica y meta-reflexiva.

El cuarto capítulo explora los primeros escritos médicos de Fanon. La tesis doctoral en psiquiatría comparte aspectos con *Piel negras, máscaras blancas* a pesar de la disparidad temática y metodológica. A partir del estudio de una enfermedad hereditaria neurodegenerativa Fanon realiza una intervención en filosofía de la psiquiatría, entre otros, cuestionando la división entre neurología y psiquiatría, la filosofía antropológica que trata al paciente como un mecanismo sin agencia y los problemas que produce a la hora del diagnóstico, y enfatiza la relación entre historia, el mundo social y la enfermedad mental. Fanon llevó estas cuestiones a la clínica en “El síndrome norteafricano”, su primer artículo publicado. A los ya citados problemas médicos Fanon añade aquí la relación entre racismo, migración, medicina y enfermedad y sitúa la clínica en medio de otras dinámicas sociales. Su temprana preocupación por el carácter alienante de las categorías diagnósticas, la deshumanización a nivel de tratamiento, infraestructura del hospital y la complejidad entre lo clínico y lo político confluyen con el trabajo que se estaba realizando en el hospital psiquiátrico de Saint-Alban. Allí coincide con el psiquiatra catalán Francesc Tosquelles, que junto a su círculo desarrolló la psicoterapia institucional, un enfoque pionero de la enfermedad mental y del hospital psiquiátrico desarrollado a partir de la experiencia de la Guerra Civil española y la resistencia a la ocupación Nazi.

El quinto capítulo parte de la base que Fanon llegó a Argelia como psiquiatra y con la intención de aplicar el enfoque de Saint-Alban. Pese a que la psicoterapia institucional se desarrolló en situaciones de guerra, el contexto que Fanon encontró a su llegada a Argelia, un año y medio antes del inicio de la guerra, difería considerablemente de la Guerra Civil española y la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Este capítulo explora la alienación colonial, el papel ambivalente de la medicina en el colonialismo, las respuestas de los colonizados hacia la medicina, y concretamente en

el papel importante de la psiquiatría colonial en la construcción del musulmán, del africano, y en legitimar la opresión y patologizar la resistencia.

El sexto capítulo se centra en los intentos de Fanon de reconstruir la psiquiatría en Argelia y en Túnez. La trayectoria de Fanon respecto al hospital psiquiátrico se podría resumir como un movimiento que va desde su intención inicial de curar el hospital mediante la psicoterapia institucional a su trabajo en Túnez donde se centra en curar con el hospital a partir de un trabajo pionero basado en la creación de un hospital de día. Es decir, pone el peso del proceso de curación en la sociedad. Entremedias, Fanon interroga la medicina mental en relación a la cultura local, la religión, las instituciones sociales, la situación política, su propia función como psiquiatra en un contexto de opresión y su papel como militante e intelectual anticolonial.

El séptimo capítulo se centra en el análisis de la violencia en *Los condenados de la tierra*. En vez de una defensa o una justificación de la violencia, Fanon la analiza como una “problemática”, es decir, a violencia está conectada a una serie de cuestiones en el corto y en el largo plazo. No es un capítulo sobre la violencia revolucionaria, ni sobre violencia física o directa, la violencia es abordada por Fanon como un fenómeno relacional y multidimensional. Como ya mencioné, un enfoque solamente moral sobre el análisis de la violencia corre el riesgo de no entender ni el análisis de Fanon ni su propia posición, no solo respecto a la violencia sino a todos los problemas a los que está ligada. En dicho capítulo Fanon articula una comprensión de la violencia que escapa a la reducción de la violencia como medio o como fin.

### **Nota sobre la traducción**

Para esta tesis he utilizado mi propia traducción al inglés de las primeras cuatro obras de Fanon pese a las posibles pérdidas a nivel de estilo y de riqueza del lenguaje.

En aras de la legibilidad y pensando en el lector he colocado la cita en el cuerpo del texto y he añadido una nota al pie con la traducción correspondiente. En las ocasiones en que la nueva traducción modifica sustancialmente la traducción inglesa publicada, he añadido otra nota explicativa.

Los problemas tras las diferentes traducciones inglesas de Fanon han sido, en general, recogidos en la literatura secundaria (Judy, 1996; Gibson, 2007; Gordon, 2015; Batchelor and Harding, 2017). Hay problemas respecto a la terminología filosófica. Como ejemplo el quinto capítulo de *Black Skin White Masks*, probablemente el más importante, ha sido traducido como “The fact of clackness” en vez de “The lived experience of the black” omitiendo toda la dimensión fenomenológica del capítulo traslada un significado diferente a como Fanon usa y entiende *blackness*/negritud, o ser negro en una sociedad racista. *The Fact of Blackness* adquirió su propia vida y se convirtió luego en un volumen de ensayos sobre Fanon. En las traducciones inglesas hay también problemas a nivel de género. En el original Fanon utiliza el género masculino y el francés *l’homme* para referirse al ser humano. Sin embargo esto se ha exacerbado en inglés con resultados confusos. En ocasiones “*the black*” se ha traducido en inglés como “*the black man*” (Gordon, 2015). El filósofo ghanés Ato Sekyi-Out en su reciente trabajo propone traducir el hombre por el ser humano, ya que citando a Fanon: “Todas las formas de explotación se ejercen contra el mismo ‘objeto’: el ser humano”. (Fanon, citado en Sekyi-Otu, 2018: 40). Sekyi-Otu escribe:

He traducido *l’homme* de Fanon en el francés original como ‘el ser humano’ (en vez de el hombre) por fidelidad a las presuposiciones igualitarias de su argumento. Esa misma fidelidad a la lógica ilativa del antirracismo de Fanon y el nuestro nos compele someter a una crítica incansable las abominables injusticias no-raciales, y toda suerte de deshumanización en sociedades poscoloniales, toda inhumanidad impuesta en mujeres y hombres. (2018: 40)

Aunque de acuerdo con el argumento de Sekyi-Otu, he mantenido el lenguaje masculino de Fanon, al ser parte del contexto discursivo en el que escribió, en las citas traducidas, y he usado “el ser humano” y no “el hombre” como générico al parafrasearlo. También, siguiendo a Gordon, no he traducido el término original *nègre* ya que sus connotaciones son difíciles de replicar en inglés. También he mantenido los títulos franceses de sus obras *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*) y *A Dying Colonialism* (*L’an V de la révolution algérienne*). Además de problemas semánticos en la traducción, los títulos ingleses no reflejan las referencias tras los títulos. *Les damnés de la terre* no solo hace referencia a La Internacional, también lo hace a Jacques Roumain, un poeta de la Négritude (Gordon, 2015). *L’an V de la révolution algérienne* (literalmente, el año V de la revolución argelina) captura un momento concreto de la guerra anticolonial, y aunque los temas y el carácter de las obras son diferentes el título puede entenderse como un guiño a *El 18 de brumario de Luis Bonaparte* de Marx. En resumen en ambos títulos puede haber una doble referencia a la tradición socialista y a las tradiciones emancipadoras africanas y de la diáspora africana.

No he traducido la nueva colección de textos psiquiátricos, políticos y obras de teatro recopilados en francés en el 2015. He utilizado directamente la traducción inglesa de 2018 excepto en los pocos casos en los que he modificado la traducción. Esta elección y el diferente tratamiento entre unos textos y otros obedece fundamentalmente a que en este caso la traducción inglesa es más cuidadosa con los problemas citados anteriormente y otros que no he mencionado aquí y a los que hago referencia en el cuerpo de la tesis.





## Chapter 1. Reading, misreading and non-readings

An Igbo proverb tells us that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. (Chinua Achebe, 2012)

In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present. The Past—or, more accurately, pastness—is a position. Thus, in no way can we identify the past as past. (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995)

### Introduction

“About Fanon, everything is still to be said”, wrote Sartre one year after Fanon’s death (quoted in Renault, 2011: 11; my translation<sup>5</sup>). Almost fifty years later Paul Gilroy observes that “rather than Fanon’s insights being redundant or anachronistic, the full impact of his political and philosophical writing has not so far been appreciated” (2010: 18). Although I concur with Gilroy’s statement concerning the possibilities that Fanon’s thought offers, it is also important to acknowledge that the engagement with the work of the Martiniquean thinker has been abundant, fecund and diverse, from a variety of contexts and from the standpoint of theoretical and political perspectives.

Ten years after Gilroy’s admonition, the scholarly work on Fanon has not devitalized but intensified. Reading Fanon implies not only establishing a relation with him but also with other readers from different disciplines and historical, geographical contexts and political traditions. Thus, Fanon does not appear untouched and intact, for, as Italo Calvino puts it concerning classics, Fanon “come[s] to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed.” (2000: 5)

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<sup>5</sup> « Sur Fanon, tout est encore à dire. »

This chapter examines how Fanon has been read and is read today. This offers a panoramic view of the secondary literature on Fanon, the main debates, contexts, themes, disciplines involved, the divergences and positions, the traces left from reading to reading, as Calvino puts it, and thereby to situate this dissertation within the literature. This chapter also addresses the readings of Fanon in peace studies. This leads to examine the boundaries of the discipline, how they are constituted, which criteria. I will focus mainly on the question of violence in peace studies. Yet this also leads to explore how themes addressed by Fanon, such as race, racism and colonialism and its aftermaths have been addressed in peace studies. To that effect I have structured this chapter thusly:

The first section addresses the secondary literature following the arrangement of the secondary literature on Fanon by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renée T. White (1996) and Gordon (2015) on six stages. Although these stages follow a chronological order, it is not necessarily a linear progression. I have chosen this classification, mostly based on works in English, over others focused on the geographical since it enable to see the themes, the disciplines, the political urgencies and the forms of activism that have been prioritized in each stage.

The second section turns to the reception in contexts in which Fanon was directly related. In Martinique, France, and Algeria, for different reasons but with the common denominator of questions related to memory, the thought of Fanon as engaged relatively late, or not engaged and treated as a figure or a symbol.

The third section explores the readings of Fanon today, in the double sense of reading Fanon for different historical and geographical contexts in which his thought was produced, and the main debates and conflicts in Fanon studies.

The fourth section explores the readings of Fanon in peace studies. Such exploration is not extensive, but limited to four important journals of the field and volumes from important authors of peace studies. This brief review reveals that, with the exception of one doctoral dissertation on postcolonial studies, the thought of Fanon is scarcely engaged, his work is referred in passing and usually in regard to his view of violence as psychologically liberating.

The fifth section delves into this silence and this reduction to violence and his historical context in order to examine the reasons for this absence. This section focuses on the question of violence and its role and position in peace studies. The following section addresses coloniality, race and racism and themes upon which Fanon theorized, and their absence in the field.

### **1.1 Six stages of Fanon studies**

Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renée T. White, editors of the volume *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (1996) have arranged the literature on Fanon into five stages according to certain common features shared. The first stage emphasize Fanon's revolutionary dimension associating him with figures of the Third World liberation movements such as Fidel Castro, Patrice Lumumba or Paulo Freire, and the reaction of thinkers like Hannah Arendt or Nguyen. His ideas also influenced the Black Panther Party and Steve Biko who led the Black Consciousness movement. A second stage is marked by the biographical moment, especially in the 1970's, with the proliferation of works on Fanon's life. The third stage was dominated by social and political theorists and analyzed the possibilities of Fanon's thought through and for social and political sciences. The fourth stage of Fanon studies is comprised by postmodern cultural studies and postcolonial studies. The fifth stage corresponds to the exploration of the usefulness of Fanon's work "for the development of original

work across the entire sphere of human studies” (Gordon et al.,1996: 6). Basically, the focus is upon what can be learnt from Fanon, without neither glorifying nor denigrating him. These works are not uniquely about Fanon, but also “*with and through* Fanon” (Gordon et al, 1996: 7; italics in the original), rather than “working over” as certain voices in postcolonial studies propose (Alessandrini, 1997: 141). The authors of the volume lead by example and offer a diverse set of essays that range from sociology and psychiatry to feminism, existential phenomenology and Africana philosophy, without confining Fanon to a specific field. Instead, the issues raised are addressed to the extradisciplinary concerns that are present in the texts of Fanon (De Oto, 2003: 29). In this fifth stage, which continues up to today, can also be included the work of Hussein Bulhan (1985) on the possibilities of Fanon’s work to the field of psychology, Lewis Gordon’s (1995) work on questions of philosophy of science and human studies. Ato-Sekyi-Otu (1996) examines Fanon for postcolonial African political theory. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (1997), employs the thought of Fanon for her explorations on feminist theory, Paget Henry’s (2000) considers Fanon as the hinge of Afro-Caribbean philosophy. Alejandro De Oto (2003) investigates postcolonial subjectivities and current political urgencies underlying Fanon’s thought on temporality and historicity. Nelson Maldonado Torres (2008) uses the Antillean thinker for his own developments on decolonial ethics. Jane Anna Gordon (2014) explores the work of Fanon for creolization theory. Achille Mbembe (2016), draws on Fanon to scrutinize current societal values of configurations based on enmity, exclusion and separation. George Ciccariello-Maher (2017) uses Fanon to rethink the question of dialectics. Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce (2017) think with Fanon questions of racism related to migrants, refugees and the clinic, violence and trauma, and questions of madness and violence in Europe. Erica Burma (2018) reads Fanon in

order to interrogate child psychology, education and pedagogy. A sixth stage that Lewis Gordon (2015) subsequently distinguished goes through and permeates the five previous ones. It consists on self-reflection on how the work of Fanon is thought and studied. This list does not intend to be exhaustive and it is still open.

### **1.1.1 Conflicts and Fanonism**

A common and recurrent theme of the sixth stage is the issue of competing and conflicting fidelities, appropriations and uses of Fanon, as it can be perceived in the other previous stages, and in the classification itself. These conflicts and concerns revolve around what Calvino, in his reading of the classics, calls the traces through which the work of Fanon reaches us today, and with them the “accretions, deformations or expansions” of original texts (2000: 5).

The question of biography is one of the elements of the debate within Fanon studies. The attempt to humanize Fanon leads to some biographical license that verge on fiction, and in some cases, falsehood. The consequence of the biographical moment was that some of its traces engendered uninformed scholarship on Fanon, by means of a tendency to psychologize and pathologize his statements and his life choices. As his fellow intern Alice Cherki points out, Fanon’s ideas are superficially or not directly engaged. Labels such as ‘outdated’, ‘obsolete’, or ‘apostle of violence’ are commonly associated with Fanon’s thought (2011). For instance, Albert Memmi’s article, *The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon* (1973), portrays the image of a Fanon driven by rage. Memmi speculates on identity troubles as the underlying cause of Fanon’s move to Algeria: for Memmi it was a way of rejecting his Caribbean origins and despising his being black. In a similar line, the political scientist Françoise Vergès offers a psychological explanation of Fanon’s relation with his homeland Martinique and his choice to work in Algeria. For Vergès, Fanon’s

decision was motivated by a need of running away from the ambiguity of his *creolité*, the anxious search for a reinvention, including his masculinity, and the need of belonging, something that he would find among the Algerian combatants (1997: 579-580). Attributing possible and plausible weaknesses in the work of Fanon to his biography is something that also bell hooks has fallen prey to. Although she generally offers a nuanced, not exempt of ambivalence, reading of Fanon, and argues for the compatibility of black male thinkers with feminist thought, hooks accounts the absence of the black female in Fanon's last work, what she calls "a symbolic matricide", to an alleged conflict with his mother in real life based on Fanon's skin color (1996: 81, 83). Against these manifestations of what Brigitte Riera calls "mediocre psychologism" (2013: 25), Hussein Bulhan (1985: 15-23) and Alice Cherki (2011) among others, have provided biographical rigor. It is not the scope of this dissertation to get into the arena of the objective facts and the subjective reasons of Fanon's life. As Gibson and Beneduce put it, to interpret or speculate retroactively on the life choices of someone whose life reached the age of 36 as if it was a coherent whole, is, to say the least, highly disputable (2017: 25). However, some brief theoretical observations may shed light on these issues. The question of rage, reactionary and evasive behavior and self-hatred that Memmi underscores reveals a lack of understanding of his work. As it will be developed throughout this dissertation these are precisely dimensions that Fanon was constantly addressing both as a psychiatrist and as a social theorist. In respect of his ambivalent relation to Martinique, both Vergès and Memmi assess Fanon through an atomistic and liberal view of *man* which did not guide Fanon's thought. They fail to consider the connections inherent in the diasporic condition, and the intimate sets of relations between distant geographies, peoples, languages, ideas, techniques and commodities

by virtue of uneven relations that were constituted, and constituting, the colonial and the modern world. Fanon was not a unique case. For the Caribbean philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant, thinkers like Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore or W.E.B. Du Bois also followed similar vital and intellectual movements. What Glissant calls *détour* is

the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it then must search elsewhere for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination (...) is not directly tangible (1989: 20).

The movement of *détour*, which for Glissant Fanon exemplifies, illuminates a “zone shared elsewhere” (1989: 26) and also involves a return, not necessarily in terms of geography or origins, but “to the point where our problems lay in wait for us” (1989: 25), “to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away” (1989: 26). In short, what Glissant brings to the foreground is the relationality and the “convergence of asymmetries” (Lowe, 2015: 11) of histories that are presented as disconnected.

In many instances Fanon has been reduced to a biography at the expense of his thought. The “man of action” has eclipsed the “man of thought”, and Fanon’s life, deeds, experiences and context are used to replace or relegate his thought (Renaultb, 2011). Lewis Gordon has widely theorized on the relation between theory and experience and the racial and gendered dynamics involved. This relationship and its meaning have shifted with time. Gordon reminds us that if the biographical for St. Augustine went beyond the individuality of the author, for the modern liberal view of the human, the biographical moment refers to a portrait of the autonomy and uniqueness of *the man*. If a thinker is conceived uniquely in terms of biography and experience, he or she may be historically and temporally bound to the specificity of his or her time, that is, the past, and easily turned irrelevant for the present (Gordon,



2000: 24). To that, a racial dimension is to be considered: Who provides experience and who figures out, interprets, and makes sense of that experience is distributed across an asymmetrical economy of Reason: “White intellectuals provide theory; black intellectuals provide experience” (Gordon: 2000: 29). How to deal with a Reason that rejected him is also a constant theme in Fanon. The fact of providing meaning to his experience was for Fanon not only a form of agency and a reaffirmation of him as a subject. Reflection on experience is also a movement of expansion from the private to the intersubjective, a movement towards establishing relations with a community of thinkers and their experiences (Gordon, 2006: 31).

Another debate turns around the question of loyalties, the plurality of readings or the misreadings of Fanon. For Stuart Hall, this debate is not a novelty, for the attempts to “colonize” Fanon can be traced back to the first readings after his death. Hall emphasizes that every reading is a re-reading (1996: 15). Anthony Alessandrini, editor of the anthology *Frantz Fanon, Critical Perspectives*, also raises the issue of fidelity when he asks, without falling into an “easy unthinking pluralism”, if every interpretation has necessarily to be a misinterpretation. The task is, however, to apply his work with its insights and flaws to contemporary cultural issues (1999: 1). In the same volume, centered around the relevance of Fanon for cultural studies, Nigel Gibson departs from that line of thought by clearly stating that he will “use Fanon to polemicize against invented Fanons” (1999: 102). His argument is not about a naïve claim for the authenticity of his interpretation, or for the existence of an unequivocal of Fanon. What Gibson is pointing at is that beyond textual considerations there are also external dimensions, historical, political and societal dynamics that inform intellectual production. In this case, the post-Cold War and its accompanying

narratives of the end of history and the end of struggles, have removed the political sharpness of Fanon in certain readings in cultural and postcolonial studies.

E. San Juan Jr. also points out harshly the cannibalistic licenses that postmodern scholarship has taken with Fanon. In a similar vein, Lewis Gordon's last work on Fanon has in its title a statement of intent against relativistic readings, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (2015). This might situate the text in what De Oto calls the limiting terrain of fidelities, especially when dealing with a thinker that is eminently about openness and not closure (2003: 27). However, this is not a form of closing off the dialogue, imposing an authorial perspective, and defining the boundaries of fidelities. What probably Gordon is referring to, is that as Italo Calvino puts it, "a classic is a work which constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of critical discourse around it, but which always shakes the particles off" (2000: 6). Therefore, an engagement with what Fanon said is an invitation to the social world, for a world of others is required for textual and contextual meanings, interpretation and evidence of what an author means to be presented, and for the subsequent critical discussion (Gordon, 2015: 1).

Thus, the question that emerges from this brief survey of Fanon studies is not about which Fanon to follow. Instead, the question, also raised by Alejandro de Oto, is however, with which texts to establish a dialogue in this diverse and seemingly mutually exclusive landscape of Fanon studies, where disagreement dominates. This is neither uncommon nor necessarily detrimental in scholarship. The added difficulty that Alejandro De Oto, Gordon and Nigel Gibson observe is, as commented above, that many of these conflicts, besides referring to the text itself, they also remit to the external space, for invoking Fanon already elicits tensions on different regions of knowledge, such as race, gender, identity, discourses on the nation, politics, violence,

experience, or theoretical crossroads. In sum, Fanon is interpellated from many diverse ideological, theoretical, contextual, and temporal regions (De Oto, 2003: 18).

To end up with Calvino's advice on classics, the Italian writer emphasizes the importance of defining one's position, "otherwise both the reader and the text tend to drift in a timeless haze" (2000: 8). In this moment of choice and to establish priorities, my inclinations will lead to those readings that recognize the different dimensions of Fanon's work as a whole, the psychiatrist, the militant, the anticolonial and postcolonial intellectual, the philosopher of science, of the human, of the social and of existence, the playwright, and the radical humanist. Once again, this is not about disciplines for their own sake, but in the spirit of Fanon, because the rupture of disciplinary borders enables a better understanding of racism, postcolonial alienation, and epistemic violence (Beneduce: 2016: 8). In this vein, the work of Lewis Gordon since the mid 1990's that reads Fanon, against the grain of dominant theories of that time, as an existential phenomenologist has opened new venues of thought that have led to multiple directions, as exemplified by the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Paget Henry, Linda Martin Alcoff, Sara Ahmed, Roberto Beneduce, Nigel Gibson, Mogobo. P More, and Sylvia Wynter.

### **1.1.2 Fanon Today**

Not unrelated to the question of readings and misreadings, uses and misuses, are the debates concerning the applicability of Fanon's work outside of his context. Henry Louis Gates Jr. famous article "Critical Fanonisms" (1999) denounced the production of Fanon as a "global theorist *in vacuo*" as opposed to "the historical Fanon" (1999: 255). His main concern was not Fanon's thought, but Edward Said's aim to elaborate "a grand unified theory of oppression" (1999: 267). For Gates Jr., literary theory is the best way to save the experiential moments in Fanon –the only ones worth saving–

from the test of time. This elicited an energetic response by Cedric Robinson in his essay “The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon” (1993), criticizing the article as “self-referential debates on colonial discourse” (1993: 78), and for emphasizing the literary and petit-bourgeois dimensions of Frantz Fanon at the expense of the Marxist and the class-critique ones. Alternatively, Edward Said’s “Travelling Theory Reconsidered” (1994) raises interesting issues regarding Gates’ suspicions against global theory. In this essay, about and with Fanon, Said revisits his own previous skepticism regarding the applicability of theory outside of its specific historical circumstances. Against his initial view that the genesis of a theory is inextricably linked to its value, and the furthest it travels from its origin the more it is weakened, Said now posits through a reexamination of concepts that have been travelling from Adorno to Lukács to Fanon, that there is a form of theoretical re-ignition beyond adaptation and use, that leads to the expansion of the intellectual community when theory is not confined by universalisms or particularisms (1999).

As stated in the introduction, in this dissertation I approach Fanon’s work in his historical context, although this does not amount to historicize him. I also treat Fanon as helping us to think different aspects of the present, and containing the possibility of engaging in dialogue with contemporary thinkers. If it is important to consider the history and context of Fanon is mainly because he adamantly did in his work, and this inscription in time and history, as several authors have pointed out, is one of the reasons that, paradoxically, have enabled his work to travel to other contexts, other times, addressing other political urgencies and to be addressed in different disciplines (Alessandrini, 2014; Renault, 2011; Mbembe, 2011). At the same time, Fanon also thought ahead of his immediate horizon.

The British playwright Deborah Levy asks “Why is Frantz Fanon, who died in 1961, our contemporary?” (quoted in Alessandrini, 2014:3). This question points in two intersecting directions. The first points at Fanon’s texts, what he theorized about, what questions did he leave open, what is useful, its shortcomings, and what he did not theorize about; and the second direction points to the current world, the changes, the continuities, the transfigurations, the grey zones and the hidden connections between his time and today.

It is obvious that the world is different that the world in which Fanon lived. There are few formal colonies, colonial empires are no longer institutionalized, there are new legal frameworks, anti-racist laws, societal and economic global configurations. Race and racism have changed their appearance several times since Fanon’s time, from silence, to colorblindness and postraciality, to the current overt reappearance of white supremacy. Yet at the same time, race as the colonial measure of humanity continues to define what it is to be a man or a woman, it fixes groups of human beings under the level of humanity. It locks people into their bodies and physicality, it thwarts human relations and configures relations at the spatial, economic, sexual level. Racism threatens life, health, and forms of living, it produces physical and mental suffering. The colonial logics of spatiality keep hindering physical movement, locking groups of people in concrete neighborhoods, migration centers, refugee camps, under conditions of violence and dehumanization. The war on terror rationalized as the spread of democracy, as a new form of the civilizing mission, pathologizes and targets new groups of people, constructing new problem people, as Du Bois put it, and enhances the economy of extraction in the Global South with the complicity of local elites. At the level of knowledge, racism still shapes how it is talked about, and how is silenced. Dominant psychiatry, under a different guise,

approaches suffering devoid of historical, social and political considerations. It produces more suffering through their definitions and diagnostics, it pathologizes abnormality and revolt.

If, as we will see, Fanon's ideas have travelled, been critically examined and completed, so have colonial practices. Elsa Dorlin studies how the colonial world has been a laboratory of techniques of repression, of knowledges of subjugation and of policies of security that have also travelled between the Global South and back to the North (Dorlin, 2017). In the same way that the military defeat of France in Indochina provided them lessons for their military and police tactics in Algeria, the colonies have also been studied for the torture and the tactics of the war on terror (Keller, 2014) Knowledges, structures and practices, are also accompanied by concrete names. As an instance, Pierre Bolotte, a high civil servant in Algiers during the well-known Battle of Algiers, would also be the prefect in charge of the bloody repression of the anticolonial movement in Guadeloupe in May 67. Bolotte later became the prefect of the region of Seine-Saint Denis, the Parisian banlieue, and in 1971 created the BAC (Anti-Criminality Brigade), a pioneering police force engaged in repression and maintenance of the social order that decades later was expanded to other French departments (Dorlin, 2017).

How the colonial condition informs the contemporary world has been theorized in diverse manners. Achille Mbembe defines the "postcolony" as emerging from the colonial regimes, their concomitant violence, and generating "a distinctive style of political improvisation, [characterized] by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed" (2001: 102). Mbembe enhances the complexities unfolding in the postcolony and the

role played by colonial continuities in its configuration. However, these continuities seem to succeed, to have their origin only in the past. The result is that he isolates the postcolony from coterminous and broader colonial-like power relations, and reduces the postcolony uniquely to an internal affair. Lewis Gordon complements this by outlining the resemblance of Mbembe's description of the postcolony with the idea of the neocolony, although he adds that it has to be situated within "a wider, international geopolitical economy of power", otherwise "the onus of responsibility becomes evidently local" (2008: 141).

For Gordon, the prefix post- meaning beyond is misleading. Instead, besides the temporal dimension and a shared distribution of agency and responsibility, the postcolonial also implies questions of politics and morality; it has connotations of shame and lack of legitimacy. In contrast to the old colonial enterprise, postcolonies are colonies that "are no longer called colonies" (2008: 241). In this light, "the post has become the absence of colonial legitimacy in the face of colonial aspiration" (2008: 242). The President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso lent weight to this argument when in 2007 unapologetically stated that the European Union is "the first non-imperial empire." (Mahony, 2007)

Intellectuals from the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality group like Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter D. Mignolo or Anibal Quijano use the term coloniality at the level of power, being and knowledge not to identify the remainders or legacies of colonialism, but to refer to the historically constituted geopolitical, economic, social, and knowledge production relations and structures that derive from colonialism and European modernity. For these thinkers racial and gendered hierarchies are the organizing principle of relations of domination, modes of production, the disposability of life and nature, sexuality, spirituality, and political organization

(Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Although these authors situate the emergence of coloniality in the conquest of the Americas, its manifestations across the globe are diverse and locally specific though related. In that sense, colonial histories are connected by coloniality as “a single globalized mode of domination” (Suárez-Krabbe, 2014:20). Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) slightly differs with the coloniality/modernity thinkers. He argues that coloniality cannot capture the insidious nature of contemporary colonialism. For him, coloniality is included within colonialism. This presupposes that colonialism has not come to an end after the struggles for independence, it has rather mutated through simultaneous processes of continuity and change. The continuity is manifested in the pervasive distinctions between humans and less than humans as the basis of modes of sociability. The mutations consist partly in hiding away the continuities themselves and their provenances. Movements and discourses on human rights, anti-racism or equality that imply a rupture and innovation with earlier times may serve to conceal the continuities of colonialism as a form of domination.

Despite their differences, these understandings of the postcolonial condition have in common that the colonial, the anticolonial and the postcolonial overlap, something that already took place in Fanon’s time, although qualitatively and proportionally different. For the purposes of this dissertation, the significance of these understandings of the disguises, continuities, transformations reveal the need to look conjointly at the present configurations of the world and at the “habits of historical construction” (Robinson, 2005: 176). Cedric Robinson warns against the risk that closed periodization of historical events imply “when we turn from the ordering of things, that is chronological sequencings, to the order of things, that is the arrangement of their significances, meanings, and relations” (2000: 177; italics in the



original). It is then important to consider, as Fanon, Cabral, N’Krumah and others did, that decolonization is an open and incomplete process. This requires “a long view” (Kelley, 2000: xxv), both backwards and forwards. A view that enables to understand anticolonialism differently: not uniquely as a moment, a stabilized, concrete historical period, but also as a dynamic, open temporal arc, and a political and ethical position.

Concerning Fanon’s texts, Gates Jr. concedes that the polyvocality of Fanon’s text, which are “highly porous” facilitates the different interpretations and the dispersion, rather than the historical relocation which Gates attempts (1999: 252). Matthieu Renault endeavors to withdraw from this either/or logic by thinking Fanon at his historical and geographical situation, while at the same time “evading these coordinates” and “moving toward a beyond (post), in another time and place” (2011: 107). The result of this conjoint strategy of historization and displacement is to consider Fanon’s thought as a “postcolonialism of war”, the kind of which postcolonial studies avoid engaging with, chides Renault (2011b: 116). Such characterization of Fanon can be understood in line with the criticisms received by postcolonial theorists of “academic domestication” and presenting a defanged Fanon, and with the scholarship that focuses on Fanon “*after* the postcolonial” (Gibson, 2011b:3-4, Sekyi-Otu, 1996; Gordon, 1995; Rabaka, 2010b; Bird-Pollan, 2015). Concerning Renault’s intriguing formulation, Gibson and Beneduce point out that although the experience of war in Europe and Algeria informed Fanon’s clinical and political thought, it is disputable whether a postcolonialism of war is the most suitable way to think Fanon, and also whether there is ‘post’, and what it would mean, in postcolonialism and postwar (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 220). It is also not clear what Renault understands by war. As stated in the introduction, Fanon’s focus on the

everyday of racism and colonialism does not conventional definitions of war. Likewise, focusing on Fanon as a thinker of armed struggle contexts risks leaving aside his concern for what he called “human things”, that is, “the pristine vicissitudes of the human predicament” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 17) interrupted by violence and dehumanization. To liberate Fanon without dehistoricize him, thinkers have taken the inverse route of Matthieu Renault, that is, to question first the meaning of the post in the postcolonial, as we have seen above, and then to examine what is or what is not profitable in Fanon for their intellectual project. Ato Sekyi Otu distinguishes between the Fanon of postcolonialism and the Fanon of the postcolony in order to illuminate the colonial political, economic, social, cultural and epistemic configurations remaining and mutating after African independence.

Anthony Alessandrini and Nigel Gibson suggest two different models of approaching Fanon today. Alessandrini warns against the logic of using current struggles to show the applicability of Fanon’s ideas. Instead, he proposes to examine whether Fanon’s theoretical framework suits the analysis of the situation. This requires centering the situation to be analyzed and seeing what can be saved (2014:8). For Gibson “[t]he issue is not so much about decentering Fanon but decentering the world” (2007:41). Rather than focusing on what can be saved in Fanon he looks at aspects of the contemporary world that would hold Fanon’s attention. He outlines that the relevance does not lie in looking at the points where the world and Fanon converge, but at the moments of non-correspondence, and how he would respond to the situation.

The authors agree that Fanon’s ideas cannot be directly transposed to current events without a specific elaboration in relation to their locus of origin, however, this is not always the case with thinkers who preceded him or who were his

contemporaries, such as Pierre Bourdieu or Michel Foucault. In that vein, Norman Ajari wonders why the works of figures like Hegel or Kant extend beyond Prussia, or the thought of Hobbes and Spinoza is not reduced to the context of the European religious wars, and Fanon's scope is supposed to be exhausted after the independences of the twentieth century. Posing the appropriate questions of one's time implies also thinking beyond of the time (Ajari, 2014). What Ajari brings up is the aforementioned question of biography and experience in thinkers of African descent and its relation to theory, in which the ideas of European thinkers can be detached from their time and experience. To this, Gordon adds, there is an additional ideological dimension by which the thought of revolutionary thinkers, like Marx or Fanon, is treated with suspicion and as a matter of the past, in anti- or counterrevolutionary times (Gordon, 2015).

### **1.1.3 Late arrivals to Fanon**

The above account of the intense intellectual and activist reception of Fanon's work would be incomplete without the other side of the reception, the silence, rejection or disavowal of Fanon's work, as the absence of Francophone scholarship in the genealogy presented above attests.

In France in 1961 *Les damnés de la terre* was banned from publication for being considered a threat to national security. This did not avoid a wide circulation of the book with different responses. Among conservative circles it was received as a diatribe against European civilization *in toto* (Cherki, 2011). By the left wing the book was treated with a paternalism that masked the discomfort that its content and unorthodoxy elicited. A work that implied the European working class as also profiting from the colonial system, and a book that directly addressed the people rather than those in power was not to be given much credit (Riéra, 2013). There

remained, however, the circle of Jean Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Francis Jeanson, Charles Lanzmann, and François Maspero, who debated and diffused the ideas of Fanon.

After the Algerian war and the African independences, the whole colonial history was “buried, or rather, encrypted” for decades (Cherki, 2000: 333), and so was Fanon’s work, except for the doctoral dissertation of Philippe Lucas in 1971 and some isolated articles. The colonial history belonged to the past and Fanon’s work was considered outdated, and Fanon was a disturbing figure (Cherki, 2011: Mbembe, 2012). Roberto Beneduce adds that the silence and the manipulation of Fanon’s writings is a manifestation of the pathological cycle of colonial violence and the unhealed colonial wounds that remain in French collective memory (2016, 9-10). Anxiety and malaise was not only in regard to Fanon. Rather than amnesia and forgetting, Laura Ann Stoler describes these phenomena as aphasia, a difficulty speaking and generating vocabulary. This “loss of access and active dissociation” (2011: 125) has affective and epistemic implications, but has also determined public debate and academia. Stoler reminds how thinkers with a close relationship with Algeria like Bourdieu, Derrida, Rancière have kept a long silence on Algeria creating a chasm thus between their Algerian experience and their intellectual production (Stoler, 2011). Also Sartre kept a long silence on the fate of the *damnés* after 1962 (Riéra, 2013).

The irruption of the study of colonial matters in French scholarship and public debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought Fanon resolutely back. Stoler wonders if this saturation of intellectual production is not a way of closing the circle, that is a redefinition of French national consciousness through morality that masks the mutations and expansion of current racism. In other words, inquiry on colonial issues

has become a safe place and has a redemptive character, “not a repentance, (...) but a new moral narrative, (...) a renewed pride that to be French is to rise above one’s past prejudices and history.” (2011: 145) In this context scholarship on Fanon went from initially preventing his loss and preservation to a sense of theoretical and political urgency as to the global debates that had been missed and to the social reality to be confronted (Mbembe, 2012).

Parallel to the French aphasia, in Algeria, after independence the Fanon that remained was the militant committed to the revolution at the expense of the intellectual one. Although the hospital where he worked in Blida, a boulevard and a high school were given his name, his intellectual contributions thinned with the passage of time. Many of the less optimistic admonitions anticipated in *Les damnés de la terre* were confirmed after the Algerian war. Fanon’s radical democratic position, his atheism, his position towards women’s role, his warning against considering decolonization as mere seizure of power and replacement of regimes, and the discordant developments in independent Algeria made of him a bothering intellectual among official circles. The government position towards Fanon was to praise his commitment in the revolution while minimizing his intellectual influence and heritage (Cherki, 2011: 327-331). As Arezki Metref explains in his article “Les traces de Fanon sur le sable de l’ingratitude algérienne”, the name of Fanon was present, but devoid of content except for within some small circles of self-taught intellectuals (2011). It was in 1987 with the organization of an international conference when Fanon’s intellectual work was brought to light, to be submerged again under the terror of the 1990’s (Metref, 2011).

Finally in Martinique, the posthumous homage by Aimé Césaire was not corresponded by the political authorities of the French department. The francophone

silence was broken in 1982 with a special number of the journal *Sans Frontière* featuring articles by Kwame N’Krumah, Marcel Manville, Edouard Glissant, Octave Mannoni, Francis Jeanson, and Ahmed Ben Bella. Raphaël Confiat observed that the long-lasting silence was not only due to French authorities, but also to the contradictions that Fanon’s voice would reveal about the Antillean elites (Riéra, 2013: 66). In the same vein spoke one year earlier his fellow Martiniquean, the philosopher and writer Édouard Glissant:

It is difficult for a French Caribbean individual to be the brother, the friend, or quite simply the associate or fellow countryman of Fanon. Because, of all the French Caribbean intellectuals, he is the only one to have acted on his ideas, through his involvement in the Algerian struggle; this was so even if, after tragic and conclusive episodes of what one can rightly call his Algerian agony, the Martinican problem (for which, in the circumstances, he was not responsible, but which he would no doubt have confronted if he had lived) retains its complete ambiguity. It is clear that in this case to act on one's ideas does not only mean to fight, to make demands, to give free rein to the language of defiance, but to take full responsibility for a complete break. (1989: 25)

The discovery and diffusion of a letter of Fanon to his mother written from the battlefields of World War II caused a shock on the island, the demands of the listeners, the work of Marcel Manville, and the new progressive government facilitated the organization of the International Memorial in 1982 and the establishment of the currently active Frantz Fanon Circle in Martinique (Riéra, 2013: 67).

## **1.2 Fanon and Peace Studies**

A look to some of the major journals of the field, such as *Peace Studies Journal*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, or *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies* reveals that the engagement with Fanon has been scarce and reduced to a few scattered and passing mentions, mostly in regard to violence and colonialism. Looking in the volumes of peace, the references are also scarce and

revolving around similar issues. The Austrian peace scholar Wolfgang Dietrich observes Fanon's influence on Paulo Freire's pedagogy. The author implies that the Brazilian thinker is a radical democrat in spite of being influenced by the liberation discourse of the likes of Fanon and Che Guevara, "which were popular at that time". Moving swiftly in the terrain of *doxa*, Dietrich qualifies Freire's thought as "dualist, moralistic, idealist and modernizing tendencies." For Dietrich this is "difficult to reconcile" with what he calls his transrational view, located in the twenty-first century (2013: 20). He argues that Freire's arguments are based on a "direct opposition between an 'evil' oppressor and a 'virtuous' victim of oppression". What he sees as an emancipatory approach characteristic of the 1960's appears in his view as "naïve and unidimensional" (2013: 230). For Dietrich, the chasm is accentuated in Fanon's case, since he conceived violence as a "cleansing power" that liberated the "suppressed" from their psychological complexes (2013: 20).

The prominent peace scholar, Elise Boulding, less judgmentally mentions succinctly Fanon in her book, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden History*. She situates Fanon within a broader framework of revolutionary utopianism, wherein violence is "a necessary wiping clean of the slate". She emphasizes Fanon's take on violence as "a cleansing force" and on the liberating aspects that he attributed it for Third World liberation struggles (2000: 36).

In the subfield of peace psychology Fanon receives also concise treatment, although with a certain degree of concern for elaboration. In the *Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, he is posited as a pioneer of radical psychology, and briefly covers his discussions with Octave Mannoni on the dependency complex and depersonalization under colonial oppression, and the internalization of racism. The author asserts that Fanon advocated violent opposition to colonial occupation, and

also hint at, according to Fanon's view, the problems that could arise from violence (Christie, 2012). Andy Dawes, in his chapter "Psychologies for Liberation: Views from Elsewhere" appeared in *Peace, Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, provides a similar outlook. Fanon is presented as an influential figure on South African Black Consciousness movement and on Latin American psychologists of liberation. Dawes emphasizes first the connection between psychology and politics, and second, the need of violent confrontation in order to achieve psychological healing. The author takes Fanon to charge for forgetting Freud's warning against catharsis and also, strangely, for his excessive reliance on race at the expense of class analysis and a materialist critique.

Sidi Omar's (2006) doctoral dissertation on postcolonial studies is practically the only engagement with Fanon's ideas within peace studies. Omar dedicates the second chapter of his dissertation to Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. He situates them as anticolonial precursors who influenced the field of postcolonial studies. The author provides firstly a brief biographical account and then, without being exhaustive, a critical overview of important aspects of Fanon's work, mostly based on *Black Skin White Masks* and *Les damnés de la terre*. Omar does not reduce Fanon to a thinker of violence and outlines also other aspects such as the analysis of racism, which is not purely psychological, and Fanon's view of humanism. Omar points out the complexity of Fanon approach to violence. Fanon uses the term violence to refer to different forms of violence and ascribing different meanings. Omar differentiates between armed struggle and Fanon's conception of violence. Concerning the former he does not justify it, he thinks it is inevitable, unfortunate and related to the context of anticolonial wars. For Omar it is more problematic Fanon's view that participating in acts of violence has a liberating effect, which, in his view contradicts Fanon's



account of the psychological effects of violence. Omar concludes that Fanon's reflection on violence can shed light on contemporary situations, notably on the responses of those suffering violence, and on the cycle of violence and counterviolence. He argues that there are lessons that can be drawn in regard to rethinking moral positions and rational analysis concerning the dynamics of violence today, and for peace workers, concerning the tension between their ideas and the situation of victims of violence and of those for whom violence is part of their everyday life.

### **1.2.1 Peace, violence, reality and perspective**

Stretching Sidi Omar's argument on the possible lessons that Fanon's thought can offer to peace studies, one of them is the question of disciplinarity. Fanon's own approach to disciplines, social sciences and their relation with racism and colonialism will be addressed in the next chapter. But by now, the examination of the silences of Fanon on peace studies, and its consideration as a thinker of violence in the field, in contrast to the fecundity of his thought in different contexts, times and disciplines and topics can shed light on help to reconsider certain assumptions of peace studies itself.

To Claude Debussy is attributed the statement that "music is the silence between the notes" (quoted in Myers, 2018: 107). That is, silences make the music. Similarly, another composer, John Cage posited that "there is no such thing as silence (2011: 51). I want to use the silence on Fanon, at least implicitly to address how, as Joshua Myers asserts "silences "are not simply overlooked, but intentionally ignored in order to advance a particular regime of truth." (2018). In other words, rather than correct absences it is also important to understand why were they constituted. Through the structuration of absences and presence one can ask how a discipline identifies itself, what vision of itself they have, what criteria are used to distinguish what is in and

what is out, how are these boundaries articulated, how do relate with other disciplines, who are they located in a determined social, cultural and historical context, and from a specific locus of enunciation, and how does it relate with other, which subjects have a central and periphery role, which is the ideological charge, which visions of the world transmit, which it rejects, and which political consequences do these aspects have for social transformation. And also, which conception of the human being, which standard of the human being is dealing with.

Looking at how Fanon is talked about in peace studies the few, with little exception, references start and stop at the chapter on revolutionary violence and his quote on violence as a cleansing force. Some add more context, others do not. Some assume that Fanon glorified violence, others try to decipher whether he actually defended violence or not. Debates seem to be revolving around the question of revolutionary violence and his position about it. The approach towards violence is usually premised on an ethical stance on his position. Is violence a means? Is violence an end in itself? Is Fanon violent or is he about violence? Those who see him as violent seem to be more anxious and concerned about Fanon than about violence itself. In any case, it is important to see how violence seems to regulate and structure and order things in progressive and not so progressive sectors. Henri Bergson posited that a philosopher, expresses one fundamental insight in his lifetime, independently of how vast the intellectual production, how varied the scope of his concerns, or how rich his thought is, “because he enjoys but one point of contact with the real.” (Natanson,1962: xxv). I would not dare to affirm the fundamental intuition behind Fanon’s thought, but I do not think that the central point of his work is that violence is liberating and purifies.

Sara Ahmed writes that “exposing a problem is posing a problem” (2017:172), and describing a problem is becoming a problem (2017: 39). As we will see in the next chapter, W.E.B. Du Bois observed that the way black people were studied in social, human and natural sciences turned them into problems rather than as people having problems. Fanon formulated this differently throughout his work. As we will develop in further detail in the last chapter of this dissertation, one of the features through which they were constituted as problems was violence. The colonized or the black were not only violent but they were violence itself. The creation of problematic people persists to this day, although the meaning and the ascription of problem to groups of people changes throughout the years. As we have seen, one of the problems with Fanon, or the one which turns him into a problem, seems to be his defense or justification of violence, which functions as a moral purgative element and a defining barrier in the field of peace studies. Peace studies shifted from the scientific study of conflict and war, and an understanding of conflict as inherently problematic, to the study of peace and considering conflict as an intrinsic element of human relations. The field considers that the attention to violence and a polemologic perspective has been dominant and shifts the focus to uncover the silenced approaches and the valorization experiences of peace. Through this shift, peace is considered the norm and violence a rupture with and a deviation from the norm. Violence is denounced from a perspective of peace, and peace studies is conceived as an interdisciplinary field in dialogue with other branches of knowledge (Martínez-Guzmán, 2001).

The role, the position and the space dedicated to violence is a site of debate within the field. Some peace scholars argue that violence has received scant attention, and is undertheorized and absent in theories of peace (Courtheyn, 2017). However, other theorists, such as Francisco Muñoz and Vicent Martínez Guzmán argue that the

“excessive attention to violence” of the peace researcher leads to “cognitive schizophrenia” (Muñoz, 2001; Martínez-Guzmán, 2001). The editors of *Geographies of Peace* argue that while the discipline has been “doing the important task of challenging the moral logic of war, it has failed to develop equally sophisticated theoretical engagements with, and devote sustained empirical research to, peace” (Williams et al., 2014: 1). In their conclusion, they point out that, “to be against violence is not necessarily the same as being for peace” (Megoran et al., 2014:256). Other theorists point out that this approach functions as a call for purity, a reduction of the ethical and epistemic boundaries of the discipline, wherein peace is implicitly reduced to nonviolence (Loyd, 2015). Another problem of this boundary making is whether such a disciplinary approach is in tune with the predicaments, the demands, the options and the objectives of oppressed people. Such narrow view of the discipline may demand the innocence and predetermine the conditions for action of oppressed groups as a prerequisite for admission.

Francisco Muñoz seeks to avoid what he considers the peaceful/violent dualism through the notion of imperfect peace. Thereby he proposes an understanding of peace as an ongoing and incomplete activity, rather than having a static character or being an aspiration. He conceives it as heuristically useful in order to recognize moments of positivity for peace research, and to highlight and valorize experiences and practices of peace amidst structural violence (Muñoz, 2001). Imperfect peace is an attempt to articulate the relation of peace with conditions of structural and direct violence, in which peace and violence are not external to the other. Yet, rather than delving into such relation, the focus is put on abstracting the moments of peace, which leads back to the original problem. One can wonder whether imperfect peace helps to unveil the possible violence of peace, or whether the well-intentioned

moments of positivity conceal histories of violence. The notion of imperfection is also implicit in Fanon's understanding of freedom and decolonization as ongoing and unfinished activities projects and relations. However, Fanon does seek to highlight moments of positivity or negativity. Instead the question of imperfection is part of his philosophical anthropology, that is, imperfection and incompleteness is an intrinsic element of any action undertaken by the human being.

Going back to Fanon, I remember sitting in a café with a renowned peace scholar. I told him I was writing about Fanon. 'I haven't read him, but I have heard that he actually did not defend violence', he answered. In another instance, I engaged in conversation with a peace researcher during the break of a conference on decoloniality. He was working on Palestine and decolonization. I told him that I had been reading about Fanon and Palestine, and asked him, naively, whether he was using him. 'No, no', the scholar answered nervously and surprised. Later, during his presentation, he mentioned the 'theories of Fanon', probably referring to armed struggle, to refer to outdated understandings of decolonization in opposition to his Gandhian one.

Fanon is usually contrasted with the nonviolent approach of Mahatma Gandhi, but as some works reveal their strongest differences do not lie in the question of violence (Federici, 1994; Kebede, 2001). Mahatma Gandhi is an important figure in the pantheon of pacifism. But this omits the participation of Gandhi in the war of the Boer against the Zulu, his call for the segregation of black people and his disregard of Indian workers in South Africa, his consideration of black people as infantile and devoid of values, and hence the need to teach them the satyagraha (Desai and Vahed, 2015), the recruitment of Indian soldiers for the Second World War in exchange of the promise of Indian independence (Losurdo, 2015), or his use of nonviolence

against the Dalit, which reinforced their condition of damnation (Roy, 2014). By this I do not seek to delegitimize Gandhi's actions, ideas, and influence; it is not a moralist indictment on Gandhi. It is not a call to expel Gandhi from such pantheon. Instead, it is a call to take him seriously and delve into a complexity that is larger than Gandhi as a figure, as an activist and as a thinker. It is a call to question who forms the canon, what criteria are used to decide what and who is inside or outside of the canon, what ideological dynamics are involved in the formation of the canon, how does it evaluate itself, and also to assess what does violence mean: what is considered violence and nonviolence, who counts as the victim of violence, and who is considered violent or even violence him or herself. It is not the scope of this dissertation to analyze the formation of the pacifist canon, but as we will see, Fanon posed some of these questions, and, beyond his answers, the mere posing of the questions can already help us to think about these aspects and the theoretical tools needed to address them.

Despite the emphasis on peace that the discipline has established, almost all the above commentators on Fanon focused exclusively on the question of violence at the expense of the other elements of his work. The identitarian, epistemic and ethical boundaries of the discipline put the peace scholar in a strange position: one is demanded to look at peace while looking at violence in order to see whether one author or group of people is qualified and accepted into the boundaries. The quick response to such situation is to eliminate the problematic thinker out of the picture.

As Lewis Gordon puts it, “[l]osing sight of the human element of human relations offers delusions of closure that, in the end, collapse disciplinary production into performative contradictions” (Gordon, 2015b: 11). The author's above pointed out that excessive attention to violence produces a form of schizophrenia in the peace

researcher. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that affects the patient's relationship to reality. Yet, the requirements of the field may not foster a healthy relationship with reality. Rather than perspective, reality, and one's relationship to reality, is, as Gordon puts it, what is at stake in the birth and the work of disciplines. By reality I do not mean the debates between realism and idealism, or the debates between peace as the norm and violence as the midwife of history. Reality as Gordon conceives it, is more about relationship than about perspective. Reality is incomplete, non-ontological, and exceeds being and thinking. It is through thought, meaning and ideas that reality unfolds. Gordon states by way of Karl Jaspers that "[a] completely thinkable reality would not be reality any longer, but only an addendum of what is possible [in thought]." (quoted in Gordon, 2006a:46) This view of reality as broader and anterior to thought makes of thought and knowledge a humbling rather than a conquering activity.

Lewis Gordon notes that disciplines are born out of human efforts to establish a relationship with something that exceeds them, namely, reality. Thus, disciplines emerge from an outward movement and knowledge production arises through the creation of the necessary resources and practices that continuously expand the field of relationships in order to deal with the dilemmas at hand. This includes methodological resources and communicative relations with other spheres of knowledge. However, when the discipline folds onto itself the result is the subordination of reality to the discipline, the shrinkage of the world and the ossification and the decay of thought. He has called "disciplinary decadence" to the ontologization or reification of a discipline, that is, when "disciplines lose sight of themselves as efforts to understand the world and have collapsed into the hubris of asserting themselves as the world" (2006a: 8; italics in the original). In disciplinary

decadence, Gordon points out, the sociologist criticizes the anthropologist for not being sociological enough, the literary critic criticizes the Marxist for not being literary enough, the Marxist criticizes the literary critic for not being materialist enough, the historian criticizes the philosopher for not being historian and, expanding his argument, the peace scholar would chide others for not being peaceful enough.

In Gordon's assertion of the risk of the discipline becoming the world, what is at stake is not only a debate between peace and violence, but between a discipline born to unfold an aspect of reality that had not been addressed and the discipline becoming the world. A case in point would be Johan Galtung's following syllogism: "Nirvana is entropy, peace is entropy - hence, in a certain sense peace is nirvana and nirvana is peace" (Galtung, 1985: 11) Bibhuti S. Yadav (1977: 451) outlines the silence surrounding the definition of nirvana in Buddhist texts: "[t]he issue is clearly methodological, of showing that a Buddhist must reject epistemology as the methodology of talking about Nirvana." Yadav refers to the ancient Indian philosophers Chandrakirti and Nagarjuna rejection of talking about Nirvana in epistemic and ontological terms, since nirvana exceeds them. This is an illustrative instance since Gordon's conception of reality also shares aspects with Buddhiss and Hinduist thought, but it is not the only one. The treatment of judo, aikido or the approach to indigenous lifestyles as peace practices disregarding the context, the struggles or their self-understanding. For Wolfgang Dietrich and John Paul Lederach (2013: 45), shamans exemplify the peace and conflict worker par excellence disregarding that they play an intellectual and genealogical role is played since the shaman works as the store of knowledge, and the memory of the community. They serve as timekeepers and masters of the calendar. Shamanistic practices are ecologically significant; shamans mediate with animals to assure enough hunting. They employ methods to heal diseases, their causes and augur future. They function as a guide for the souls of the death. The shaman is endowed with economic, social and political influence and authority in the



community (Ripinsky-Naxon, 1993: 9, 62-65). These and other functions cannot be extracted from specific contexts, conceptions of knowledge and being. For Viveiros de Castro from the Amerindian multinaturalist and perspectivist stance, shamanism is a form of acting that implies a form of knowing and being in the world that he defines as

the manifest aptitude of certain individuals to deliberately cross bodily boundaries and adopt the perspective of alo-specific subjectivities so as to manage the relations between these beings and humans. Seeing non-human beings as these see themselves (as humans), shamans are capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in transspecific dialogues. (Viveiros de Castro, 2005: 42).

Vicent Martínez-Guzmán has, in a general way, perceptively warned against the logic of replacing the dominant paradigm with another one:

[W]e need to be critically alert for any culture or field of study becoming a dominant paradigm for the solutions. The nature of the problems addressed is such that, if some cultures or fields of knowledge present themselves as dominant, they become dominating and, consequently, will make other cultures and fields of knowledge dominated, submitted and excluded. (2005: 24)

For Gordon, interdisciplinarity is not the solution to the decay of thought. In this model, discrete disciplines, conceived as sovereign over particular fragments of reality, communicate, yet they drag their notions of autonomy, identity and completeness down with them; the resulting tangential convergence leaves disciplines, and the established disciplinary framework and communities, unaltered (2015b). Conversely, the vitality of thought demands the ongoing building of communicative relations between disciplines and communities pursuing knowledge at a deeper level. To that effect, notions of identity, borders, epistemic and methodological presuppositions are to be left aside. He proposes “teleological suspensions of disciplinarity”, or the decentering of the discipline with the purpose of going beyond the discipline “because of a commitment to questions greater than the

discipline itself'. Ironically, he notes, these suspensions “breath life” (2006a: 34) into the discipline, for they enable to establish a new relationship with it, one that fosters a deeper understanding of the discipline (2006a: 44). Yet the telos here would not be the achievement of a predetermined result, or the mastery of a particular portion of knowledge, the telos is to open the possibilities of disciplines by expanding or creating new relationships to the extent that their interplay may lead to the transformation of disciplines, their disappearance, or the creation of new ones (2015b).

This extra-disciplinary stance may resonate with transdisciplinary practices insofar as the latter are not understood as an end in themselves or as an extension of a discipline, but as the constant and conjoint interrogation of social problems, epistemic limitations, and the institutional structures of the organization of knowledge. What Gordon does not take into account in his account of the impoverishment of thought, and also contribute to it, are the dynamics of power within the university that elicit defensive positions and the closure of ideas: funding, hierarchies within departments, promises and aspirations of promotions are also linked to the reproduction of genealogies and the lack of breathe of thought.

In sum, what is at stake is broader than the peace perspective or the perspective of violence, it is the expansion of relationships that lead to the openness, the outward movement, and the fecundity of the field through the collective unfolding of reality, instead of closure, incompatibilities, and dominance over a fragment of reality.

### **1.2.2 Peace, race, racism and colonialism**

The paucity of engagement with Fanon in the field may not only be due to the question of violence. Relatedly, there is a significant silence in peace studies on questions which were central to his work, such as race, racism and coloniality

(Azarmandi, 2016, 2018) or the mutations, continuities, and structural legacies of colonialism at the level of knowledge power and being, of which Fanon was one of the earliest thinkers. These silences may have to do with one of the characteristics that Gordon identifies in racism, evasiveness, and self-deception. As he points out, “the study of racism is dirty business. It unveils things about ourselves that we may prefer not to know.”(Gordon, 1999: ix) That is, the study of racism is not delinked from the problems of reality addressed in the previous section. The study of racism encompasses the study of society in which it is produced, in which it is studied and how it is studied or not studied, for racism permeates knowledge production. As Ann Laura Stoler observes, silences, evasions, disavowal and ignoring do not have a passive character:

racialized regimes of truth have been refracted through a more fundamental and durable epistemic space. They shape what issues are positioned at the fulcrum of intellectual inquiry and what counts as a recognizable frame of reference in scholarly and public debate. (Stoler, 2011: 129)

It is important to note that Fanon does not use the term racialization as Stoler does above, or in the diverse ways in which it is used today referring to forms of governance and regulation of the social order (Hesse, 2007), formation of groups (Hochman, 2019), or social and bodily configurations inflicted by race, as in cultural studies. Fanon uses racialization as synonym for dehumanization. For Fanon race was a problem insofar as he understood that it is racism what produces race, and not the other way round. The core of the problem lies, then, in racism. Not all race theorists agree with this view. Others argue that the elimination of race entails the elimination of racism (Zack, 1993; Appiah, 1992; Gilroy, 2000). For Fanon race is not a marker of identity, or morphologic or demographic category, but a relational marker of the distance of groups of people to the standard of humanity, that is, of belonging or not to humanity. Capturing this aspect, Alex Weheliye argues that race is not to be

understood “as a biological or cultural descriptor, but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (2014: 3). For that matter, although Fanon privileged race in his analysis of dehumanization and re-humanization, he did not treat it in isolation and as an abstract category, but as constantly interacting with class, gender and questions of sexuality.

Race as the naturalization of a hierarchy of human difference rationalizes the plunder of lives, land, wealth, the commodification of people and the reproductive control of populations in the colonial project. Like colonialism, race is constitutive of European modernity, or concretely it is its philosophical anthropology (Gordon, 1995b; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Wynter, 2015). Maldonado-Torres characterizes European modernity as lived in its underside as a “paradigm of war”: “one of the characteristic features of European modernity is the naturalization of the death ethics of war through colonialism, race, and particular modalities of gender differentiation.” (2008: 4) By war he does not refer to the usual definitions of armed conflict or military and organized warfare between states, but to the suspension of ethics in ordinary life (2008: iv).

What Maldonado-Torres points out is that within a colonial and racist normative framework, in which the European man becomes the measure of humanity, notions of normality and abnormality are vitiated. The question of normality is important for Fanon in his thought on social and human sciences, his political thinking and also as a psychiatrist. In “Racism and Culture” Fanon argues that in a racist society racism is normal. By this he posits that racism is not an anomaly or a visible and excessive feature of the society, instead it is normalized and rationalized in different ways: disguised, taken for granted, unspoken, located in another context, moved to the past,

or ingrained in the everyday life and well-adjusted to the culture, economic relations and forms of knowledge (1964). In other words, in a racist society there is a shift of the standards: the abnormal is the norm, the extraordinary becomes the ordinary, the pathological becomes the healthy, and the irrational takes the place of the rational. This doubleness that colonialism and racism creates, as we will see throughout the dissertation in further detail, has implications for how to think about emancipation and action.

One of the questions that guide *Black Skin White Masks* is the possibility of having normal relations between black and whites. Fanon dedicates the sixth chapter, “The Black and the Psychopathology”, to examine what is for blacks in a racist society to be normal. But black and normality, he observes, are almost oxymoron terms within the racist normative framework. “A normal black child, having grown up in a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world.” (1952: 141; my translation<sup>6</sup>) The heart of the problem, Gordon argues, does not lie in the notion of normality and abnormality, but in the normative, which is “a perversion of normality”. In other words, normativity pathologizes abnormality by conflating it with being or the subject rather than with the functioning or the actions of the subject. Blacks cannot be normal because they do not meet the requirements of humanity; for them to achieve normality means to become white. Thus, in the racist framework a normal black is abnormal as a human being. And for the black to be a normal human being is to be an abnormal black. This Manichean framework, Gordon notes, is a Catch-22 situation for the black (2004:181-182; 2015:59).

The foundational narrative of peace studies accounts for the emergence of the field, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the horrors of the World War II and the

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<sup>6</sup> « Un enfant noir normal, ayant grandi au sein d'une famille normale, s'anormalisera au moindre contact avec le monde blanc. »

nuclear threat, as a response to the ultimate moment of violence in human history (Dietrich, 2012). Yet the narrative of the Holocaust does not enable to think the previous history of racism, genocide, and the slave trade of colonialism. That is what Aimé Césaire refers to when he pointed out that Hitler was not an anomaly and the World War II was the violence that was legitimate in the colonies coming back to Europe (Césaire, 2001). Césaire is not comparing or diminishing the violence of fascism, but connecting histories. Besides Césaire, other African thinkers such as Cedric Robinson, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, Ralph Bunche, and Oliver Cox, among others, also articulated the same point: Nazism was not a right-wing deviation but the logic development of Western civilization (Kelley, 2002). As W. E. B. Du Bois put it in 1947:

There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which Christian civilization or Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world. (Du Bois, 2007a: 15)

The importance of the narrative of the Holocaust and Nazism as the peak of racism and violence not only lies in that it occludes the connections with previous histories, it also entailed a shift of how racism was to be understood, how it was to be normalized and how it was reshaped and manifested after the World War II, concomitant to the cultural and social changes. The Holocaust and the defeat of Nazism elicited a condemnation of racism and debates among social, natural scientists and public intellectuals on the meaning and the scientific status of race.

In the aforementioned 1956 article “Racism and Culture”, Fanon offers reflections on the functioning of racism not only innovative for his own time and regarding his earlier work, but also fruitful to think the different expressions, occlusions and ongoing mutations of racism. Inquiring on the reciprocal relation between racism and

culture he points out that racism is a cultural element, and as such it renews itself, adapts and changes its modes of manifestation according to the larger cultural and social framework that informs it. But, he states, the relation is reciprocal. That is, as a cultural element racism is not “an additional element discovered by chance during a research of the cultural elements of a group. The social constellation, the cultural ensemble are deeply reshaped by the existence of racism.” (1964: 44; my translation<sup>7</sup>)

He observed that the simple and brutal biological racism gradually yields to a more refined form of cultural racism. Both can coexist, but the racism that through anatomy, physiology and genetic evolution questioned the human status now targets particular cultures, its normative value and the legitimacy of certain forms of existence and being in the world. Fanon expresses the reasons behind this transformation through the mutual influence between racism and culture thusly:

The memory of Nazism, the common misery of different men, the common enslavement of large social groups, the apparition of ‘European colonies’, that is the establishment of a colonial regime at the very heart of Europe, the raising consciousness of workers in the colonizing and racist countries, the evolution of techniques, all these have deeply modified the aspect of the problem. (1964: 41; own italics; my translation<sup>8</sup>)

Fanon points out that there are “cultures with racism and cultures without racism” (1964: 40; my translation<sup>9</sup>), and in his inextricable connection between racism and colonialism, the cultures with racism are colonial cultures, that is, European cultures. In this light, Nazism is not alien or extraneous to European culture. Following Césaire, Fanon notes that the anomaly of Nazism is not so much its horror as the enactment of colonial horror in the metropolitan territory and against its populations.

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<sup>7</sup> « Le racisme n’est jamais un élément surajouté découvert au hasard d’une recherche au sein des données culturelles d’un groupe. La constellation sociale, l’ensemble culturel sont profondément remaniés par l’existence du racisme. »

<sup>8</sup> « Le souvenir de nazisme, la commune misère d’hommes différents, le commun asservissement de groupes sociaux importants, l’apparition de « colonies européennes » c’est-à-dire l’institution d’un régime colonial en pleine terre d’Europe, la prise de conscience des travailleurs des pays colonisateurs et racistes, l’évolution des techniques, tout cela a modifié profondément l’aspect du problème. »

<sup>9</sup> « Il y a donc des cultures avec ra-cisme et des cultures sans racisme. »

The consequences of Nazism on post-war European culture shaped the definition and the manifestations of racism, partially as a way to distance from Nazi racism: racism, in its association with Nazism, is confined to the past and to forms of bad science.

Concomitant to the transfiguration of racism, Fanon implicitly points out another constant characteristic of it, its denial. A double denial: a denial of racism and a denial of its intrinsic capacity to move and to change. Contemporary race theorists such as Alana Lentin or David Theo Goldberg (2006) have retaken and delved into Fanon's argument on the establishment of paradigmatic events of racism such as the Holocaust, apartheid or Jim Crow as forms of locking racism into a racist past, already overcome by proper science and ethically expunged. Lentin has called this "frozen racisms" (Lentin, 2016). This view is often accompanied by a nominalist understanding of race, treating contemporary racism as the fault of pathological individuals, and by the disavowal of coloniality as the matrix of contemporary forms of racism. As Fanon points out, the very racism shapes how racism is manifested, denied, identified, and even talked and thought about.

Fanon points out that for a European the racist person would be pathologized as the Nazi who held biological theories on the inferiority of concrete bodies, but not the one who asserts the inferiority, the immaturity, or the illegitimacy of a certain culture, religion, civilization, worldview, system of reference or forms of being, knowing and relating to the world.

For Fanon there is hardly any difference and no significant rupture between biological and cultural racism. What connects the different faces that racism adopts, is, as stated, the broader cultural, social and political framework, that is, colonialism. Racism is both symptom and consequence of colonialism. Thus, the necessities, the conditions and the evolution of that larger structure explain the changing faces of



racism. Fanon notices that in the first stage of the domination the colonizer has to assert its superiority through the dehumanization, exploitation, torture, and systematic and collective seizure of lives. This is the stage of biological racism. However, he adds, racism is adapted to the needs of the society's technological developments, the changes in the modes of production, and economic relations, to the extent of masking racism within a democratic and humanistic structures and discourses. He writes:

At some point people might have believed that there was no more racism. This exhilarating impression without real foundations was simply the consequence of the evolution of modes of exploitation. (...) The truth is that *the rigor of the system makes the daily affirmation of a superiority superfluous*. The need to appeal to various degrees of compliance, to the native's cooperation modified relations in a less brutal, more nuanced, more 'cultivated' sense. It is not rare to see the emergence of a 'democratic and humane' ideology at this stage. (1964: 45; own italics; my translation<sup>10</sup>)

In sum, assuming the narrative of the Holocaust and World War II as the paradigmatic events and moments of racism is not conducive to a proper understanding of its global manifestations through colonialism, its ongoing changes and transfigurations in the postcolonial world, and also does not enable to analyze racism and colonialism, not only as an object of study, but also shaping the way in which it is talked, thought and understood.

### **1.2.3 Euro-modernity and its underside**

Bringing the connection of histories, ideas and events to the forefront also offers a relational view of modernity, not as an intrinsic European phenomenon spread through colonialism. Decolonial authors speak of modernity/coloniality to account for their co-constitution (Suárez-Krabbe, 2016), Enrique Dussel (1994) talks about first modernity, dating back to the arrival of the Spanish in the Caribbean initiating a

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<sup>10</sup> « À un certain moment on avait pu croire à la disparition du racisme. Cette impression euphorisante, déréelle, était simplement la conséquence de l'évolution des formes d'exploitation. (...) La vérité est que la rigueur du système rend superflue l'affirmation quotidienne d'une supériorité. La nécessité de faire appel à des degrés divers à l'adhésion, à la collaboration de l'autochtone modifie les rapports dans un sens moins brutal, plus nuancé, plus « cultivé ». Il n'est d'ailleurs pas rare de voir apparaître à ce stade une idéologie « démocratique et humaine ».

mercantile capitalism, and second modernity referring to the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. Lewis Gordon (2013) talks about Euro-modernity to mean the process through which the European set himself as the legitimate present and the future orientation of humanity, and to signal that there have been other possible modernities. In peace studies this relational element is absent in Wolfgang Dietrich and Wolfgang Sützl definition of modernity as “the societal project characterized by Newtonian physics, Cartesian reductionism, the nation state of Thomas Hobbes, and the capitalist world system.” (1997:283) This view responds to the conception that modernity is an intra-European or Western phenomenon whose ideas, practices, institutions were subsequently spread through the European empires, rather than constituted in their entanglement with colonialism. Equating modernity with Europe is itself an element of the Euro-modern discourse through which Europe set itself as the future direction of humankind, and that impedes to account for the relational phenomenon through which the state, capitalism or Cartesian metaphysics and doubt emerged (Gordon, 2013).

As David Theo Goldberg shows in the important study, *The Racial State*, the close relation between race and state is understudied also in race theory, except in what are considered exceptional cases such as South Africa, the South of the United States, or the Nazi Germany. In his work he shows that there is a “historical co-definition” of race and the modern state, at the level of its emergence, development, and transformation, at the conceptual and material levels. He points out that the project, the practices and institution of the state gives expression to racial subjugations and exclusions, but also in the way that inclusions and resistances are deflected: inclusions, colorblindness or celebration of multiculturalism. The racial state and its gendered dimensions, for Goldberg, in contrast to Marxist or liberal analysis, is not a

secondary phenomenon that obeys instrumentally to outside interests or its own interests, but it is contradictory, fractured and far from coherent (Goldberg 2002: 3-5).

The thought of Descartes must also be conceived in relation to Transatlantic connections, argues Enrique Dussel. He states that Descartes, contrary to what is considered, is not the first modern philosopher. Dussel offers evidence that Descartes was influenced by Saint Augustine and by Iberian Jesuits in America of the XVIth century, something that Descartes did not acknowledge and expressed in mathematics as the basis of reasoning during the first half of the XVIIth century. Dussel traces back the thought on method, doubt, consciousness, the separation of the mind and body to the ideas and events taking place in what he called the first Modernity, that is, the relation between the South of Europe and America through conquest. Anticipating Descartes' work, the ideas of Francisco Suárez, Francisco Sánchez or Gómez Pereira were articulated as a response to the dilemmas that the new and unfamiliar forms of human difference rose in the imperial framework. For Dussel, Descartes faced an anthropological aporia, with ethical and political ramifications, that he did not resolve but addressed by leaving the anthropological question aside and, in favor of epistemology as first philosophy (Dussel, 2008a). As Gordon adds, this shift to epistemology expelled the human dimension from scientific models premised on the separation of soul and body. A dehumanized knowledge that rests upon the concrete expressions of dehumanization taking place in America, produced and articulated first in theological terms, and later in secular terms with the emergence of Euro-modern natural and social sciences.

This [Cartesian] premise of disunity was already receiving concrete manifestation in the presupposition of the Christian European as reality purged of supposed embodied vices of emotion and passion in a

philosophical anthropology of the truly human as this disembodied Christian European archetype. (Gordon, 2013: 67-68)

In peace studies, Vicent Martínez Guzmán offers a different view of modernity in his project for a transmodernity, which shares certain aspects with Dussel's. Martínez-Guzmán talks about Western modernity as white and masculine, which avoids the aforementioned discourse of the uniqueness and autonomy of Europe, and contains the possibility of other modernities and other ways of being modern. Martínez Guzmán argues that peace studies disrupts modern postulates on scientific modes of inquiry based on neutrality. He articulates a critique of modernity through Nietzsche, Heidegger, Frankfurt critical theory, poststructuralism and postmodern thought, communicative ethics, gender epistemologies and knowledge from the South. He observes that modern Western science has imposed itself through the colonial expansion and one of its manifestations is the notion of development as a covert form of racism and sexism.

Martínez Guzmán, in his critique of Western modernity prioritizes the epistemological element in order to produce forms of knowledge that overcome modern forms of violence, treats the question of race as epiphenomenal to science. That is, science was linked to colonialism through its imposition onto other forms of knowledge and beings. However, this addresses one side of the coin. Considering race as the philosophical anthropology of European modernity one can see how race and racism is not imposed after the colonial expansion but was coterminous and integral to modern forms of knowledge production and scientific rationality. That is, the emergence of modern science, disciplines and racial definition, the production of new types of human beings, the white, the black, or the indigenous, were co-produced and evolved together in the colonial process (Gordon, 2013). And with them, new and modern questions about gender were brought up. Julia Suarez-Krabbe (2016) points

out that, at the beginning of the Spanish conquest, the first response to the unfamiliar was to categorize Amerindian as women, but this posed two problems. First, if the Amerindians were women, what were then Christian women in Europe? Second, conceiving them as women entailed conceiving them, to a certain extent, as adults and fully formed, which was an obstacle to the project of Christianization, civilization and development. To that effect, Amerindians, and later blacks, were subsequently infantilized.

Frankfurt critical theory, postmodern, poststructuralist thought and communicative ethics have scarcely paid attention to what Dussel calls the “underside of Modernity”, and are insufficient to account for the long history of war, violence and dehumanization, and also the generative implications of Western ideals of the human at the level of science, institutions, legal framework and economic relations (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 6). The question What are they? Are they human beings?

that was posed in in the debates of Valladolid in the 1550’s, disappeared in Descartes, and reappeared as affirmations in Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Hume and John Locke, still haunts the present condition. Black and indigenous thinkers, those suffering “the underside of Modernity” (Dussel, 1994), posed and still pose the underside of these questions. In Fanon’s words: “Colonialism forces the dominated people to constantly ask themselves the following question: In reality, who am I?” (Fanon, 1961: 240; own italics; my translation<sup>11</sup>)

## **Conclusion**

The next chapter continues with the underside of modernity, the question of human difference and its central role in knowledge production through the examination of

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<sup>11</sup> « colonialisme accule le peuple dominé à se poser constamment la question: « Qui suis-je en réalité? »

the interventions in philosophy of science of Anténor Firmin, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. As Paget Henry points out, in the Africana philosophic tradition the motive of reflection has been the question of racial domination and liberation, which is the underside of the variations of the problem of scientific rationality, positivism or the mechanicism of the subject that have animated European philosophical thought (Henry, 2006). I do not treat Firmin, Du Bois or Fanon as outsiders to European modernity; in their African diasporic conditions they are both insiders and outsiders. They have been produced by European modernity as blacks, and at the same time denied their belonging to the modern world. It is from this double condition of within and without Europe that they issue a critique of it (Gordon, 2008).

Their reflection being oriented towards the question of freedom entailed bringing up the question of the human being from the standpoint of those whose humanity has been denied, and also interrogating methods, disciplinary separations, epistemic presuppositions and thought at its basic level since racism was not only the object of inquiry but also informed how knowledge is produced.

## **Chapter 2. The human, the subhuman and modern science**

The study of racism is dirty business. It unveils things about ourselves that we may prefer not to know. If racism emerges out of an evasive spirit, it is hardly the case that I would stand still and permit itself to be unmasked. Race theorists theorize in a racist world. The degree to which that world is made evident will have an impact on the question of whether the theorist not only sees, but also admits what is seen. The same applies to the society in which the theorist theorizes. (Lewis Gordon, 1999)

To express reality is an arduous task (Frantz Fanon, 1952)

### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses the intricacy of race and colonialism in the emergence of modern social and human sciences through the work of three African diasporic thinkers, the Haitian lawyer and diplomat Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), the economist, historian and philosopher W.E.B Du Bois (1868-1963), and lastly of Frantz Fanon. Such choice adheres to the fact that thought on human and social sciences, questions of method, reality, disciplinarity and the study of the human are a central element in Fanon's work. In his work, colonialism and racism were not only objects of thought, but also the context in which such thought is produced. Thus, it required addressing the very process of thought, or how to think about thought.

I could have addressed the relation between colonialism and science and the centrality of race and philosophical anthropology by focusing on primary European literature. Starting by the theological view of Bartolomé de las Casas and continuing by the importance of race and human difference in Kant, Hegel, Hume, Locke, and Enlightenment thought in general, or its absence in Descartes, despite his mentors were dealing with the relation between epistemic doubt and human difference in America (Dussel, 2008). Instead, I have decided to address the underside of this question by focusing on three African diasporic thinkers with similar concerns on the study of the human for two main reasons. First, because African diasporic thought is

not external to European thought, instead the sociopolitical and epistemic location of Africana thinkers led them to engage dominant thought, build upon it and go beyond it. It is, as Gordon puts it (2008), then dialectically broader. Second, because throughout this dissertation as I have mentioned I do not treat Fanon as an individual thinker, but connected to different networks of thinkers, of predecessors, coetaneous, and successors. In this sense, I do not treat Firmin and Du Bois as direct influences on Fanon –although it is plausible that he was acquainted with the work of Firmin– but as thinkers who shared similar political, ethical and epistemological concerns, and who were part of one of the different networks in which Fanon’s work is located. Such network is not closed, but continues in the work of Paget Henry, Nelson-Maldonado Torres, Sylvia Wynter, Jane Anna Gordon, and Lewis Gordon. These thinkers, animated by similar concerns have built upon the previous ones, and will guide my thoughts on Firmin, Du Bois, Fanon and themselves. In order to analyze their work I take as the basis Lewis Gordon’s observation that African diasporic thought revolves around three fundamental interrelated questions out of which other questions arises: the question of the philosophical anthropology or the meaning of the human being in face of the experience of dehumanization, the question of freedom and action, and what he calls the “metacritique of reason”, that is, how to justify thought and practices, including and how to justify justification (Gordon, 2008).

I have structured this chapter in the following way: The first section addresses Anténor Firmin’s intervention in the anthropological debates of his time through his 1885 work *On the Equality of Human Races*. This work is more than a response to Arthur de Gobineau’s famous *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, but a work on philosophy of science and the study of the human being. In order to challenge dominant racist theories Firmin first questions the definition and limits of



anthropology, its relations with ethnography and ethnology and the division between science and philosophy in the field. By challenging such limits and their object of study Firmin questions what a human being is and how to study it. He carries out an archaeological analysis of the approaches to study the human being and natural history covering Aristotle, Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Cuvier, Comte, Lamarck, Darwin, Kant and Hegel, unveils contradictory and arbitrary typologies and outlines the role of science in producing the human being while studying it. The study of black people then could not be based on idealistic or naturalistic conceptions of the human, but had to take into account the historical power relations that had produced racist hierarchies and the society in which such ideas are produced. By means of a particular and contradictory positivist approach Firmin outlines a science that to call itself as such must favor the equality, harmony, and progress of the human being.

The second section addresses the work of W.E.B Du Bois, a very prolific writer covering a wide array of themes and disciplines. I will focus on his decisive role in the founding of American sociology, and in the development of sociology in general. Although later subsumed under the subdiscipline of sociology of race, the question of race and black people were at the center of the birth of the discipline. In order to study the predicament of black people he had to address first the way in which they were studied, that is by pathologizing them and problematizing them instead of having problems. Du Bois also addressed the subjective element of oppression through the question of “how does it feel being a problem” and the notion of double consciousness and potentiated double consciousness.

The third section discusses Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* as a work on philosophy of science and the study of the human. This aspect is present throughout his work, but I will abstract from his first book certain elements. In order to study the

black as a human being, as an active agent in the world, and to produce a form of knowledge oriented towards decolonization Fanon puts under suspicion methods, disciplines, understandings of the human, and articulates what he calls sociogeny.

## **2.1 Anténor Firmin**

### **2.1.1 Anthropos and Humanitas**

Anténor Firmin arrived in Paris in 1883 as Haitian diplomat. In 1884 he was accepted by the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris, the leading forum in the budding field of anthropology. During the one and a half years of attending the meetings of the association, Firmin wrote *De l'Égalité des Races Humaines* (1885), a 662- page volume addressing the dominant debates of the society. Those discussions took for granted the hierarchical division of human beings in superior and inferior races, locating the black race at the bottom of the scale. Instead, the polemics revolved around the arguments to sustain such ideas, considered as absolute scientific facts. The main debate at the heart of the Société, and of scientific inquiry on race in general, was between supporters of monogenesis and polygenesis, the latter was the dominant view and one of the founding motifs of the institution (Bernasconi, 2008). Monogenesis affirms the common origin of the different races, whereas polygenesis defends that racial difference can be traced back to two or more separate species. To elucidate the contention scientists drew mainly on physical anthropology, that is, the scientific study of race out of morphological, physical differences through craneometry, phrenology or comparative anatomy. Moreover, the discussions were theoretically supported by the racial ideas of Arthur de Gobineau's influential *The Inequality of Human Races*, where he posited the innate inferiority of the black race and warned that racial mixing would lead to the decadence of humanity. Also

predominant were the explorations of applying Darwin's theory of natural selection to human races.

In this scenario, the presence of Firmin at the Société put him in an intricate position. Looking back at those sessions, he attributes his lack of intervention in the debate to the prudence of the newcomer. The book then took shape as a critical response to the dominant racist theories circulating unquestioned under the guise of science. In the preface, Firmin shows his perplexity about the compatibility of science and the defense of the inequality of human beings, and the lack of interrogation of his peers of their presuppositions, notably when his presence embodied the contradiction of their theories: "Is it natural to sit as equals at the same society with men whom the very science that they are supposed to represent seems to declare unequal?" (1885: ix; personal translation<sup>12</sup>). Such contradiction was, however, rationalized as an exception that confirmed the rule (Fluehr-Lobban, 2000). An instance of such incongruity took place on a subsequent meeting in 1892, seven years after the publication of his book. This time Firmin engaged in a discussion on the innate underdevelopment of African people by pointing out to the speaker that the causes had to be looked for in the social, economic and political conditions in the continent. The response of the president of the Société, Professor Bordier was to ask him if he had white ancestry. For Robert Bernasconi, "he was being asked whether his intelligence could be explained only in this way." (2008: 383) But the implications of such remark also point to the dim position of the black thinker within the white scientific community, for "it showed how in an instant Firmin's colleagues could switch from considering him a participant in their debates to treating him as an object of anthropological study" (Bernasconi, 2008: 383). This anecdote instances Oshamu Nishitani's

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<sup>12</sup> « Est-il naturel de voir siéger dans une même société et au même titre des hommes que la science même qu'on est censé représenter semble déclarer inégaux? »

distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas* in Euro-modern conceptions of the human being. The former referred to groups of people, accepted as humans or considered sub-humans, conceived as objects of cognition, whereas the latter were subjects of knowledge. *Humanitas* is both the answer to the question what is a human being, and the ones who poses the question. Thus, *humanitas* emerges by dint of creating and recognizing *anthropos* as the object (Nishitani, 2006).

Firmin does not address the arguments on the superiority and inferiority of races straight from the beginning. He first undertakes an epistemic journey through the “the historical order” of the development of anthropology (Firmin, 1885: 36). His aim being the production of not only different arguments, but of another kind of knowledge, required addressing the paradigms of the discipline. Therefore, he examines how philosophical and scientific systems of thought on the human being are produced, how is knowledge classified and organized, and whether this knowledge is based on philosophic or scientific principles and criteria.

Firmin notes that in the previous decades anthropology had enticed the attention of researchers and philosophers interested in predicaments of the human being. However, he warns that such endeavor demands “to embrace the ensemble of characters that constitute the human being”, since the human can “descend into the abyss of the deepest ignorance and take pleasure in the mud of vice, and it can also rise to the brightest peaks of truth, goodness and beauty” (Firmin, 1885: 3; personal translation<sup>13</sup>). The importance and the challenge for anthropology lie in the contrasts, contradictions, multiple facets and dimensions of the human, and the consequent array of questions that this complexity constantly poses for the studier. This demands to mobilize all spheres of knowledges while being on guard against “this exclusive

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<sup>13</sup> « c'est embrasser l'ensemble des caractères qui constituent l'être humain (...)descendre jusque dans l'abîme de la plus profonde ignorance et se complaire dans les fanges du vice, il peut aussi monter jusqu'aux sommets lumineux du vrai, du bien et du beau. »

specialization that narrows the horizon of the spirit and turn it incapable of consider the objects in all their facets” (Firmin, 1885: 5; personal translation<sup>14</sup>). He illustrates the problem of establishing a closed domain by shedding light on the disputes between scientists and philosophers on setting the definition and the limits of anthropology. For Firmin, both idealism and naturalism foster a reductionist view of the human. In his view, Kant’s definition and distinction between pragmatic anthropology and moral philosophy, inherited and subsequently modified by Hegel and other German idealists, did not consider the definitions of scientists of their time. According to Kant, moral philosophy belongs to the rational and pragmatic anthropology is empirical. Thus, for Firmin, scientists’ study of humans belonged to physical geography rather than pragmatic anthropology. Likewise, for Hegel, the question of racial difference is treated as the natural differences between humans across the geographic spectrum (1885: 6-8). In that sense, both Kant and Hegel engage human difference through a “geographical theory of intelligence” predicated on a “geographical idealism” (Gordon, 2008: 60).

For scientists, however, anthropology was understood as the natural history of the human. Firmin examines the systems of *natural* history developed by Aristotle, Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Cuvier, or those based on the positivism of Comte and the evolutionism of Spencer. The problem in these cases is that the imposition on the human beings of methods designed for the study of animals, plants and minerals omits the social dimension of the human being and its capacity to generate its own history (1885: 9). Firmin’s emphasis on the social and the historical breaks away with the prevailing notions of biological inequality and inferiority in the study of race, thereby he anticipates a form of social constructivism with special attention to history

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<sup>14</sup>« cette spécialité exclusive qui resserre les 'horizons de l'esprit et le rend incapable de considérer les objets sous toutes leurs faces. »

in the formation of the social world. As it will be later detailed, this led him to look for the causes of inequality and inferiority in asymmetries of power and systems of domination

Firmin, consequently, attempts to bridge the gap between philosophers and scientists by defining anthropology as “the study of man from a physical, intellectual and moral point of view throughout the different races that constitute the human species.” (1885: 15; personal translation<sup>15</sup>) He takes ethnographers to task for subsuming anthropology under the field of ethnography. Ethnographers consider their domain as the general science of humanity, and anthropology is seen as a subfield which concerns with the physical taxonomies of humans. Alternatively, he sees ethnography as the descriptive study of people, something travelers acquainted with a group of people could do (1885: 17). Ethnology, adds Firmin, requires knowledge on anatomy, physiology and taxonomy. It differs from ethnography in that it does not merely describe groups of people but studies those groups from the point of view of races. The latter focuses on the external features whereas the former approaches human difference in a detailed, comparative, and systematic way (1885: 17-18). The problem with ethnography is that it takes the part for the whole, a form of lazy reason that Sousa Santos (2014) calls metonymic reason. The problem with ethnology is that it functions in a teleological way because human divisions are established hierarchically before addressing questions of difference. For him, it is after the work of ethnography and ethnology that anthropology takes the stage. In his comprehensive view of anthropology, the field raises questions about the nature of the human, the development of the human potential of the different races, and the alleged superiority or inferiority of certain races.

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<sup>15</sup> « l'étude de l'homme au point de vue physique, intellectuel et moral, à travers les différentes races qui constituent l'espèce humaine. »

Therefore, the ambitious scope that he envisages for anthropology poses a challenge to a field of knowledge that cannot be settled within the systems of thought which had produced the ranking of races (1885: 19). The expansion of the scope requires rethinking the relationship of subordination of anthropology to other spheres of knowledge, to that effect, Firmin draws on August Comte's proposal to include biological, philosophical, sociological and cosmological sciences as the resources necessary to account for human reality (1885: 15-16).

The influence of Comte's positivism is patent in the subtitle of the work, *De l'Égalité des Races Humaines, Anthropologie Positive*. Firmin considered the positivist sociological method of Comte the model that would enable him to conciliate the study of black people with the scientific rigor lacking in the conclusions of his time (1885: xii). Therefore, positivism was a tool to unmask the false positivism of the anthropological community, that is, to expose the absence of scientific basis and criteria in their naturalistic ranking and distinctions of races. Moreover, positivism situated him in a position from which the neutrality of his colleagues will be revealed as biased, for "they conflated the general problem of knowledge about the human species with the specific issue of the meaning or value of that knowledge" (Beckett, 2017: 11). His insistence on facts and empirical evidence was not at odds with philosophical reflection (Bernasconi, 2008), conversely, he believed that rethinking the philosophical foundations of scientific theories can transform dominant ideas and lead to new ways of thinking and doing science (1885: 14).

Firmin's reliance on Comte's idea of progress and the gradual perfectibility of the human as an aspiration that undergirds his philosophy, although problematic for today's reader, differed from Comte in multiple ways. Firmin argues that each of the

different manifestations of a unique human species contains the possibility of the progress of humanity, he illustrates this by emphasizing the role of black people in the history of civilization with examples from Haiti, Ethiopia and ancient Egypt, (1885: 582-599), in contrast to the dominant view that attributed the leading role and the telos of human development uniquely to white people. Thus, he rejects the naturalistic view of progress based on biological races in favor of considering the physical, moral and intellectual perfectibility of the human according to different degrees of civilization (1885: 124). Moreover, it is also this view of progress what enables Firmin to envisage a different form and role of knowledge. In his opinion, a science that supports the inequality of groups of people and is not driven by a commitment to justice, progress and harmony cannot call itself as such (1885: 644).

When Firmin proceeds to examine the different systems of racial classification what he finds is a series of contradictory and arbitrary typologies, which, in his view, reflect the limitations of imposing an order on the irregularity of nature, since “the causes of differentiation are so varied and complex that they tear every artificial series and mock the combinations that scientists create to regulate them.” (1885: 23-24; personal translation<sup>16</sup>) In order to understand the failure of those attempts of classification, the excessive divergences, and the inability to reach a consensus among scientists, Firmin delves further into the bases and the principles that undergird natural history and the systems of classification. The author affirms that the problem of biological racial classification lies in both the lack of solid principles and in the “preconceived systems that accommodate natural facts to certain theories” (1885: 127; personal translation<sup>17</sup>).

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<sup>16</sup> « Les causes de différenciations sont tellement multiples et complexes qu'elles brisent toute série artificielle et se moquent des combinaisons que font et défont les savants pour les régler ».

<sup>17</sup> « le résultat des systèmes préconçus, voulant tirer des faits naturels la confirmation de certaines doctrines (...) »



For Lewis Gordon, Firmin's contribution is not only limited to the anthropology of his time but also to philosophy of science. He observes that his historical analysis of systems of classifications parallels Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, for Firmin exposed how "the orders of knowledge of the nineteenth century were in fact constructing the very subject they had set out to study" (2008: 61). To that it could be added, as it was pointed out above through Nishitani's (2006) articulation of *anthropos* and *humanitas*, that the studier is also created through scientific practices. Firmin states that the understanding of the discipline is linked to the point of view that the scientist has on the subject (1885: 14). In other words, the notion of what is anthropology is inseparable from the notion of what is the human, which points to the intricacy –though asymmetrical– of the studier and the studied.

### **2.1.2 A science of equality and the problems of liberal freedom**

Through this archaeological work Firmin exposed the limitations of anthropology and rebuked the arguments of the biological theory of inequality, the purity of races and their different origins in two or more distinct species. In order to construct anthropology as a science at the service of the equality and freedom of the human being, he then shifted his attention to the social and historical processes that produce inequality and inferiority, and their relation to the production of knowledge. Thus, the society where these theories are produced cannot escape the analysis. As Beckett (2017) puts it, Firmin moved from biological theories of race and inequality to address the actual manifestations of inequality and inferiority as grounded in relations of power: "The anti-philosophical and pseudo-scientific doctrine of the inequality of races rests on nothing more than the idea of the exploitation of man by man." (Firmin,

1885: 204; personal translation<sup>19</sup>) He observes that in the Egyptian, Greek, or Roman empires the notions of superiority in regard to surrounding groups differed from how Europe constructed the meaning of inferior groups.

Perhaps a spirit of egoism and pride has always led civilized peoples to think of their superiority in regard to their neighboring nations, but we can affirm that there has never been a relation between this narrow patriotism (...) and the positive idea of a systematic hierarchy of human races. (1885: 203; personal translation<sup>21</sup>)

Hereby he establishes an important distinction between ethnocentrism and racism. And, in line with the definition of Euro-modernity sketched in the previous chapter, he poignantly identifies that the creation of groups of people and the systematic classification and ranking of human beings through the idea of race, where one group functions in a god-like manner (1885: 645), is a particular practice of European domination without precedents in history. For Firmin, the debates in France in the aftermath of the French, the Haitian revolution, and the abolition of slavery revolving around liberty, and equality cannot be delinked from events in the colonies. In contrast to most of his peers, he saw that the doctrine of racial inferiority was used to legitimize practices of slavery. He delivers a fierce critique of the hypocrisy of philosophers and scientists who reject slavery on humanitarian grounds while maintaining the physical, moral, and intellectual inferiority of slave. He also examines the contradiction between the science that legitimizes the right to submit inferior people and the legal measures that grant political and social equality to slaves

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<sup>19</sup> « La doctrine anti-philosophique et pseudo-scientifique de l'inégalité des races ne repose que sur l'idée de l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme. »

<sup>21</sup> « Peut-être observe-t-on un esprit fait d'égoïsme et d'orgueil, qui a toujours porté les peuples civilisés à se croire d'une nature supérieure aux nations qui les entourent; mais on peut affirmer qu'il n'y a jamais eu la moindre relation entre ce sentiment, qui est la conséquence d'un patriotisme étroit, et une idée positive de hiérarchie systématiquement établie parmi les races humaines. »

(1885: 205-209). Firmin explains this contradiction in the attunement of scientific thought with the “ambient ideas” in Europe (1885: 211; personal translation<sup>22</sup>).

These “ambient ideas” have been consistent in the defense of equality, liberty and civility in the wake of the French revolution, and the development of a racist philosophical anthropology that places groups of people outside of the sphere of the human, as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze observes concerning the Enlightenment (1997) and Toni Morrison calls “the parasitical nature of white freedom” (Morrison: 1992: 57). Likewise, Greg Beckett posits that such contradictory positions are not incompatible, for Firmin identified in the persistence of racial theories that “inequality was a central organizing value of European society that served to justify its domination of others.” (2017:8).

In a similar vein, Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) shows the centrality of race hierarchies and the foundational role of colonialism in making possible liberal ideas on freedom, equality, sovereignty, or modern conceptions of personhood, civility and governance. The simultaneity and intricacy of the liberal political project with indigenous dispossession, African slave trade, and forced migrations from Asia in the Americas in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been disavowed *in* and *by* modern political philosophy by means of what she calls an “economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding” (Lowe, 2015: 3).

Lisa Lowe’s work shares certain resemblances with the authors examined in this chapter in as far as their methodological and disciplinary concerns. Whereas Firmin looks at the significance of race at the moment of the emergence of social sciences,

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<sup>22</sup> « idées ambiantes »

Lowe observes how once disciplines have solidified and established rigid boundaries the study of race becomes a subdiscipline, for the foundational element of human difference articulated through race fades by being scattered among anthropology, history, sociology, philosophy, economics, literature, race and gender studies. Her methodological challenge to the liberal economy of forgetting is a “reminder that the constitution of knowledge often obscures the conditions of its own making” (Lowe, 2015: 39). Lowe interrogates how liberalism has shaped knowledge production through the organization of the archives and the compartmentalization of disciplines, thereby occluding the linkages between interdependent histories of the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and Europe, reducing them to a single History with a single actor.

She identifies both the dependency of modern liberalism on despotism, colonial divisions and asymmetries, and the circular logic that underpins its political project: the liberal idea of the human and the concomitant promises of universal freedom and rights were predicated on the subordination and exploitation of those whose freedom and rights had been denied by liberalism itself due to their distance from the definition of the human, which had the European man as its endpoint. Within the “colonial division of humanity” (Lowe, 2015: 7) the meanings assigned to groups, civilizations and whole continents according to their degree of proximity to the liberal definition of humanity delimit their suitability to be bearer of rights, freedom and good governance. The deviation from the norm placed them in a situation of non-humanity. She writes:

Colonized peoples created the conditions for liberal humanism, despite the disavowal of these conditions in the European political philosophy on which it is largely based. Racial classifications and an international division of labor emerged coterminously as parts of a genealogy that were not exceptional to, but were constitutive of, that humanism (Lowe, 2015: 39).

She observes that abolition of slavery was not motivated by humanitarian concerns as the liberal narrative that traces a linear progress from slavery to liberty, wage labor, modern citizenship and free trade celebrates; instead, official archives reveal as the causes both the fear of the spreading of Black revolutions to the rest of plantation societies, and the necessity to expand the economic profits in light of the exhaustion of mercantile capitalism and slavery as a mode of production (Lowe, 2015: 13). The response to such problems laid the foundations to new, interrelated systems of domination and management of labor, reproduction, and social organization globally, based on the adaptation and combination of “colonial slavery *with* new forms of migrant labor, monopoly *with* laissez-faire, and an older-style colonial territorial rule *with* new forms of security and governed mobility” (Lowe, 2015: 15-16; emphasis in the original). The cases of Chinese and East Indian forced migrants that Lowe meticulously presents illustrate how distinct but connected racist logics pervaded the liberal account of the move from bondage to freedom. Racial classifications circulated, they were reoriented and improvised according to concrete conditions and needs; the spotlight was moved from group to group, rearranging colonial systems of meaning and providing the rationale for new imperial configurations thusly. If indigenous were assimilated to the land and eliminable or equated with the past, Africans were cast as chattel fit for enslavement, the rationale for Chinese and Indian exploitation was their suitability for indentured labor. As Lowe points out such impositions did not follow a linear logic. The processes of assigning racial and colonial meanings to human difference were interrelated, overlapping, continuous, and not yet concluded (Lowe, 2015: 7-9).

### 2.1.3 Social regeneration

Firmin's philosophical anthropology, his understanding of the social world, and his philosophy of history enabled him to overcome the shortages that Lowe exposes in liberal knowledge production, which were on the making at his time. Through his relational understanding of humanity, which he expresses as an "invisible chain [that] links all the members of humanity in a common circle" (Firmin, 1885: 662; personal translation<sup>23</sup>), he extends the impact of the doctrine of racial inequality, and every other form of domination, to humanity as a whole. Within that framework he understands equality as the inalienable condition for the foundation of solidarity and justice, his call for a "regenerative conciliation" (Firmin, 1885: 657; personal translation<sup>24</sup>) requires that "human beings take an interest in each other's progress and happiness" (Firmin, 1885: 662; personal translation<sup>25</sup>). If inequality is mutually damaging, solidarity and regeneration are mutually enhancing.

Both the common circle as the metaphor for humanity and his view of the theory of equality as "a regenerative doctrine" (Firmin, 1885: 662; personal translation<sup>26</sup>), distance him from the linear conception of progress of Comtean perfectibility. Throughout the book he insists that the regeneration of the black race is the goal that his work attempts to contribute to. The term regeneration implies the damage in social health produced by racism, a view shared by Fanon. Firmin's choice of the term regeneration is nothing short of irony. Regeneration has biological denotations, it refers to qualities of living beings, and points to a previous descent of their condition. Etymologically, regeneration is linked to the Latin *re-generare*, to bring forth or generate again, and it is also related to gene, as in genetics, genital,

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<sup>23</sup> « une chaîne invisible réunit tous les membres l'humanité dans un cercle commun. »

<sup>24</sup> « conciliation régénératrice »

<sup>25</sup> « Il leur faut s'intéresser mutuellement les uns aux progrès et la félicité des autres »

<sup>26</sup> « doctrine régénératrice »

generation, origin or genealogy, referring to birth or descent. His use of regeneration is, however, not related to the biological inferiority that scientists attributed to inferior races, but to the social world as the *living* site generated by human beings. Thus, regeneration has a twofold direction: first, it aims at the reintroduction of the human capacity to create and participate the social world that the doctrine of inequality has erased in its naturalistic understanding of the human; and secondly, it purports at the humanization of relations in the social world that the racist structure has impeded.

In *De l'Égalité des Races Humaines*, Firmin anticipated debates later resumed by Pan-Africanists, Négritude and not yet concluded in current scholarship on race and postcolonialism (Fluehr-Lobban, 2000) concerning black aesthetics and the normative value of standards of beauty, racial mixing and hybridity, the erasure of the intellectual contributions of African people by Eurocentric philosophies of history, or the importance of Haiti in the modern world. If I have failed to cover these and other aspects is not due to their lack of significance and relevance, but because they fall outside the scope of this chapter.

To sum up, this sketch of Firmin's work is meant to illustrate, (1) that the question is not only about how race is studied, but race as part of the whole formation of modern knowledge production on the human being. Within that framework race and power cannot be separated. Race does not function as a mere descriptive category of human difference but it is rooted in asymmetrical colonial histories. (2) As Gordon (2008) puts it, Firmin's archaeological work identifies the role of science in the constitution of the subject of study, to which it can be added that the studier is also constituted in that process. (3) The positivist anthropology that Firmin advocates is paradoxically exceeded in different aspects of his own work, for his comprehensive study of the human required mobilizing a wide array of knowledge resources and

methodological tools. This is related to Lisa Lowe's genealogical critique of modern liberal disciplinary formation and their subsequent compartmentalization resulting in the occlusion of the role of race in their founding moments. (4) Her examination of these occluded conditions upon which knowledge was produced can correlate Firmin's inquiry on the society that produced the doctrines of racial superiority. (5) Whereas Lowe frames the discussion in terms of the conditions of possibility for such knowledge, Firmin's genealogy centers his attention on the assumptions and presuppositions of the scientific practices of his peers. The problem he identifies when he expresses his incredulity about the lack of rigor, despise of evidence and the incapacity of scientists and philosophers to *see* their relation to the world that produced such racist ideas, is the absence of critical self-reflection inherent in a model of science as made by god. In his phenomenological work, Lewis Gordon (2006, 2015b) has written extensively on the predicaments of the human as knower and the question of theory, which etymologically is related both to god and to see. In theoretical approaches where the human replaces god nothing falls outside of the eye of the theorist; both the knower and the known are complete, without contradictions, and theory accounts for a complete reality. Alternatively, a model of science as made by humans necessarily brings to the fore the relational element, also with regard to the self: one sees what one sees and conjointly one sees oneself as seeing. In contrast to the previous approach based on capturing reality, the realization that through seeing one establishes a relationship to the world prompts a model of humility, "human reality" is then incomplete, and therefore, "greater than any effort to contain it" (Gordon, 2015b: 3). This approach exposes the contradictions of the model of humans functioning as gods, but it is not the end of the story for the knower has now to deal with the limitations of what is seen, that is, "seeing one's non-seeing"



(Gordon, 2015b: 3). Thus the relationship to reality is enlarged by these realizations and new relationships. This also means that the model of the human as knower is neither devoid of contradictions, for the question that now arises revolves around how to relate to this new knowledge either by admitting or denying what is seen, which Gordon calls, following Sartre, bad faith, a lie to the self, resulting in the shrinking of reality (Gordon, 2015b: 1-4).

## **2.2 W.E.B. Du Bois**

### **2.2.1 The birth of American sociology**

Akin to Lisa Lowe's aforementioned argument on the centrality of race in the formation of social and human sciences and its subsequent sidelining from the canonical histories and the main practices of disciplines, South African sociologist Zine Magubane presents an account of the development of her field in the United States. She argues that according to the standard accounts, the inceptions of social sciences in the United States followed the model and ideals of the great European figures theorizing about European modernity. In the particular case of sociology she observes the co-constitutive relation between modernity and sociology; modernity is explained by sociology and, in turn, the discipline is understood as a modern form of knowledge production on modernity. The self-understanding of sociology's project as a form of knowledge produced *by* and *about* the modern condition is rooted in a conception of modernity consisting in European industrialization, revolution, democratization and disconnected from the global colonial experience and the plight of indigenous and people of African descent in America (Magubane, 2016: 1-2; Bhabra, 2007). Sociologist Gurminder Bhabra adds that the bifurcation of sociology and anthropology was a decisive move in the understanding of the project of sociology, the latter's scope was the *traditional* whereas the former was dedicated

to the study of the modern world understood as originated in European peculiarity and “distinct from its colonial entanglements” (Bahmbra: 2014a: 2).

Against this backdrop the study of race is isolated from “issues of ‘general’ sociological concern”, for “[r]acism has been made an anachronistic survivor in tradition, rather than a constitutive part of modernity” (Magubane, 2016: 1). Thus race and the study of black people are circumscribed to a particular space; such issues have become “a topic” to be dealt within “sociology of race”, “race and ethnicity” or “race relations”. In other words, presenting race issues are as a subfield separated from general sociological inquiry impedes the understanding of the formation of U.S. sociology and modern societies around questions race (Magubane, 2016:2). She observes that the recognition of slavery as the “signal event in American modernity” would cast doubt on the compartmentalization of race and the organMagubane, ization of sociology or “the discipline that arose to explain it [American modernity]” (2016: 3).

However, as Alana Lentin bluntly puts it: “[r]acism was embedded in US social sciences from their inception” (Lentin, 2017: 181). The conflation of modernity with intra-European events adopted also by US sociology enabled to rewrite a history of the discipline that occluded its role in the support of slavery, segregation and global colonial racism. Magubane shows how mid-nineteenth century sociological studies by Henry Hughes, George Fitzhugh or George Frederick Holmes were written by “pro-slavery imperialists” who considered slavery a modern form that depended on colonial expansion for its maintenance (Magubane, 2016: 6). By removing such cases and the concomitant racism and global colonialism from the main canon of US sociology the field moved closer to the European model as the study of European modernity, disconnected from colonial issues. In that vein, the isolation of race is

accompanied by a localist approach in the study of social matters that ignores their global connections; thereby the scope of the field is delimited by rigid national boundaries which hinder the understanding complex and broader phenomena such as race. As it was stated in the previous chapter, Gurinder Bhambra notes how privileging “particular sets of connections leads to particular understandings” (Bhambra, 2014a:5), this begs the question of which connections are established and which are masked by this manifestation of American exceptionalism in social sciences’ self-understanding.

As Magubane points out, the canonical history of social sciences traces back the emergence of modernity in the United States to 1776, to which a fundamental anticolonial character is attributed. Hence, the project of sociology presents itself as anticolonial in orientation. The view that the United States emerged out of a colony nourishes the dissociation between colonialism and racism: colonialism takes place elsewhere and racism is treated as an endogenous multifarious matter in the narrative of the new nation liberated from Europe (Mugabane, 2016). The narrative of liberty as intrinsic to the US modernity required then the obliteration of processes of dispossession, extermination and enslavement. Yet in the cases in which slavery may be acknowledged as the background of contemporary racism, the former is not conceived as an internal form of colonialism informed by European coloniality, as Black Power scholars framed it (Bhambra, 2014b), and embedded in wider processes of expansion that led to what Magubane calls “the long era of global Jim Crow (1865-1965)”. Hence, the contemporary sociological analysis of race is unframed from colonial histories, privileging instead social psychology and the examination of individual prejudice (Magubane, 2016: 11).

The absence of race in general sociology had influence on what was to be studied, how was to be studied, and also on who was the studier. In other words, the separation of the living conditions of blacks from main concerns in the study of the society went hand in hand with the silencing of black social scientists, or their tokenization under the subdiscipline of sociology of race, or the study of “race relations” (Mugabane, 2016, Bhabra, 2014b). The same can be applied to the cases of Native American and women. For more than a century these groups have been consistently challenging the basic tenets of general sociology and exposing that the subtext of *general* in general sociology equates to white and male sociology. As Bhabra notes, despite this challenges and fundamental contributions, the racial segregation within the discipline has not yet been acknowledged in current disciplinary practices and or in specific historiographical works on US sociology. Alternatively, the initial exclusion of gender perspectives and the contributions of feminist theorists from the 1960’s on have been conceded, without that implying that feminism is currently part of the main agenda of the discipline (2014b: 477).

The formation of a canon is not merely a collective process whereby certain authors delineate the contours of a field by means of an apparent, continuous conversation that delimits the insiders from the outsiders. It does not suffice to entice the intellectual community about the *quality* of an author or a text for her to be accredited with canonical status since these conversations do not take place in a vacuum. The historical context and the forces that shape social relations in which the discipline is embedded condition and define who is to participate in the conversation and which ideas are to be recognized as *important* (Bhabra, 2014b: 477). For Toni Morrison, rigidity, defensiveness and resistance to change or expansion are intrinsic elements of the canon. This partly explains the “virulent passion that accompanies”

(Morrison, 1994: 371) canonical debates since the intellectual process cannot be separated from the *motives* for the fabrication of the canon. Yet, she notes, not all debates elicit the same response, and not all “incursions” are perceived as a threat. She attributes the absence from the canon of third-world contributions not merely to the intrinsic rigidity, but to the fear of “miscegenation” of the Eurocentric canon (Morrison, 1994: 372). At stake are political interests, conceptions of culture, entitlement to measure and indict *other* cultures, and the organization of meanings that provide a certain understanding of the self and that legitimate one’s position within the debate: “Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate (...) is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested” (Morrison, 1994: 374; italics in the original). However, the alleged purity of the canon that the presence of colored contributions would threaten is put into question at the outset by their paradoxical role in the building of the canon, for “invisible things are not necessarily not-there”. In other words, the absences, and the “intellectual feats” –the refined strategies of epistemic escapism, invention, oblivion and evasion of contradictions– required for keeping them at distance from society are also constitutive part of the canon (Morrison, 1994: 378).

### **2.2.2 Du Bois and the origin of sociology**

A case in point of these constitutive absences and the aforementioned strategies of segregation is the erasure from sociology’s historiographies of W.E.B. Du Bois –and the Atlanta school that he initiated and led between 1897 and 1913. Instead, his work is located within the subfield of “sociology of race”, “sociology of racial relations” or “the Negro question” (Bhambra, 2014b; Magubane, 2016; Morris, 2016, Rabaka, 2010a). This dominant view silences his pioneering role in the development of the discipline, and his leading work in the first school of sociology in the US, in a

segregated institution, and a prolific career as a committed scholar, activist, public intellectual and institution builder.

As it was argued above, the marginalization of Du Bois from mainstream sociology is rooted in the omission of race as a modern phenomenon, which also neglects how mainstream sociology and US social sciences are structured since their inception around race (Morris, 2016; Bhambra, 2014b). Furthermore, Du Bois is not only overlooked in current historical narratives of sociology and undergraduate and graduate curricula (Rabaka, 2010), during his lifetime Du Bois also faced the institutional segregation reserved to black scholars who challenged the dominant approach to the study of race, and questioned the scientific paradigms and the hegemonic ideology of their time. As Gurminder Bhambra notes, “sociology itself was embedded within a racial logic of segregation” (2014b: 478); hence, besides the epistemic and methodological complicity of science with oppression, Du Bois and the Atlanta scholars were displaced from main academic circles by white academic and political elites. Working in a black institution during segregation entailed the lack of peer support, the absence of recognition and scientific capital, the isolation from main intellectual networks, and, fundamentally, the lack of economic resources (Morris, 2016). In his autobiography, Du Bois recalls,

So far as the American world of science and letters was concerned, we never ‘belonged’; we remained unrecognized in learned societies and academic groups. We rated merely as Negroes studying Negroes, and after all, what had Negroes to do with America or science? (1968: 228).

Under this onerous conditions Du Bois weaved an “insurgent intellectual network” (Morris, 2016: 193) formed by students, scholars, leaders from religious and women movements, activists and volunteers. Thereby he produced a groundbreaking sociological work and brought forth a model of social sciences from below, “embedded in social networks and communities” (Morris, 2016: 189) to be studied,

and committed to social justice. The interplay between the academic institution and black communities led to a two- way relation between the scholars and oppressed groups. On one side, it informed the scientists methods and theories to study society, on other side, the critical sociology that he generated functioned as a mediator that aims to both understand oppression and facilitate action towards social change (Morris, 2016).

Main historiographies accredit Robert E. Park and the Chicago school of sociology to be the initiators of sociology and race studies in the first decades of the twentieth century in spite of the contributions of Franz Boas or Du Bois and his group of sociologists. The black conservative leader Booker T. Washington had an important influence in the development of the Chicago school and in the marginalization of Du Bois and the Atlanta school. Washington explained the unequal condition of people of African descent by means of their inherent inferiority; he promoted programs of professional training as the solution to racial problems, and held an accommodating stance towards racial segregation that gained the favor of philanthropists and white intellectual and political elites. The ascendancy of Washington was felt in the ideas of Park, with whom he had closely worked in the industrial education programs, and in the marginalization of Du Bois and black radicals that confronted him and were left without economic support. Park and the Chicago school explained the condition of blacks by means of social Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckian theories that affirmed the cultural and biological inferiority of colored people and rationalized oppression. Those deemed inferior races were inevitably placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy either because of genetic reasons and natural selection, or because of the inheritance of inferior traits derived from a common history of inferiority (Magubane, 2016; Bhabra, 2014b; Morris, 2016). In the 1897 article “The

Conservation of Races” Du Bois had already taken the baton from Firmin in order to challenge the criteria and expose the contradictions of natural sciences in classifying human beings in different races according to physical characteristics. Like Firmin, Du Bois did not reject the concept of race, neither pleaded for its elimination. Instead he advanced an understanding of race closer to what today is called social constructionism grounded in common language, history, traditions and aspirations, emphasizing the social and historical without discarding physical differences but neither bestowing them with a central role (Du Bois, 2001: 192).

It should be noticed that Du Bois was trained in philosophy as undergraduate and held doctorates in history and economics. His intellectual production work outgrew the boundaries of sociology (Rabaka, 2010), for it spanned philosophy, history, anthropology, literature, psychology, political science and international relations, also while doing sociological work. Yet, if we stay within the boundaries of sociology, Du Bois’ studies of black populations had an impact on the development of the whole field, for he did not treat black communities separately from the rest of society, but showed “their entire implication within the vital questions of modernity” (Magubane, 2016: 13; Morris, 2016). In other words, he did not disentangle race from questions of gender, political economy, urbanism, agriculture, criminality, arts, religion, education or leisure (Rabaka, 2010; Morris, 2016). Taking race and racism seriously challenged dominant approaches to explain oppression and opened the path to theoretical and methodological innovations to study society, which decades later became standard models of inquiry, and were attributed to white thinkers (Morris, 2016; Bhambra, 2014b).

Aldon Morris has detailed how Du Bois influence on acknowledged major figures like Max Weber has been overlooked in accounts of the field. The stance of Du Bois



on industrial capitalism as stemming from the plantation system and a worldwide process of colonization sparked the interest of the German sociologist who, thereby, reexamined his biological understanding of race. Weber considered Du Bois' work on the social configuration product on the relation between race and between race and capitalism and as the guiding model, and put down the lack of relevance of main literature on the issue. In his study on the Polish peasantry, Weber drew from Du Bois' work to take into consideration the role of race and ethnicity within the social and economic configuration of the nascent industrial capitalism (Morris, 2016: 153-159). Du Bois' analysis of the social and political dimensions of racial inequality and his description of segregation as a caste system was years later retaken by Weber's reflections on the relation between social stratification, power, economics and social institutions (Morris, 2016: 165). Moreover, Weber's shift towards social constructivism, democratic values and cultural pluralism can be also attributed to the intense intellectual exchange with Du Bois. Weber's initial opposition to Polish migrants in Germany was sustained by a social Darwinist view that posited the innate superiority of German people, and by his conception of the nation which functions by separating biologically different groups of people. Notions of purity, essence, biology and nationalism were revised to the extent that Weber became the scourge of German eugenicist social scientists (Morris, 2016: 166).

### **2.2.3 The Negro problem and the problem Negro**

Besides the relation of social sciences with race and the anthropological question, in what follows I will briefly focus on two other interrelated themes of Du Bois' work that share resemblances with Fanon's concerns. In 1898 Du Bois published the essay "The Study of Negro Problems" in which he denounced the practical absence of studies on the living conditions of black people and identified the limitations of the

few attempts until the date. The title itself is indicative of the orientation of the research; the formulation “Negro Problems” nuances the singular form “the Negro Problem”, and challenges the evasive and alleged symmetry of the “race relations” approach of Booker T. Washington and Robert E. Park. Thereby Du Bois calls to address the predicaments of black people *within* questions of power in their social, political and economic manifestations, that is, it points out that Negro problems are a symptom of the condition of the whole society. Du Bois also exposes how framing the issue is also entrenched in questions of power, for the race relations approach leaves the legitimacy of the society that produced such problems unquestioned, thus rendering illegitimate the assertion of the problem (Fields, 2001). In Barbara J. Fields words, the “Negro Problem”

reveals without euphemism the illegitimacy of the problem in the context of a democratic polity. Proposing to decide the fate of people occupying the nominal status of citizens otherwise than with their participation and assent is a profoundly undemocratic, indeed anti-democratic, undertaking. (...) race relations as an ideological formation of the problem, popularized with genius by Booker T. Washington, arose precisely as a way to disguise the antidemocratic essence of the problem by providing for it both a definition and a solution apparently capable of bypassing the issue of naked power that lay at its core (Fields, 2001: 813-814).

At the outset, he posits that the study of Negro problems are to be treated as a social problem, which he defines as a maladjustment in the relation between conditions and actions (Du Bois, 1898: 3): “the failure of an organized social group to realize its group ideals, through the inability to adapt a certain desired line of action to given conditions of life” (Du Bois, 1898: 2). The author takes studies on black people to task first, because they “judge the whole from the part” (Du Bois, 1898: 13), which turns black people into “one inert changeless mass” (Du Bois, 1898: 14); and second, for disregarding the social element and leaving also aside the historical, economic, demographic, educational,

psychological and institutional elements of the social world, in favor of reductionist explanations derived from “grand theories” based on natural laws (Bay, 1998: 44).

so much of the work done on the Negro question is notoriously uncritical; uncritical from lack of discrimination in the selection and weighing of evidence; uncritical in choosing the proper point of view from which to study these problems, and, finally, uncritical from the distinct bias in the minds of so many writers. (Du Bois, 1898: 12-13)

The implications of such analysis as we have seen was not only limited to how social sciences were to study race; the society in which these forms of knowledge were produced was also put under scrutiny. Their mutual constitution reveals the political possibilities for social reform or the continual degradation of racialized communities (Du Bois, 1898: 15). In the examined accounts, which he describes as superficial, unsystematic and uncritical (Du Bois, 1898: 11-12), the aforementioned *failure* becomes an inherent feature of black people and the confirmation of their pathological constitution rather than a symptom of broader elements of social life. Social scientists conflate Negro problems such as violence, alcoholism, lack of education or health, or poverty, with the Negro problem, “the burden [that] belongs to the nation” (2015: 45), which results in producing Negroes as problems:

In effect, the Negro problems were thrown out of the sphere of human problems into the sphere of necessity premised upon pathologies. Consequently, Negro problems often collapsed into the Negro Problem—the problem, in other words, of having Negroes around. (Gordon, 2000)

The fundamental question that Du Bois poses is how to study black people without replicating their production as “problematic people”. The complexity that the study of human beings requires finds an additional difficulty when considering that the humanity of the Negro is put into question. (Gordon, 2008) In order to amend the pitfalls of social scientific works on the Negro problem, and especially with the purpose of shedding light on such problems, in 1899 he published *The Philadelphia*

*Negro*, an unprecedented systematic study of the Seventh Ward in Philadelphia, the most populated black urban ghetto in the North of the U.S. This study is the first major empirical research in US sociology. Although in histories of sociology this is attributed to William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's 1918 study on the Polish peasant, Du Bois work antedated the Chicago school by two decades (Bhambra, 2014b). As Mia Bay observes, reducing the merits of this work to being the first and being sociological does not allow to appreciate the multi-methodological and transdisciplinary scope of the study in a moment when disciplines were not completely formed (1998: 5). Also important in the study is that it initiated a tradition of scientific work directed at black liberation, for Du Bois conceived a form social science, attuned to the African American experience, in connection with social reform.

Rabaka outlines that the path was loaded with “theoretical trials and tribulations” and “conceptual growing pains” (2010a: 76). Du Bois faced two main difficulties, first, the absence of comprehensive models of social science's research in the U.S. (Morris, 2016); second, the epistemic, methodological and institutional intricacy of social sciences with the situation he was meant to study (Rabaka, 2010a). Sociologist Pierre Saint-Arnaud summarizes both aspects:

Du Bois simply had no theoretical corpus on which to base a contrary position. He had to build a new science from the ground up, a science devoted to the advancement, as opposed to the near-term extinction, of black Americans (quoted in Rabaka, 2010a: 72).

Du Bois responded to this twofold obstacle with an anti-racist “counter-sociology” (Rabaka, 2010a: 71) that challenged the “armchair grand theorizing” (Morris, 2016: 50), social Darwinism and natural laws of nineteenth-century European sociological systems. He dedicated careful reflection on methodological aspects that resulted in an innovative empiricism. In order to carry out the bottom up explorations of the

community, he collected considerable qualitative and quantitative data based on the combination of ethnographic research, participant-observation, interviews, surveys, maps, archival research, statistical analysis comparative and historical analysis, and the cross-checking of the data obtained (Rabaka, 2010: 53).

For Du Bois the history of Negro problems at the time of post-emancipation cannot be delinked from slavery and connects it to the situation of post-emancipation, for “one cannot study the Negro in freedom and come to general conclusions about his destiny without knowing his history in slavery.” (Du Bois, 1898: 12) To that effect, he carried out studies of blacks under slavery, tracked the migrations of emancipated slaves to Philadelphia, established comparisons with Jews and Italians communities, and delved into how the community was formed across time. Thereafter, he examines the internal constitution of the community, the dynamics within families, and the demographics, political economy, education, religion, criminality or health conditions. For Du Bois, “a slum is not a simple fact, it is a symptom and that to know the removable causes of the Negro slums of Philadelphia requires a study that takes one far beyond the slum districts” (Du Bois, 2007b: 4). Thus, *The Philadelphia Negro* is not solely a study of a black community, neither can be reduced to black sociology, rather, by examining how “oppression and discrimination trapped blacks in a vicious cycle of subordination” (Morris, 2016: 48) the author treats race within the social configuration. This entails taking into consideration the role of racist imaginaries, the racial organization of space, the origins and the effects of the exclusion from public life, or the seclusion to limited labor options.

Du Bois discusses the formation of social classes in the particular context of a racist society, and the processes of stratification within the community derived from

the intricacy of class, race and gender, which is particularly evident in the chapters dedicated to income and access to labor market and, on education and illiteracy. Although I concur with Rabaka (2010b) when he sees *The Philadelphia Negro* as informed by a male, bourgeois perspective which flawed Du Bois's interpretation of the data and gender analysis –a perspective that Du Bois shifted in subsequent works with a firmer anti-sexist stance– the gendered dimension is not tangential to his methodological proposal. The influence of black female thinkers like Anna Julia Cooper or Ida B. Wells is present in his work. Likewise, for his reflection on methodology he drew from the studies of urban poverty by Jane Addams and the Hull House settlement movement. Isabel Eaton, who participated in the research for the important *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), wrote the section on the study of black domestic workers for *The Philadelphia Negro*.

In his autobiography Du Bois recalls that the University of Pennsylvania, which assigned him the project of *The Philadelphia Negro*, provided scarce economic resources, did not offer a research team, intellectual support, methodological instruction, neither membership nor recognition, and allotted a year time for the realization of the study on his own (1968: 194-198). Lewis Gordon points out that the project itself was embedded in the racist logic of failure mentioned above, for Du Bois was expected to fail as a scientist, and thereby “demonstrate that Philadelphia's evils were extrasystemic, were features of the black populations, rather than intrasystemic, things endemic to the system and, hence, things done to the black populations.” (2000: 68; italics in the original). In other words, the project was conceived to reaffirm the pathologies of Negro populations and legitimize their condition as “problem people”.

Gordon identifies in the phenomena of “problematic people” (2000: 69) one of the manifestations of the theodicy of Euro-modern epistemic and political systems. Theodicy is the theological inquiry that arises from the presence of evil in light of the existence of God: If God is loving and almighty, how can evil and injustice be explained? The answer, not only by Christian theologians like Saint Augustine of Hippo, but also among African thought as the Akan, has been mainly twofold: either human beings ignore the deity’s plan, or it is the free will endowed by God to human beings and their subsequent choices that accounts for evil. In both cases, the deity is presumed complete and exempted from evil, which falls of the shoulders of human beings. For Gordon, the grammar of theodicy persists in its secularized form in the Euro-modern world wherein the conception of political and knowledge systems as complete and absolute have “taken up the void left by God” , and the imperfections are to be found outside of the system (Gordon, 2006b: 7).

African diasporic thinkers have recurrently identified the theodicean grammar of Western political thought. Although they did not explicitly formulate it as such, the accounts of Firmin, Du Bois and Fanon in this chapter illustrate different aspects of this point. A perfect and just system, by definition, denies the existence of problems within the system, then, black people representing the imperfections and contradictions of the system are displaced outside of the system. They are rationalized as “problematic people” by virtue of an isomorphic relation between the problems they experience and what they *are* (2007: 125). The theodicean grammar is not limited to neat inside/outside distinctions, for the recognition of systemic incompleteness, paradoxically, may lead to creating a new complete system:

Even where the (white) thinker is admitting the injustice of the system and showing how it could be made good, the logic of ultimate goodness is inscribed in the avowed range of the all-enveloping alternative system. Such

a new system's rigor requires, in effect, the elimination of all outsiders by virtue of their assimilation (Gordon, 2007: 122).

#### **2.2.4 Being a problem and double consciousness**

The theodicean relation of blacks to the epistemic and the political undergirds the 1903 classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, where Du Bois perceptively warned at the beginning that the problem is not the so-called Negro problem, and that had far reaching implications: “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (Du Bois, 2015: 1). Du Bois was not only referring to black and white relations in the United States, he was also alluding to the global connection between capitalism and racism that formed a “dark vast sea of human labor” (Du Bois, 1998: 15) that extends over Asia, Africa and the Americas, which he addressed in subsequent works.

If in *The Philadelphia Negro* he challenged dominant forms of study of black people and societal presuppositions by detailing the social character of the problems faced by black communities in its objective dimension through empirical research, *The Souls of Black Folk*, entailed a “shift in the theoretical attitude of the knower” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 8). Du Bois, turned his attention towards the *perspective* and the inner-life of those who live as a problem. He approached the question of problem people in its subjective dimension, that is, by looking from *within* at the relation between the structure and black subjectivity. To that effect he merges the first, second and third person and combines poetry, Negro spirituals, sociology, personal memories, short stories, history, and philosophy. Gordon (2000) remarks that what makes Du Bois's work humanistic social sciences is that neither of both approaches is presumed as complete.

The methodological critique of the study of black people is also explicit in this work. Du Bois caustically describes as “cold statistician” (Du Bois, 2015: 8) or “car-



window sociologist”, to the social scientists who locate the origin of the Negro problem in their constitution (Du Bois, 2015: 116). Instead, he demands to treat the study of black people with the same level of proximity, rigor and complexity that the study of human issues requires, with, as stated above, the added complication that their humanity is questioned by society:

We seldom study the condition of the Negro to-day honestly and carefully. It is so much easier to assume that we know it all. Or perhaps, having already reached conclusions in our own minds, we are loth to have them disturbed by facts. And yet how little we really know of these millions,—of their daily lives and longings, of their homely joys and sorrow, of their real shortcomings and the meaning of their crimes! All this we can only learn by *intimate contact* with the masses, and not by wholesale arguments covering millions separate in time and space, and differing widely in training and culture. (Du Bois, 2015: 103-104; own italics)

Methodologically, what Du Bois proposes through such “intimate contact” and the inside approach to study phenomena is to take into consideration the existence of a black perspective and the possibility of it being communicated, which reduces the gap between the studier and the studied (Gordon, 2000: 92-93). Consequently, Du Bois sets out the problem through a question, not without sarcasm, in the well-known passage that follows:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, *How does it feel to be a problem?* I answer seldom a word. (Du Bois, 2015: 3-4; own italics)

The question of being a problem is not only explored in terms of feelings and the subjective experience, but also in terms of “the strange *meaning* of being black” (Du Bois, 2015: 1; own italics). In order to unravel such meaning he directed his attention beyond the subjective to the intersubjective world, and to the generation of meaning

by consciousness. As Paget Henry (2006) shows, Du Bois explored phenomenologically the relationship of the black to the self and to the world from the perspective of consciousness by engaging Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage<sup>28</sup>, removing from it ontological considerations, and articulating the concept of double consciousness.

In his view, blacks in the United States are both strangers and at home, "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight" (Du Bois, 2015: 5). Being black and U.S.-American are two irreconcilable terms for the racist project. Then double consciousness refers to the "strange experience" (Du Bois, 2015: 5) of being a problem, of constantly seeing oneself and the world, through the contemptuous eyes of others, or, in other words, double consciousness is looking at the world through the other's eyes. The result of this external imposition on the sight is the impossibility of self-consciousness and the subsequent splits: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 2015: 5). This particular form of false consciousness entails adopting a self-deprecating image and accepting the validity of black people as problems. The psychological result is self-rejection, vacillation, self-hatred, and a distorted perception of reality.

The Hegelian dialectics of recognition between self and other is interrupted at the level of the skin when deprived of its metaphorical and disembodied character and is taken to the concrete experience of the African-descent subject under colonial and racial history. Instead of the reciprocal interplay between self and Other required for the emergence of two mutually constituting self-consciousness, the black self is split in an inner clash "between two We's", between "two racialized and hence irreconcilable collective identities". The black remains trapped in the relation

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<sup>28</sup> Hegel's dialectics of lordship and bondage and its treatment by Fanon will be covered in detail in chapter 7.

between master and slave (Henry, 2006: 7). Besides the psychological effects, double consciousness implies accepting as the norm the double standards produced by white normativity, that is, the acceptance of notions of universality, normality, justice, freedom, citizenship, peace or equality that are premised upon the pathologization of groups of people. Within the framework of double consciousness, conceiving oneself as problematic and inferior is normal (Gordon, 2000; 2006b).

Double consciousness, however, contains the possibility of what Paget Henry called “potentiated second sight” (2006), an epistemic position that enables new perspectives and opens up new critical possibilities vis-a-vis white society. In his chapter dedicated to whiteness in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, Du Bois writes:

Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language (...) Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the workings of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, now furious! (2007c: 29).

Similarly, in one of his firmest anticolonial works, *The World and Africa*, potentiated double consciousness underpins his stance on colonial paradoxes and contradictions:

Perhaps the worst thing about the colonial system was the contradiction which arose and had to arise in Europe with regard to the whole situation. Extreme poverty in colonies was a main cause of wealth and luxury in Europe. The results of this poverty were disease, ignorance and crime. Yet these had to be represented as natural characteristics of backward peoples. Education for colonial people must inevitably mean unrest and revolt; education, therefore, had to be limited and used to inculcate obedience and servility lest the whole colonial system be overthrown. Ability, self-assertion, resentment, among colonial people must be represented as irrational efforts of “agitators” (...) (2007a: 23).

Potentiated double consciousness exposes the self-deceptive and narcissistic character of the theodicean system, it unveils “the lived contradiction” (Henry, 2006: 9) of double consciousness, and redirects its attention toward the contradictions of the society that generated problematic people. It brings into the open a society that functions through the generation of doubles while asserting its completeness: double selves and double notions of membership, but also double notions of universality, normality, justice, equality, freedom, or peace, in contradiction with the “lived reality” of white normativity, injustice, inequality, unfreedom and violence, as experienced by blacks despite the dominant claims. It is the experience of these tensions and contradictions that enables black people to question the legitimacy of the society (Gordon, 2000: 92).

In epistemic terms, potentiated double consciousness is an expansive experience. The black knows the white perspective that creates her as a problem, and thereby gains a perspective on white perspective, and questions its legitimacy. Or as novelist and poet James Weldon Johnson famously put it: "I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them." (quoted in Bernasconi, 2000: 182) The dialectical movement in this form of double consciousness enables a broader perspective of reality, for it covers both dominant reality and its contradictions. However, it is not an understanding of dialectics that leads to another closed system. The critical perspective gained does not propose the clashing of two universals; it is not an attempt to replace a god by another god, a hegemonic position by another hegemonic form of consciousness, or substituting white normativity by black normativity. Rather, paraphrasing Toni Morrison, it transforms knowledge from a model of “invasion and conquest to revelation and choice” (1992: 8). It is an

expansive movement grounded on humility, for the realization that there is more to the story than what double consciousness reveals (Gordon, 2000; Henry, 2006).

With his articulation of double consciousness Du Bois opened up the way for the phenomenological explorations of Africana lifeworld (Henry, 2006; Gordon, 2008). Although no trace indicates that Fanon was acquainted with Du Bois' work, the former delved into that path and cleared new venues by exploring the psycho-existential and the sociopolitical implications of double consciousness. Moreover, to the centrality of racial liberation as the driving force of self-reflection, Paget Henry points out that both Fanon and Du Bois incorporated the poetic dimension as an inseparable element of their thought. For both authors the question of reality and meaning in their connection with history, politics, psychology, economic structures, and social institutions is brought to the forefront, and as Fanon points out, "reality turns out to be extremely resistant" (Fanon, 1952: 147; my translation<sup>29</sup>). The following section deals with how Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* and throughout his work addressed this question.

## **2.3 Frantz Fanon**

### **2.3.1 Decolonization as first philosophy**

In 1951 Fanon submitted as his medical thesis a work that would later become *Black Skin White Masks*. Originally entitled "Essai sur la désaliénation du Noir", such work caused a "scandal" at the department of psychiatry in Lyon and was rejected on the grounds of its excessively subjective approach (Cherki, 2011: 39). The department, led by neurologist Jean Dechaume favored the positivist study of mental illness predicated on an organicist approach, that is, it relied on a physiological understanding of mental illness that sought a direct correlation between symptom,

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<sup>29</sup> « Et la réalité se révèle extrêmement résistante. »

organic localization and medication. Within this biological orientation, shock therapy, injections and internment were the customary treatments recommended at the department to basic mental alterations (Cherki, 2011; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Fanon declares at the outset that “this work is a clinical study”, pointing out the intricacy of racism and health issues (Fanon, 1952: 12; my translation<sup>30</sup>). Yet, besides psychiatric literature, he relies on philosophy, sociology, anthropology, poetry, film, comics, popular and children stories, and personal narratives, thereby outgrowing the disciplinary limits, including the established boundaries of neuropsychiatry, and advancing a different conception of the clinical.

Moreover, questions of racism, social exclusion, economic exploitation, violence and their subsequent psychic impact on black populations fell outside the scope of psychiatry and medicine in general. Amidst the substantial developments in psychiatry and psychology, the increasing concern for mental health issues, and the proliferation of public and private mental care facilities after World War II in the Europe and the United States, the mental disorders of populations of color were systematically ignored by researchers, policy makers and health care providers. The link between health and oppression was disregarded. Except for the initiatives of groups of black psychiatrists and psychologists in the United States, supported by religious and black intellectual figures and with a strong communitarian character, such as the Lafargue Clinic in Harlem (Mendes, 2015), or the exceptions in Great Britain driven by and directed to migrant populations and students (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017) in the mid-twentieth century, psychiatry, shielded in scientific value neutrality and objectivity, stood apart from political concerns. Psychiatry’s putative detachment from politics occludes the role that the field played in sustaining racism

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<sup>30</sup> « Cet ouvrage est une étude clinique. »

and an oppressive social order, not only in the colonies, as it will be addressed in chapter five, but also in the western world. If matters of racism and oppression were alien to the field, race and racial difference, in contrast, were central elements to be considered in differently valuing pathologies, establishing diagnostics, defining treatments and building distinct doctor-patient relationships. Hence, pathologies of people of African descent were approached out of the stereotype that depicted them as criminal, violent, lazy, bewildered and inherently pathological (Mendes, 2015; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

At the same time, as Fanon shows throughout the book, and several studies have delved upon (Anderson, Jenson and Keller, 2011), psychiatric theories like psychoanalysis travelled back and forth between the metropolis and the colony. That is, psychoanalysis did not emerge in a relationship of exteriority to colonialism, but as other Euro-modern sciences and theories, its constitution was embedded in colonial ideology and inseparable from the colonial project. Dominant ideas and categories such as primitivism, the savage mind and the darkness of the colony informed early psychoanalytic theories. In its turn, psychoanalysis permeated notions of culture, civilization and citizenship upon which the colony was examined, and psychoanalytical views were applied to the colonized taking as the measure the Euro-modern bourgeois psychoanalytic subject, universal and cosmopolitan. As Fanon puts it, there is a “discordance between the corresponding schemas and the reality that the *nègre* offers” (Fanon, 1952: 148; personal translation<sup>31</sup> ).

*Black Skin White Masks* is a multilayered and transdisciplinary work in which he addresses different themes: a critique of Euro-modernity, the psycho-existential condition of black Antillean in the metropolis, the suffering and alienation of racism,

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<sup>31</sup> « inadéquation entre les schémas correspondants et la réalité que nous offrait le nègre. »

the possibility of understanding between blacks and whites, or the pathologies produced by the search of recognition, among others. Yet I concur with Jane Anna Gordon, (2014), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008, 2009) and Lewis Gordon (1995, 2015) when they argue that the fundamental theme that undergirds this work is a philosophical reflection on how knowledge on the human being is limited by the entanglement of colonialism with human sciences. Through his analysis on racism and dehumanization Fanon reflects on how human sciences can account for the condition of those placed below the colonial standards of humanity when methods and models of study are designed and actively related to their creation as subhumans. As Maldonado-Torres (2009) observes, putting at the center the experience of racism and dehumanization is not solely a description of the particular condition of the black, it rather serves to examine and challenge the philosophical bedrock of social and human sciences and expose their limitations in the study of the human being, and simultaneously, to outline a liberation-oriented human sciences out of the experience and the theorization of those whose humanity is denied, that is, to produce a form of knowledge that enhances their agency rather than obstructs it and pathologizes them.

Du Bois in the earlier cited essay from 1899 “The Study of Negro Problems” pointed out that despite the growing interest in the study of social phenomena sociology had ignored those derived from the presence in the United States of America of eight million persons of African descent. Besides the fact that the urgencies that afflicted black people demanded to be addressed, he also saw this situation as containing the opportunity to challenge the prevailing methodological presuppositions, generate new kinds of knowledge, expand the intellectual production of social sciences, and also addressing the institution that produces knowledge.



Fifty years later, from metropolitan France, Frantz Fanon faces a different landscape, although the heart of the problem remains untouched. The aftermath of Nazi horror was followed by a general response against racism and the gradual turn away from racial-biological science in the West. In this vein, the UNESCO declaration of race from 1950 issued by a group of anthropologists and geneticists affirms the common belonging of humankind to a single species, attempts to shed light on the concept of race, its scientific use, and assert the equality of human beings within “the ethic of universal brotherhood” (UNESCO, 1952: 103). Fanon seemed to be acquainted with this declaration and in the opening pages of *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon addresses the liberal values that undergird the changing approach to race and racism of his time:

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. Provide a single answer and the black problem would lose its seriousness.  
 What does man want?  
 What do blacks want?  
 Even if I risk provoking the resentment of my colored brothers, I would argue that the black is not a man. (Fanon, 1952: 8; personal translation<sup>32</sup>)

Ethical appeals to a common humanity, brotherhood, equality, compassion or love between abstract human beings add layers of sediment to the problem instead of

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<sup>32</sup> « Vers un nouvel humanisme...  
 La compréhension des hommes...  
 Nos frères de couleur...  
 Je crois en toi, Homme...  
 Le préjugé de race...  
 Comprendre et aimer...  
 De partout m'assaillent et tentent de s'imposer à moi des dizaines et des centaines de pages. Pourtant, une seule ligne suffirait. Une seule réponse à fournir et le problème noir se dépouille de son sérieux. Que veut l'homme ?  
 Que veut l'homme noir ?  
 Dussé-je encourir le ressentiment de mes frères de couleur, je di-rai que le Noir n'est pas un homme. »

shedding light onto it. “I am not as innocent to the extent of believing that appeals to reason or respect of the human can change reality. For the *nègre* who works in the sugar plantations in Le Robert, there is only one solution: the struggle.” (Fanon, 1952: 218; my translation<sup>33</sup>) Devoid of attention to matters of history, power, to the meanings and values ascribed to the human beings, to conflict, and to the systemic dehumanization of the colonized, liberal values uphold the system and block the possibility and the scope of change. Is the black a human being? What is a human being? What is the standard of the human and what is the relation of the black to such standard? These, and their concomitant historical, political and cultural trajectories, are questions that the humanism of the UNESCO declaration skips in their hasty ethical leap and that Fanon implicitly and explicitly addresses with his initial question. He writes:

By appealing to humanity, to dignity, to love, to charity, it would be easy to prove or to make admit that the black is equal to the white, but my goal is different: what I want is to help the blacks to liberate themselves from the arsenal of complexes that has sprouted in the colonial situation (Fanon, 1952: 18; my translation<sup>34</sup>).

Likewise, in *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon alludes to the “the human person” of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Fanon writes:

But this dignity has nothing to do with the dignity of the ‘human person’. The colonized have never heard of this ideal human person. What the colonized have seen in their land is that they could be detained, beaten and starved with impunity. And never a priest or a professor of morals came to receive the beatings in their place or to share their bread with them. (Fanon, 1961: 47; my translation<sup>35</sup>)

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<sup>33</sup> « Nous ne poussons pas la naïveté jusqu'à croire que les appels à la raison ou au respect de l'homme puissent changer le réel. Pour le nègre qui travaille dans les plantations de canne du Robert1, il n'y a qu'une solution : la lutte. »

<sup>34</sup> « en faisant appel à l'humanité, au sentiment de la dignité, à l'amour, à la charité, il nous serait facile de prouver ou de faire admettre que le Noir est l'égal du Blanc. Mais notre but est tout autre : ce que nous voulons, c'est aider le Noir à se libérer de l'arsenal complexe qui a germé au sein de la situation coloniale. »

<sup>35</sup> « Mais cette dignité n'a rien à voir avec la dignité de la « personne humaine ». Cette personne humaine idéale, il n'en a jamais entendu parler. Ce que le colonisé a vu sur son sol, c'est qu'on pouvait impunément l'arrêter, le frapper, l'affamer; et aucun professeur de morale jamais, aucun curé jamais n'est venu recevoir les coups à sa place ni partager son pain avec lui. »

Samuel Moyn points out that the notion of the human person was one of the most disputed elements of the text—for its conservative undertones—between liberals and communitarians. Christian in its origin, the individualistic and moralistic notion of the human person became its central tenet; at stake was also the underlying Christian framework of the Declaration (Moyn, 2010). Throughout his work, Fanon skipped the debate between liberals and communitarians and, although closer to the later, articulates a relational philosophical anthropology in which the subject is inherently bound to and responsible for the other, as Maldonado-Torres puts it, “*to the point of substitution*”, that is, the “subject lives and works *for the Other*.” (2008: 154-155; italics in the original) In this vein, dignity for Fanon is not an inborn quality of the human being, but is rather an achievement; it is something to be struggled for and related to action. “Was my freedom not given to me in order to build the world of the *You?*” (Fanon, 1952: 223; personal translation<sup>36</sup>; italics in the original) Fanon links the question of the human being and subjectivity to freedom, agency and responsibility. As Maldonado-Torres (2009) points out, *Black Skin White Masks* is guided by decolonization as first philosophy, and it is from that angle that he interrogates the human, social sciences and conceives the possibility of action. For Fanon the problem is political, and as we will see, racism disrupts the relation between ethics and politics upon which good-willed declarations and liberal political theories are based. For Fanon, decolonization is not tantamount to the demands or the struggle for equality, recognition or justice. Instead, it is a historical process through which the colonized subject intervenes actively and responsibly in the world after liberation, and human relations at the level of economics, land, knowledge, sexuality,

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<sup>36</sup>« Ma liberté ne m'est-elle donc pas donnée pour édifier le monde du *Toi* ? »

the understanding of the human being and the normative framework are radically transformed.

The very question “What do blacks want?”, that is not posed and Fanon demands to be posed, entails the existence of the interiority, the perspective, and thus, the humanity of the black, which itself is a challenge to colonialism and racism. If Du Bois accessed black interiority through the question “What does it feel to be a problem”, for Fanon the question of desire, “What do blacks want?”, guides him through both the denied interiority of the black and the societal, cultural and historical structures that inform such desire. It is then not only a question about subjectivity. At the same time, the question of desire brings to the forefront the question of reality, which drives his thought on alienation and social sciences. To that effect, as we saw, he drew on multiple disciplines and perspectives. But as he puts it, “the analysis of the real is a delicate issue. (...) The key is not to accumulate facts and behaviors, but to disclose their meaning.” (Fanon, 1952: 163; my translation<sup>37</sup>) Miraj Desai points out that for Fanon reality is not purely psychological, but also phenomenological. It entails unfolding the meaning of “the world, self, others, objects, media, race/ethnicity, political and economic structures, and collective traditions as they are given in lived experience and the lived world.” (Desai, 2014:63-64)

Also, the question of desire is linked to the aforementioned aspects of action, freedom and subjectivity. In this sense, desire is not only a lack, but can also be affirmation, agency and connection:

I ask to be considered on the basis of my Desire. I am not only here-now, locked into thinghood. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that my negating activity is taken into account insofar as I pursue

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<sup>37</sup> « L'analyse du réel est délicate. (...) L'essentiel pour nous n'est pas d'accumuler des faits, des comportements, mais de dégager leur sens. »

something other than life, insofar as I fight for the birth of a human world—that is, a world of reciprocal recognitions. (1952: 211; my translation<sup>38</sup> )

However, amidst the chatter of the many pages that assail him, Fanon finds a piercing silence. In the introduction he asks why to write a book that nobody had asked for, especially those at whom it was addressed (Fanon, 1952: 7). To his own question, Fanon “calmly” responds that “there are too many imbeciles in this world. And after having said that, now I have to prove it” (Fanon, 1952: 7; personal translation<sup>39</sup>). Who are these imbeciles<sup>40</sup>? Unlike Du Bois’ aforementioned article, Fanon was not only addressing his writing to the scientific community, but also to a black readership. Paradoxically, as Jane Anna Gordon (2014: 64) notes, the fact that this book was not required by black people indicates the extent to which it was needed, for evasion is one of the mechanisms of oppression that Fanon addresses throughout this work.

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<sup>38</sup> « Je demande qu'on me considère à partir de mon Désir. Je ne suis pas seulement ici-maintenant, enfermé dans la chose. Je suis pour ailleurs et pour autre chose. Je réclame qu'on tienne compte de mon activité négatrice en tant que je poursuis autre chose que la vie ; en tant que je lutte pour la naissance d'un monde humain, c'est-à-dire d'un monde de reconnaissances réciproques. »

<sup>39</sup> « Alors, calmement, je réponds qu'il y a trop d'imbeciles sur cette terre. Et puisque je le dis, il s'agit de le prouver. »

<sup>40</sup> The English version of this passage translates imbeciles as idiots. Both have been used as medical terms to describe degrees of mental weaknesses, but they are not synonymous. In Ancient Greece the idiot referred to those who did not participate in public affairs, and thus would be pertinent to describe the ethical approach to racism devoid of its political consideration. Imbecility, from Latin *imbecillus*, is etymologically related to *baculum* or walking stick, denoting physical weakness, which was extended to mental weakness in medical French and subsequently it became an insult. Another sense of imbecility is connected to the Latin *im bellum*, without war; an expression that Romans used to refer to people who were physically or mentally weak for war. Imbecile is also related to the Greek *baculus*, or scepter. The royal stick here would not imply weakness but it would refer to the positive value of having knowledge and experience. Thus, the imbecile is here the one who lacks *baculus*, that is, who constantly vacillates, is between two minds, and evades decision (Erneut and Meillet, 2001). In other words, the one that is too young and lacks experience, judgement and support, that is, maturity, which as Lewis Gordon (1995, 2015) has extensively developed, is one of the central elements of Fanon’s philosophical anthropology. This connects with a passage where he states that “this book should have been written three years ago... but back then these truths were burning in me, today I can tell them without feverishness” (1952: 9). In this sense, *Black Skin White Masks* may also be a personal departure from imbecility, from the weakness that racism fosters in the black through the evasion of reality, locking her in an enforced infancy, and a move towards responsibility for one’s learning, growth and agency.

### 2.3.2 Questioning methods and disciplines

As stated, Fanon conceived *Black Skin White Masks* as a clinical inquiry, but the study of the black condition requires a reformulation of the conception of the clinical, that is, addressing questions of economics, history, culture, value, being and meaning, and like the study of the human being, it cannot be entrusted to a single discipline.

When I started this work, having completed my medical studies, I thought of submitting it as my thesis. But the dialectic required redoubling my positions. Although in a certain way I concentrated on the psychic alienation of the black, I could not overlook certain elements which, however psychological they may be, originated effects that bear upon the domain of other sciences. (Fanon, 1952: 46; personal translation<sup>41</sup> )

As we have seen throughout this chapter, disciplinary segmentation functions as a technology that shapes and filters, content and occludes the embeddedness of Euro-modern social sciences with colonialism (Lowe, 2015). In *Black Skin White Masks* and throughout the rest of his work, including his more orthodox psychiatric writings, he develops an implicit critique of methods and disciplines through a particular anti- or extra-disciplinary approach. In Gordon's terms, Fanon takes psychiatry as his starting point, but it is by privileging the problem what enables him to stretch out towards the domains of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, political economy, history or literature without being subjected to the disparate existing scholar communities and disciplinary constraints, that is, the centripetal forces of their epistemic, methodological and identitarian guidelines and boundaries.

This would not be best described as interdisciplinary. In this model, discrete disciplines, conceived as sovereign over particular fragments of reality, drag their notions of autonomy, identity and completeness down with them; the resulting

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<sup>41</sup> « Quand nous avons commencé cet ouvrage, parvenu au terme de nos études médicales, nous nous propositions de le soutenir en tant que thèse. Et puis la dialectique exigea de nous des prises de position redoublées. Bien qu'en quelque sorte nous nous fussions attaque a l'aliénation psychique du Noir, nous ne pouvions passer sous silence certains éléments qui, pour psychologiques qu'ils aient pu être, engendraient des effets ressortissant a d'autres sciences. »

convergence is tangential, which leaves disciplines, and the established disciplinary framework and communities, unaltered (Gordon, 2015b). Instead his work could resonate with certain transdisciplinary practices insofar as these are not understood as an end in themselves or as an extension of a discipline through the addition of diverse texts and actors. Anthropologist José Juncosa (2014), with the struggles for emancipation of indigenous and black people in mind, casts doubt on the emancipatory potential of transdisciplinary approaches since they may serve to sustain the hegemonic conception of knowledge within an endogamic system of disciplines. He argues that the critique of interdisciplinarity can be applied to transdisciplinarity if the latter is premised on the assumption that each discipline can learn something from other disciplines because of their coincident scopes. In his view, this approach reinforces the discreteness of disciplines, and lacks the political impulse to upend the institutional framework of knowledge production and organization. In a similar vein, although treading carefully and avoiding a critique in toto, Maldonado-Torres (2015) distinguishes different forms of transdisciplinarity. He warns that transdisciplinary thought blunts its critical possibilities when it prioritizes already existing disciplines and methods over the epistemic, ethical, and political urgencies that outgrow the framework of disciplines. Paying attention to these aspects is what he calls “decolonial transdisciplinarity”, which he identifies in the work of Fanon, Du Bois, Sylvia Wynter and Gloria Anzaldúa.

If Fanon’s work may be described, in today’s language, as transdisciplinary it is ironically, because it was not sought. He developed an anti-disciplinary stance out of the necessity that results from the constant and conjoint interrogation of social problems, epistemic limitations, and questions of power relating the structural organization of knowledge. As Jane Anna Gordon conceives the “creolization” of

thought and methods, “syntheses and mixture are not pursued for their own sake” (Gordon, 2014: 3), instead, “the imperatives of the inquiry itself prevail over what might be mandated by dictates of disciplinary membership.” (Gordon, 2014: 4) But such approach does not stop at the level of critique; what emerges from these “forms of mixture that were not supposed to occur” (Gordon, 2014: 11) are “fresh ways of addressing urgent political debates” (Gordon, 2014: 3).

In the previous chapter, the notion of disciplinary decadence was discussed in one of its manifestations, the ontologization of the discipline, or the discipline becoming isomorphic with the world. Another form of decadent knowledge that Lewis Gordon identifies is what he calls the “fetishization of method”, or how establishing an isomorphic relation between method and reality produces another inward movement of the discipline. In this instance, methods subordinate reality instead of mediating between the studier and the reality to be studied. In other words, method becomes “Reality” itself (2015b). In this vein, Fanon, before starting his dialogue with, among others, Freud, Lacan, Sartre Jaspers of Hegel, first casts methods under suspicion through what Ato Sekyi-Otu calls “his detective hermeneutic of Western reason” (1996: 17):

It is considered appropriate to introduce a work on psychology with its methodology. I will not hold to the custom. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point in which methods are resorbed. (Fanon, 1952: 12; personal translation<sup>42</sup>)

This is not a method-less approach; it is, in phenomenological language, the bracketing or suspension of method, or in other words, a method that demands radical reflection on method itself. It implies examining from the root how knowledge is produced and legitimized before addressing the what, or the outcomes. Anne Norton

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<sup>42</sup> «Il est de bon ton de faire précéder un ouvrage de psychologie d'un point de vue méthodologique. Nous faillirons à l'usage. Nous laissons les méthodes aux botanistes et aux mathématiciens. Il y a un point où les méthodes se résorbent. »



points out that methods are not neutral, they are inseparable from culture, politics, and the institutional dynamics in which they are employed. “Methods are allied with particular regimes of truth. Methods are governed by assumptions.” (Norton, 2004: 82) Hence, method cannot be taken for granted since it both shades light and casts shadows; it enables to see certain things and impedes seeing others. Fanon understood that to elucidate the black condition requires to “shake the worm-eaten roots of the edifice” (Fanon, 1952: 11; personal translation<sup>43</sup>), that is, addressing the problems that racism poses for knowledge at the fundamental level. In other words, he examines how to think about and through racism and colonialism when these are ingrained in the whole process of knowledge production. In this sense, the suspension of method “outlaws the movement of a colonizing episteme as a legitimating process” (Gordon, 2006b: 27). Through the medical term resorption, meaning the process of gradual dissolution of cells or tissues until their disappearance or their assimilation into the circulation, he underlines that the how and the what of knowledge production are not separable. Thus, methods are not merely external tools to be applied, but are to be submitted to critical inquiry as an inseparable element of the research problem.

By leaving methods to botanists, Fanon expresses that the study of the human cannot follow the model of natural sciences, for “[s]ociety, unlike biochemical processes, does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being” (Fanon, 1952: 11; personal translation<sup>44</sup>). Thereby he rejects naturalist and mechanistic understandings of the human and their predetermined approach to human action as functioning like natural or structural proceedings that can be explained through laws or rules. This cannot account for the multiple human dimensions and the variety of responses, attitudes, stances or desires. Fanon instead locates human

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<sup>43</sup> « secouer les racines vermoulues de l'édifice. »

<sup>44</sup> « la société, au contraire des processus biochimiques, n'échappe pas à l'influence humaine. L'homme est ce par quoi la société parvient à l'être. »

agency—and thus the possibility of change—at the center of his methodological perspective. As Jane Anna Gordon posits, the previous approaches “cloaked the very contorted agency that Fanon sought to uncover in the most constrained of conditions” (Gordon, 2014: 74).

Phenomenologists’ suspicion of methods, adds Maldonado-Torres (2008: 98), results from the understanding of human reality as incomplete, unfixed and, therefore, exceeding methodological constraints. This requires a different approach than those aspiring for exhaustive and complete explanations. Fanon emphasizes that scientific and popular literatures have created too many stories about “*nègres*”. These are too many to be silenced, and a quantitative approach misses the mark. Instead the “real task is to reveal the mechanism. The essential is not to accumulate facts and behaviors but to disclose their meaning” (Fanon, 1952:164; personal translation<sup>45</sup>). Austrian philosopher Alfred Schutz outlines the fundamental difference between the distinct type of realities that natural sciences and human studies deal with in terms of his conception of action –understood as the self-conscious meaning provided by the actors. Methods of natural sciences deal with “first-degree constructs”, namely the natural scientist observes objects within the observer’s field which “does not ‘mean’ anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein” (Schutz, 1962: 5). Social sciences address second-degree constructs, or “constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene” (1962: 6). In other words, the object of social sciences –human beings acting, thinking and living with other humans– have previously interpreted and given meaning to the world and their actions. The task of the social scientist is then, for Schutz, the interpretative understanding (*Verstehen*) of the

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<sup>45</sup> « la véritable tâche qui est d'en montrer le mécanisme. L'essentiel pour nous n'est pas d'accumuler des faits, des comportements, mais de dégager leur sens. »

meanings that humans bestow to their actions. Gordon expresses Fanon's point otherwise:

It is easier to study what does not think and cannot return the look and study you. As signifying beings, the action by human beings always points beyond the human. The human being is always involved in future-oriented activity that always tests the scope of law-like generalizations. This is why human studies at best derives principles and is an interpretive affair (2006b: 33; emphasis in the original).

### **2.3.3 Sociogeny**

Fanon weaves his concerns on method, human action, the constitution of meanings, subjectivity, history, structure, philosophical anthropology, and the study of the human being through what he calls sociogeny. Although he only referred to it once in his writings, the sociogenic is the form of analysis that permeates his whole political and psychiatric work enabling him to study the question of desire, the encounter of the black with the white society, alienation, the black in relation to the notions of normality and abnormality, mental disease, the psychiatric hospital, the meaning of health and disease, the pursue of freedom, or violence.

In response to the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud demanded through psychoanalysis that the individual factor be taken into account. He replaced the phylogenetic thesis by the ontogenetic perspective. But as we shall see the alienation of the black alienation is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is sociogeny. (Fanon, 1952: 11; personal translation<sup>46</sup>)

Phylogeny refers to the study of the origin and evolution of organisms initiated by Darwin and Lamarck's work. In this perspective then the human being is treated as a natural species. Fanon posits that for Freud, a uniquely phylogenetic approach could not account for the distinct historical developments at the individual level. Ontogeny, as a complement to phylogeny, does not break with its biologist bases, but puts the

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<sup>46</sup> « Réagissant contre la tendance constitutionnaliste de la fin du xix siècle, Freud, par la psychanalyse, demanda qu'on tînt compte du facteur individuel. A une thèse phylogénétique, il substituait la perspective ontogénétique. On verra que l'aliénation du Noir n'est pas une question individuelle. A côté de la phylogénie et de l'ontogénie, il y a la sociogénie. »

focus on the development of the individual history, where the human as unity becomes the notion of human being. In both cases, the human being is fixed to the biological and left adrift either to natural processes or to historical structures. And in both cases the black belongs outside the realm of the human or is located at the bottom of a human hierarchy. Sociogeny does not reject or replace the other two; it is located “alongside”.

Sociogeny does not exactly amount to social constructivism. It rather brings to the forefront the basic relationality and the interplay in the formation of the self and of society. Starting from the aforementioned existential phenomenological insight that it is the human that brings society into being, it aims at exploring the twofold process through which meanings in the intersubjective world and the social structures are produced by human beings, while at the same time, such meanings and social structures constitute the human being. Thus, Fanon emphasizes again human agency in the formation of the historical, cultural and societal structures, institutions, meanings, and values, in which the human beings are enmeshed and constituted. Thereby Fanon links the individual and the collective, the private and the public, the objective and the subjective, the historical with everyday life, the passive and the active side of the human, or what in Husserlian phenomenology is called “the problem of constitution” (Gordon, 1995), the creation of meanings in a world where meanings are already established. In Fanon’s work, this problem takes the form of the creator and the created: “White civilization and European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black. (...) what is called the black soul is a white construction.” (Fanon, 1952: 14; my translation<sup>47</sup>) The white is the creator and the black is created as a deviation from the human, which makes of her a “phobogenic

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<sup>47</sup> « La civilisation blanche, la culture européenne ont imposé au Noir une déviation existentielle. (...) ce qu'on appelle l'âme noire est une construction du Blanc. »

object” (Fanon, 1952), a creature, a monster, as Gordon remarks (2015). In a racist society the alienated black desires to be human and attempts to overcome such imposed deviation through evasion, imitation, and forms of reactivity, self-deprecation, self-closure or self-transformation, which limit her own agency and her capacity to intervene in the social world, that is, the black as creator. Through the sociogenic analysis Fanon carries out an archaeological exploration of the construction of the black, theorizes the journey of the black through the structures of the racist society and seeks venues for pursuing freedom.

That the human is what brings society into being draws forth the existentialist axiom that existence precedes essence. This is patent in his rejection of static and presumed notions of human, whether biological or structuralist. For Fanon, the human being cannot be contained and conceptualized before action. His search for a “concrete and ever new understanding of man” (Fanon, 1952: 20; my translation<sup>48</sup>) starts from the notion that the human is inherently free, and lives and acts in an existential situation which defines her and strongly limits and conditions her. The situation could be equated with the options available for human action generated by other human beings. In this view, the human is enmeshed in a web of relationships with the world, institutions, social structures, structures of meaning, cultural sedimentations, or forms of knowledge. These limiting elements, however, do not determine the meaning that humans give to the lived situation. Indeed, it is in this interplay between human freedom and the situation where meanings are created. The conception of the human as freedom resides in the capacity to act, to choose, to define herself and to create meanings within her existential situation (More, 2018). By bringing agency to the forefront Fanon keeps the human being open, in the making,

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<sup>48</sup> « une compréhension concrète et toujours nouvelle de l'homme ? »

or as Sylvya Wynter's captures it, "humanness is no longer a noun. Being human is a praxis" (Wynter, 2015: 23; italics in the original). Thus, sociogeny is not only a way of studying human affairs, at issue, is the very understanding of what a human being is. These two questions, the anthropological and the methodological are for Fanon to be addressed conjointly. By emphasizing the role of science in the formation of the ideas of the human, of normality and deviance, sociogeny responds to the delicate matter of transforming the study of the human being, and redefining it without foreclosing it. Fanon's project, as Sylvya Wynter puts it, and her own work also exemplifies, is an effort to move "after Man towards the human". He writes:

There is a drama in the so-called human sciences. Should one postulate a type of human reality and describe its psychic modalities, taking into account only its imperfections, or should one not strive unrelentingly for a concrete and ever new understanding of man? (Fanon, 1952: 20; personal translation; own italics<sup>49</sup>)

Yet there is an additional component. As Walter Mignolo (2009) observes, sociogeny is an intervention in the geopolitics of knowledge. Whereas Darwinian and Freudian ideas of the human as biological species or as individual-unity are premised on the cultural and sociohistorical experience of European societies, Fanon draws on the experience of colonized societies to raise the question of the human. By taking as a starting point those whose humanity has been denied Fanon questions the meaning of the human, and also challenges the legitimacy and authority of who decides, and upon which criteria, who is a human and who is not. In the colonial world the "white gaze" bears the legitimacy to classify, to name, to measure, to give meaning, and to ascribe and deny humanity to groups of people:

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<sup>49</sup> « Il y a un drame dans ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler les sciences de l'homme. Doit-on postuler une réalité humaine type et en décrire les modalités psychiques, ne tenant compte que des imperfections, ou bien ne doit-on pas tenter sans relâche une compréhension concrète et toujours nouvelle de l'homme? »

The white gaze, the only real gaze, dissects me. I am *fixed*. Having prepared their microtome, they cut off objectively the slices of my reality. I am betrayed. I feel, I see in those white gazes that a new man has not come in, but a new type of man, a new genus. All in all, a *nègre!*” (Fanon, 1952: 113; personal translation<sup>50</sup> ; italics in the original)

Fanon represents the construction of the black—a new genre—by the detachment of a scientist studying an insect in the laboratory. Yet, the epistemic authority of the white gaze extends beyond the scientific domain; the everyday life is turned into a testing room under the weight of the white gaze. The interpellation of the French child, “look, a *nègre!*” (1952: 109; personal translation<sup>51</sup>), is not radically different from the slur “[d]irty *nègre!*” (1952: 107; personal translation<sup>52</sup>), from the meticulous scientist: “the underwear of the *nègre* smells like *nègre*, the teeth of the *nègre* are white, the feet of the *nègre* are big, the large chest of the *nègre*” (1952: 113; personal translation<sup>53</sup>), or from the words of the white philosopher, Sartre, “a friend of colored people” (1952:130; personal translation<sup>54</sup>), considering the creative efforts of Négritude to bestow meanings to blackness and black liberation as the negative moment of a dialectic.

In Fanon, the need to redefine humanity and question the normative status of whiteness as human is inseparable from the themes of desire, double consciousness and the problems of recognition. What the black wants is to be human, what the black in double consciousness attempts is to escape this conflict within herself, where blackness is perceived as the embodiment of negativity and deviation from the norm,

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<sup>50</sup> « Déjà les regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis fixé. Ayant accommodé leur microtome, ils réalisent objectivement des coupes de ma réalité. Je suis trahi. Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n’est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais un nouveau type d’homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi ! »

<sup>51</sup> « Tiens, un nègre ! »

<sup>52</sup> « Sale nègre ! »

<sup>53</sup> « le linge du nègre sent le nègre — les dents du nègre sont blanches — les pieds du nègre sont grands — la large poitrine du nègre (...) »

<sup>54</sup> « un ami des peuples de couleur »

by being recognized as human through the adoption of whiteness. Throughout his work Fanon warns about the predicament of inclusion:

Western bourgeois racism with regard to the *nègre* and the *bicot* is a racism of contempt; it is a racism which minimizes. But bourgeois ideology, which is the proclamation of an essential equality between men, manages to appear coherent to itself by *inviting* the sub-human to become human through the adoption of the type of humanity that the Western bourgeoisie incarnates (Fanon, 1961: 158; personal translation<sup>55</sup>; own italics)

If humanity is measured according to a standard that posits the human being as Western, white, bourgeois and mostly, male, the colonized affirmation of their humanity could not be premised on a model of the human that is based on their exclusion from belonging to humanity. Fanon shows how such attempts are doomed to failure at the individual and systemic levels. As Gordon (2015: 23) notes, pursuing recognition from the white, accepting the invitation of Western liberalism, encloses the black within a hellish circle of reactions and evasions. Either the attempts are directed towards radicalizing the deviation, claiming one's originality or imitating the standard, such moves foster a relation of dependency with the white, who is reinforced in its normative position, and maintains the subordination of the black.

Thus, sociogeny responds to a threefold task, methodological, anthropological and political. It is due to this fundamentally relational view of the human that the scope of sociogeny is not exclusively dedicated to the study of the black or the colonized. Black and white, men and women, structure and culture, self and society, the subjective and the objective elements are to be studied together. Hence, although it has a solid geopolitical component, Fanon's concerns are directed to the study of the human being in its multiple dimensions, and the transformation of the ways of studying it (Maldonado-Torres, 2009).

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<sup>55</sup> « Le racisme bourgeois occidental à l'égard du nègre et du « bicot » est un racisme de mépris ; c'est un racisme qui minimise. Mais l'idéologie bourgeoise, qui est proclamation d'une égalité d'essence entre les hommes, se débrouille pour rester logique avec elle-même en invitant les sous-hommes à s'humaniser à travers le type d'humanité occidentale qu'elle incarne. »



### 2.3.4 The zone of non-being.

Another important element that Fanon barely mentioned a couple of times but is present throughout his work in order to account for racism and colonialism is the zone of non-being. For Fanon, the black finds herself below the level of humanity. He states:

There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an essentially stripped incline from which an authentic emergence can be sparked. In most cases, the black cannot take advantage of this descent into a real hell. (Fanon, 1952: 8; personal translation<sup>56</sup>)

The zone of non-being has been widely referred to, differently read and applied: in psychological, sociological, cartographical, geopolitical, theological, existential terms or concerning the historicity of the black and colonial categories forms of representation. It falls beyond the scope of this chapter to review these readings, which are not always mutually exclusive. Instead, it may be first necessary to answer what does Fanon mean by an “authentic emergence”? What is this hell to which the black cannot have access to? What are the positive connotations of hell that the black misses? Where is the black then?

Hence, a possible way to answer these questions and to understand Fanon’s zone of non-being, as Maldonado-Torres (2016) points out, is in conversation with Jean-Paul Sartre’s early phenomenological ontology. In *Being and Nothingness* the French philosopher argues against the notion of human nature and the concomitant understandings of the human as determinate, definite, self-justified and necessary. Instead he affirms the contingency and the indeterminacy of the human being, which he equates with embodied consciousness and with freedom: “there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free” (Sartre, 1992: 60). Sartre identifies two

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<sup>56</sup> « Il y a une zone de non-être, une région extraordinairement stérile et aride, une rampe essentiellement dépouillée, d'où un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance. Dans la majorité des cas, le Noir n'a pas le bénéfice de réaliser cette descente aux véritables Enfers. »

fundamental domains of being, which he describes them as an “indissoluble dyad” (Sartre, 1992: 176) and “capable of a valid coordination” (Sartre, 1992: 98). Being (being-in-itself) is the world of non-conscious things. It is an inert region of positive, self-coincident substances, fixed, solid and filled with themselves. He characterizes it as fullness. Being-in-itself is not the phenomenon, but the “being of the phenomenon” (Sartre, 1992: 7). The region of nonbeing (being-for-itself) is “an emptiness, a nothingness which is distinguished from the thing only by a pure negation” (Sartre, 1992: 245), it is the region of transcendence. Nonbeing is devoid of substances, empty, or, as he calls it, nothingness, which is the core of pre-reflective consciousness, and hence, of human freedom. It emerges from being-in-itself through the intentional acts of consciousness. Sartre takes Husserl’s notion of intentionality to point out that if consciousness is always consciousness of something, then consciousness is the lack of being, and more precisely, to be conscious of something implies “not being that being” (Sartre, 1992: 242). Consciousness arises out of a relation with a being that is not consciousness. This negativity is what makes consciousness free. By transcending what is and grasping what is-not, human beings are capable to disengage or detach from the world, which makes them free (Anderson, 1993: 13). In short, nothingness, unlocked from being, is the basis of human freedom. If consciousness is not something but the intentional act, freedom is neither a quality nor a property, but “the stuff of my being” (Sartre, 1992: 553). Following the existential axiom that existence precedes essence, consciousness is self-determining for it is a “being whose existence posits its essence” (1992: 24). In other words, the human being is freedom as non-being through choice, self-creation and self-definition, a constant questioning and becoming.

For Sartre, as he puts it in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, there is no escape from freedom, human beings are “condemned to be free” (Sartre, 2007: 29). In this sense, freedom can have a hellish dimension; it elicits anguish in the face of its ambiguity, of the unavoidability of choice and action, and the concomitant responsibility that it entails. The attempt to escape from freedom is what Sartre calls bad faith. In other words, bad faith is the denial of one of the poles of the human condition, either reducing the human to pure facticity, or to complete transcendence. Facticity are the given antecedents such as race, nationality, class, birth, character, psychophysical structures or the past, which escape one’s own choosing and limit the possibilities of choice, but not choice itself. Transcendence, for Sartre, are the possibilities derived from choice. Pure facticity would turn the human being into a thing, whereas absolute transcendence would be the attempt of make a god of the human being. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre sketches, but does not elaborate further, that overcoming the lie to the self of bad faith is not through sincerity, but through a “self- recovery of being” (Sartre, 1992: 116) that he calls authenticity.

Another obstacle that freedom finds, according to Sartre, is the freedom of the Other. Freedom, as the human being, is also situated, it is lived with others; the social world is in this perspective the meeting of freedoms. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, “the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom” (Beauvoir, 1948: 91). Situations exceed, limit and define one’s own choices, however, despite, and also because of, these “resistances and obstacles” one can confer new meanings to situations through “the free choice which human reality is” (Sartre, 1992: 629). Sociality and the relations between consciousness are described by Sartre as the fundamental site of conflict, in his own words, “[c]onflict is the original meaning of being-for-others” (Sartre, 1992: 474). He

conceives the social world as consisting of reciprocal relations of objectification which make inviable the meeting of two mutually recognizing freedoms (Sartre, 1992: 529). The negation of the Other as a subject poses a challenge to her freedom and self-definition, but not to the comprehension of herself as subject, which, in turn, incites her to maintain the objectification of the Other. In other words, the way to escape the Other's locking me into facticity and turning me into a thing is through the same response, which reaffirms my status as subject. This is what he refers to when at the end of his short play *No Exit* he declares that "[h]ell is—other people!" (Sartre, 1989: 45) Although Fanon may be in dialogue with Sartre, and shares the understanding of the human being as freedom, it does not entail that he fully subscribes Sartre's premises on intersubjectivity. Fanon continues:

Man is not only possibility of recapture, of negation. If it is true that consciousness is an activity of transcendence, we should also consider that this transcendence is haunted by the problem of love and understanding. Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. (Fanon 1952: 8; my translation ; italics in the original<sup>57</sup>)

The important point by now is that what he does, as he would do with Hegel, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty and other European thinkers and medical theories, is to show that their theories of alienation, intersubjectivity fail when applied to the experience of a the black in a racist society. The zone of non-being, as used by Fanon, may not be the region where the black finds herself, but instead where the black does not find herself, that is, where the black is not. Where is the black then if she cannot descend into hell? Is it because she is already in hell? Or, is she most probably in a "limbo" of a multilayered hell, as Lewis Gordon (2015) observes? Or, in a region below being and non-being, as Maldonado Torres (2016) remarks?

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<sup>57</sup> « L'homme n'est pas seulement possibilité de reprise, de négation. S'il est vrai que la conscience est activité de transcendance, nous devons savoir aussi que cette transcendance est hantée par le problème de l'amour et de la compréhension. L'homme est un OUI vibrant aux harmonies cosmiques. »

In any case, rather than a purely psychological reading or a cartographic bird-eye view, the two latter authors have emphasized the inside, the impossibility of the black to descend to the world of sociality, self-identity and authenticity that Sartre characterizes as hell. In this literally hellish region, the black is situated below the level of sociality, ethics, and, all the more, conflict. For Gordon, this epitomizes the above mentioned political and epistemic theodicean dimensions of racism. The self-other relation between human beings is turned into a non-self and non-other relation in a racist setting. In a setting without ethical values, the colonized is a thing and the white is a master. Thereby, Fanon poses a challenge to theoretical perspectives, particularly to modern liberal political theory, which presuppose an already existing ethical substratum, a Self-Other relation, that upholds the pursuit of the political good. In a world where groups of people are placed outside of the sphere of humanity, ethical claims risk of acquiescence with a system that threatens the existence of groups of people without losing its legitimacy as a just and humane system. In other words, the relation between ethics and politics needs to be inverted; political action is to be prioritized and oriented towards the creation of new ethics out of which to base politics (Gordon, 2008, 2015). What is at stake, then, in Fanon's account of the zone of non-being is not authenticity and self-identity as in Sartre's, but the very existence of the black. Like Du Bois, Fanon cultivated action that fosters radical subjective and structural transformation at the expense of pursuing authenticity and identity as ways of coming into being (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Posnock, 1997).

In epistemic terms, racism, as we will see in further detail, is not the problem of the Other, of the fear of the stranger or the unknown. In this sense, the celebration of the figure of the stranger and the ethics of alterity and love for the stranger as they appear recurrently in postmodern thought and multiculturalism (Ahmed, 2000) pose a

frail challenge to racism. The other in racism is a non-other and is not a stranger, it is overdetermined, loaded with meaning and historicity, it is too familiar. For Alejandro De Oto and Leticia Katzer (2014), the limbic character of the zone of non-being has an epistemic and political character. Fanon conceives it as the possibility from which to start thinking the political emancipation in an-other way that the zones of being and non-being do not provide. For the authors, it reflects the problems of representing the heterogeneity foreclosed by colonial markers, and the complexity for the colonized to constitute herself as a subject amidst the piles of reductive categories. It is then closely link to temporality. It recognizes how colonized bodies are bound and constituted, historically and from outside, and it is in that moment, and from that lived experience of alienation where the political emerges and claims another form of historicity. The incertitude and instability of the zone of Fanon's non-being is a critique and a way to escape the Manicheism inherent in colonial conceptual configurations and descriptive impositions that lock colonized bodies into objects, and from which a different landscape to talk about colonial subjectivity can be generated. In that sense, they argue, the zone of non-being is a region of specters in which colonial identities lose their rigidity, and from which one can think the emancipatory politics out of relations and not out of substances.

### **2.3.5 An existential ontology**

Racism, as Fanon points out, entails a relation of subordination and exploitation which produces the non-other. In other words, racism entails a relation that eliminates relations. Another related move that Fanon undertakes in order to account for the reality of the black is the rejection of ontology.

Ontology, once it is finally admitted as leaving existence aside, does not enable us to understand the being of the black. Because the black must not

only be black; he must be black in relation to the white. (Fanon, 1952: 108; personal translation<sup>58</sup>)

Fanon is not rejecting ontology *in toto*, but signaling that an ontology that neglects existence and treats being as abstract and eternal, is not only meaningless, but by systematically ignoring the role of race in shaping relations of subordination, it contributes to objectification and oppression. Such ontology “ascribes necessity instead of contingency to being” (More, 2014: 7). In other words, it does not entail the possibility of change and that things can be otherwise. Fanon considers futile the studies of Placide Tempels and Alioune Diop on Bantu ontology. Following Césaire’s scathing critique of *La philosophie bantoue*, Fanon unveils the political character of studies that praise Bantu’s lack of ambition for material wealth, metaphysical richness, pristine morality and harmonic notions of peace while a strike of black miners in South Africa ends up with dozens of miners killed and thousands injured by the police (Fanon, 1952: 178). “Since Bantu thought is ontological”, Césaire, caustically remarks, “the Bantu only ask for satisfaction of an ontological nature. Decent wages! Comfortable housing! Food!” (Césaire, 2001: 58). Leaving aside by now their point on the different forms of complicity of the intellectual with colonialism and capitalism<sup>59</sup>, what I want to underscore here is that for Fanon an ontology that does not consider the concrete existence of colonized functions as a

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<sup>58</sup> « L'ontologie, quand on a admis une fois pour toutes qu'elle laisse de côté l'existence, ne nous permet pas de comprendre l'être du Noir. Car le Noir n'a plus à être noir, mais à l'être en face du Blanc. »

<sup>59</sup> Christopher Wise notes that Césaire and Fanon’s criticisms have not lost their validity in light of the continuing attempts to “commodify African *being*, especially for the sake of merely enriching the West’s powerful university system” (1999: 2). Haitian anthropologist Michel Ralph Trouillot (2003) calls the “savage slot” to the functioning of certain non-Western groups as forms of radical alterity, untouched by European modernity, and serving to illuminate Western debates on alternative paths to modernity. To this logic obeys the persistent celebration of African *traditional* ontology, to which indigenous and Eastern spirituality could be added, in first-world scholarship. Besides abstracting the group from their material and historical conditions, it also omits the intricacy of these with the prosperous conditions upon which such scholarship rests.

perverse distraction from the urgency and the political character of the problems at hand:

Be careful! It is not a question of finding Being in Bantu thought while Bantu existence is situated at the level of the non-being, of the imponderable. (...) We know that Bantu society does not exist anymore, and there is nothing ontological about segregation. Enough of this scandal. (Fanon, 1952: 180; personal translation<sup>60</sup>)

He raises a similar point in his critique of Octave Mannoni's work on the psychology of colonization. Mannoni, a Lacanian psychiatrist who lived several decades in Madagascar, identifies an acute sense of inferiority and dependency complex in Malagasy society to the extent of needing and awaiting to be colonized. In addition to rebuking Mannoni's imposition onto the colonized of psychoanalytical arguments circumscribed to the experience of European subjects, Fanon exposes the limitations of Mannoni's phylogenetic approach:

What Mannoni has forgotten is that the Malagasy does not exist anymore; he has forgotten that the Malagasy *exists with the European*. Alterity for the black is not the black but the white. The arrival of whites to Madagascar has distraught the horizons and psychological mechanisms. (...) An island like Madagascar, invaded overnight (...) underwent destructuralization. (...) The introduction of a new element required the attempt to understand the new relationships. The landing of the white in Madagascar opened an absolute wound. The consequences of the European irruption in Madagascar are not only psychological, since, there is an internal relationship between consciousness and the social context (1952: 94; personal translation<sup>61</sup>; italics in the original).

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<sup>60</sup> « Attention ! Il ne s'agit pas de retrouver l'Être dans la pensée bantoue, quand l'existence des Bantous se situe sur le plan du non-être, de l'impondérable. (...) Or, nous savons que la société bantoue n'existe plus. Et la ségrégation n'a rien d'ontologique. Assez de ce scandale. »

<sup>61</sup> « Ce que M. Mannoni a oublié, c'est que le Malgache n'existe plus; il a oublié que le Malgache existe avec l'Européen. Le Blanc arrivant à Madagascar a bouleversé les horizons et les mécanismes psychologiques. Tout le monde l'a dit, l'altérité pour le Noir, ce n'est pas le Noir, mais le Blanc. (...) Une île comme Madagascar, envahie du jour au lendemain (...) connut une destruction. (...) Un apport nouveau étant intervenu, il fallait tenter la compréhension des nouveaux rapports. Le Blanc débarquant à Madagascar provoquait une blessure absolue. Les conséquences de cette irruption européenne à Madagascar ne sont pas seulement psychologiques, puisque, tout le monde l'a dit, il y a des rapports internes entre la conscience et le contexte social. »



The sociogenic analysis prioritizes lived experience over ontological claims in order to understand what it is for the colonized to live in a world where “being, value, reality, and possibility are white” (Gordon, 2014: 69). Focused on action, Fanon’s investigations depart from the non-being, or how the weight of colonial histories shapes the concrete existence of embodied subjects, thereby making certain groups of people function as human and others as non-human. As Maldonado-Torres puts it,

(...) for Fanon, beyond a science of being we must engage a science of the relation between being and non-being, describing how the exclusion from being is performed and how non-beingness is lived or experienced. (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 105)

This is what he refers to when he declares that Bantu or Malagasy society do not exist anymore. He is not implying the total passivity, cultural extinction or complete dormancy of colonized societies. Instead he refers to the historical process that expels them from them from the possibility of being for others except through relations based on subordination. As he explains, the black experience the dislocation of having to resituate themselves in relation to an enforced system of reference which contradicts and obliterates their social, cultural and psychological practices (Fanon, 1952: 108).

### **2.3.6 The lived experience: Embodiment and alienation**

One of the ways in which Fanon carries out a meta-critic of social sciences is phenomenologically through the poetic dimension of his work, as we will see in the next chapter. Yet, phenomenology also enabled him to theorize out of the predicament of the black, the colonized and the patient in his analysis of the alienation of racism, oppression in the colony, and also in the clinic, by focusing on the lived experience of the black in the metropolis, the colonized in a restricted and divided world, the veiled Muslim woman, or the patient in the clinical setting. As

Hourya Bentouhami (2014) points out, although Fanon uses the terms with precision, he does not position himself in relation to the Husserlian phenomenological tradition or conceive phenomenology as a field of knowledge to be followed or from which to borrow, he actually uses phenomenology for his analysis of racism, colonialism or mental disease, and expands, reconstructs and disrupts the premises of the field.

The experience of the black in a racist society, Fanon points out, is not an exclusive, subjective experience, which cannot be understood by the white or by others. Lived experience (*Erlebnis*) does not conceive experience as a fact, an event or an external happening onto which meanings are subjectively projected from the inside. Lived experience understanding of consciousness is not psychological but phenomenological, that is, consciousness is intentional, it is always consciousness of something. It addresses how phenomena appear to consciousness as an object of thought and are constituted, and enables to grasp how the world unfolds to consciousness. Likewise, it takes into account that consciousness is embodied, situated, entangled and active in a shared social and historical horizon, an already constituted world, in which one encounters categories, organization, frameworks and a flow of meanings that are “phenomenologically real”. Thus, consciousness and the body are not things, but *are* in relation to a social world. So are meanings, which are produced in the active engagement with the intersubjective world. Lived experience has also a temporal aspect. Meanings do not derive from the immediate course of experience, but in the elapsed and explicit reflection.

Yet, Fanon’s phenomenology In Fanon’s work, the body occupies a central role, as a social thinker, as a doctor, and also as a writer. The body is not treated as an anatomic-physiological structure, or as a thing. In phenomenology, the body is a “lived body” (Gordon, 1995), endowed with consciousness, agent in the world, and

also exposed to the world. This dynamism and interaction between the body and the world, transcending Cartesian dualism between body and mind, is what Merleau-Ponty analyzes in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon refers to the corporeal schema of Merleau-Ponty in order to understand through the relation of the black to his body and to the world, what it means being black in the metropolis. In a passage similar to that Merleau-Ponty, Fanon describes how a person sitting in a desk knows that if he wants to reach a packet of cigarettes at the other side of the table, he has to extend his arm and grab the packet. He knows that the matches are in the left drawer, and that he has to slightly lean himself backwards, and open the drawer. He adds:

All these gestures are not made out of habit, but out of implicit knowledge. Slow construction of the self as body within a temporal and spatial world, this seems to be the schema. It is not imposed upon me, it is rather a definitive structuration of me and the world – definitive, because between my body and the world an effective dialectic is established. (Fanon, 1952: 109; my translation<sup>62</sup>)

In such schema, Fanon posits, the knowledge of one's body is third-person knowledge. "The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain incertitude." (Fanon, 1952: 108; my translation<sup>63</sup>) Fanon hints Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "if I wanted to express perceptual experience with precision, I would have to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive." (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 223; italics in the original) However, the dynamism of the body, open to the world, moving effortlessly and integrated in the world known implicitly of the corporeal

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<sup>62</sup> « Et tous ces gestes, je les fais non par habitude, mais par une connaissance implicite. Lente construction de mon moi en tant que corps au sein d'un monde spatial et temporel, tel semble être le schéma. Il ne s'impose pas à moi, c'est plutôt une structuration définitive du moi et du monde — définitive, car il s'installe entre mon corps et le monde une dialectique effective. »

<sup>63</sup> « Tout autour du corps règne une atmosphère d'incertitude certaine. »

schema does not take place in the case of the black man in a racist society, Fanon notices. He writes:

*Below the corporeal schema I had elaborated a historic-racial schema. The elements that I used had not been provided for me by 'residuals sensations and perceptions of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic and visual order', but by the other, the white, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. (1952: 109; my translation<sup>64</sup>; own italics)*

Fanon adds to the body a historical depth, and a social and political density that the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty does not capture. The historic-racial schema refers to the discourses and practices of racism, the social order and the organization around the colorline that had historically constituted the black body and are sedimented beneath the skin. Because of its historical condition and because it is located beneath the skin, it precedes the arrival of the black, who is not necessarily aware of such schema. To the historic-racial schema, Fanon adds: "Then, the corporeal schema, attacked at various points, collapses and is replaced by an epidermal-racial schema." (Fanon, 1952: 110; my translation<sup>65</sup>) The epidermal schema locks the black into the surface to the extent that the black becomes his or her skin. Every accomplishment, every failure, every individual feature or every condition of the black is explained by the color of the skin.

Fanon notices that the black arrive open to the world and to the other, but the "other, through gestures, attitudes and the gaze, fixes me, in the sense that one fixes a preparation by a colorant". The epidermal schema emerges from the white gaze. Fanon explores what it means for the black body to be seen by the white gaze, a gaze that only sees the color of the skin and constantly sends the black back into it: "Mom,

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<sup>64</sup> J'avais créé au-dessous du schéma corporel un schéma historico-racial. Les éléments que j'avais utilisés ne m'avaient pas été fournis par « des résidus de sensations et perceptions d'ordre surtout tactile, vestibulaire, cinesthésique et visuel », mais par l'autre, le Blanc, qui m'avait tissé de mille détails, anecdotes, récits.

<sup>65</sup> « Alors le schéma corporel, attaqué en plusieurs points, s'écroula, cédant la place à un schéma épidermique racial. »

look the *nègre*”, says a child, or the “Look, a *nègre*” in the train, the interpellation does not go further than the skin and its color. A gaze, he says, that fixes and dissects, leaves him “locked in a crushing objectivity.” (Fanon, 1952: 107; my translation<sup>66</sup>) As Hourya Bentouhami notices, rather than fixing the object in a detached way and keeping it at distance, the white gaze fixes itself onto the Arab and the black until their paralysis, petrification and objectification (Bentouhami-Molino, 2014). It is not only the scientific gaze, it also takes place in everyday conversations, in the street, in the train, in the doctor, in the classroom. Fanon insists in the mundaneness and the repetition of the ‘external stimuli’ that imprisons and stops the black body; it is also in the temporal dimension, as we will see in the next section, where the dynamism between the black body and the world is interrupted. ‘The black doctor’, ‘the black professor’, ‘the dirty *nègre*’, ‘the beautiful *nègre*’, ‘the smart negro’, ‘the black is a human like us’, ‘the black is civilized like us’, the self-declared negrophile, ‘we love you despite your color’, ‘we dislike you but it is not because of your color’. From the example of the body reaching the packet of cigarettes to the example of the interpellation, there is, as Sara Ahmed puts it, a shift from an active body successfully accomplishing actions in the world, to a body that is “negated or stopped in its tracks” by an hostile world (Ahmed, 2006: 110). It is in the constant repetition and the disruption of the corporal schema where alienation and the pathological emerge. He writes:

In the train, it was no longer a question of knowing my body in the third-person, but in a triple-person. In the train, instead of one place I was left two, three places. (...) I could no longer find the feverish reference points of the world. I existed in triplicate: I occupied space. I went to the other... and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, absent, disappeared.

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<sup>66</sup> « et l’autre, par gestes, attitudes, regards, me fixe, dans le sens où l’on fixe une préparation par un colorant. (...) Enfermé dans cette objectivité écrasante.»

(...) I was at the same time responsible of my body, my race, my ancestors.  
(Fanon, 1952: 110; my translation<sup>67</sup>)

The corporeal schema as the consciousness of one's own body, and also in its social dimension that approaches the body as an opening to the other is interrupted for the black body in a racist society. The world through which one moves and intervenes by an implicit knowledge of it, has a strange character. The black is "disoriented", writes Fanon, "Where do I place myself? Or, if you prefer where do I get myself into? (...) Where do I hide? (...) My body was sent back to me flat, disjoint, shattered, grief-stricken." (Fanon, 1952: 111; my translation<sup>68</sup>) As Sara Ahmed summarizes:

For Fanon, racism "interrupts" the corporeal schema. (...) race does not just interrupt such a schema but structures its mode of operation. The corporeal schema is of a "body at home." If the world is made white, then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness. As Fanon's work shows, after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism (...). This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism makes the world "white," which is of course a world "ready" for certain kinds of bodies (2006: 111).

In his earliest writings Marx referred to alienation as the strangement of the worker derived from the capitalist mode of production. The human is alienated from the product of labor, from the act of production, from "his species being" (*Gattungswesen*), and from other humans. These include the alienation from one's individuality and one's own body (Marx, 1988: 78). Fanon also took into account the role of political economy and the international division of labor in the analysis of racism. Although his views changed according to time and the context: In his earliest works such as *Black Skin White Masks* and in the article "Antillais at Africains" he

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<sup>67</sup> « Dans le train, il ne s'agissait plus d'une connaissance de mon corps en troisième personne, mais en triple personne. Dans le train, au lieu d'une, on me laissait deux, trois places. (...). Je ne découvrais point de coordonnées fébriles du monde. J'existais en triple : j'occupais de la place. J'allais à l'autre... et l'autre évanescant, hostile mais non opaque, transparent, absent, disparaissait. (...) J'étais tout à la fois responsable de mon corps, responsable de ma race, de mes ancêtres. »

<sup>68</sup> « Où me situer ? Ou, si vous préférez : où me fourrer ? (...) Où me cacher ? (...) Mon corps me revenait étalé, disjoint, rétamé, tout endeuillé »

argues in Marxian terms that racism is the superstructure that responds to the economic conditions and relations of production. Whereas in *Les damnés de la terre* he affirms that the relation between substructure and superstructure is not unidirectional, and that there is no such division between these spheres. The objective and the subjective, culture, the symbolic, the psychic, the ideological, and the economic are inseparable:

In the colonies, the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence: one is rich because one is white, one is white because one is rich. This is why the Marxist analysis must always be slightly stretched when dealing with the colonial problem. Likewise, the concept of precapitalist societies, well studied by Marx, requires to be rethought here. (Fanon, 1961: 43; my translation<sup>69</sup>)

Whether this responds to an overall change in his thought or to an adaptation of his analysis to the African context instead of the Caribbean and metropolitan France, falls beyond the scope of this chapter. In any case, despite the various meeting points between Marx's and Fanon's understanding of alienation, Fanon's phenomenology of black embodiment adds two dimensions, the depth of history and the flatness of the surface that are concomitant to the knotted body of the black in a racist society. Hence, in racist societies the black skin is a naturalized marker of a "damnation" (De Oto, 2011) that *precedes* dispossession from labor. It signals and explains which beings are able to *appear* in the realm of politics, labor, sociality and humanity, and which beings are able of self-possession. Comparing with anti-Semitism, Fanon notes that the Jew "is not integrally what he is." The anti-Semite waits for the Jew to reveal himself: the actions, behaviors and the practices of the Jew are what determine his Jewishness for the other. In contrast, the black is "overdetermined from without. I am

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<sup>69</sup> « Aux colonies, l'infrastructure économique est également une superstructure. La cause est conséquence: on est riche parce que blanc, on est blanc parce que riche. C'est pourquoi les analyses marxistes doivent être toujours légèrement distendues chaque fois qu'on aborde le problème colonial. Il n'y a pas jusqu'au concept de société précapitaliste, bien étudié par Marx, qui ne demanderait ici à être repensé. »

not the slave of the ‘idea’ that the others have of me, but of my *appearance*.” (Fanon, 1952: 113; my translation<sup>70</sup>; own italics) Fanon uses here the verb “*apparaître*”, to appear. Gordon notes that existence, from the Latin *ex-sistere*, is etymologically related to emerge, to stand out, and to appear. To exist is “to emerge from indistinction” (Gordon, 2008: 132). The body in its dimension of being seen by others “is a necessary condition of appearance, since to be seen is to be seen somewhere.” (Gordon, 2015: 137). Hence, being a slave of one’s appearance delimits where the black can and cannot appear, and also what the black *is*. In Fanon’s existential ontology, as we saw, existence exceeds and cannot be contained by being; the latter rules out the possibility of contingency, freedom and change. Being a slave of one’s appearing entails that the emergence and the existence of the black are arrested by being. The black is ontologized, complete, it is what it is, and what *appears* “is not a new man (...) but a new type of man, a new genus. All in all, a *nègre!*” (Fanon, 1952: 113; personal translation<sup>71</sup>; italics in the original) As I will develop in Chapter 7, the question of appearing, of who and where can one be seen, is central in Fanon’s understanding of violence in *Les damnés de la terre*.

### **2.3.7 Temporality, alienation and Euro-modernity**

As stated above, Fanon identifies that both being and non-being are the effect of a historical relation which expels non-being from the sphere of relations, sociality and ethics (Gordon, 2015). He puts forward this fundamental mechanism of racism and colonialism when he points out that ontology is meaningless to understand the black, for the black must be black in relation to the white, to which he adds that this circumstance is not reciprocal, since, he continues, in a racist world the “black has no

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<sup>70</sup> «Il n’est pas intégralement ce qu’il est. (...) Je suis surdéterminé de l’extérieur. Je ne suis pas l’esclave de « l’idée » que les autres ont de moi, mais de mon apparaître. »

<sup>71</sup> « ce n’est pas un nouvel homme (...) mais un nouveau type d’homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi ! »



ontological resistance in the eyes of the white” (Fanon, 1952: 108; personal translation<sup>72</sup>). The white, structurally, is neither required to exist with nor to be in relation with the colonized. That he has a perspective and interiority is not questioned by the black or other whites; the white functions as a human and is perceived as such by others (Gordon, 2015). However, the being of the black does not emanate from herself, from her interiority, but as we saw, from the flatness of the epidermis. The black is “overdetermined from outside” (Fanon, 1952: 113; personal translation<sup>73</sup>), that is, the constitution of meaning is anterior and exterior: “It turns out that is not me who creates a meaning for myself, but the meaning was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me.” (Fanon, 1952: 131; personal translation<sup>74</sup>) In *Black Skin White Masks*, he points out that the black arrives “too late” to the meaning making for there is a “white world” in between that has already imposed meanings and values:

‘Dirty *nègre*’ or simply ‘Look, a *nègre*!’ I came into the world yearning to give meaning to things, my soul was eager to be at the origin of the world, lo and behold I discovered myself an object among other objects. (...) All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I would have wanted to arrive smooth and young into a world that is ours and build it together. (Fanon, 1952: 107-110; my translation<sup>75</sup>)

Kelly Oliver notes that the kind of alienation Fanon describes is nothing like Heidegger’s or Sartre’s account of the estrangement of arriving into a preexisting world of meanings, yet being also part of the world and responsible for meaning making. This is the predicament of all humans as meaning making beings. Alternatively, the tardiness that Fanon exposes in relation to racist alienation refers to the specific arrival into a white world that has constructed and determined the black

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<sup>72</sup> « Le Noir n'a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc. »

<sup>73</sup> « surdéterminé de l'extérieur. »

<sup>74</sup> « Et voilà, ce n'est pas moi qui me crée un sens, mais c'est le sens qui était là, préexistant, m'attendant. »

<sup>75</sup> « J'arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d'être à l'origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d'autres objets. (...) Je voulais tout simplement être un homme parmi d'autres hommes. J'aurais voulu arriver lisse et jeune dans un monde nôtre et ensemble édifier. »

as a monster. As less than human, the black is deprived from the capacity to make sense of the world, the responsibility for the meaning of the self and of one's own body is circumscribed to the white (Oliver, 2004: 16).

Maldonado-Torres points out that related to the suspension of method and ontology, Fanon's privileging of the lived experience of the black also "brackets" History –from which the colonized are pushed outside (Maldonado-Torres: 2009). However, time, temporality and historicity occupy a central role in Fanon's reflection on alienation and other phenomena. He opens *Black Skin White Masks* pointing out that

The architecture of the present work is rooted in temporality. Every human problem demands to be considered from the perspective of time. The ideal is that the present always serves to build the future. (Fanon, 1952: 13; my translation<sup>76</sup>)

Time is at the core of his understanding of the human being, which, he posits, "is *movement* towards the world and towards his fellow" (1952: 39; personal translation<sup>77</sup>; own italics). In this conception of the human as a process the subject is incessantly formed by and forming social relations in his disposition towards the future. The human being, he adds in his medical dissertation, is experienced as "a latency of action" by other human beings (2018: 219). From this perspective, human action and existence are not static but situated in a present continuous, and subjectivity, social relations and time are not dissociated. Fanon extends and endows a political character the concerns of neurologist Constantin von Monakow and Gestalt thinkers who argue for a "chronogenic" approach that would take seriously "the temporal integration of phenomena" (Fanon, 2018: 215). Hence, the importance of temporality is felt in his approach to mental illness, the functioning of the psychiatric

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<sup>76</sup> « L'architecture du présent travail se situe dans la temporalité. Tout problème humain demande à être considéré à partir du temps. L'idéal étant que toujours le présent serve à construire l'avenir. »

<sup>77</sup> « L'homme est mouvement vers le monde et vers son semblable. »

institution, while it also informs his political thought on racism, alienation, liberation embodiment, spatiality and his conception of culture.

The Malagasy and the Bantu that do not exist *anymore*, the black Caribbeans overdetermined from outside who arrive *too late* to their construction as an abomination, “cannot be thought outside of the history that has constituted them as such.” (De Oto, 2003: 105). The peculiar entanglement of colonial and racist histories on the body binds the black to a perpetual present under the weight of such past, thereby putting a curb on the motion towards the future, which in his own words is a precondition of *human* existence: “the human is human to the extent that he is totally turned towards the future” (2018: 257). The impediment of this orientation towards the future, is another form through which “white civilization, European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black” from the vicissitudes inherent to the human condition (Fanon, 1952: 14; my translation<sup>78</sup>). Whereas in *Black Skin White Masks* this perpetual present revolves around the embodied subjectivity of the alienated black—“living his neurosis to the extreme and finding himself paralyzed” (1952: 135; personal translation<sup>79</sup>)—in *Les damnés de la terre*, Fanon extends his analysis to the “motionless, Manicheistic, compartmentalized world” (1962: 53; personal translation<sup>80</sup>).

If the alienated black looks to the future the option available is a path already trodden for her by the white: “The black wants to be like the white. For the black there is only one destiny. And it is white” (1952: 221; personal translation<sup>81</sup>). In a racist world, the only way for the alienated black to become human, in temporal terms, that is, to have a present that is oriented towards the future, is to be white.

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<sup>78</sup> «La civilisation blanche, la culture européenne ont imposé au Noir une déviation existentielle. »

<sup>79</sup> « vivant à l'extrême sa névrose, et qui se découvre paralysé »

<sup>80</sup> « Monde compartimenté, manichéiste, immobile »

<sup>81</sup> « Le Noir veut être comme le Blanc. Pour le Noir, il n'y a qu'un destin. »

Given the impossibility of being white, accepting the white destiny encircles the black in the psycho-existential and psycho-social drama of a perpetual present. Fanon's articulation of the problem of racism and colonialism in regard to time contains and buttresses an aspect of the definition of modernity and Euro-modernity advanced in the first chapter by Lewis Gordon. Gordon puts forward that the term modern fundamentally means that the legitimacy of the present of a society is linked to it being oriented towards the future. In other words, to be modern is to be in a present which is in motion towards the future; such orientation legitimizes the present existence and brings value to the past. Throughout history, he points out, there have been many moderns, that is different societies which have defined the practices that would lead their coetaneous to the future. This, however, changed with European colonialism and the creation of new types and hierarchies of humans. In Euro-modernity, the headlight of humanity and the validity of the existence in the present would not be defined by a set of practices to be imposed and adopted by others, but by belonging to a specific group of people, that is, being modern becomes isomorphic with being European. The colonized that strives to be attuned to the self, to the other and to time by desiring to be modern/white and following the path to the future paved by European modernity, which is premised on their rejection as belonging to the future and an illegitimate present, faces an existential conundrum: "A feeling of inferiority?", Fanon diagnoses, "No, a feeling of nonexistence." (1952:135; personal translation<sup>82</sup>)

It is also considering temporality that Fanon examines initiatives directed to set the black out of stasis and alienation, and expresses his skepticism of the political possibilities of certain Négritude currents. Concretely, those focused on the splendor

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<sup>82</sup> « Sentiment d'infériorité? Non, sentiment d'inexistence. »

of ancient black civilizations in order to sustain black self-affirmation, or Leopold Senghor's emphasis on rhythm and emotion as a way out of the existential stagnancy. Rhythm, emotion and irrationality are important elements in Fanon's poetics, as we will see in the next chapter. However, in Fanon's reading of Senghor, African art, dance and poetry are the expression of an African sensibility and an ancestral black metaphysics which stand in opposition to white reason, objectivity and mechanicism. Senghor's proposal of a black substance ultimately elicits in an initially enthusiastic Fanon notions such as retrieval, origin, primordial, essence, or source, which belie Fanon's idea of setting the black in motion towards the future. Although seemingly expansive, for Fanon such proposals have a restrictive effect for they enclose the black in a relation of dependency with its opposite, the white, also alienated, but ontologically resistant to be particularized, and who has the last word:

The black vis-a-vis the white has a past to valorize, a revenge to take; the contemporary white vis-a-vis the black feels the need to recall the anthropophagic period. (...) Certain men want to inflate the world with their being. A German philosopher had described this process as the pathology of freedom (Fanon, 1952: 219; personal translation<sup>83</sup>).

Fanon makes reference here to Günther Anders' 1937 essay "The Pathology of Freedom: An Essay on Non-Identification". Although animated by different concerns and taking distinct directions, the central role that freedom, contingency and experience play in the early philosophical anthropology of Anders explains Fanon's interest in the German philosopher for his own reflections on psychiatry and politics<sup>84</sup>. In the cited essay, Anders, instead of attempting to capture, define or

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<sup>83</sup> « En face du Blanc, le Noir a un passé à valoriser, une revanche à prendre; en face du Noir, le Blanc contemporain ressent la nécessité de rappeler la période anthropophagique. (...) Certains hommes veulent enfler le monde de leur être. Un philosophe allemand avait décrit ce processus sous le nom de pathologie de la liberté. »

<sup>84</sup> Günther Anders was a student of Edmund Husserl. His influence is felt on theorists of the Frankfurt school, German phenomenology, French existentialism and also psychiatry, among others. In his medical dissertation Fanon cites French psychiatrist Henry Ey who considered madness a

elucidate a human essence, he conceives the human as constantly being defined through action. As he puts it, “artificiality is man’s nature and his essence is instability” (Anders, 2009: 279). Thus, instead of a priori models of explanation, he approaches the human in its concrete situation and puts the focus on the relation that the human establishes with the world. This is derived from the understanding that, unlike animals, which belong to the world and are adjusted to it, the human being is both part of and excluded from the world. For Anders human freedom resides in the act of detachment from the world and retreat into oneself: “To be free, this means: to be strange, to be bound to nothing specific, to be cut out for nothing specific, to be within the horizon of the indeterminate”. The separation and having to establish a relationship with the world may be experienced as a condemnation; in return to the indeterminacy, the possibilities for action and self-definition and the lack of fixity that emanate from freedom, humanity experiences its own contingency and becomes “the victim of its own liberty” (Anders, 2009: 280). From this non-identification with the world emerges “the desire to render the world congruent with oneself, more exactly, to force the world to become the *I*” (Anders, 2009: 293). Two related manifestations of this unfreedom are the nihilist and the “historical man”. For Anders, the nihilist man is overwhelmed by his contingency. He is determined by indetermination and pre-destined to instability, hence, he fails at the identification with the self and with the world. The pathological dimension derives from the fact that “he does not realise his freedom in practice, in the constitution of his world” (Anders, 2009: 294). The historical man does not stand in opposition to the nihilist but alongside a continuum, wherein one can also contain the other. The historical man attempts to exceed human contingency and achieve a form of identification by

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pathology of freedom, a view which Fanon shared and developed throughout his work, in contrast to Jacques Lacan’s stance on madness as compatible with, or even inducing to freedom.

situating the problems of strangeness and contingency as a past experience upon which he can look back and thus overcome it. “Through his history, which becomes one with him and envelops him, man escapes from the strangeness of the world and from the contingency of his ‘being-precisely-me’” (Anders, 2009: 300). This synthesis of the shocked self of the past with the current self extends beyond the individual biography to encompass the past of “other beings and other persons” (Anders, 2009: 301). Yet, this seemingly firm identification with the world and the self through the possession of *his* life and *his* history reveals its slippery character in the encounter with other selves in the social world, where he “must comply with and answer to the claim to identity that the world places in him” (Anders, 2009: 304), hence its pathological character (Anders, 2009: 305).

Fanon identifies the pathology of those “men who want to inflate the world with their being” in the black that seeks self-affirmation in black history or in a black essence rooted in the cosmos, as well as in the white man, the “defender of European purity” (Fanon, 1952: 219; personal translation<sup>85</sup>). Although he shares with these trends of Négritude the importance they attribute to the historical and cultural processes in which the black subject is enmeshed and constructed as the negation of the human and the need for self-affirmation, creation and action, his main objection lies in the different value and role they ascribe to the past as the site from where reconstruct meanings and affirm the black humanity. For Fanon, history is a “site of intersections and not purifications”, as De Oto puts it (2003: 177). The past is not to be retrieved, but it receives its meaning in view of the action in the present that is oriented to building the future (De Oto, 2003: 125). The dismissal of temporality by Négritude intellectuals makes their effort not only insufficient in order to understand

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<sup>85</sup> « défenseur de la pureté européenne »

and act upon alienation, but is also an expression of the aforementioned pathologies of freedom. Fanon writes:

The problem considered here is rooted in temporality. Those *nègres* and whites *will be disalienated* insofar as they *will have refused* to let themselves be locked in the substantialized Tower of the Past. For many other *nègres*, disalienation will come from refusing to accept the present as definitive. (Fanon, 1952: 220; personal translation<sup>86</sup>; own italics<sup>87</sup>)

As Alejandro De Oto (2003) remarks, Fanon does not view the present as something to be dispensed with and subordinated to a prescribed point of arrival in the future. It is instead in the present, at the heart of the everyday experience of alienation and the embodied subjectivities produced by racism from where he thinks the ongoing task of disalienation and decolonization. In his view, disalienation hinges upon two elements which are intrinsic to alienation itself: an essentialized past, of which any strategic use is disallowed, and a perpetual present that is not oriented towards the future. In Fanon the present is the tension between stasis and movement. It is the lived site of imposed and fixed identities, existential paralysis, and the psycho-social split resulting from colonial practices and discourses that tell the colonized that she is the negation of the human. Yet, the present as the site of temporality is also where the colonized remembers her historicity and faces and responds to such practices. By recognizing how the colonized is enmeshed with the

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<sup>86</sup> « Le problème envisagé ici se situe dans la temporalité. Seront désaliénés Nègres et Blancs qui *auront refusé* de se laisser enfermer dans la Tour substantialisée du Passé. Pour beaucoup d'autres nègres, la désaliénation naîtra, par ailleurs, du refus de tenir l'actualité pour définitive. »

<sup>87</sup> Fanon's choice of words was not fortuitous. The English version translates "*auront refusé*" (will have refused) with the present simple "who refuse to" (2008: 176). The use of the future perfect in the original echoes Anders' view of the future perfect as going beyond the imprisonment of the present framework by "anticipating memory" (Anders, 2009: 291): "That man can declare 'I will have been' and that he can outlive himself in thought constitutes an astonishing act of freedom and of self-abstraction" (2009: 290). David F. Garcia perceptively notes the problem of translation and the meaning that each tense conveys, but he places the core of the problem in the first part of the sentence, "*Seront désaliénés*", which he translates as "will have been disalienated" (2017: 174). However, in that part Fanon uses, again not accidentally, the simple future of the passive voice of the verb, that is, *être désaliéné* instead of the active verb *desaliéner* in future perfect as Garcia translates. In my view, Fanon's attention to temporality considers disalienation, in the simple future, as an unfinished process; hence his emphasis on the action of refusal as a finished act in the future is what enables the self to exceed oneself in the present, and simultaneously "to preserve its memory" (Anders, 2009: 291).



colonial plot to the extent of conditioning and limiting the visions of the future, and by exposing the *décalage* between colonial discourse and her own everyday existence, the possibility of agency of the colonized is set in motion and the movement from object to subject is initiated. It is amidst this tension, at the interstices of colonial discourses, that action is possible and thus the opening up of politics. Within this process Fanon finds a new sense of historicity that emerges from the lived experience of the colonized. This new sense of historicity is based on temporality and contingency, that is, it is a historicity that is unfixing and open to change since it starts in and because of the awareness and refusal of the determined relationship with the world that has been imposed onto her (De Oto, 2003).

Thus, in underscoring the relation between time and subjectivity in the *process* of disalienation Fanon locates liberation in the political action that takes place “not only in but *upon* the present” (Garcia, 2017: 175; italics in the original). In other words, politics implies a shift from the black as a construction in the stifling present of Euro-modernity to the black as an agent that opens up a new sense of temporality.

In sum, as Paget Henry comments, Fanon locates the historical dimension at the center of the existential, the social and the psychological. In this view the edifice of personality and the psycho-existential complexes that inform it are “thoroughly historicized” (2000: 81), that is, the individual is permeated by the historical and the cultural. Yet for Fanon the relation between history and the psyche is not unidirectional; in his medical dissertation he conceives history as “the systematic valorization of collective complexes” (2018: 257). Hence, history for Fanon would not only be entangled in the psyche, but it would also be the manifestation of the “collective psychic life” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 42). As Gibson and Beneduce put it (2017: 42), the co-constitutive character of the relation between history and

psychic life brings forth understandings of normality and alienation: “normality is acting within history and alienation is the suspension of the existential link to time; thus, madness means removing oneself from history and renouncing action within it”.

This has not been an exhaustive account of Fanon’s temporality, but mostly limited to the relation between time and the alienation of the black in the metropolis. As stated, Fanon’s thought is heavily rooted in the temporal, it permeates other subjects of his work as we will see in this dissertation. The next chapter partly covers how in his writing and his poetic and aesthetic dimension is an intervention in and upon the present and entails a rupture with Euro-modern temporalities.

### **Conclusion**

The questioning of method, interrogating the fundamental assumptions of thought, the relation of the tools of reflection and knowledge production with colonialism and the unveiling of reality is also a central element of the next chapter, which addresses Fanon’s reflections on language and his use of language in his writing. The theme of Caliban and language is recurrent in Caribbean thought. Caliban, the slave, receives his language from his master. The possibility of emancipation requires then to pay attention to the language that has been imposed onto him. The reflection is not only in the language that he uses, but also in how it was received (Gordon, 2006a).

The reflection of language, as the fundamental tool of communication, of making and conveying meaning, of establishing relations with enables Fanon to shed light on how racism and colonialism thwart intersubjective relations. Fanon analyzes manifestations of racist and colonial alienation through the use and the relation of the black and the colonized with French language, and also explores its emancipatory possibilities.

Fanon's use of language is also an intrinsic element of his attempt to produce a form of knowledge oriented towards liberation. As Paget Henry points out, in Africana philosophy, "reason has always had to share the metaphysical stage with poetics and historical action." (Henry, 2006: 19) Fanon's singular style of writing is not an ornamental device, but is entangled with methodological, political and pedagogical considerations. What Fanon says has to be read alongside with what he does in his texts with language. That is, the use of humor, the images, poetics, the different voices and the theatrical element in his writing are embedded in theoretical considerations which he did not make explicit.

### Chapter 3. Poetics of disalienation

In this study I endeavored to touch on the misery of the black –at the tactile and the affective levels. I have not wished to be objective. Indeed, this is not accurate. It was not possible for me to be objective. (Fanon, 1952)

#### Introduction

Fanon was also a playwright and is evident in his social, political and psychiatric writings. This chapter addresses the question of language in Fanon's work, both in his theorizing and in his use of language. Language as he explicitly puts it in the opening chapter of *Black Skin White Masks* is a central concern in his thought. Language is a tool of communication, of expressing subjectivity, making meaning. And as element of human interaction and in the relation with the world, language is a central concern in his thought. As such, language is embedded with power relations. In its important role in the process of subjugation and civilization, language can serve to trap the black Caribbean in the vicious circle of looking for white recognition, but it can also be appropriated for emancipatory purposes.

Like surrealists and Négritude thinkers, Fanon's language is animated by this double concern of domination and liberation. Through his writing Fanon questions and transforms the French language, the terms and the categories received. At the same time he crafts a language that enables him to render and analyze the complexities and ambiguities of the colonial situation, and also to convey the experience of colonialism to the reader at the level of the senses, affects and reason. However, language and writing itself is to be accompanied by action, which is what what he seeks to elicit in the reader.

Many readers have treated Fanon's language as an excessive ornament which has to be broken through in order to get to the meaning and the core of his ideas.

However, form and content are related. The images, the theatrical element, the different voices that appear in the texts, the contradictions, the ambiguities, the humor, the rhythm and the corporeal quality of his language also play a role in the content of his work at the level of politics, method and also at the pedagogical level. In sum, in order to grasp what he means it is important to pay attention to what he says, how he says it, and to what he *does* in and through his writing, for there is a performative quality in his work. I have divided this chapter into several sections:

The first section addresses Fanon's analysis of language in the colonial world, in *Black Skin White Masks* and in relation to the chapter on the radio in *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*. In the former he delves into the intricacy of colonial language and power; his analysis of the use and meanings and values ascribed to the French language enable him to shed light on the relations between whites and blacks, between the colonized. Thereby he delves into the alienation of the black Caribbean as manifested in his or her relation with the colonial language and expressed through language. In the latter, he shows the process of transformation of the meaning of the colonial language linked to collective, political action. Rather than self-transformation and demanding admission, it is the transformation of the social structure that leads to the appropriation and the shift of the values ascribed to French language. From a language of subjugation, French is turned into a language of liberation.

The second section addresses an important influence on Fanon at the level of ideas and of the aesthetics, Aimé Césaire, and its relation with surrealism. Césaire's theorization on aesthetics, language, creativity, and poetic and scientific knowledge had an impact on Fanon, but the latter diverges in certain aspects. Namely, Fanon does not pit science against poetry as a form of knowledge but blends it with other

theoretical tools, and does not endow an extraordinary value and a privilege position to his poetics and to the aesthetic dimension in general.

The third and the fourth section deal with the relation between language and the body, the oral quality of his work, the use of humor and the different metaphors and images. The fifth section covers the dramaturgical element in his work, the different voices and characters, and how they are intertwined with the theoretical dialogues that he undertakes. I have used the example of his approach to psychoanalysis in *Black Skin White Masks*, but this will be expanded in the seventh chapter.

### **3.1 Caliban and Language**

Paget Henry points out that the poetic dimension is an indispensable element in African diasporic thought and inseparable from other dimensions: “[i]n the Africana tradition, reason has always had to share the metaphysical stage with poetics and historical action” (Henry, 2006: 19). Henry seems to imply that dealing with poetics and the creative dimension of language is a matter of necessity. This is partly related to the need to create suitable concepts that describe the complexity and the ambiguities of the condition of Africana people. And more fundamentally, the issue of words and language lies also in its entanglement with colonialism at the level of method, as Gordon puts it (2006a). Namely, how colonialism affects thinking and the way one thinks about thinking, which in turn inform the directions of action, as Henry points out above. Thus inquiry requires addressing the fundamental levels of thinking, including language as a tool for making sense of the world and for liberation.

The question of language, knowledge and colonialism is present in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, addressed by many Caribbean thinkers. The main character, Prospero, the magician, inventor and possessor of knowledge arrived on an island in the Caribbean and enchanted Caliban, the local, gave him a name, and taught him the

language in exchange of his enslaved work. Miranda, Prospero's daughter, admonishes the protesting Caliban:

Abhorred slave, (...) I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known.  
(Shakespeare, 2006: 144).

Language, the fundamental tool to participate in the world, make sense of their experience, communicate with others and to generate and express meaning, is *received* from Prospero; the language that created Caliban is the same that made him into a monster and a slave. Double consciousness risks to appear, then, in efforts of liberation premised on the language received. Therefore, the question goes deeper than a particular language or words, it rather points to the intricacy of method and language: critical reflection on *what* is received, words, must be accompanied by critical reflection on *how* it is received (Gordon, 2006a), for “we convert what we receive into possessions, a conversion that often hides the conditions of having received, as if the possession is too simply ‘already there’” (Ahmed, 2006: 126). As Gordon (2006a) puts it, rather than epistemic and linguistic, this points out the obstacle that colonization poses at the very level of method.

Language is a constant concern in Fanon, in his writing and also in the way he writes. The opening chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*, addresses the question of language in the colonial context. Language, he observes, is a fundamental element to “understand the dimension of *being-for-others* of the colored man, since to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.” (Fanon, 1952: 15; italics in the original; my translation<sup>88</sup>) Language, he argues, constitutes subjectivity, as in an element in human

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<sup>88</sup> « compréhension de la dimension *pour-autrui* de l'homme de couleur. Etant entendu que parler, c'est exister absolument pour l'autre. »

interaction, participation in the constitution of the intersubjective world, and in the appropriation of the world. The one who possesses a language “possesses, as a result, the world expressed and implied by this language. (...) There is an extraordinary power in the possession of a language” (Fanon, 1952: 16; my translation<sup>89</sup>) Yet, this does not amount to a deterministic view of language, and Fanon does not imply that language shapes cognition and thought. Instead, it is the black who is already alienated, the one who rejects blackness, identifies with metropolitan values, and is obsessed with mimesis and assimilation, who conceives language in a deterministic way (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

Hence, Fanon begins his analysis of black alienation in colonial societies through the exploration of language and its intricacy with power. To speak, he writes, is “above all to assume a culture, to carry the weight of a civilization.” (Fanon, 1952: 15; my translation<sup>90</sup>). Through the relationship of the colonized with the colonial language, Fanon explores the intersubjective world, the values and the meanings, the relation between colonizer and colonized, between Caribbean and Africans, and the different manifestations of colonial alienation related with and also expressed through language.

He notices that the black does not speak in the same way in the Caribbean than in the metropolis, but also the Caribbean returning from France suffers from a radical transformation. In the colonies, French language is linked to positive values, not only literature, philosophy and elevated forms of culture, also the administration, technology, medicine, trade, the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, in sum, progress and civilization are expressed through the French language. Creole and other vernacular languages are associated with values of negativity and backwardness. The alienated

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<sup>89</sup> « le langage possède par contre-coup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage. il y a dans la possession du langage une extraordinaire puissance. »

<sup>90</sup> « c'est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation. »



black conceives French language as a form of affirmation and escaping blackness; mastering and possessing the French language is a means to enter French society, the white world and, hence, becoming a human being. Thus, the Caribbean is resolute to speak *proper* French, the French of the colonizer, and to distance themselves from the African, who in turn, and for the same reason, attempts to speak creole. What could be a movement of self-affirmation, empowerment and openness is for the alienated black a trap into a neurotic circuit. He writes that “all colonized people (...) in whom an inferiority complex has been ingrained (...) position themselves in relation to the language of the civilizing nation” (1952: 16; my translation<sup>91</sup>). This reveals the circular logic in which the colonized is enmeshed. There is, alienation derived from the deprecation and devaluation of the humanity of the colonized, in which language plays an active part, but the same language becomes their resort to achieve civilization and the elevation into humanity.

The exultant Caribbean arrives in France decided to change, to become someone new, but is received by one of the daily mechanisms that lock the black into the colonial image, the *petit-nègre*. The *petit-nègre*, the simplified French that the black is supposed to speak, is the linguistic correlate of the colonial image created for the black and reproduced through language. The black is simple, devoid of history, past, civilization and culture, it is locked in an eternal childhood, hence, the paternalistic mode of being addressed by the white, the condescending tone, the simplified grammar. Fanon describes its effects as a form of imprisonment: To make the black speak *petit-nègre* is to “fix him to his image, to snare and imprison him in an eternal essence, an *appearance* of which he is not responsible.”( Fanon, 1952: 32; my

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<sup>91</sup> « Tout peuple colonise (...) au sein duquel a pris naissance un complexe d'infériorité (...) se situe vis-à-vis du langage de la nation civilisatrice »

translation<sup>92</sup>; italics in the original) And to answer in *petit-nègre* to the black is “to lock the black, to perpetuate the conflictual situation in which the white infests the black of foreign and extremely toxic bodies.”( Fanon, 1952: 33; my translation<sup>93</sup>)

In this situation the black faces a dilemma: either claiming a black past, or aspiring to whiteness, but both are reactive responses, and the latter is an understandable one. One of the most glaring illustrations of the experience of escaping blackness through language and its material impact in the body is the description of the black determined to learn the phonetics and the pronunciation of the metropolis:

The black arriving in France will react against the myth of the R-eating-Martinican. He will become aware of it, and he will declare the war against it. He will practice not only rolling the R, but decorating it. Secretly scrutinizing the slightest reaction of others, listening to his own speech, mistrusting his tongue— such a lazy organ—he will lock himself in his room and read for hours—adamantly determined to learn his diction. (1952: 19; my translation<sup>94</sup>)

Fanon notices that the colonized is not only struggling with the unyielding R, but also with his tongue, with his own body. As Gibson and Beneduce point out, for the colonized, “language is lived in the flesh and inscribed on the body” (2017: 65). In the understanding of the body as politically constituted, the decolonization of language must go hand in hand with the decolonization of the body, the senses and the imagination, just like sexuality. Fanon attempted to identify the “deep traces of alienation embodied in gestures and speech” in everyday life. In this sense, the disciplined training of the body with the expectation of being admitted and recognized is for Fanon the symptom of a broader pathology (Gibson and Beneduce,

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<sup>92</sup> « c'est l'attacher a son image, l'engluer, l'emprisonner, victime éternelle d'une essence, d'un *apparaître* dont il n'est pas le responsable. »

<sup>93</sup> « c'est enfermer le Noir, c'est perpétuer une situation conflictuelle ou le Blanc infeste le Noir de corps étrangers extrêmement toxiques. »

<sup>94</sup> « Le Noir entrant en France va réagir contre le mythe du Martiniquais qui-mange-les-R. Il va s'en saisir, et véritablement entrera en conflit ouvert avec lui. Il s'appliquera non seulement a rouler les R, mais a les ourler. Epiant les moindres réactions des autres, s'écouterant parler, se méfiant de la langue, organe malheureusement paresseux, il s'enfermera dans sa chambre et lira pendant des heures — s'acharnant a se faire diction. »

2017: 70). He continues with the episode of another Caribbean in a bar struggling with the R, with tragicomic results:

‘Waiterrr! Bing me a beeyya.’ We witness here a true intoxication. Determined not to fit the image of the R-eating-*nègre*, he hoarded a good amount of them, but could not distribute them properly. (Fanon, 1952: 19; my translation<sup>95</sup>)

The entrance into the white world is premised upon the condition that the black fit the image that the society has prepared for them, that is, that they remain fixed in the stage of infancy, otherwise they arise suspicion: “When a *nègre* speaks about Marx the first reaction is the following: ‘We have educated you and now you turn against benefactors’. Ungrateful! Certainly we can expect nothing from you.” (Fanon, 1952: 38; my translation<sup>96</sup>)

As Gordon notes, seeking in this way transformation through language is insufficient since the black is looking for recognition from the one who oppresses them. This assumes the legitimacy of the oppression, and amounts to the re-affirmation of the oppressive system. Transformation requires then more radical questions: questioning what is legitimate, what one values and why one values what one values, and questioning what and who constitute the standards. In other words, the black has to put questions beyond his or herself, since the alienated black who seeks transformation through language actually seeks self-transformation and remains trapped in the narcissism that Fanon diagnosed throughout the work (Gordon, 2015).

Fanon’s analysis of language is very specific and contextually-attuned. In “The Voice of Algeria” Fanon describes that in Algeria the relation of the colonized towards the French language is different from the Caribbean and the metropolis. The

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<sup>95</sup> « ‘Garrcon ! un vè de biè.’ Nous assistons la a une véritable intoxication. Soucieux de ne pas répondre a l’image du nègre-mangeant-les-R, il en avait fait une bonne provision, mais il n’a pas su repartir son effort. »

<sup>96</sup> « Quand un nègre parle de Marx, la première réaction est la suivante : « On vous a élevés et maintenant vous vous retournez contre vos bienfaiteurs. Ingrats ! Décidément, on ne peut rien attendre de vous. »

Algerians educated in French schools also present an ambivalent and hesitant relation to the French language as the above-described. However, lay Algerians openly rejected it since it was considered a tool of domination; it was perceived with hostility and associated with the injunction, the insult and the threat, the three domains of contact between the colonizers and the population. Nationalist organizations also rejected the French language as a form of cultural resistance and to reaffirm the national singularity through the Arab language. However, Fanon notes, the use of the French language, together with the Arab and the Kabyle, in the radio communications during the revolution entailed a radical change of the values ascribed to the French language. The same message conveyed in the three languages “unifies the experience” and liberates the French language from “its historical meaning.” (Fanon, 1959: 74; my translation<sup>97</sup>). This change of meanings were also noticed at the level of psychopathology; in patients with hallucinations the voices in French were no longer aggressive and related to rejection but to support and protection. At the political level, revolutionary congresses and national councils were held in French, disconcerting the colonized. I quote at length:

The French language loses its accursed character, revealing itself capable of conveying, for the healing of the nation, the messages of truth that the latter awaits. Paradoxically as it may appear, it is the Algerian Revolution, the struggle of the Algerian people, what facilitates the spreading of the French language in the nation. (...) The occupation authorities have not measured the importance of the new attitude of the Algerian toward the French language. Expressing oneself in French, understanding French does not amount anymore to treason or to an impoverishing identification with the occupier. (...) The French language becomes also an instrument of liberation. We see that the ‘native’ almost assumes responsibility for the language of the occupant. (Fanon, 1959: 74-75; my translation<sup>98</sup>)

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<sup>97</sup> « ses significations historiques. » « unifie l’expérience »

<sup>98</sup> « La langue française perd son caractère maudit, se révélant capable de transmettre également, à l’intention de la Nation les messages de vérité que cette dernière attend. Aussi paradoxal que cela paraisse, c’est la Révolution algérienne, c’est la lutte du peuple algérien qui facilite la diffusion de la langue française dans la Nation.(...) Les autorités d’occupation n’ont pas davantage mesuré l’importance de l’attitude nouvelle de l’Algérien en face de la langue française. S’exprimer en français, comprendre le français, n’est plus assimilable à une trahison ou à une identification appauvrissante

Besides the contextual difference with *Black Skin White Masks*, in contrast to the futility of self-transformation by adopting French language as a tool of evasion and admission, Fanon is here pointing out a process of *appropriation* of the French language concomitant to a transformative action at the level of society. Such action first reveals that values and meanings are not fixed and then questions and shifts the values of colonial societies, without necessarily rejecting colonial elements. The societal transformation and the process itself, entails new form of relations and the construction of new meanings. In Fanon's words, "To use the French language is both to domesticate an attribute of the occupant and to show oneself permeable to the signs, the symbols and to a certain order of the occupant. (Fanon, 1959: 76: my translation<sup>99</sup>) This process of appropriation, twisting and permeability through action that transforms the French language from a tool of subjugation into a language of liberation is present in Fanon's own way of writing, to which we dedicate the rest of the chapter. However, one missing element in Fanon's account of language, is as Larose Parris (2015) remarks, the absence of explorations of the emancipatory possibilities of Caribbean creole languages.

### 3.2 Négritude and surrealism

In terms of language, Fanon faces the same predicament as the Négritude movement by which he was influenced, particularly by Césaire in the aesthetic sense and not without divergences, also in political terms. The Négritude, initiated by the founders of Presence Africaine Léon Damas and Aimé and Suzanne Césaire aimed at the revalorization of black identity and cultural production through poetry. Although

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avec l'occupant.(...) la langue française devient aussi un instrument de libération. (...) On assiste à une quasi prise en charge par « l'indigène » de la langue de l'occupant. »

<sup>99</sup> « utiliser la langue française, c'est à la fois domestiquer un attribut de l'occupant et se montrer perméable aux signes, aux symboles, enfin à un certain ordre de l'occupant. »

there has been an homogeneization of the group in certain critiques of essentialism and of retrieving a lost Africaness, the group was not homogenous, there were different trends, targets, goals, aspirations and means to achieve it. What they shared was centrality of the question of black identity and cultural production, and the role of aesthetics, poetry and working through language and arts. Césaire found in surrealism both a source of inspiration and a confirmation of his own concerns, that is, of a poetry as the way to deal with language not merely for aesthetic experimental purposes but with the intention of expressing a political critique. As he says, “Surrealism provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for.”(Césaire, 2001: 83) Surrealists’ critique of modern societies and their anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist position relied heavily on psychoanalytic elements expressed through languages, or seeking transformation through language, looking for the irrational.

The relation between Césaire, the Négritude movement and the surrealists was not unidirectional. The Négritude movement, with a less psychoanalytical emphasis, inspired and outgrew the concerns of surrealists, introduced new ideas, and approaches which had a bearing on surrealists. Césaire, Fanon’s high school teacher and mentor, attempted to revalorize and built a new image of the black, and propose a new society, expose the situation and critique, but also to imagine something different, or “to see the future in the present” (Kelley, 1999: 23). These qualities are not only present in the poetical or the strictly literary work of Césaire, if a strict distinction between the literary and his work in essays form can be held. Robin Kelley, who proposes to read Césaire’s essay *Discourse on Colonialism* as a surrealist text permeated by an understanding of the revolutionary function of poetry, would probably not maintain such separation:

“Césaire’s text plumbs the depths of one’s unconscious so that colonialism might be comprehended throughout the entire being. It is full of flares, full

of anger, full of humor. It is not a solution or a strategy or a manual or a little red book with pithy quotes. It is a dancing flame in a bonfire. (Kelley, 2001: 10)

Despite its lyrical prose, *Discourse on Colonialism* is formally more restrained and has predominantly an argumentative character. Rather than at the forefront, the poetic element and the surrealism that Kelley describes is what animates and lies at the heart of his critique of what he calls the decadence and self-deception of Europe. In Césaire the poetic is not necessarily a formal or a rhetorical strategy, but as he puts it in his essay “Calling the Magician: A Few Words for a Caribbean Civilization”, a “spirit”, “[o]nly the poetic spirit corrodes and builds, erases and invigorates (...) links and reunites (Césaire, 1996a: 120-121). The poetic spirits strives to “re-establish a personal, fresh, compelling, magical contact with things” (1996: 122). This requires “a new attitude towards the object”, which, “[o]nce generalized, this attitude will lead us to the mad sweep of renewal. I’m calling upon the Enraged.” (1996: 122)

In philosophical thought the question of attitude occupies a more fundamental level in knowledge production than methodological and epistemic concerns, notes Maldonado-Torres. Edmund Husserl distinguished between the natural attitude and the change of attitude that the phenomenological reduction entails. The change of attitude also appears in Heidegger and Habermas. Foucault conceives modernity as an attitude instead of a period (Maldonado-Torres, 2015). Steve Biko conceived the Black Consciousness movement as “an attitude of the mind and a way of life” (Biko, 2002: 91). Likewise, Fanon pays a considerable attention to attitude beyond strictly psychological considerations. As he remarks, “attitude points at the intention” (Fanon, 1952; my translation<sup>100</sup>), that is, attitude is an orientation towards the world which manifests itself in actions. Hence, as noted, the importance of the question of

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<sup>100</sup> « L’attitude renvoie à l’intention.”

desire which guides Fanon's first book. In *Black Skin White Masks* he announces that he attempts to ascertain "the attitudes of the black in the white world" and those of the white about the black (Fanon, 1952: 13; my translation<sup>101</sup>). His following work, *L'an V del la revolution algerienne*, delves into the "new attitude" (1959), the different forms of relating that Algerian people developed during the decolonization struggle towards norms and values imposed by colonialism, the inner structures of Algerian society, and their own subject formation. Maldonado-Torres reads Du Bois, Firmin, Fanon, Biko and Césaire's work, among others, as impelled by what he calls a "decolonial attitude". Such attitude brings forth the silencing of the problem of the colorline, its centrality in the constitution of Euro-modernity and in the formation of modern subjectivities, delves into the perspective of those silenced, and revolts against the attitudes, structures and forms of relating that sustain the problem of the color-line (2015). What I want to underscore from Maldonado-Torres's reflection is that attitude is a basic orientation in one's form of relating. Thus, it shapes one's disposition towards the world and sets the course for knowledge and action.

Césaire reflected on the new attitude that he demands on "the Enraged" in "Poetry and Knowledge", a conference delivered in Haiti in 1944, which can be read as a manifesto of the political and epistemic character of poetry. Poetry, he states, "is that attitude that by the word, the image, myth, love and humor places me at the living heart of myself and of the world." Such attitude, unleashes imagination's "demented impulse." (Césaire, 1996b: 145), which takes epistemic and political shape in what Césaire calls "poetic knowledge" as opposed to science. Thus, at the outset he declares that "[p]oetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge." (Césaire, 1996: 134). Following the Aristotelian and Nietzschean thread,

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<sup>101</sup> « Je prends le Noir actuel et j'essaie de déterminer ses attitudes dans le monde blanc. »



Césaire argues that science does not reach to the heart of things. It classifies, enumerates, judges and fixes, yet it offers a parochial and superficial perspective of the world and demands the purge of the human element of the knower: feelings, desires, fears and any trace of subjectivity are to be ruled out for scientific knowledge to be produced. The result is an “impoverished knowledge for, at its origin, whatever its richness in other ways, lies an impoverished man”. Poetic knowledge offers instead a holistic account of the human experience through the intimate connection with life’s forces. At the root of the poem lies “an astonishing mobilization of all human and cosmic powers” (Césaire, 1996b: 134). Poetry is not grounded on a gifted intelligence or a special sensibility, he adds, but on “experience as a whole” (Césaire, 1996b: 138). It is by placing the human amidst and within the vast energetic movements that antinomies between humans and with nature are bridged, and results in the “blossoming of man in the world’s measure” (Césaire, 1996b: 140). As Ronie Scharfman summarizes:

(...) poetry only is capable of saying both self and world, of sounding the bitter absurdity of the world, the irrationality of life, the richness of the universe, the injustice of colonial history, and the suffering of a people formerly enslaved. (Scharfman, 2010: 115)

Césaire stresses in his lecture that the holistic character of poetic knowledge and the unity of the self with the world do not amount to the “poet’s disarmament” (1996b: 141). By equating poetry to a weapon he makes clear that he parts company from irenicist understandings of poetry, for the relations that constitute the human can be harmonious as they can also be absurd, brutal and violent. It is precisely out of the penetrating insight gained through poetic knowledge that poetry acquires the political, rebellious and anticolonial character, and connects theory and practice.

For that reason he mistrusts Apollonian approaches to poetry that attempt to capture a fixed point, to grasp what is instable and disordered, for they fail to engage

with the instability, the “vital movement (...), the creative impulse” (Césaire, 1996b: 139) which animates life. Nourished by “the revenge of Dionysus over Apollo” (1996b: 136), poetry as knowledge (*connaissance*) is also poetry as *co-naissance*<sup>102</sup>, or the mutual birth of the subject and the poem.

Ronie Scharfman (2010) understands the knowledge of poetry and *co-naissance* as “self-knowledge” in regard to the anthropological question that haunts the African Diaspora, also present in Césaire’s work, arising from colonial de-individualization and dehumanization: “Who are we and what? Admirable question!”, asks Césaire in *Return to My Native Land* (1969: 56). Scharfman remarks that in the poetry of Césaire “subjectivity and *écriture* are co-extensive, that with each poem, the poetic subject is born and born anew, differently, in the incarnation of each text. (2010: 114). Yet the emergence of the self rather than a purpose or an outcome is the condition of a tragic moment that extends beyond the self to the community. Eva Figs notes that tragedy is the “sad story” of the protagonist, who, “deliberately or by accident”, challenges the basic and naturalized order of the society. The protagonist, “bringing disruption on himself and the community within which he lives, is eliminated, whereupon peace and order are restored.” (Figs, 1976: 12). Such a conflict painfully brings forth what has been evaded by the community, catharsis, which, in its Dionysian form takes place in ecstatic dance and liberation of energy. Amidst a “climate of fire and fury” (Césaire, 1996: 141), poetry melts fixities, questions colonial values and morals, challenges the legitimacy of the colonial order, shakes its foundations, ignites imagination and unshackles horizons.

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<sup>102</sup> A version of “Poesie et connaissance”, contains a part of Césaire’s lecture which was omitted in the original publication in *Tropiques* in 1945. Therein, he links the French word for knowledge, *connaissance*, with *co-naissance* (birth or emergence together), by way of the poet Paul Claudel: “In times were knowledge was co-naissance in the Claudelian sense of the word. I refer to the times everything was born together” (Césaire as quoted in Harcourt, 2016). Bernard E. Harcourt (2016) interprets Césaire as referring to the relation between art and ancestral knowledge situating poetic knowledge at the birth of knowledge.

### **3.3 Fanon: poetry and home building**

As it was noted, Fanon had a formative relation with the Négritude movement and notably with Césaire, with who Fanon is in conversation throughout his work. Besides his explicit and political divergences with the Martinican poet, Fanon would differ from Césaire's poetics on two aspects. First, Fanon adamantly opposes to the ascription of a creative value or potential to madness through the association of the mad person with the freedom and the visionary character of the poet, as argued in surrealism, Lacanaian psychoanalysis and also present in Césaire. Second, and more important for the scope of this section, instead of opposing science to art, Fanon deals with the "great silence of scientific knowledge" to which Césaire alludes to, by seamlessly merging art with other forms of knowledge. The inherent incompleteness of science, added to the bad faith of modern social, human and natural sciences of ignoring the colonial situation in spite of its constitutive role in their formation, led Fanon to mobilize all literary, and linguistic recourses in order to account for the complexity of the colonial condition and to convey to the reader the subjective experience of the colonial subject that he seeks to destroy.

In other words, Fanon does not situate art and aesthetics on a separated level or considers them as more elevated concerns than other human activities. Illustrative is an editorial of the journal of the hospital that he directed at Blida. Therein he responds to those that consider unworthy of the space dedicated in the journal the writings of the boarders exposing and criticizing the quality of the food at the hospital. Fanon appeals to the sensory to argue that eating "is not inferior to thinking, and I don't see why considerations about food should yield to aesthetic concerns." (Fanon, 2018: 332). For, he continues, the patient who asks for "food that caresses the palate (...) is doing anything else other than developing the sense of a taste for

nuance.” Fanon actually sees that the observations of the boarders represent “a highly elevated form of sociability”. In another issue of the journal, he links aesthetics to other fundamental aspects of humans living together in a human way when he writes: “people need love, affection and poetry in order to live. Patients show this privation in their illnesses by closing up inside themselves.” (Fanon, 2018: 333).

These two passages have to be understood in the context of Fanon’s attempts to recreate a society in the psychiatric hospital as way of healing *the* and in the asylum. Yet precisely for this reason his conception of the aesthetic expression as inseparable from the rest of human activities that constitute the human world can be discerned. Poetry, rather than a mode of writing or a skill for the gifted is here related to how human beings configure and furnish the world, turn space into place, or as Gordon summarizes it, aesthetics is part of the means through which “human beings in effect make themselves at home with reality” (2018: 20). The metaphor of home is also present in Audre Lorde’s essay “Poetry is not a Luxury”: “poetry is not only dream and vision; it is also the skeleton architecture of our lives” (Lorde, 2007: 38). Lorde sees the necessity of poetry as part of the everyday resistance and opening up of possibilities against oppression whereas Fanon here sees the lack of poetry as the lack of an outward activity through which humans intervene and participate in the symbolic world, such a lack leads to the withdrawal into the self, which as we will see is one of the effects and signs of alienation. Fanon’s earthly view of aesthetics, grounded on the everyday and inseparable from other dimensions of the human being, is substantiated when he puts it at the same level than seemingly more mundane concerns such as food. As Gordon notes, this is not to belittle aesthetics but to affirm, as the proverb says, that humans do not live by bread *alone*, to the extent that even the proverbial bread, together with its alimentary function, is embedded in the

“aesthetics of everyday life”. That is, food is also embedded in making livable the ordinary intersubjective affair through which meanings are brought and values are generated –including the meaning of the ordinary, the mundane, and the livable (Gordon, 2018: 19). Gordon adds:

Aesthetics is not, then, the dessert we have after our nutritional needs have been met but instead, as perhaps also dessert should be understood, part of the entire constellation of meeting such needs. It is as central to what it means to live a human life as the various other converging dimensions of human existence. (Gordon: 2018: 24)

Gordon notices above that living an ordinary human existence implies not only the everyday activity of furnishing the world, of home building, at issue is also the meaning and the value of what is ordinary, normal, or human. As stated in the previous chapter in the analysis of temporality and alienation, for Fanon the black arrives “too late” to a world that has already imposed meanings and values onto the black as less than human. That is, racism and racist alienation entail and existential deviation from common human problems, including those of alienation and liberty. Ato Sekyi-Otu punctuates this aspect when he observes that for Fanon the drama at the heart of racist and colonial dehumanization is not the fall from a “black nirvana” and the loss of a paradisiac and ancestral particularity, as certain Négritude proponents might have seen it, but “a deviation from the regular predicaments of human intercourse, normal prospects, and pathologies of the paths of liberty” (Sekyi-Otu, 2011: 50).

The world that Fanon finds at his arrival is a world of twoness, of double standards, as Du Bois also identifies, where notions of normalcy or humanity are selectively and asymmetrically assigned to certain type of beings and practices at the expense of those considered pathological and inhuman. As Fanon points out racism is not an aberration or an anomaly; the racist person in a racist society is “normal” (Fanon, 1964), that is, he or she is well-adjusted to the economic, cultural, symbolic

and intersubjective spheres of coloniality. In *Black Skin White Masks*, and also in the rest of his work, Fanon puts the emphasis on the everyday of racism and colonialism, in the relation to language, sexuality, family relations, the oxymoronic character of a black philosopher, the mistrust that provokes the educated black, the relations to the means of production and to technology, the disbelief in the Arab patient at the clinic, the doctor of color that constantly needs to prove himself, the Caribbean that returns to his or hers native land, the relation of the body to space and time.

If, in a world of double standards, racism is normal, the quotidian of the black person implies living the abnormal as if it is the normal. Hence, Fanon's focus on how racism and colonialism permeate and thwart quotidian activity reveal, in Gordon's phenomenological treatment, that under oppression the ordinary is the imposition of the extraordinary given as ordinary (1995). Hence, daily life under racism "demands extraordinary choices and efforts to be lived mundanely. There is the mundane for the white and the mundane for the black" (Gordon, 1995: 42). Therefore, what Fanon strives for is "to reintroduce the extraordinary back into the extraordinary" (Gordon, 1995: 62). The understanding that the normalcy of racism turns ordinary life into an extraordinary endeavor, that it forces an existential deviation from human predicaments, and the view of aesthetics as another aspect of the human being, not necessarily antithetical to science as Césaire and the surrealists argue, but as an ordinary human activity of world building, helps to illuminate on the *extraordinary* function and the character of aesthetics in Fanon.

### **3.4 Language in the flesh**

Fanon's purpose in *Black Skin White Masks*, is to "help blacks to liberate themselves from the *arsenal* of complexes that has sprouted in the colonial situation"

(Fanon, 1952: 18; my translation<sup>103</sup>; own italics). This demands more than the mere description and a well-argued critique of the colonial situation, but also the “total *lysis* of this morbid universe” (Fanon, 1952: my translation; own italics). In the book Fanon makes reference to Marx’s well-known eleventh thesis on Feuerbach where the German philosopher proposes a shift in philosophy that goes from describing the world to a philosophy directed to change it. As a thinker, Fanon’s position is clear: one cannot sit on the fence.

The analysis of the real is a delicate issue. The researcher can adopt two attitudes concerning the subject. Either he limits himself to describe, like those anatomists who are surprised when, in the middle of the description of the tibia, they are asked how many fibular depressions they have. This is because their research always addresses others and never involves them (...) Or after having described reality, the researcher attempts to change it. In theory, moreover, the intention of describing seems to imply a critical approach, and hence the demand to go farther towards a solution. (Fanon, 1952: 163; my translation)

However, at least implicitly, Fanon adds some nuance to Marx’s dictum, for before changing reality one has to see it as it is, understand it, and engage it. Let us recall that the question that initially guides his research is that of desire, “what do blacks want?”, which contains in it the question of reality and the false reality that is accepted under colonialism, or the mechanisms of avoidance, reactivity, and delusions.

Fanon attempts to offer in *Black Skin White Masks* a “mirror with a progressive infrastructure, through which the black on the way to disalienation can get his or her bearings.” (Fanon, 1952: my translation) Such a mirror binds different dimensions of the human being, in a way that attempts to transmit the colonial experience in its full being and contribute to provoke reflection, raise reflection and consciousness, that leads to action, which is for Fanon the crux of the matter. As Gibson and Beneducce

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<sup>103</sup> « aider le Noir à se libérer de l’arsenal complexe qui a germé au sein de la situation coloniale.»

posit, for “Fanon, the movement from understanding to knowledge, and the critical work of each, necessitates action (2018: 73). In other words, Fanon attempts to insert the reader within the traps of colonial alienation and the search for white recognition, and move him or her out the “hellish circle” (Gordon, 2015)

Francis Jeanson notes that to grasp the meaning, to figure out the sense of a limit experience, requires recreating the “stage of disintegration: passage through nothingness and a descent into the true hell” (1952: 16; my translation<sup>104</sup>). In line with Césaire’s argument above, an argumentative approach does not suffice for this task. There are nooks of the human being where philosophy, sociology or psychiatry cannot reach. Hence, one of the functions and the effects of his poetics in its synthesis with the former forms and fields of knowledge is to bridge the distance between description and action, to have an effect on the reader of a book that is addressed to a scientific and intellectual community but also, the alienated black, and, albeit to a much lesser extent, to alienated and alienating whites.

Thus, rather than plain descriptions of the colonial situation Fanon is concerned with bringing up an understanding that engages and binds the different aspects of the human being, including the cognitive, somatic, and affective dimensions. Colonialism not a form of domination or economic exploitation, it is also lived in the flesh, it informs embodied subjectivities, the psychic, the affective and the sensory levels, it reaches as Du Bois puts it, also the *Souls*. Thus, besides the domain of cognition it also shapes the domain of the senses, the receptive, the perceptive, and poses a limit to imagination. In this sense, as stated, decolonizing the mind is inseparable from decolonizing the body, a body that feels, touches, hears and speaks. The body, as we will see, is conceived as the site of contact with the world, with other

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<sup>104</sup> « la phase de désintégration : passage par le néant, descente aux véritables Enfers. »



humans in relation to space and time, it is historically, socially and politically constituted.

The relation between the body and language is an important dimension of Fanon's crafting his own language, a language that "goes from body to words, from the 'muscular tension' to 'conscientisation'." (Cherki, 2011: 182; my translation<sup>105</sup>) A review of Fanon's *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* affirms that "none of Fanon's books is really a book. None was composed with care and long reflection, in successive drafts, for a clearly conceived audience. Fanon was a dictater, not a writer." (Celarent, 2011: 2064). Besides the question of the authority of the written over the oral word, this statement is all the more questionable and surprising when one considers the reviewer's overall favorable stance on the book, since, as we argue in this chapter, language plays more than an ornamental role in his writing. Form and content in Fanon go hand in hand, that is, it is not always possible to understand what he means without paying attention to how he says it, what he *does* in his writing, and how the political, the methodological, the pedagogical and the poetical are intertwined.

Echoing Fanon's aforementioned description of a body in movement, Alice Cherki declares that Fanon dictated his books and most of his articles "pacing back and forth in the manner of an improvising orator; the rhythm of the body in motion and the breath of a voice punctuate the style." Although later edited, she adds, this way of writing as if speaking to a preferably close person, transmits the sensation of movement, directedness and the proximity of the spoken word (Cherki, 2011: 56; my translation<sup>106</sup>). As Cherki points out, Fanon binds the spoken and the written world, and language and the body. Fanon quoted Paul Valéry, who posited that language "is

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<sup>105</sup> « qui va du corps au mots, de la 'tension des muscles' à la 'prise de conscience'. »

<sup>106</sup> « tout en marchant de longue en large comme un orateur qui improvise ; le rythme du corps en mouvement, e souffle de la voix scandent le style. »

the god gone ashtray in the flesh” (quoted in Fanon, 1952: 16; my translation<sup>107</sup>)  
Language stems from an embodied subjectivity and a breathing body, hence the cadence, modulation, hesitation, silence, emphasis, vibration and rhythm. Language is for Fanon an incarnated vehicle of communication through which a living body tries to reach another one.

As stated above, decolonizing language and the mind is also decolonizing the body, the senses, the tactile, the visual, and the kinesthetic from all the obstacles that the colonial world puts to human interaction. The closing of *Black Skin White Masks* epitomizes the call to the decolonization of embodied subjectivities and human relations. After the warning of a latent explosion that opens the book, the ensuing serenity and the rejection of enthusiasm, the anger elicited by the racist episode, the tears of disappointment and self-deception due to Sartre and Négritude, and the subsequent revelation of reality, Fanon ends up with a prayer to his own body:

Superiority? Inferiority?  
Why not simply trying to touch the other, feel the other, to reveal oneself to the other?  
Was my freedom not given to me in order to build the world of the *You*?  
At the end of this work, we would like the reader to feel, as we, the open dimension of consciousness.  
My final prayer:  
O my body, make me always a man who questions! (Fanon, 1952: 225; my translation; italics in the original<sup>108</sup>)

The sealed body, historically constructed by racism and colonialism, is turned into a body that questions and reflects on a world that denies its capacity to do so, but the

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<sup>107</sup> « le dieu dans la chair égaré »

<sup>108</sup> « Supériorité? Infériorité?

Pourquoi tout simplement ne pas essayer de toucher

l'autre, de sentir l'autre, de me révéler l'autre ?

Ma liberté ne m'est-elle donc pas donnée pour édifier le monde du Toi ?

A la fin de cet ouvrage, nous aimerions que l'on sente comme nous la dimension ouverte de toute conscience.

Mon ultime prière :

O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge! »

body is also turned into a question, that is, an open site for thinking, feeling, and touching the other, of contact with the world.

As Alice Cherki remarks, Fanon attempts to transmit the reader the subjective experience of a black in a white world, to communicate that which cannot be communicated with ideas (2011: 53). To render the subjective experience, an affectively extreme experience as it is lived requires expanding the language beyond the semantic and the conceptual, where a deeper understanding of lived things can be reached, and a new reflection can lead to action (Cherki, 2000; Jeanson, 1952). In this sense, his editor in France, Francis Jeanson, remembers Fanon's answer when asked for the clarification of a word or a passage:

This sentence is unexplainable. When I write such things I try to touch the reader affectively, that is, irrationally, almost sensually. For me, words carry with them a load. I feel incapable of escaping from the sting of a word or the vertigo of a question mark. (Fanon quoted in Jeanson, 1952: 15-16; my translation<sup>109</sup>).

In the same letter Fanon alludes to Césaire's way of breathing a new life into words as a reference for his writing; "as he does", Fanon would like to be able, "when necessary, to sink beneath the staggering lava of words that have the color of frantic flesh" (Fanon quoted in Jeanson, 1952: 16; my translation<sup>110</sup>). For Fanon, Césaire's use of language epitomizes the piercing power of words so that they can trespass flesh and blood and seep into the deepest corners of the reader. In *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon comments on the style of the colonized intellectual struggling with language and with the colonial experience. I will quote the passage at length since it condenses almost all the elements discussed so far:

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<sup>109</sup> « Cette phrase est inexplicable. Je cherche, quand j'écris de telles choses, à toucher affectivement mon lecteur... c'est-à-dire irrationnellement, presque sensuellement. (...) Les mots ont pour moi une charge. Je me sens incapable d'échapper à la morsure d'un mot, au vertige d'un point d'interrogation.»

<sup>110</sup> « couler, comme lui, s'il le fallait, sous la lave ahurissante des mots couleur de chair trépidante.»

A spasmodic style, full of imagery since the image is the drawbridge that enables the unconscious energies to strew over the surrounding meadows. A nervous style, animated by rhythms, pierced by an eruptive life. A colored style too, bronzed, sunny and violent. This style, which once astonished Westerns, does not obey to a racial character, as some have said it. Above all, it conveys a *corps-à-corps*, it reveals the necessity of this man to inflict injury in himself, to actually bleed red blood, to free himself from a part of his being which already held the germs of putrefaction. A swift and painful combat, where inevitably the muscle had to replace the concept. (Fanon, 1961: 209-210; my translation<sup>111</sup>)

Language is a constant theme in Fanon's theater, both in its use as the author and in the characters themselves: In "The Drowning Eye", one of the character shows that the existential struggle is not separated from language:

Mere words, you say?  
But words the colour of pulsating flesh.  
Words the colour of mountains on heat.  
Of cities on fire.  
Of the resurrected dead.  
Words, yes, but battle flag words.  
Words like swords. (Fanon, 2018: 97)

And in the tragedy of "The Parallel Hands", the main character states,

"But words avoid me  
The only tragedy, language beats my thought" (Fanon, 2018: 154),

while at the same time, expresses the insufficiency of language devoid of action:

"If I could ...  
Language enabled by the ACT, raise the world" (Fanon, 2018: 162;  
translation modified<sup>112</sup>).

### 3.5 The colonial wound

The textural character in Fanon's use of language, and Alice Cherki's observation above relating to his intention to communicate ideas that cannot be communicated

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<sup>111</sup> « Style heurté, fortement imagé car l'image est le pont-levis qui permet aux énergies inconscientes de s'éparpiller dans les prairies environnantes. Style nerveux, animé de rythmes, de part en part habité par une vie éruptive. Coloré aussi, bronzé, ensoleillé et violent. Ce style, qui a en son temps étonné les occidentaux, n'est point comme on a bien voulu le dire un caractère racial mais traduit avant tout un corps à corps, révèle la nécessité dans laquelle s'est trouvé cet homme de se faire mal, de saigner réellement de sang rouge, de se libérer d'une partie de son être qui déjà renfermait des germes de pourriture. Combat douloureux, rapide, où inmanquablement le muscle devait se substituer au concept. »

<sup>112</sup> « Si je pouvais... Langage habilité par l'ACTE soulevez le monde »

through words resonates with psychologist Julian Jaynes posture when he argues that “language is an organ of perception, not simply a means of communication.” Jaynes ascribes an important role to metaphors in the formation of the self and relate them to the expansion of the possibilities of reflection and action: “metaphors increase enormously our powers of perception of the world about us and our understanding of it, -and literally create new objects.” (2000: 50). Aimé Césaire, through the vivid language of Négritude and thus with human affirmation in mind, emphasizes the expansive power of the image and the metaphor, for it “overthrows all the laws of thought”(Césaire, 1996b: 142), it lays bare the absurdity of the world and the richness of life. He associates the image with the surpassing of patterns of thought, safe pathways of for thinking and the limitations set to the imagination. As opposed to judgement, the image unbridles identities, unleashes contradictions, and melts antinomies. As he puts it, the object of thought A does not have to be A, it can simultaneously be non-A, or neither of both. Thus, the image “ceaselessly sublates the perceived because the dialectics of the images transcends antinomies” (Césaire: 1996b: 144).

Fanon’s depiction of the experience of colonialism are not direct and unequivocal, it abounds in metaphors, images and similes that do not have a mere lyrical function. They rather attempt to delve where literal language does not reach. Filling his descriptions of colonialism with the perceptual and the nonverbal, alluding to light, color, temperature, taste, touch, texture, or tone, may do not offer the reader a straightforward understanding of colonialism. But as part of his explicit intention of trying to touch the reader affectively and sensually, metaphors provide a thread to be unraveled by the reader, that is, they hint that there is more to be revealed than what

is tangible and can be communicated. Thereby metaphors play a role in the expansion of language and senses.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's important work *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) exposes the ubiquity of metaphors in everyday experience and how they shape the understanding and the perception of abstract concepts. In this vein, there has been wide empirical research that analyzes the impact of metaphors and their transference to feelings and behaviour. A study carried out by psychologist Adam Fetterman et al. (2016) shows that those who tend to think and express themselves through metaphors are prone to meet more easily than literal or concrete thinkers the "representational challenge" (2016: 469) that experience poses. Metaphors, they argue, help to make sense of experience; people who use metaphor thinking present a sharper understanding of emotions, greater benefits from therapy, and a higher impact in their feelings and actions.

Fanon draws from to a wide array of semantic fields in order to build the images in his work. Medical, and psychiatric terms ("the lysis of the morbid universe) lexicon of war ("arsenal of complexes"), theological references ("true hell", "the fall from paradise"), or from the world of magic and spirituality, among others. Yet not all metaphors elicit the same kind of response. A psychological study led by Paul H. Thibodeau, Lera Boroditsky (2011) shows that the character of a metaphor has different impact on the reasoning and the action of the receiver. In the experiments, participants read reports of a city with high levels of criminality and were asked to provide solutions. A group read reports that described crime in the city with metaphors of animals such as a "wild beast preying on a city", whereas the reports of the other groups used metaphors of disease like crime infecting the city like a virus. The first group offered solutions like "capturing the beast and then killing or

caging it” or “catching and jailing criminals and enacting harsher enforcement laws.” Alternatively, the second group suggested “investigating the source of the virus and implementing social reforms and prevention measures to decrease the spread of the virus” (2011:2).

Illuminating how such results may be, Fanon does not offer a report addressed to a third person, an observer, in order to apply solutions to a distant situation. He instead attempts to embed the reader within a context that he presents as a plot, the dramatic work of the colonial situation whose characters have internalised alienation and dehumanization and built a series of fictions to deny, avoid and justify reality. Fanon, among others, used both kinds of metaphors. He uses “theriomorphic language” (Gordon, 2015: 50), to describe animals or beasts, and metaphors of monstrosity, in order to refer to the dehumanization of the black: “The language of the colonizer when he speaks of the colonized is a zoological language.” (Fanon, 1961: 45; my translation<sup>113</sup>) He also used psychiatric and medical language and images, although the line between the metaphor and the clinic in his use of medical terms is blurry and delicate. For instance, about the role of psychiatry and the psychological language, Ato-Sekyi-Otu (1996: 6-8) argues that such elements in Fanon’s work have rather a metaphoric character than actually expressing or reflecting psychological content and theories. I partly agree with Sekyi-Otu’s point, yet this partially may demand some explanation. Fanon’s language and images are built upon all the linguistic and rhetorical resources at his disposal. In this sense the anatomical, the psychiatric, the clinical, as well as theological language, surrealism, Négritude, the language of drama, or the lexicon of war, or spatial metaphors can be considered rhetorical devices that go beyond the rethorical, as it was stated above. However, the limitation

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<sup>113</sup> « le langage du colon, quand il parle du colonisé, est un langage zoologique. »

of Sekyi-Otu's stance may lie in that treating the psychiatric as rhetorical element risks fragmenting and driving a wedge between an important side of Fanon, his profession, and his political and social thought, and also between the affective, the somatic and the physiological impact on racism. When Fanon says that people revolt because for many reasons they cannot breathe, he is talking as a doctor and as a political thinker, he is talking about the physiological act and metaphorically about the attacks of racism on *life*. This is something that Sekyi-Otu acknowledges and justifies it on the grounds that colonial alienation is "occasioned by the language of political experience" (1996: 8). Thinkers of colonialism and racism have frequently resorted to medical metaphors. For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa talks of the "colonial wound" (2007). Malcolm X in an interview compares racism in the United States to a knife stuck in the back and calls to "heal the wound", to which he adds that "they [whites] won't even admit the knife is there" (quoted in Ambar, 2014: 122). These two examples of metaphors illustrate some of the points mentioned above in a propos of the depth that the metaphor alludes to and its expansive possibilities. However, in Fanon, the use of medical and the psychological has a different quality than in those examples, also when it is used metaphorically. Psychiatry was for him not merely a day job, it provided him with a clinical lens, a medical sensitivity, a language and theoretical tools with and through which to raise questions and address the problems of suffering, as Gibson and Beneduce argue (2017). Moreover, his social and clinical work is closely intertwined; they nourish each other and hence are not to be subordinated one to the other since both are part of a continuum where he introduces the clinical into the political sphere and conceives the medical as imbued by politics. The relation between psychiatry and politics includes yet exceeds the metaphorical



and points to a close interplay between both –notably in racist societies where particular forms of mental suffering and the social context could not be dissociated.

### **3.6 Method and drama**

However, in his important work *Fanon and the Dialectics of Experience* (1996) Sekyi-Otu offered a refined reading that reveals that the complexity and nuances in Fanon's work also lie in the theretofore almost ignored relation between the formal and the epistemological. Concretely, the Ghanaian philosopher underscores the dramaturgical aspect not only within the different texts taken in isolation, but also, in his work as a whole, which for the author constitute “one dramatic dialectical narrative” (1996: 4), bound to its dialectical content. Whether this attempt to systematize Fanon's work is an excessively elastic hermeneutic exercise is open to question. The important point for now from Sekyi-Otu's approach is that linking form and content, shape and substance, that is, treating the aesthetical as an intrinsic element of his politics, methodology and epistemology, enables to cast new light on Fanon's work.

As Alejandro De Oto (2003) observes, many readings of Fanon treat his language – usually deemed as tragic, fiery and passionate– as something that has to be set aside in order to reach to the depths of his ideas. Such readings are based on the premise that underneath his writing lies occluded a transparent and closed area of meaning that leads to what De Oto calls “utopian prescriptive project” (2003: 88) associated with certain political traditions. Similarly, Sekyi-Otu points out, readers of Fanon have tended to “bestow upon utterances in his texts the coercive finality of irrevocable propositions and doctrinal statements” (1996: 4). Both authors concur that such readings of Fanon search in him an authorial voice that sounds clear, univocal and definitive once the rhetorical obstacles have been removed. The distinction

between surface and depth fails to consider that the themes on the surface run parallel to his ideas, the ways in which Fanon navigates through the linguistic and theoretical difficulties to offer an account of the colonial reality, and relatedly, how Fanon faces the heterogeneity and the complexity of such reality.

The colonial discourse offers, and attempts to impose, a rigid and unequivocal world by means of obstinate ontologies, reductive conceptual categories and a rigid representation of the constitution of the colonial subject (De Oto and Katzer, 2014). The challenge that Fanon and other anticolonial face is how to offer a critique of the colonial world –a world that appears as fixed and definite– and how to think liberation, without anchoring it in the sealing and the certitudes of colonial discourses in which Fanon is embedded. Thus, the poetic is also linked to the disruption of colonial temporality and the historicity of the colonized subject addressed in the previous chapter. Through the drama Fanon enmeshes the colonized subject in colonial history and its closed forms of representation, it takes such representations to the extreme and exhausts its limits, and simultaneously contains the latency of resistance and invention (De Oto, 2003)

This compels Fanon not to subject categories, concepts and ideas to any mechanism of homogenization and closure. As De Oto points out, at the epistemological and political level his writing is itself a space of opening and instability (2003: 23). Such opening is achieved by means of what De Oto identifies as a poetical and political ambivalence. By ambivalence he does not refer to detachment or not taking sides, rather he uses ambivalence to describe how Fanon holds the tensions between distinct theoretical and political views without *clearly* resolving them. Thereby he exposes the intricacy and heterogeneity of the colonial

and the difficulty to provide a straightforward analysis of it, or, simply put, there is no instructions manual for the reality he was analyzing.

### **3.7 Drama and theory**

Fanon's view of violence cannot be understood without the poetic dimension of his writing, as we will see in further detail in Chapter 7 of the present dissertation. However, like other elements, Fanon's theoretical and metatheoretical accounts can neither be detached from the poetic and dramatic elements. In this section I will illustrate the relation between the aesthetic and his critique and metacritique of psychoanalysis.

By taking the dramatic element into consideration, the writing of Fanon acquires a choral quality that submerges his voice as an author within a plot of different first and second persons and third persons; he juxtaposes characters, presents conflicting voices, accumulates positions and attitudes, where irony, paradoxes and feigned contradictions contribute to offer different and simultaneous planes and perspectives, and bestows a motion-like quality within and to the "critical narrative" (De Oto, 2003; Sekyi-Otu, 1996). The choral and polyhedral nature of the work complicates distinguishing Fanon's as a single, protagonist and authorial voice, it impedes to isolate statements as concluding, unambiguous and univocal, to bestow them a prescriptive character and a marked direction, and to take his positions as definitive instead of in constant reconsideration (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 5). As Sekyi-Otu explains:

the relationships between utterance and proposition, representation and truth, enacted practice and authorial advocacy, are rendered quite problematic. It means, furthermore, that an utterance or a representation or a practice we encounter in a text is to be considered not as a discrete and conclusive event, but rather as a strategic and self-revising act set in motion by changing circumstances and perspectives, increasingly intricate configurations of experience. (1996: 5)

To emphasize the open and flexible character of Fanon's writing does not amount to a relativistic hermeneutics – although it may lend itself to it – if relativism is understood as the lack of criteria for validity. This would be at odds with his aim of social transformation; if everything is valid, everything could also be invalid (Santos, 2014). Instead, what these qualities bespeak is the relativity inherent in Fanon's work, that is, he does not provide an immediate *final word* on many topics. As Alejandro de Oto argues, such partiality and incompleteness serve as a “counterweight to the seduction of a final formula in order to construct mechanisms and figures of resistance and opposition” in a world that appears as closed and static (De Oto, 2003: 110-111).

As Lewis Gordon notes (2015: 98), in Fanon's writing coexist two intertwined texts, with epistemic and political implications. There is the critical narrative of the tribulations of the black Caribbean, the Arab patient at the doctor, or the colonized under a colonial regime; and simultaneously, Fanon juxtaposes a self-critical and metacritical text that puts the focus on the critical narrative as an object of reflection. In *Black Skin White Masks*, this plurivocality reflects and critiques one of the elements of Euro-modernity stated in the previous chapter: the creation of a group of people identified as black, who are at the same time rejected by the world which has created them. Fanon follows the vicissitudes of the black Caribbean who, trapped in his or her black body, searches for admission in and by the white world. This would lead to a series of “failures” upon which Fanon puts the focus, “‘failures’ as we talk about an engine malfunctioning.” (Fanon, 1952: 21; my translation<sup>114</sup>) The alienated black assumes the negative meanings under which blackness has been constructed and fails in his or her attempts to achieve humanity by assimilating into whiteness

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<sup>114</sup> « des « ratés », au sens où l'on dit qu'un moteur a des ratés. »

through language, culture, romantic relations, or pursuing formal education. The black also resorts to the affirmation and transvaluation of blackness of the Négritude movement. Fanon acknowledges the potential of Négritude proposals for shifting from created to creator: “It is the white who creates the *nègre*. But it is the *nègre* who creates Négritude” (Fanon, 1959: 29; my translation<sup>115</sup>). But for Fanon this reinventive impulse is weakened, as we saw, t entails a reactive position towards colonial values and is entangled in colonial alienation.

As mentioned above, to the critical narrative that constitutes the drama of the alienated black Caribbean, Fanon intertwines a self-questioning and meta-theoretical narrative. In the introduction Fanon declares that “we think that only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can reveal the anomalies of affect responsible for the structure of the complexes” (Fanon, 1952: 10; my translation<sup>116</sup>). Throughout the work, he establishes a conversation with Sigmund and Anna Freud, Lacan, Jung, Marie Bonaparte and Helene Deutsch or Octave Mannoni, among other psychiatrists. Fanon seems to guide the reader through the journey of the alienated black by seemingly assuming the arguments provided by different schools of psychoanalysis. However, the sentence above and the acts of ventriloquism of Fanon exemplify what Gordon calls “demonstration by failure” (1996: 76), wherein Fanon proceeds to disentangle, deny, and contradict what he had previously asserted. Throughout the book he proceeds to show how different psychoanalytic are insufficient to shed light on black alienation.

Fanon makes reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis in three instances. First, in a long footnote on the theory of the mirror stage and how it would differ in regard to the Caribbean. In Europe, Fanon argues, the specular counterpart of the self is another

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<sup>115</sup> « C’est le blanc qui crée le nègre. Mais c’est le nègre qui crée la Négritude. »

<sup>116</sup> « nous pensons que seule une interprétation psychanalytique du problème noir peut révéler les anomalies affectives responsables de l’édifice complexe. »

peer. Whereas in the Caribbean, he argues “historical and economic realities” shape the imaginary, not only differently than in Europe, but in delusive way to the extent that produce a chasm between the imaginary and the real. In his own words, “in the Antilles perception takes place on the level of the imaginary” (Fanon, 1952: 159; my translation<sup>117</sup>). The result is that in the Antilles the perception of the self and of one’s fellow is the same as in France, that is, white. The black Caribbean expects the other to perceive him or her as white. The internalized image of the white and of the white imaginary, or as it was mentioned in the previous chapter by means of Du Bois, double consciousness, manifests itself in inferiority complex, fears, aggressiveness, Negrophobia, self-hatred, and diverse mechanisms of imitation and evasions. A case in point that he brings up is that of a black student of medicine who has the “hellish impression” (Fanon, 1952: 57) of not being recognized as a human in France. After joining the army as an auxiliary doctor he refuses to be transferred to a colonial unit because he wanted to be in charge of whites:

As a boss he should be feared or respected. This is what he wanted, this is what he was looking for: to lead white people to have an attitude of blacks towards him. Thereby he took revenge of the imago that had always obsessed him: the scared *nègre*, trembling, humiliated in front of the white master. (Fanon, 1952: 58; my translation<sup>118</sup>)

Second, Fanon also denies the centrality and “fecundity” of the Oedipus complex in the development of neuroses, and question its universality: “We too often forget that neurosis is not a constitutive component of human reality. Whether you like it or not, the Oedipus complex is unlikely to appear among *nègres*.” Relying on ethnographic works he asserts that it could be argued that, due to cultural and historical reasons, Oedipal neuroses are almost absent in Antillean families (Fanon,

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<sup>117</sup> « aux Antilles la perception se situe toujours sur le plan de l’imaginaire. »

<sup>118</sup> «C’était un chef ; comme tel, il devait être craint ou respecté. C’est en fait ce qu’il voulait, ce qu’il recherchait : amener les Blancs à avoir avec lui une attitude de Noirs. Ainsi se vengeait-il de l’imago qui l’avait de tout temps obsédé : le nègre effrayé, tremblant, humilié devant le seigneur blanc. »

1952: 149; my translation<sup>119</sup>). He also questions the Lacanian view of the family as “psychic circumstance and object” (Lacan, quoted in Fanon, 1952: 139; my translation<sup>120</sup>), where the psychic conflicts taking place in the adult life are incubated. The view that there is a correlation between the family and the social milieu in concerning values, organization and behavior towards authority cannot not be extrapolated to the colonies, Fanon argues, for “ a black child having grown up within a normal family will become abnormal with the slightest contact with the white world” (Fanon, 1952: 141; my translation<sup>121</sup>). The contact with the white world is what triggers colonial neurosis and trauma.

Fanon agrees with Freud that a “determined *Erlebnis*” (1952: 142; my translation<sup>122</sup>), in this case the contact with the white world, lies at the cause of trauma. However, Fanon disagrees with Freud in two important points. First, the traumatic experience in colonial and racist settings for Fanon is not triggered by a single event or a shocking episode, but it is caused by repetition (Bird-Pollan, 2015: 136). Second, Fanon differs from Freud in the role of a pillar of psychoanalysis, the unconscious. Whereas for the early Freud trauma is repressed and stored in the unconscious, for Fanon the colonial trauma is not covert and contained, but takes place in plain sight and in the everyday life:

the racial drama is played out in the open, the black has no time ‘to make it unconscious’. (...) The *nègres*’ superiority or inferiority complex or the feeling of equality are *conscious*. These feelings constantly traverse them. Blacks embody their drama. There is none of the affective amnesia that characterizes typical neuroses. (Fanon, 1952:148; italics in the original; my translation<sup>123</sup>)

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<sup>119</sup> « On oublie trop souvent que la névrose n’est pas constitutive de la réalité humaine. Qu’on le veuille ou non, le complexe d’Oedipe n’est pas près de voir le jour chez les nègres. »

<sup>120</sup> « comme ob-jet et circonstance psychiques »

<sup>121</sup> « Un enfant noir normal, ayant grandi au sein d’une famille normale, s’anormalisera au moindre contact avec le monde blanc. »

<sup>122</sup> « *Erlebnis* déterminées »

<sup>123</sup> « Ensuite, il y a l’inconscient. Le drame racial se déroulant en plein air, le Noir n’a pas le temps de l’ « inconscienciser ». (...) Le complexe de supériorité des nègres, leur complexe d’infériorité ou leur

In chapter four, he discusses the work of Octave Mannoni who had diagnosed an inherent disposition of Malagasy people towards their colonization on the basis of their pre-colonial inferiority feeling and a dependency complex towards Europeans. Mannoni proposes to explore the unconscious life of Malagasy through their dreams. But for Fanon “the discoveries of Freud are of no use.” (1952; 101- 102; my translation<sup>124</sup>) In a psychoanalytic interpretation of the recurrent appearance in the dreams of Malagasy children of black bulls chasing them, or the presence of armed Senegalese soldiers, the symbolic would stand in the way of the real. Instead, he demands to “place the dream *in its time* (...) and *in its place*” (Fanon, 101-102; italics in the original; my translation<sup>125</sup>), that is, in the concrete time and place of colonial violence which, he asserts, had eighty thousand natives killed (Fanon, 1952: 101). In this light, the phobic or fear inducing character of blackness is not to be found in “unconscious neurotic dispositions” (Fanon, 1952: 104; my translation<sup>126</sup>), but in the presence of Senegalese troops at the service of the colonial enterprise. In the dreams of the Malagasy children the black bulls do not represent a phallic symbol but an actual chase, the black men do not symbolize ancestry and “the rifle of the Senegalese soldier is not a penis but a real rifle Lebel 1916.” (1952: 104; my translation<sup>127</sup>).

As Gordon points out, Fanon’s assessment of psychonalysis is phenomenological, by exposing that in the colonial context psychoanalysis confounds the symbolic and the real Fanon shows the theoretical inadequacy of psychoanalysis to assess colonial phenomena from a perspective that transcends its own presuppositions (1996). The *a priori* application of an interpretative framework based on universal categories, as in

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sentiment égalitaire sont conscients. A tout instant, ils les transigent. Ils existent leur drame. Il n'y a pas, chez eux, cette amnésie affective qui caractérise la névrose-type. »

<sup>124</sup> « les découvertes de Freud ne nous sont d’aucune utilité. »

<sup>125</sup> « replacer ce rêve *en son temps*, (...) et *dans son lieu* »

<sup>126</sup> « dispositions névrotiques inconscientes »

<sup>127</sup> « Le fusil du tirailleur sénégalais n’est pas un pénis, mais véritable-ment un fusil Lebel 1916. »



Mannoni's analysis, inverts cause and consequence with the resulting pathologization of Malagasy psychology. His demand to consider the contextual and socio-historical elements of the pathology entails the provincialization of psychoanalysis. Yet Fanon does not advocate for an ontological difference of the black psyche or black suffering, neither seeks the solution in mere cultural attunement or the adjustment of psychoanalysis to the socio-cultural context. As Maldonado-Torres puts forward this is not a relativist position:

Fanon is not satisfied with only indicating that what these thinkers say may be valid 'there' in the territory of the colonizer and not 'here' in the territory of the colonized. He wants to show that what happens 'here' is related to what happens 'there,' and conversely as well. This conceptualization demands new and more sophisticated theories and critical ventures. (2008: 99)

Referring to psychoanalysis Fanon states that “reality, that is our only resource, impedes such operations” (Fanon, 1952: 148; my translation<sup>128</sup>). That is, besides the aforementioned Eurocentrism and the production of problem people by psychoanalysis, Fanon's critique implies that colonial and racist alienation exceeds psychoanalytical interpretations and reductive understandings of the psyche and individual approaches to psychic phenomena at the expense of the social and the political. For him “the real source of the conflict” is located in the social structure (Fanon, 1952: 98; my translation<sup>129</sup>). In other words, racist societies are pathogenic sites. Therefore, the psychiatric practice should face the double task of making conscious a historical and internalized drama, and eliciting action towards social change (Fanon, 1952: 97). It is in societal structures and institutions where the focus is to be put on, since “‘the black becomes abnormal’ because of white society's internalization of its image of the black.” (Gibson and Beneduce: 2017: 82). For such

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<sup>128</sup> « Mais le réel, qui est notre unique recours, nous interdit pareilles opérations. »

<sup>129</sup> « la véritable source conflictuelle »

society the black problem is “the problem of the increase of blacks, of the black peril.” (Fanon: 1952: 195; my translation<sup>130</sup>). As Gibson and Beneduce (2017) recall, Fanon’s analysis resonates with Richard Wright’s words to Sartre. To the question of what was the “black problem” in the United States Wright answered that there was no black problem but a white problem.

Like Du Bois referred to the problem of the color-line, Fanon observes that the problem is not limited to those “blacks living among whites”, but also those “exploited, enslaved and despised by a colonial and capitalist society that happens to be white” (1952: 195; my translation<sup>131</sup>). As we have seen, in order to diagnose racist alienation and to assess its role in the formation of the subjectivity of the colonized Fanon develops a sociogenetic approach that encompasses the relation of the subject, understood as embodied consciousness, with the social world and its historical constitution, including the generation of meanings, socio-cultural elements, the political experience, relations of power, economic structures and ideological formations.

In sum, the “drama [that] is played out every day in colonized countries” (Fanon, 1952: 142; my translation<sup>132</sup>) has its correlate in the text in the simultaneous metatheoretical narrative. Or, paraphrasing Gordon, to the dilemmas of the colonized facing and questioning the everyday life marked by colonialism and racism Fanon juxtaposes the “unveiling of an unveiling”, where the metacritique questions and illuminates the act of questioning itself (Gordon, 2015: 98).

This double layer in the text has a methodological and epistemic role, and also a pedagogical and political function. **Exposing the embeddedness of theory within the**

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<sup>130</sup> « il y a un problème, le problème de la montée des Noirs, le problème du péril noir »

<sup>131</sup> « des Noirs exploités, esclavagisés, méprisés par une société capitaliste, colonialiste, accidentellement blanche. »

<sup>132</sup> « Un drame chaque jour se joue dans les pays colonisés. »

political and historical dynamics of colonialism and racism does not amount to equating theory with colonialism and rejecting theory in toto. Instead, this initiates the search for other forms of theorizing, of producing knowledge and of transforming the theoretical knowledge at hand.

David Macey (2001) argues that Fanon did not properly understand phenomenology, Marxism or psychoanalysis. Yet, this unidirectional view omits that how Fanon's theorizing is also an intervention in these fields. In line with Hourya Bentouhami-Molino's remarks it is important to notice that Fanon does not merely borrow, "he reconstructs, and therefore disrupts the premises of the scientific fields from which he is supposed to borrow" (2014: 38). The dialogues with Freud, Lacan or Mannoni addressed above do not entail the rejection of psychoanalysis, but its expansion and reformulation. The same could be argued with his dialogue with Sartre or Merleau-Ponty on the corporeal schema. Theorizing the experience of the alienated black and their concrete social and political situation, for which the disciplines and theories were not directly conceived, requires the displacements of their presuppositions, which, in return broadens the fields and bestows them with a political dimension for the study of racism. Thus, instead of measuring how Fanon follows Freud, Merleau-Ponty or Marx, how he is positioned with respect to their respective traditions, or what he owes to them, a more perceptive question, in order to both understand Fanon and to apprehend the possibilities that his work offers, would be to ask what Fanon *does with* and *to* psychoanalysis, phenomenology, or Marxism, among others (Bentouhami-Molino, 2014: 40). Thus, Fanon's metacritique of psychoanalysis and phenomenology is both psychoanalytical and phenomenological itself, in the sense that he analyzes their failures, and questions the presuppositions and the foundations of thinking (Gordon, 2015).

Another form in which the political traverses Fanon's poetics is his view of "politicization" as the invention of souls: "to politicize is to open the spirit, to awaken the spirit, to put the spirit in the world. It is, as Césaire said, 'to invent souls'." (Fanon, 1961: 187; my translation<sup>133</sup>) The words of Césaire which Fanon recalls are from his conference "L'homme de culture et ses responsabilités". In this essay, Césaire takes on the aforementioned issue of the colonial separation between the creator and the creature, and the function of aesthetic creation and the "man of culture" in activating the consciousness of the people. As he states, in colonial societies "there is not only a hierarchy of *master* and *servant*. There is also a hierarchy of *creator* and *consumer*." (Césaire, 1959: 118; italics in the original; my translation<sup>134</sup>) Hence, the disruptive quality that Césaire attributes to every creative act, for "every creation, just because it is creation, is participation in the struggle for liberation" (1959: 117; my translation<sup>135</sup>). Césaire, in a reference to Stalin, writes that "some might have said that the writer is an engineer of the soul". However, he insists on the different nature of the political and pedagogical work that separates the technician from the artist: "we are *propagators of souls*, multipliers of souls, and, if need be, *inventors of souls*." (Césaire 1959: 118; italics in the original; my translation<sup>136</sup>)

Fanon's adaptation of inventing souls as politicization besides the cultural encompasses the political, the pedagogical, and the anthropological, in an educative work that exceeds a goal oriented or instrumental understanding of political education

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<sup>133</sup> « politiser c'est ouvrir l'esprit, c'est éveiller l'esprit, mettre au monde l'esprit. C'est, comme le disait Césaire, « inventer des âmes ».

<sup>134</sup> « Dans la société coloniale, il n'y a pas seulement une hiérarchie *maître* et *serviteur*. Il y a aussi, implicite, une hiérarchie *créateur* et *consommateur*. »

<sup>135</sup> « toute création, parce qu'elle est création, est participation à un combat libérateur. »

<sup>136</sup> « Certains ont pu dire que l'écrivain est un ingénieur des âmes. (...) nous sommes des *propagateurs d'âmes*, des multiplicateurs d'âmes, et à la limite des *inventeurs d'âmes*. »

as instruction, bringing information or leading people's thought in a specific direction.

to politicize is to open the spirit, to awaken the spirit, to put the spirit in the world. It is, as Césaire said, 'to invent souls. To politicize the masses is not, cannot be to deliver a political speech. Political education means to persist feverously in making understand the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility and that if we move forward it is also because of them, that there is no demiurge, that there is no illustrious man responsible for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are ultimately only the hands of the people (Fanon, 1961: 187; my translation<sup>137</sup>)

Political education, which involves "enlarging the brain of the people" and also working on spirit and soul, is directed towards enlivening the means and setting the conditions so that people can edify a world where power is organized and circulates in a way that improves the life conditions of humans rather than at the service of control, domination and abuse<sup>138</sup>. In short, the notion of power with which Fanon is concerned and is reflected in his poetic, is closer to empowerment.

There is, however, another side of Fanon's view of the pedagogical related to the poetical, the political and his conception of the human being that is implicit throughout his work, and that Paulo Freire grasped and elaborated further. This aspect points paradoxically to the absence of explanation of his methodological decisions. In general, Fanon barely explains his methodological movements, or conceptual

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<sup>137</sup> Or, politiser c'est ouvrir l'esprit, c'est éveiller l'esprit, mettre au monde l'esprit. C'est, comme le disait Césaire, « inventer des âmes. Politiser les masses ce n'est pas, ce ne peut pas être faire un discours politique. C'est s'acharner avec rage à faire comprendre aux masses que tout dépend d'elles,

que si nous stagnons c'est de leur faute et que si nous avançons, c'est aussi de leur faute, qu'il n'y a pas de démiurge, qu'il n'y a pas d'homme illustre et responsable de tout, mais que le démiurge c'est le peuple et que les mains magiciennes ne sont en définitive que les mains du peuple.»(...) «rendre humain »

<sup>138</sup> Fanon's view of power and his reference to magic, soul and spirit parallels a notion of power as understood in the ancient Egypt or KMT. As Gordon notes, predating Latin notions such as *potis* or *autoritas*, the ancient word *pHty* means "godlike strength" and refers to the type of power of the authority, the kings. Yet prior to that there is the word *HqAw* or *Heka*, "which activates the *ka* (sometimes translated as 'soul, spirit,' or, in a word, 'magic') that manifests reality." *Heka* is a precondition also for *pHty*, and therefore, also for gods' creative force; the former is thus a form of power that enables the realization of things. Gordon defines this enhancing and life generating kind of power "as the ability with the means to make things happen." (Gordon, 2017: 41) We will elaborate further on Fanon and Gordon's theory of power, and on the different ways Fanon talks about magic.

decisions; as stated, the way he elaborates his argument demands reading what he says alongside with what he *does*. And as much as he attempts to reach the reader through and beyond argumentation, this absence of explanation leaves the reader a space to build his own understanding. As Paget Henry notes, about his “creative and synthetic strategies Fanon does not really speak. He leaves us completely on our own, and at the mercy of our own creative and synthetic capabilities.” (2006:20) In other words, the lack of explicitness in his writing, which results from the combination of poetics with psychiatry, philosophy, sociology or experiential vignettes, responds to the rejection of a paternalistic relation with the reader, who is treated as an agent actively thinking and bestowing meaning, in line with his constant concern to make human beings “actional” (Fanon, 1952: 151).

### **Conclusion**

The next chapter deals with another aspect of Fanon, his earliest psychiatric writings and his medical work in France. However, the concerns that animate his clinical writing and practice are not unrelated to those previously covered. As stated, the psychiatric and the political aspects of Fanon do not follow parallel paths, but intersecting ones. His doctoral dissertation shares elements covered in *Black Skin White Masks*. In the former he departs from a clinical case of a degenerative disease in order to question the distinction between neurology and psychiatry, and above all to interrogate understandings of the patient as a human not as a physiological body or a mind but as an agent and a social and multidimensional being in its and to produce medical knowledge that uncovers rather than obstructs the agency of the patient. This enables to discern the historical and social aspects of the disease. This has also implications at the level of diagnostics and also for the face to face relation between patient and doctor, which is the theme of “The North African Syndrome”. This is an

important article in Fanon's work as it connects aspects addressed in the dissertation, with the problem of racism in the consultation room, the expansion of the clinical to society as addressed in *Black Skin White Masks*, and also with the problems that he would later face in his medical practice in Algeria regarding the complicity of medicine and racism.

This chapter has focused on Fanon as a writer, but he also paid attention to the other side of the communicative relation, the listener. The side of Fanon as a listener is mostly related to his psychiatric work, in which language is a central aspect, and is related to a different set of problems. Putting the patient at the center is one of fundamental tenets of institutional psychotherapy, an avant-garde approach elaborated in the psychiatric hospital of Sint-Alban which sought to create the conditions for the speech of the patient, enhance its agency, humanity and freedom.

## **Chapter 4. A medicine of the human**

Without the recognition of the human value of madness, it is man himself who disappears. (Francisc Tosquelles, 2014)

### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with Fanon's earliest concerns with the need to humanize medicine and psychiatric practice. Fanon's concerns with a humanistic medicine had started in his doctoral dissertation. Therein, very subtly he questioned the neuropsychiatric positivism of his department and the epistemological and disciplinary assumptions of theories of mental health. Yet, the underlying problem was the view of the patient as a physical or a psychic entity, as a mere body or as a mind. Through examining a hereditary neurodegenerative disease Fanon also questions the anthropological assumptions, the understanding of the human being, and the importance of the social and historical dimension in the disease.

In "The North African Syndrome", Fanon links concerns addressed in his dissertation concerning the understanding of the patient as a psycho-physical entity with the problems of racism in society and in the clinic. In such setting, the patient is not a patient but the North African patient. This raises a different set of problems. Fanon links migration, citizenship, exclusion with the clinic and "the politics of diagnostics" (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Fanon questions the medical attitudes, episteme, and structures that take a toll on the patient, and against a human doctor-patient relationship. This also implies a different approach to disease in relation to the society

The two year stay with François Tosquelles at the Hospital of Saint-Alban was an important formative experience and at the same time a confirmation of the concerns that had guided his writings in the doctoral dissertation and in "The North African Syndrome". Since the early 1940's the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban was the



site of a pioneering experience to reconceive the theoretical approach to mental illness and the practices of mental care. Mental illness was conceived in its physical, social, political and somatic aspects, and the treatment of mental disorders had to start by transforming the psychiatric hospital itself, considered as a sick and generator of sickness itself. I have structured this chapter as follows:

The first section reads Fanon's dissertation, not exhaustively, but in light of *Black Skin White Masks*. As stated, the latter was initially submitted as the doctoral dissertation but was rejected. Fanon wrote a second dissertation on a different topic and with a different methodological approach. But the obvious differences reveal some commonalities when one considers both as interventions in social in human sciences, as attempts to build a social science that liberates the human. In his doctoral dissertation, among other things Fanon questions the epistemological and anthropological foundations of neuropsychiatry that conceive mental disease as a damage in the body or in the psyche.

The second section addresses an important article in Fanon's work, "The North African Syndrome". Through an ethnographic account of the consultation room and the relations between doctor and patient delves into the relation between the clinic and the wider social oppression in which it is part, at the level of attitudes, epistemology, and the structures of the hospital setting. The problems of the North African migrant do not adjust to the medical model and the North African becomes itself the problem. This requires a whole shift in the ethical, social and political understanding of the clinic, and of disease.

The third section covers the influence of Francesc Tosquelles, a committed antifascist and a decisive figure in the history of European psychiatry, on Fanon during his stay in Saint-Alban. Tosquelles approach to psychiatry was crafted during

the Spanish Civil War, his stay in the concentration camp of Septfonds, and especially in the psychiatric hospital in Saint-Alban during the Vichy France. In Saint-Alban, Tosquelles and Jean Oury gathered a transdisciplinary group which transformed the treatment of mental health by questioning the organization, the structure, and the hierarchies within the psychiatric hospital. Many of the aspects developed in Saint-Alban had an impact on Fanon's philosophy and psychiatric thought. Although at the same time, his stay with Tosquelles also served as a confirmation of the questioning of the clinic and his understanding of mental disease that he had advanced in "The North African Syndrome" and in his medical dissertation.

#### **4.1 The patient as agent**

As stated, *Black Skin White Masks* was submitted as Fanon's doctoral dissertation, and was rejected on the basis of not fitting the methodological, the thematic, the disciplinary boundaries and the implicit political concerns of the field. Parallel to this work Fanon had been researching on patients with Friedreich's ataxia, a rare hereditary disease derived from the degeneration of the nervous system. Thus, he submitted a second dissertation with the title *Mental alterations, character modifications, psychic disorders and intellectual deficit in spinocerebellar heredodegeneration: A case of Friedreich's ataxia with delusions of possession*, which deals with the mental disorders related to such disease. The topic of the dissertation, its empirical approach and disciplinary delimitation seemed to be best suited to fulfill the academic requirements of the field, and the intellectual environment of the department. However, what Fanon actually does is to skip such requirements and to interrogate them.

Despite the disparity of topics, the perspective adopted, and the methodological orientation there is a singular continuity between both works. This continuity is manifested in a twofold way. First, at the level of certain theoretical elements and analytical positions that Fanon adopted and were to remain central in Fanon's clinical and political thought throughout his work, such as the clear opposition that he establishes between madness and freedom, the importance of embodiment, sociality, history, language, temporality, or the socio-cultural in their relation to subjectivity for the study of alienation. Second, and more important for the scope of this chapter, there is a significant continuity at the level of the underpinning question that guides both works, that is how to study human beings in a way that it can contribute to set them free, instead of turning them into an object.

In *Black Skin White Masks* he does so by exposing the limitations of human sciences, and their imbrication with their colonial world, to study the human being through the constraint condition of black people under racism and colonial dehumanization (Maldonado-Torres, 2009). In other words, he explored how to study the black and the colonized without turning them into a problem. In his dissertation he addresses the question of how to study and treat a patient suffering from hereditary spinocerebellar degeneration when disciplinary, epistemic and anthropological presuppositions of neurology and psychiatry lead to conceive the patient as an object. However, in contrast to the transdisciplinary work of his first book, his dissertation apparently remains within the confines of neuropsychiatry and positivism to issue a philosophical critique from within of his own medical training, and the limitations that entail looking at illness without considering the social and historical dimensions in the construction of illness, and the role of the human being in it.

His research on Friedreich's ataxia enables him to enter one of the main debates concerning the distinction between neurology and psychiatry and the relation between neurological and mental disorders. Fanon distances himself from the debate between the organogenesis and the psychogenesis of mental illnesses. The former locates the origin of illnesses in the altered physiology of the patient whereas for the latter mental illnesses start in the psyche. Fanon does not reject a priori any of the positions but considers both stances insufficient and the debate, unproductive. At the heart of neurological and psychiatric models, Fanon observes, lies a conception of the human being either as an organic mechanism or as an independent psyche, which has significant implications for the understanding of what illness means and, thus, for the identification of the problems of the patient. By bringing to the foreground a relational conception of the human, and hence what illness means socially and historically, he complicates notions of symptoms, lesions, and mental health or illness premised on purely organic or psychic causality. Yet, what is at stake in such theoretical debate is the character of the relation between the psychiatrist and the patient at the therapeutic moment, either a relationship based on a conception of the patient as an actor or as an object.

At the outset Fanon notes that neurological illnesses such as paralysis can be frequently accompanied by psychiatric symptoms. In those cases, the tendency in medicine is to look for "causal or mechanistic explanations" (Fanon, 2018: 206) in order to create a nosological entity, that is, a unified category that gathers the neurological and psychiatric symptoms of the illness. In the case of Friedreich's ataxia, the rare presence and the disparity of the types of mental disorders complicates any attempt to establish a law-like relation between both types of disorders. This raises the question concerning the relations between the origin of mental problems

derived from organic illnesses, and also whether the very division between the neurological and the psychiatric is actually appropriate to account for the illness:

At a time when neurologists and psychiatrists are striving to define their disciplines as pure sciences, that is to say a pure neurology and a pure psychiatry, it is good practice to set among the debate a group of neurological diseases that are also accompanied by psychic disorders, and to ask the legitimate question about the essence of these disorders. (Fanon, 2018: 206)

In his view, the reason that this century old problem has turned into a crisis of knowledge lies in “today’s very powerful urgency towards specialization, and thus towards boundaries.” He continues:

What are the respective limits of neurology and of psychiatry? What is a neurologist? What is a psychiatrist? In such a situation what, then, becomes of the neuropsychiatrist? Far from proposing a solution – *I believe a life of study and observation is required.* (Fanon, 2018: 247; own italics)

These are not rhetorical questions, neither is Fanon’s answer elusive. Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce argue that Fanon was claiming for the autonomy of psychiatry in relation to neurology (2017:41). In my view, Fanon takes a different direction. His requirement to study and observe is a call to put the problem to be addressed at the center and to part company from the loyalty that identitarian understandings of disciplines demand. Otherwise, if neurology, psychiatry or neuropsychiatry function as discrete, complete and autonomous what will fall by the wayside are the pathologies of the patient who is not aligned to their models or methods and what will remain is the patient as an obstacle. As we further develop, Fanon shows the limitations of reducing the patient to an object, devoid of the human element; likewise he now proposes a relationship between the studier and the studied, the physician and the patient, as humans.

Fanon offers an historical overview of the illness first described by the neurologist Nikolaus Friedreich in 1861. The earliest accounts of this hereditary spinocerebellar

degeneration reported the existence of motor debility affecting the musculature, hearing and vision without presenting psychic alterations. Throughout the medical literature different psychic impairment are observed in scarce proportions; between 1894 and 1949 the reported mental disorders consisted in language disorders, progressive dementia, hallucinatory psychosis, delirium, schizophrenia, affective lability, sudden negativity, apathy and inattention, bouts of rage, irritability, or anxiety. Despite their rarity and variability, theorists such as Bleuler and Walder paid considerable attention to the mental alterations and have defined the mental problems associated to Friedreich's disease as a "psycho-organic syndrome" in their attempts to systematize and delimit the syndrome (Fanon, 2018: 212).

Fanon warns that these attempts to delimitate the illness do not enable to draw categorical conclusions. Yet, more important, is the direction he takes when he wonders whether the low rate of psychiatric disorders obeys to the neurologist's lack of interest in psychiatric symptoms and the disattention to the mental state of the patient (Fanon, 2018:214). Fanon poses thus the question whether the very compartmentalization of medical science is blinding the scientist, the physician or the therapist from the problems of the patient. In short, what falls by the wayside is the patient as a human. Thereby he attempts to shift the orientation of the issue: from a conception of medicine where the pathologization of the patient lurks when the disease does not fit the established diagnostic framework, to another where the problems of the patient require expanding the interrogation beyond the clinical to include the historical, social and institutional aspects of illness.

This leads Fanon to question what illness means beyond purely anatomical or psychic understandings. Conjointly, he challenges the naturalistic view of the patient, that is, the human as uniquely a psycho-anatomical unity, concomitant to the

neurological and psychiatric models. In other words, even in the case of a hereditary disease from organic origin Fanon exposes the insufficiency of naturalistic and empiricist categories to account for the whole range of human experience, and therefore for the aetiology, pathogeny and treatment of mental illness. First, he underscores the necessity of considering the temporal dimension of illness. Second, he focuses on the intersubjective and the social dimension of the illness. In the first case, the lack of understanding of the problem is due to

the fact that our thinking is scarcely able to liberate itself from the anatomo-clinical. We think in terms of organs and focal lesions when we ought to be thinking in terms of functions and disintegrations. Our medical view is spatial, where it ought to become more and more temporal. (Fanon, 2018: 215)

For Fanon the heart of the problem is the underlying Cartesian division between body and soul. In this view, neurological and mental disorders, are unrelated, or, at best, “contingent coincidence” (Fanon, 2018: 215). Attempts to exclusively localize spatially mental disorders lead for Fanon to a blind alley, as the cases of Parkinson or multiple sclerosis with mental modifications that he reports also attest. Alternatively, supported by the work of neurologists Von Monakow and Mourgue and by Gestalt theorists, he advocates for a holistic view of the human, wherein the physical and the mental are not dissociated but intertwined; for Kurt Goldstein, argues Fanon, “no absolute, local symptom exists” (Fanon, 2018: 258). In that vein, Julián de Ajuriaguerra and Henri Hécaen argue that Henri Ey’s excessive attention to and valorization of the symptom misleads the direction of the problem, for “the symptom must be divested of all fixity” (Fanon, 2018: 258). Ajuriaguerra and Hécaen warn against confusing lesion and function. Contra Ey, they posit that a neurological alteration is a global alteration, which requires shifting the attention to the organizational level of the organism in its response to a disturbance. The *hormè* of

Von Monakow and the Gestalt school prioritize the study of disease from the perspective of temporality instead of the spatial localization of pathological phenomena. Fanon associates the *hormè* with Henri Bergson's idea of *èlan vital*, both the neurologist and the French philosopher put time and the creative force as the organizing principle of life at the center of their thought. For Von Monakow, the *hormè* or vital impulse is the creative energy that contains the memory of the species and drives them towards the future (Harrington, 1999). According to Von Monakow's chronogenetic perspective, instincts must be subordinated to the *hormè*, for pathology occurs when this relation is inverted. Fanon assents with him that "the human is human to the extent that he is totally turned towards the future" (2018: 257). Thinking illness in relation to time is a constant element in his clinical analysis, which, as we saw, he extends and endows it with a political character in his analysis of racist and colonial alienation.

Secondly, Fanon adds that it is necessary to go beyond the individual and the family levels and take into consideration the social implications of the disease, that is, to examine the impact of organic disorders on the patient's social relations and how it in turn affects the mental equilibrium. By taking into consideration that the patient is a human being whose actions are embedded in time and within a world of others, "[h]umanity loses its mechanistic character. It is no longer passively moved. It discovers itself as actor." (Fanon, 2018: 218) In contrast to an atomistic and substantive view of the human, a relational conception of the human pervades Fanon's thought since his earliest writings. He affirms that it is through the encounter with another fellow human that the self is constituted. Hence one cannot speak of the human as a fact, but "a mosaic of facts", bereft of all stability and substance:

A human being always exists in the process of .... He or she is here with other humans and, in this sense, alterity is the reiterated perspective of his or



her action. This means that the human being, as an object of study, demands a multi-dimensional investigation (Fanon, 2018: 218).

Fanon criticized neuropsychiatric approaches that conceived the body as the “anatomy-physiological” (2018: 219), that is, the alpha and omega of the approach to health and disease. Instead, he points out, one has to consider the relation between the body and the ego and how the limited motricity has an impact on the appropriation of the body by the personality:

the personality no longer appropriates muscular activity, the individual has the feeling of passively submitting to walking movements; he is not the one who walks, but instead he is, as he says, ‘transported as if I was in a car’. The result of this deficit is that the notion of the ego, of the personality, gives out to such a point, the patient says, that if he did not stop, he would lose consciousness. (Fanon, 2018: 231)

Yet, the corporeal is also a site of relations, and a dimension that makes human interaction possible. In other words, when looking at a person who suffers from degenerative paralysis, Fanon does not conceive his or her body as a *thing* to be examined, but as a layer of an *actor* whose outward orientation to form and engage in a web of social relations is cramped.

It is thus difficult to admit that a disruption ending in deficits in the stock of relationships would nonetheless leave a consciousness normal. In other terms, a young man of eighteen, seeing the progressive limitation of his field of action, cannot conserve an intact psyche. I would have liked to show the step-by-step progress of this limitation, which is first biological, then psychic, and lastly metaphysical. (Fanon, 2018: 19)

In this early work he outlined some of the key elements of his view of alienation: the relation between the muscular and personality and hence, to movement and the social world. In short, the shrinkage of the person’s possibility of acting in time starting at the corporeal level. The social dimension plays a key role in his understanding of mental disease. Not only in the matter of the relations of the patient with the world, but also in the very conception of health and disease.

Fanon analyzes then seven cases where the disease is accompanied by mental disorders, which are attributed to a mechanical origin. Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce underscore the Kuhnian character of this methodological move. By treating these mental alterations as anomalies Fanon puts into question the adequacy of the existing paradigm and exposes the necessity of further analysis on the relationship between neurology and psychiatry (2017: 39). He describes six relevant cases from the medical literature. Four of them consist of spinocerebellar heredodegeneration, followed by two cases of Friedreich's ataxia. The seventh one was personally observed by him. It addresses the case of Odile, a patient suffering from Friedrich's ataxia with "delusions of possession and hysterical structure" (Fanon, 2018: 243) which were observed for the first time in the literature of the disease. Three of Odile's brothers had died from paralysis and presented similar neurological problems, but none of them showed mental problems. Fanon provides a detailed description of her family and personal background, and of the evolution of the disease. He also carefully describes the evolution of the mental disorders, which he points out may have emerged because of "the atmosphere" (Fanon, 2018: 244) of the asylums in which she was hospitalized, and the responses of the patient to the psychiatrists.

Then, Fanon delves into the scope of psychiatry and neurology by examining the relation of the psychic with the neurological through the theoretical debates between Henri Ey, Jacques Lacan, Kurt Goldstein, Hector Ajuriaguerra and somatic medicine. Fanon, as we said, leaves the debate purportedly open and does not reject but neither totally concurs with any of their overall arguments; indeed he had already distanced himself from all of them considering that he had already elaborated his sociogenic approach to mental illness. Beyond the debate between organogenesis and psychogenesis, the sections dedicated to the theoretical discussions are interesting

also in terms of understanding how Fanon built up his own psychiatric and social thought by adopting, rejecting and transforming different aspects of their thought. However, dedicating an analysis of these theoretical debates is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, what I want to emphasize, besides the already mentioned point of intersections with *Black Skin White Masks*, is that this dissertation represented a first interrogation of the epistemological and anthropological basis of neuropsychiatry in the search for a medicine that approaches the patient not as a passive object to be scrutinized but as a human and, thus, as an agent. These concerns would be taken to the actual doctor-patient encounter in the consultation room, to which we now turn.

#### **4.2 The North African Syndrome**

“The North African Syndrome”, was the product of another parallel research he was undertaking and became the first work that he published, in early 1952. This is an important article in Fanon’s work for several reasons. First, because of its “strange currency”, as Alice Cherki notes (2011: 38; my translation<sup>139</sup>); second, because it blends the political and sociohistorical aspects of racism outlined *Black Skin White Masks* with his concerns for a humanistic medicine exposed in his doctoral dissertation about the obstacles posed by science itself that preclude a human relationship between the physician and the patient; and third, because it anticipates the imbrication of medicine with oppression that Fanon would address, although to a lesser extent, in Saint-Alban, and would definitely inform his practice in Algeria.

The setting of the dramatic ethnography that Fanon offers is the consulting room and the *face to face* encounter between the medical staff and the North African male migrant in France. Yet the backdrop of the critique points also beyond the room, namely, to the origin of the attitudes and practices in medical schools and health

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<sup>139</sup> « étrange actualité »

institutions, and their role in the reproduction of racism. The article opens by posing the question of responsibility in light of the dehumanization of the North African:

It is a common saying that man is constantly questioning himself, and he would deny himself were he to pretend he is no longer so. Yet it is possible to describe the basic dimension of all human problems. More precisely, all the problems posed on the subject of man can be reduced to this question: "Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do contributed to the devaluation of human reality"? The question could also be formulated thusly: "Have I in all circumstances reclaimed and called forth the human who is in me? (Fanon, 1964: 12; my translation<sup>140</sup>)

The North African migrant attends the consultation room with a disease that puzzles the medical personal. He feels pain everywhere, he says that he is going to die. The doctor addresses the patient with a condescending tone, in *petit-nègre*. He examines, he poses questions. Yet what he hears is vagueness, lack of precision, an odd conception of time, and elusiveness to his questions. The doctor finally establishes an approximate diagnostic and treatment, but the patient returns soon after the visit and before finishing the prescribed treatment. The doctor loses patience, the patient does not listen. He is cloistered in his own pain, he is an incarnated pain. The doctor's distrust, derision and condescension exacerbates the fear and insecurity of the patient, on his guard: "It is because I am Arab that they don't heal me like others." (Fanon, 1964: 13; my translation<sup>141</sup>)

The patient goes to another doctor. This time he explains himself in detail; he mobilizes all his being:

And he explains his pain, a pain that turns increasingly his own. Now he talks about it with loquacity. He seizes it in space, he puts it before the nose of the doctor. He grasps it, touches it with all his fingers, he unfolds it, he

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<sup>140</sup> « On dit volontiers que l'homme est sans cesse en question pour lui-même, et qu'il se renie lorsqu'il prétend ne plus l'être. Or il semble qu'il doit être possible de décrire une dimension première de tous les problèmes humains. Plus précisément: que tous les problèmes que se pose l'homme au sujet de l'homme peuvent se ramener à cette question: « N'ai-je pas, du fait de mes actes ou de mes abstentions, contribué à une dévalorisation de la réalité humaine ? » Question qui pourrait se formuler encore: « Ai-je en toute circonstance réclamé, exigé l'homme qui est en moi ? »

<sup>141</sup> « C'est parce que je suis Arabe qu'ils ne me soignent pas comme les autres. »

exposes it. It grows noticeably as he speaks. He puts it all over his body, and after fifteen minutes of gestural explanation, the interpreter (disconcerting as it should be) translates: he says that he has a stomach ache. (Fanon, 1964: 13-14; my translation<sup>142</sup>)

#### **4.2.1 The patient as problem**

And the cycle starts again, examination, tests, approximate diagnostic and treatment. At issue is not only a problem of language at the level signs and symbols, but of broader problems that thwart the possibility of an intersubjective encounter. Maurice Natanson puts it that [“t]he speech of the Other announces the bridge to his spirit, a way of crossing the zone of his objectness and exteriority and arriving at his person-hood.” (Natanson, 1969: 101) However, there are different obstacles in this medical encounter that stand between a human doctor-patient relationship, and between expectations of the patient’s desire to be understood and treated, and the doctor’s willingness or duty to understand, diagnose and to cure. For Natanson, the face-to face situation of the consulting room is marked by these expectations and obligations. The patient expects and desires that his concerns, problems and anxieties are treated “in his uniqueness” rather than into “typified causal terms.” But this raises a paradoxical situation for the doctor, who also wants to comprehend the patient in his uniqueness and at the same time must generalize as part of his or her job. “A paradox within a paradox is generated: the problem of uniqueness replaces the unique person, and the former is itself typified.” (Natanson, 1969: 105) Natanson here refers to psychiatry and not to general medicine. In the case of psychiatry this paradox constitutes a serious concern since the access and the comprehension of the patient’s world is more delicate, but the expectation to be understood and the need to approach the patient both as unique and as general also apply to general medicine.

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<sup>142</sup> « Et il raconte sa douleur. Qui devient de plus en plus sienne. Il l’expose avec volubilité maintenant. Il la saisit dans l’espace, la met sous le nez du médecin. Il la prend, la touche de ses dix doigts, la développe, l’expose. Elle grossit à vue d’œil. Il la ramasse sur toute la surface de son corps et après quinze minutes d’explications gestuelles, l’interprète (déroutant comme il se doit) nous traduit : il dit qu’il a mal au ventre. »

Typification, as Alfred Schutz and Natanson point out in their phenomenological descriptions of everyday life, is a central epistemological element of human experience in the everyday social world. Through typification human consciousness apprehend objects, events, persons, activities, attitudes, motives, ends, and organize their experience of the world concerning their familiarity or strangeness. Schutz writes:

Objects are experienced as trees, animals, and the like, and more specifically as oaks, firs, maples, or rattlesnakes, sparrows, dogs. This table I am now perceiving is characterized as something recognized, as something foreknown and, nevertheless, novel. (Schutz, 1962: 281)

The new table is a token, which, devoid of its particularities and by association with other similarly and previously perceived tokens, is understood as an instance of a type. Typification enables to situate what is not yet experienced or perceived within a horizon of familiarity. For Schutz, typification does not enable to directly understand the subjective meaning that a fellow human ascribe to their actions, but though it one can “comprehend the subjective meaning intended by the Other in the sense of what is typically intended.” (Natanson, 1986: 13) Yet, for Schutz’s concerns, intersubjectivity does not depend on one’s knowledge of the subjective meaning of the Other “in their uniqueness; it is enough to grasp them in their exemplification.” (Natanson, 1986: 29) Typification points to what he identifies as one of the central features of everyday life, anonymity. Natanson argues that anonymity “is part of the structure of the social world (...) an invariant feature of an existence lived in the taken-for-granted terms of ordinary life.” (1986: 24) Anonymity, he adds, is reciprocal, I am anonymous to most others and most others are anonymous to me. For Schutz, typification entails an epistemological limitation and, thereby, encompasses the existence of difference. Both in typification and anonymity imply that there are things and persons that we do not know, although they can be ideally typified, and

that they are different. As Gordon argues, typification does not entail essentialism, if essence is understood as the substance, that is, the feature without which a thing would not be what it is. Phenomenological essence “is an appeal to a thing-itself (a type), but not a thing-in-itself (a type of being).” (Gordon, 1995: 56)

As stated above, the doctor faces the paradox between the uniqueness of the patient and the professional obligation of generalization. For Natanson this requires approaches to *seeing* and *listening* that enable simultaneously comprehension (*Verstehen*) and therapy. We will return to listening in Fanon in Chapter 6.

Back to Fanon’s consultation room, the suffering patient is actually asking for help, but the doctor cannot *see* or *listen* the patients’ demand since the pain does not adjust to the objective reality that the examination reveals. There is first a problem in the medical model. Fanon argues that the Neo-Hippocratic medicine taught at the faculties prioritizes a diagnostic of functions over organs, but this is hardly applied in the consulting room with North Africans. In the examination prevails the understanding that every symptom corresponds to a localized lesion. Thus damages are sought in the brain and in the organic systems of the patient, conceived as a clinical object, a corporeal structure. When no lesion is found, then there is no pathology and the scientific procedure is not what is put into question, instead it is “the *patient* [who is] at fault—an indocile, undisciplined patient, who ignores the rules of the game: (...) each symptom entails a lesion.” (Fanon, 1964: 16; my translation<sup>143</sup>; italics in the original).

The view of the patient as a generic set of symptoms is, however aggravated by the “a priori” attitude of the medical personal in their engagement with the North African (Fanon, 1964: 15). The construction of problem people emerges here out of the

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<sup>143</sup> « le malade en défaut, — un malade indocile, indiscipliné, qui ignore la règle du jeu. (...) Tout symptôme suppose une lésion. »

conjunction of the aforementioned reductive conception of the human in medicine with the racism of the society, to which the clinic presents itself as an extraneous element. In other words, the patient is *the* North African patient.

In front of this pain without lesion, this disease spread in and over the whole body, this continuous suffering, the easiest attitude, which one adopts more or less rapidly, is the negation of any morbidity. The North African is a simulator, a liar, a good-for-nothing, a bum, an idler, a thief. (Fanon, 1964: 15; my translation<sup>144</sup>)

Fanon and Gordon have explored phenomenologically the consequences of racism and colonialism in the everyday social life, the latter in conversation with Fanon, Schutz and Natanson. The patient here is not a type (being-itself), but a type of being (being-in-itself). The North African does not go into the doctor's room as a patient and then can go to a café as a customer, or sits in a vehicle as a driver. He is a North African patient, driver or customer. As Gordon puts it, the denial of the human element in the North African leads to the closure of the other possibilities. The North African is overdetermined and turned into a thing: "Overdetermination transforms consciousness in the flesh into a thing, a form of being-in-itself." (1997: 73) To turn the black or the Arab into a thing demands the elimination of the perspective of the subject. He notes that racism produces a "perverted" form of anonymity, through which the black or the Arab becomes all blacks and Arabs.

This perversion of anonymity results in the invisibility of the black or the Arab, since "to be seen in a racist way is an ironic way of *not being seen* through *being seen*." (Gordon, 1995:58; italics in the original) In other words, racism does not stem from the fear of the Other, the unknown, the unfamiliar or the stranger. Instead, in its epistemic dimension racism actually renders the black and the Arab too familiar,

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<sup>144</sup> Devant cette douleur sans lésion, cette maladie répartie dans et sur tout le corps, cette souffrance continue, l'attitude la plus facile et à laquelle on est plus ou moins rapidement conduit, est la négation de toute morbidité. À l'extrême, le Nord-Africain est un simulateur, un menteur, un tire-au-flanc, un fainéant, un feignant, un voleur



everything is known and there is nothing else to know. In “Racism and Culture”, Fanon observes that during the liberation struggles colonial nations try to reinforce racist discourse, but it ceased to have an effect: “The occupier does not understand anymore. The end of racism starts by a sudden *incomprehension*.” (1964: 52; my translation<sup>145</sup>; own italics) That is, epistemically, the end of racism starts by a disruption of meanings that leads to a shocking and humbling moment and to a movement of openness to difference.

In the perverse form of anonymity there is not the epistemological limitation which Schutz and Natanson exposed because there is no possibility of anonymity, everything is known, and as such the black is invisible by being too visible (Gordon, 1997). Fanon writes: “I aspire to anonymity, to oblivion. Look, I accept everything, as long as no one notices me!” (Fanon, 1952: 113; my translation<sup>146</sup>) Gordon observes that for Fanon the transformative task is to build institutions attuned to the plight of oppressed people. These institutions “must afford a level of typicality that affords anonymity in the ordinary sense of human limitability.” That is, the North African could be a typical patient, a typical driver and a typical North African. As such, this would not be based on the notion of an essential North African, and as a typical North African “one could live life amid the hubbub of everyday existence.” (Gordon, 1995: 66)

#### **4.2.2 The clinical and the political**

The clinic presents itself as an element extraneous to the society. For Fanon, the consultation room is a space where meanings, temporalities, experiences of the world, and histories meet and clash. The “pre-existing framework” built by Europeans into

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<sup>145</sup> « L’occupant ne comprends plus. La fin du racisme commence avec une soudaine incompréhension. »

<sup>146</sup> « j’aspire à l’anonymat, à l’oubli. Tenez, j’accepte tout, mais que l’on ne m’aperçoive plus ! »

which the North African enters (Fanon, 1964: 15; my translation<sup>147</sup>) poses not merely a problem of cultural attunement. It points both to the bodies and beyond them, to the meanings and roles ascribed onto specific bodies, and the lack of attention to the sociogenic dimensions of illness:

Today the North African who attends the doctor bears the dead weight of all his compatriots. All those who had only symptoms, all those about whom the doctors said: ‘Nothing you can get your teeth into.’ (Meaning: no lesion). But the patient who is there in front of me, this body that I am forced to assume to be swept by a consciousness, this body that is no longer a body or at least that is doubly a body because it is terrified – *this body that asks me to listen to it, without, however, dwelling on it* – provokes a revolt in me. (Fanon, 1964: 17; my translation<sup>148</sup>; own italics)

The question of embodiment, central in Fanon, acquires in the consultation room a vital importance. The terrified body that asks for help “*without dwelling on it*” is a body embedded in a larger mesh of practices, institutions, structures and forces that hold sway over it. It is also a body not dissociated from consciousness, hence it is through the body that the North African relates to the self and to the social world. It is thus a body constituted *in relation* to the aforementioned regulative attitudes, practices, institutions, forces and structures. In short, what doctors fail to consider is the existential situation, the lived experience of what it is to live in a colonial society carrying the weight of the roles and definitions assigned, that being, perceiving, acting and experiencing the world as a North African cannot be delinked from a social milieu that rejects him. As Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce point out, Fanon anticipates the concept of body politic by identifying that the experience of pain, self-perception of the body, and the anguish and fear of the North African “are

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<sup>147</sup> « cadre préexistant »

<sup>148</sup> Aujourd’hui, le Nord-Africain qui se présente à une consultation supporte le poids mort de tous ses compatriotes. Tous ceux qui n’avaient que des symptômes, tous ceux à propos de qui l’on disait : « Rien à se mettre sous la dent. » (Entendez : pas de lésion.) Mais le malade qui est là, en face de moi, ce corps que je suis forcé de supposer balayé par une conscience, ce corps qui n’est plus tout à fait corps ou du moins qui est doublement corps puisque ahuri d’épouvante, — ce corps qui me demande de l’écouter sans toutefois m’y attarder, — provoquera en moi une révolte.

always politically and racially situated” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 124). As Fanon shows, disregarding these aspects may serve instead to reify the symptoms. That is, considering the symptoms at the expense of social and political considerations risks locating the origin and the cause of pathologies in the very patient.

The North African begins an odyssey from doctor to doctor. There are multiple variations of this. The patient goes back to the same doctor or drags his pain elsewhere seeking help. Further explorations, new tests, nothing is found. The doctor hesitates. He is referred to a specialist. He is sent to surgery. He comes back happily without surgery. Or, right after being discharged from hospitalization, the patient comes back with different symptoms. The doctor suspects. He feels mocked. Laziness, lies, obstinacy, indiscipline are the explanations found for such behaviors. Mistrust and indifference extend and a diagnosis circulates among the medical personal for the “pseudo-pathology” of this “pseudo-sick person” (Fanon, 1964:17; my translation<sup>149</sup>), the North African syndrome:

The medical staff discovers the existence of a North African syndrome. Not through experimentation, but according to an oral tradition. The North African takes his place in this asymptomatic syndrome and situates himself automatically as undisciplined (cf. medical discipline), inconsequential (with reference to the law according to which every symptom implies a lesion), and insincere (he says he is suffering whereas we know there are no reasons for suffering). (Fanon, 1964: 18; my translation<sup>150</sup>)

Fanon notes that there are also good-willed doctors and medical approaches which attempt to overcome the anatomical reductionism. He follows Dr. E. Stern recommendation’s in “Médecine psycho-somatique” to carry out a situational

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<sup>149</sup> « pseudo-pathologie (...) un pseudo-malade. »

<sup>150</sup> Le personnel médical découvre l’existence d’un syndrome nord-africain. Non pas expérimentalement, mais selon une tradition orale. Le Nord-Africain prend place dans ce syndrome asymptotique et se situe automatiquement sur un plan d’indiscipline (cf. discipline médicale), d’inconséquence (par rapport à la loi : tout symptôme suppose une lésion), d’insincérité (il dit souffrir alors que nous savons ne pas exister de raisons de souffrir).

diagnostic, namely, taking into account the biography of the patient, the relations with his associates, his sexuality, his preoccupations and occupations, his feelings of security and insecurity, and the dangers that threaten him. In his dissertation, Fanon briefly but positively considered the synthetic approach of psychosomatic medicine in “its resolute bearing on the very core of the human conflict”, and its possibilities to offer a “medicine of the person.” (Fanon, 2018: 270)

However, the attempt to follow the situational diagnostic turns into a caricature when tested against the experiential reality of the North African. As Gordon observes, Fanon exposes the failure of theoretical models premised on a universal and disembodied human being to account for and establish a diagnosis of the pathologies of the North African, a concrete embodied consciousness taken apart by exploitation and oppression: “What each of Stern’s recommendations misses is the meaning, content, and impact of the abstract patient in the face of a flesh-and-blood being whose humanity is questioned.” (Gordon, 2015: 91) Such model, by staying at the surface level, may serve to nourish the racist imaginary and engulf the North African patient with colonial knowledge, reinforcing his position as *anthropos*, the subhuman object of knowledge.

Fanon proceeds with the situational diagnostic: With regard to the relations with his associates, he points out, the North African migrant to French eyes is a ghostly figure: “one does not *see* them, one perceives them, one glimpses them. (...) There are no contacts there are only clashes.” (Fanon, 1964: 19; italics in the original<sup>151</sup>; italics in the original). Concerning his occupations and preoccupations, looking for a job is both a preoccupation and an occupation. Not considering the structural exploitation and marginalization misses the mark of the situation. Concerning the

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<sup>151</sup> « on ne les voit pas, aperçoit, on les entrevoit. (...) Il n’y a pas de contacts. Il n’y a que des heurts. »

sexuality of the North African, Fanon underscores that the recurrent link between immigration and sexuality is anxiety and fear. He quotes a doctoral thesis in medicine wherein the author wonders whether the incontinent sexual needs of North African men, expressed through rape and prostitution, could be tamed with family reunification policies. However, bringing North African women to France, warns the author, would pose a threat to the demographic structure, and hence to French notions of, morality, family, citizenship and civilization. As far as his feeling of security or insecurity are concerned, Fanon writes that the first term is absent from the experience of the North African, since he lives in a constant and multidimensional insecurity. ‘But they have rights, they just don’t know them’, Fanon ventriloquizes. Not keen on abstraction notions, he writes:

Rights, Duties, Citizenship, Equality, much beautiful things! The North African on the verge of the French Nation—which is, we are told, also his own—*experiences in the political and civil domains an imbroglio which no one is willing to face*. How is this connected with the North African in the hospital setting? Actually, there is a connection. (Fanon, 1964: 21; my translation<sup>152</sup>; own italics)

Thereby he puts the political at the heart of the clinical, and the clinical as embedded in wider societal dynamics. What takes place in the daily life, at the tram, in the cinema, at work, in his relations with women, is what leads him to the doctor. The medical setting, in turn, is not exempt from this pathological circuit in which the North African is confined. Fanon has a broader perspective of what constitutes the North African syndrome. His caustic and subversive use of the term puts under examination the medical institution in its intricacy with the society. It does not refer to the diagnosis of a possible pathology suffered by North Africans, it also encompasses the attitudes of the doctor, the ontologization of symptoms, the

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<sup>152</sup> Droits, Devoirs, Citoyenneté, Egalité, que de belles choses ! Le Nord-Africain au seuil de la Nation française — qui est, nous dit-on, la sienne — vit dans le domaine politique, sur le plan civique, un imbroglio que personne ne veut voir en face. Quel rapport avec le Nord-Africain en milieu hospitalier ? Justement, il y a un rapport.

normative sway to define the normal from the ill, and how “the politics of migration and debates about citizenship overlap with the politics of diagnosis” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 127). In short, the North African syndrome puts under the examination the society as the origin of pathologies and the role of the clinical in creating, reinforcing or legitimizing the pathological or abnormal subjects.

As Fanon posits, the North African is threatened in his affective life and his social relations, and in the sense of belonging to the community. Therefore a biographical analysis of the North African should not start by an account of his life, but by his relationship with life itself, for he lives an ongoing death:

(...) the North African meets all the conditions that make a sick man. Without a family, without love, without human relations, without communion with the collectivity, the first encounter with himself will occur in a neurotic mode, in a pathological mode; he will feel himself emptied, lifeless, in a body-to-body struggle with death, a death short of death, a death in life (1964: 21; my translation<sup>153</sup>).

In his view, the North African is a sick person, yet in a different understanding of illness and health than that of the previous doctors. As we have seen, Fanon understood that health cannot merely be reduced to the psycho-physiological, thereby displacing the origin, the causes and the weight attributed to the pathological to the society that generates sick people. He conceives the pathology of the North African as a consequence of the overall condition of the migrant. Thereby, he urges to reconsider what is the North African patient asking for when he visits the doctor, what are the needs, demands and expectations of a patient “starving for humanity” (1964: 12; my translation<sup>154</sup>), what is the role of the medical institution in relation to oppression, the spatial structures of the hospital that take a toll on the very patient, the

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<sup>153</sup> (...) le Nord-Africain réunit toutes les conditions qui font un homme malade. Sans famille, sans amour, sans relations humaines, sans communion avec la collectivité, la première rencontre avec lui-même se fera sur un mode névrotique, sur un mode pathologique, il se sentira vidé, sans vie, en corps à corps avec la mort, une mort en deçà de la mort, une mort dans la vie (...).

<sup>154</sup> « affamés d’humanité »

epistemological basis, the attitudes and the character of the relationship that a doctor establishes with a patient. “Your solution, sir?”, he is asked. He answers:

Do not push me until the end. Do not force me to tell you what you should know, sir. If *you* do not reclaim the man who is in front of you, how can I suppose that you reclaim the man that is in you?

If *you* do not want the man who is in front of you, how should I believe the man that is perhaps in you?

If *you* do not demand, if *you* do not sacrifice the man that is in you so that the man on this land can be more than a body, more than a Mohammed, by which magic trick will I acquire the certainty that, you too, are worthy of my love? (1964: 24-25; italics in the original; my translation<sup>155</sup>)

Fanon closes the article by appealing to a fundamental first step, the commitment, through a radical demand to take responsibility for dehumanization. This is not only an ethical demand, it points to the formation of the self through the expression of what Maldonado-Torres calls a “loving subjectivity” (2008: 153). This is not a closed, atomistic subject, but an open understanding of the self as in relation, in a relation of generosity, to the other. It entails to put one’s humanity at the service of humanizing the suffering other, to the extent of failing to one’s humanity by not doing such work. In other words, the humanity of the doctor and the patient, the self and the other, are mutually constituted through this “act of giving” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 153).

Fanon’s subsequent move to the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban under the mentorship of Francesc Tosquelles would be a continuation and a confirmation of his search for a medicine for the human.

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<sup>155</sup> « Votre solution, monsieur ?

Ne me poussez pas à bout. Ne m’obligez pas à vous dire ce que vous devriez savoir, monsieur. Si *tu* ne réclames pas l’homme qui est en fa-ce de toi, comment veux-tu que je suppose que tu réclames l’homme qui est en toi ?

Si *tu* ne veux pas l’homme qui est en face de toi, comment croirai-je à l’homme qui est peut-être en toi ?

Si *tu* n’exiges pas l’homme, si *tu* ne sacrifies pas l’homme qui est en toi pour que l’homme qui est sur cette terre soit plus qu’un corps, plus qu’un Mohammed, par quel tour de passepasse faudra-t-il que j’acquière la certitude que, toi aussi, tu es digne de mon amour ? »

### 4.3 Fanon and Tosquelles

Frantz Fanon arrived at the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban at the beginning of 1952 and left for Algeria at the end of 1953. Francesc Tosquelles, the pioneer of institutional psychotherapy and the director of the institution at the time, recalls that in their first encounter Fanon explained that what had led him to Saint-Alban was their shared interest in “a psychiatric practice fundamentally attentive to the complexity of differences –maintained and sometimes tragically reinforced– that bound humans to each other” (Tosquelles, 2001: 168; my translation<sup>156</sup>). Saint-Alban was at the time the site of what would be labelled institutional psychotherapy, a pioneering approach to mental illness that questioned and recasted psychiatry at the conceptual and the practical levels.

Institutional psychotherapy explored the “morbidity, and also the possible fecundity, of collective structures” (Murat, 2014:16; my translation<sup>157</sup>). Concretely, the therapeutic process entailed the transformation of the asylum from a site of confinement and segregation that generates or exacerbates mental illness into a human institution of disalienation. The reconfiguration of hierarchies, modes of organization, spaces, diagnostic policies, classifications, roles, functions and relations within the asylum aimed at creating a collective daily life that parallels that of society outside of the hospital and at promoting exchanges with the immediate community outside of the hospital, as intrinsic elements of the therapy. As Jean Oury, another decisive figure in the elaboration of institutional psychotherapy, puts it,

we need to treat the hospital in order to treat the patients. The hospital is ill. There is an accumulation of regulation that needs to be treated – the hospital requires treatment in order to treat. It is a double movement. (Oury, 2007: 6).

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<sup>156</sup> « une pratique psychiatrique attentive surtout à la complexité des différences – entretenues et parfois renforcées tragiquement – qui liaient entre eux les hommes »

<sup>157</sup> « la morbidité – mais aussi la possible fécondité – des structures collectives »



If institutional psychotherapy analyzes mental illness necessarily in relation to the social and institutional setting, the analysis of the hospital as ill and the possibility of turning it into a therapeutic tool, also entails to consider the institution not in isolation but embedded within the cultural, social, historical and economic immediate context, and in relation to broader administrative and political structures.

Francisc Tosquelles remarks that the previous and the subsequent work of Fanon cannot be understood without considering both his stay in Saint-Alban and, perhaps more importantly, his decision to go to Saint-Alban, a place that Tosquelles described, removing from it all the accompanying idealism, as “the place of a hypothesis, not the place of a wager or the place of an adventure” (Tosquelles, 2007: 11; my translation<sup>158</sup>). The innovations being undertaken in Saint-Alban resonated with Fanon’s concerns against narrow conceptions of the clinical and against his own psychiatric training, as he had set out in his thesis and taken further in *Black Skin White Masks* in the matter of the psychopathological, social, cultural and political dimensions of mental illness. It also matches certain elements of the critiques already advanced in “The North African Syndrome” of a dehumanizing medicine based on a priori diagnostics, fixing nosographic categories, degrading medical facilities, a vitiated subject-object relationship between doctor and patient, and the obstacles that impeded fecund encounters in the consultation room. Similarly, both Tosquelles and Oury emphasized that institutional psychotherapy understands, and demands, the view of the psychiatric practice and the institution as living and open, as a *movement* or a process in constant refashion rather than a model, a static organization or a set of tenets (Appril, 2014).

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<sup>158</sup> « le lieu d’une hypothèse, non le lieu d’un pari, ni le lieu d’une aventure.”

This echoes the importance of temporality and the idea of motion that permeates Fanon's view of the human, culture, alienation or freedom. So does the concern for circulation and the centrality of empowering and promoting the responsibility of the patients in Saint-Alban, themes that undergird Fanon's political and psychiatric thought. In this light his stay and his decision to go to Saint-Alban can be considered both a significant formative experience and a confirmation. A confirmation not so much in the sense of reinforcing a previous held position or a set of principles, but in the sense of a step in a path that Fanon had already set forth. A path, Tosquelles recalls, that for Fanon involves constant questioning, learning and alertness against reverie, dogmatism, obfuscation and obliviousness (Tosquelles, 2007: 12): the path of working on the political, psychological and historical conditions for human beings to be free. This is not dissimilar to one of the ways in which Tosquelles posits the hypothesis of Saint-Alban:

The hypothesis proposed in Saint-Alban gathered human beings, mads or not, so that they are able to get hold of the mobile, articulable and re-articulable matter of which they are constituted, and unfortunately, sometimes kneaded by history (2007: 11; my translation<sup>159</sup>).

#### **4.3.1 Francesc Tosquelles and the origin of institutional psychotherapy**

Pierre Delion locates the changes introduced by Francesc Tosquelles, Jean Oury and the circle of Saint-Alban as the third moment of rupture in the history of Western psychiatry, after Pinel and Freud (Delion, 2014). In a similar vein argues historian Laure Murat. To explain the lack of recognition or the marginal position of institutional psychotherapy in the history of European psychiatry she uses the term "symbolic revolution", drawing from Bourdieu, to refer to "a revolution that has

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<sup>159</sup> « L'hypothèse posée à Saint-Alban rassemblait des êtres humains, fous ou pas fous, pour qu'ils puissent puiser dans leurs propres possibilités la matière mobile articulable et réarticulable dont ils sont constitués, et hélas souvent pétris – comme quiconque – par l'histoire. »

become invisible because it has changed our categories of perception” (Murat, 2014: 15; my translation<sup>160</sup>). Like Delion, she identifies the first decisive moment at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century with Philippe Pinel and the emergence of European modern psychiatry through moral therapy, a human approach that comprised the liberation of psychiatric patients from the chains with the aim of reintegrating them in society. The second turning point dates back to the invention of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and his associates in Vienna in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As stated, the last major shift is the creation of what has been known as institutional psychotherapy<sup>161</sup> (Murat, 2014).

This third moment revolved around the vibrant groups gathered in the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban during the stay and the direction of Tosquelles between 1940 and 1962. In this period the institution hosted psychiatrists like Jean Oury, Lucien Bonnafé, Félix Guattari, Phillipe Paumelle, Maurice Despinoy, or Frantz Fanon, among others. Michel Foucault was distantly yet also related to the network since Tosquelles, together with Henry Ey, co-supervised his training in psychotherapy (Oury, 2007). Their contributions were to nourish and enlarge the scope of what started in Saint-Alban by taking it elsewhere and endowing it with new theoretical perspectives and practical experiences. The clinic La Borde, founded in 1953 by Jean Oury after a stay in Saint-Alban from 1947 to 1949, became the other main conceptual and practical reference point for this new orientation to mental health (Delion, 2014; Murat, 2014). The ramifications that emerged from Saint-Alban and a detailed account of the development of institutional psychotherapy, including their

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<sup>160</sup> « une révolution devenue invisible car elle a changé nos catégories de perception. »

<sup>161</sup> The term was coined by Georges Daumézon in 1952. Initially it was referred to “sector psychiatry” or “psychiatry of extension”, and it has also been called “anthropo-psychiatry” and “psychoanalytic psychiatry” (Oury, 2007). As Jean Khalfa notes Fanon usually employs the term “social therapy”, which Tosquelles also did, and sometimes refers to it as “sociotherapy” (2018). Murat considers the term institutional psychotherapy as unfortunate because it fail to capture the complexity of the movement and the diversity of its practices (2014: 17). Jean Oury emphasizes the dimension of motion when he says that institutional psychotherapy does not exist and has never existed because, like psychiatry, it is a *movement*, a process always in the making (quoted in Murat, 2014).

influence on Franco Basaglia and the ideas elaborated in the Gorizia hospital in Italy in 1960's, their relation with Anglo-Saxon approaches, or their relation with the subsequent emergence of the antipsychiatric movement fall beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead I have decided to briefly focus on the figure of Francesc Tosquelles, “the catalyst of the Saint-Alban group, the fire of the ‘generation of gestation’” (Oury, 2007: 34), and also Fanon’s mentor.

The roots of the movement that blossomed in Saint-Alban date back to the World War II, the Spanish Civil War, and to the dynamic social and political tissue of Catalonia in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its organized working class movement against fascism. Francesc Tosquelles, born in 1912, was a precocious psychiatrist, Marxist militant and a committed antifascist both in France and in Spain. Since he was ten years old he frequented the Institut Pere Mata in Reus, a leading psychiatric hospital directed by Professor Emili Mira i López, who played a key role in Tosquelles’ training. The hospital, located in a modernist building, had running water and electricity available, which was not necessarily usual, and provided group therapies based on ergotherapy, hydrotherapy, dance, theater and games (Tosquelles, 1993). Another important element in his training was the community of Eastern and Central European neurologists, psychiatrists, gestalt psychologists and psychoanalysts that sought refuge between 1931 and 1936 in Barcelona, which was known at the time as the “little Vienna”. He underwent psychoanalysis by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Szador Reminger. After obtaining his degree in medicine in 1933, he worked at the Institut Pere Mata until the beginning of 1937 (Tosquelles, 1993).

During this period Tosquelles began to interrogate aspects of the institution and its relation to the treatment of mental health problems. He noticed that the Freudian notion of transference was insufficient to provide a humane treatment to psychotic

patients. Pierre Delion underscores the importance of the transference, or the projection of feelings or early fantasies of the client on to the therapist, in order to understand the therapeutic relationship. However, Freud was reluctant to analyze psychotic persons and his students did not consider the whole psychiatric framework in their analysis. Tosquelles noticed that the application of typical treatments to hospitalized psychotic patients neither matched their specific condition nor their “being-in-the-world”. He thus developed the concept of multireferential transferences to observe how the “transference of these patients on to their environment was fragmented”. These patients required human institutions that house them in, and try to produce “for them and with them forms of collective counter-excitation so that they can be protected from the effects of these multiple splits.” (Delion, 2014: 22-23; my translation<sup>162</sup>)

Besides the psychiatric circles, Tosquelles was actively involved in the social and political movements of Barcelona, which had also an impact on the development of his psychiatry. He first became a member of BOC and then of POUM<sup>163</sup>, and participated in political debates, meetings, reading clubs and working class associations. Tosquelles explains that Catalan collective forms organization of the means of production and the traditional cooperative associations, of which the psychiatric hospital in Reus was an example, would be a source of inspiration for the

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<sup>162</sup> « avec et pour eux une sorte de pare-excitations collectif de nature à les protéger des effets de ces multi-clivages. »

<sup>163</sup> POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) was a Spanish communist party deeply ingrained in Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands. It was founded in Barcelona in 1935 out of the alliance of BOC (Bloque Obrero y Campesino ) and ICE (Izquierda Comunista). It built a strong peasant organization and introduced Marxism in the working class movement, until then mostly dominated by anarchosyndicalism, and quickly became the main working class party in Catalonia. It advocated for a single working class front, trade union unity and the unity of revolutionary Marxists in light of the upcoming struggle against fascism. Opposed to the bureaucratization of the Russian Revolution and the International Communist, it held an autonomous position towards Moscow and a strong anti-Stalinist stance, which resulted in the constant persecution and the repression of POUM militants during and after the Spanish Civil War (Solano, 1999).

organization of the asylum, the role of the patients, and the relation to the French administration in Saint-Alban:

We created a society of mental hygiene (...) upon which depended the activities of the hospital (clubs, etc...) and all the external activities, although the central office was inside the asylum. The society was administrated by a cooperative of patients as a preparation for an open psychotherapy. The supporting members of the society were all people external to the hospital who contributed economically in order to sustain and promote activities independent from the central administration and to carry out activities that exceeded the usual therapeutic practices. (Tosquelles, 1987: 9; my translation<sup>164</sup>)

By transposing the cooperative and trade union models into the asylum Tosquelles sought to weave a social and economic tissue in order to cultivate the autonomy of the patients and the institution. It also enabled him to exceed the rigid demarcations outside/inside of the psychiatric hospital and favored the generation of encounters with therapeutic significance. Thereby, Tosquelles poses a threefold challenge to the physical, social and administrative structures that sustain asylums.

The social dimension, the notions of encounter, interaction and exchange are at the core of Tosquelles understanding of the institution and by extension of his psychiatric work. Being aware of the dangers of relying on a priori and fixist definitions of a healing institution, he emphasizes the functionalist dimension when he defines institutions as “*échangeurs*”(1986<sup>165</sup>), or what generates exchanges. An institution is “a place where people meet with an expected regularity. (...) It is a site of assemblage where different groups articulate themselves and are articulated” (1993: 209; my

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<sup>164</sup> « nous avons créé une société d'hygiène mentale, devenue ensuite la "Société de la Croix Marine", de laquelle dépendaient toutes les activités de l'hôpital (clubs, etc...), ainsi que des activités extérieures, bien que le siège se trouvait à l'intérieur de Saint Alban. L'administration de cette société était assurée par une coopérative de malades, en vue d'une psychothérapie ouverte. Les membres de soutien de cette société étaient des personnes extérieures à l'hôpital, qui payaient une cotisation pour promouvoir et financer des activités indépendantes de l'administration hospitalière, et pour avoir la liberté de prendre des initiatives qui ressortaient des pratiques courantes. »

<sup>165</sup> « échangeurs »

translation<sup>166</sup>) Through the term *échangeur*, Tosquelles also draws a parallelism with the interchange or the motorway junction: a helical site where different paths intersect and set off in different directions. It is built and enables to build and organize lives. The *échangeur* changes ways and directions, it makes circulation more fluid, but it is not always possible to drastically start a new life, he notes (Pain, 2015).

This double intellectual and vital formative experience, the psychiatric and the political is resumed by Tosquelles through the image of the two legs upon which institutional therapy advances, the Freudian and Marxian one, the psychic and the political (Delion, 2014). The step of one leg must be accompanied by the other for movement to be produced. Namely, in the analysis of madness the psychopathological dimension of alienation must be accompanied by the social dimension of alienation, for without taking action towards social disalienation there is no mental disalienation (Tosquelles, 1987). Pierre Delion summarizes this double dimension:

Institutional psychotherapy results from this extraordinary pioneering work which consisted in using Freudian conceptualizations by rethinking them with regard to psychoses, that is, by reconstructing a metapsychology that can illuminate the mechanisms and the specificities of the transferences. Yet at the same time it enables to enlarge the scope of the necessary revolutions by including the political dimension, the only capable of thinking social alienation and its effects on patients. Thereby, Tosquelles, helped by Bonnafé, invents not only institutional psychotherapy as a method to navigate through the ocean of madness, but also sector psychiatry as the condition of possibility of its application to a psychiatry renovated from stem to stern. (Delion, 2014: 23; my translation<sup>167</sup>)

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<sup>166</sup> “ un sitio donde hay gente que se encuentran con una regularidad prevista; (...)Es un sitio de "manejo" donde se articulan grupos diferentes y se les articulan”

<sup>167</sup> La psychothérapie institutionnelle résulte de ce travail de pionnier extraordinaire qui consistait à utiliser les conceptualisations freudiennes en les repensant à l'aune de la psychose, c'est-à-dire en reconstruisant une métapsychologie de nature à en éclairer les mécanismes et les spécificités transférentielles, mais dans le même temps à élargir le champ des révolutions nécessaires en y incluant la dimension politique, seule capable de penser l'aliénation sociale et ses effets sur les patients. C'est ainsi que Tosquelles, aidé de Bonnafé, inventa non seulement la psychothérapie institutionnelle comme méthode de navigation sur l'océan de la folie, mais la psychiatrie de secteur comme condition de possibilité de son application à une psychiatrie renouvelée de fond en comble.

During the Spanish Civil War Tosquelles joined the P.O.U.M. militias at the Aragón front. There, he decided to apply a proximity therapeutic service and treat the patients in the battlefield instead of sending them back to a distant healing post. Tosquelles argued that by treating them in the immediate context where the neurosis arises, their familiarity to the context would prevent the chronification of the pathology. He emphasizes, however, that most of his efforts were directed to make a preventive therapeutic work with the doctors, who, for Tosquelles, were the most scared during wartime. He argues that the roots of their fear and anguish lie in their resistance to change derived from their bourgeois mentality, that is their search for stability, erudition, economic status and individualism, which he considered at odds with the practice of psychiatry. After being named medical chief of the psychiatric services of the republican army Tosquelles is relocated to the southern front where he organized therapeutic communities and recruited medical teams to create sector psychiatry structures. Arguing that psychiatrists were afraid of madness, he avoided to enroll them and instead created teams composed by volunteer non-specialist laypersons who had never had a direct contact with mental illness, namely local priests and nuns, lawyers, sexual workers, peasants or painters (Tosquelles, 1991). He prioritized persons “endowed with natural capacities to stay [*rester*] with others because it takes a long time to transform a person into someone who can stay with others”, that is, persons who possessed the quality of “knowing how to live, to exchange, how to connect with others”. In a short time of training, he remarks, laypersons who were sensitive to the twists and turns of the human souls could achieve extraordinary therapeutic results (Tosquelles, 1987 my translation<sup>168</sup>).

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<sup>168</sup> « dotés de capacités naturelles à rester avec les autres, car on perd beaucoup de temps à transformer une personne en quelqu'un qui sait rester avec les autres (...) de savoir vivre, échanger, savoir entrer en relation avec les autres. »



After the defeat of the Spanish Republic, Tosquelles arrived at the detention camp of Septfonds in Southern France where circa 500.000 Spanish refugees were confined in concentrationary conditions. Tosquelles remarks that from the outside the camp looked a psychiatric hospital: a yard of mud, hunger, epidemics and suicides enclosed by barbed wire. There, Tosquelles initiated a psychiatric work which he describes as one of his best therapeutic experiences (Tosquelles, 1991). Enrolling again refugees, laypersons, from the camp as assistants, he treated the patients in a wooden shack placed at the border of the camp. In this way many patients entered the psychiatric area through one door and escaped from the camp through the back door. Tosquelles describes the psychiatric service in the camp as “just one of the transit points.” (Tosquelles, 1987; my translation<sup>169</sup>) Different elements present in this experience such as the importance of spatiality, movement and circulation, of heterogeneity, and the centrality of the question of freedom, would subsequently take a more complex form in the psychiatric hospital.

In Saint-Alban, Tosquelles favored the exit of patients from the hospital, the exchanges and the encounters with people coming from outside, but he deemed as utopic the possibility of a fully open therapeutic service that leaves *freely* the patients in society—he would later be very critic of approaches that advocate for the total elimination of asylums arisen with the anti-psychiatric movement in the late 1960’s (1987). This is related to his view of the asylum as a refuge, a protected space from the outside, from the prejudices of society and the fear of madness, which is at the roots of the exclusion of so-called mads. Yet, he emphasizes that the asylum does aim at protecting the patients, but the freedom of the patients, and “[t]he protection of the freedom of those who work, who are engaged in building new relationships with their

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<sup>169</sup> « Le service de psychiatrie n'est qu'un des lieux de passage. »

fellows inside the asylum, and with the world.” (Tosquelles, 1987; my translation<sup>170</sup>)  
Tosquelles defines freedom as a condition that has to be built, learnt and taught collectively, hence his notion of the asylum as “a school of freedom”.

The school of freedom requires a double transformation within the hospital and from the inside towards the outside through what he calls the creation of areas of freedom, namely the club, the bar, the psychodrama, the cinema, the printing room, among other spaces—some of them were dispersed and located 10 kilometers away. Tosquelles advocates for a multidisciplinary analysis of space that combines the geographical, administrative, bureaucratic and the therapeutic. He calls for a phenomenology that takes into account the politics and the poetics of space, that is, how spaces are lived, which emotions arise, which sense does it stimulate, which encounters do they foster, which conflicts do they enable to appear and which do they hide and block (Tosquelles, 1987). Both Oury and Tosquelles underscored the importance of the atmosphere and the ambiance in institutional psychotherapy, which is neglected and denied by “pseudo neurosciences” (Oury, 2007: 35). Yet atmosphere and space is to be accompanied by heterogeneity to generate a living space, which in their view is the condition for it to be effectively therapeutic. Oury points out that the different spaces that form hospital and education settings tend to offer the same the conditions, atmosphere and status. Homogeneity is associated with inert, lifeless and motionless spaces, relations, characters and functions:

What I call the architectonic – the totality of relations, roles, functions and people that defines the site where *something happens* – is based upon heterogeneity rather than homogeneity!. (...) It is a fundamental word for many, but especially for François Tosquelles. He often said that the milieu needed to be heterogeneous, even the educational milieu of children. He made clear that in order for things to be alive, for there to be exchanges, groups, inter-groups, initiatives, chance and encounters, there must be heterogeneity. (Oury, 2007: 34; emphasis in the original)

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<sup>170</sup> « La protection de la liberté de ceux qui travaillent, qui s'occupent de construire des nouveaux rapports avec leurs compagnons à l'intérieur et avec le monde. »

Heterogeneity, and the ideas of life and motion that it entails, connects the spatial with the temporal. He makes reference to certain approaches to Gestalt that rather than form and fixicity put the focus on the process and the movement that creates the form, that is, “the action that gives shape” (Tosquelles, 1987; my translation<sup>171</sup>). In this light the creation of areas of freedom does not mean that freedom lies in these or in any specific space, neither that patients are free or learn freedom there. Freedom is ensured by the multiplicity of spaces and their heterogeneity, the different characteristics, ambiances, rules and different ways functioning. The common construction of spaces, of the notion of the limit, the creation of the limits, the collective establishment of a law and the tracing of the perimeters is what enables the freedom of creation. Considering this, freedom lies in the capacity of passing from one space to the other. The creation of areas of freedom is oriented towards producing structures inside and outside that facilitate passing from one structure to the other, and the role of the psychotherapist is to build bridges (Tosquelles, 1987). Jean Oury expresses the importance of movement in the therapeutic process in La Borde:

We must find the means through which people can express themselves. This is what we call, here at La Borde, the liberty of circulation. The liberty of circulation produces the possibility of the encounter, of real encounters – what Maldiney calls ‘possibilization’, the ‘possibilization of the encounter. The encounter is not foreseen. If it is, it is not an encounter! A real encounter touches the Real, not the Symbolic or the Imaginary. It marks the point where things are no longer the same as before. (...) ‘Yes, it is true, we organize encounters, we programme chance’. (Oury, 2007: 44)

As stated, the notion of encounter is a key element to Tosquelles’ transformation of the institution. This obeys to his understanding that in the case of isolated treatment there can be no effective psychotherapy because there is no need of self-identification, the subject becomes evasive. It is through the encounters, the different

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<sup>171</sup> « l'action de la mise en forme »

itineraries that they offer, the bifurcations that they open up, the conflicts that they unveil and the options that they foster, that patients take responsibility for their choices and ultimately find the subject *at* and *as* the origin of their own movement: “the different encounters that can take place in the different spaces enable us to say afterwards: ‘this is me’” (Tosquelles, 1987; my translation<sup>172</sup>). In other words, the subject discovers his or herself, and at the same time discovers his or herself as a responsible subject. Thus for Tosquelles freedom is not only inseparable from responsibility but to be free means that “‘I take responsibility for my freedom’. Being free means becoming responsible.” (Tosquelles, 1987; my translation<sup>173</sup>)

#### **4.3.2 Resistance and healing in Saint-Alban**

The work of Tosquelles in Septfonds came to Paul Balvet’s notice, at the time the director of the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban, who had the intention to introduce changes into the hospital. In 1942 Balvet was replaced by Bonnafé and more marked changes started to take place. Tosquelles arrived at Saint Alban in January 1940 officially as an assistant nurse; his Spanish degree did not enable him to work as a psychiatrist in France and he had to complete again his studies in psychiatry under the French system (Tosquelles, 1993).

The hospital was located in a remote countryside area surrounded by peasant and shepherd communities and cut off from urban centers, in the *département* of Lozère, a region that had historically been neglected by the central administration. At his arrival, Tosquelles found a ruinous and overcrowded building (1993). His first initiative was to ask Balvet to let him dwell with the villagers for a time, to attend the fairs, the markets, the festivals and the bars, for “the hospital has to be modified in

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<sup>172</sup> « Les différentes rencontres que nous pouvons faire dans des lieux divers avec des personnes diverses nous permettent de dire après : "ça, c'est moi". »

<sup>173</sup> « "je prends la responsabilité de ma liberté". Etre libre veut dire devenir responsable. »

relation with the real life in the fairs. (...) In psychiatry one must desist from performing as a doctor and one must go out to the street to see as a doctor.” (Tosquelles, 1993: 2007; my translation<sup>174</sup>) One of the things that Tosquelles saw was that, as a response to the situation of relative abandonment of the region, communities around Saint-Alban were organized following cooperative models similar to those of Catalonia (1987). This would be an important factor to establish relationships between the hospital and the outside and also for the subsistence of the patients and the hospital staff during the years of the German Occupation under which the isolation of Saint-Alban and Lozère was exacerbated.

The measures taken in Saint-Alban made of the asylum one of the few exceptions of what has been known as the “*extermination douce*”, the silent death of 40.000 mental health patients of hunger and lack of attention in French during the Vichy regime (Lafont, 1987). The abandonment of the patients did not obey to a deliberate policy of extermination issued by a concrete authority, but it was the result of the conjunction of a series of “abominations” stemming from different sectors: the precarious economic situation, the general consideration of madness as a degeneration of the race and producing superfluous spending, the view among the Vichy elite of the mentally ill as useless, the eugenicist positions of eminent doctors of the regime such as Nobel laureates Alexis Carrel and René Leriche, and the work of French psychiatrists outside the metropolis on the mental structure of the colonized. In this sense, notably influential was the work that the psychiatrist Antoine Porot was undertaking in Algeria on the mental inferiority of the native (Doray, 2006). The importance of Porot for colonial and French psychiatry, its influence on social policies and the response of Fanon will be addressed in the following section.

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<sup>174</sup> “hay que modificar el hospital, en relación con la vida real de las ferias (...) En psiquiatría hay que dejar de hacer de médico e ir a la calle a presenciar como médico.”

In this context, knocking down the walls and the bars of the asylum was a question of conviction as much as of necessity. Patients were taught how to collect vegetables and with the medical staff went to pick them up at neighboring fields. Shepherds crossed the hospital with their cattle where patients exhibited their craft and manufactured goods and were exchanged by small goods. Also an underground economy flourished around the capture of alleged escaped patients; guards and neighbors profited from the reward of the authorities and the patients could spend several days living with a family in the village. A service of tuberculous patients was simulated, since the diagnosis of tuberculosis enabled to obtain ration cards and food supplies (Tosquelles, 1991).

Yet, the asylum was opened in both directions. This also meant becoming a site of contestation and resistance. Political refugees, Jewish refugees, fleeing peasants, injured Resistance fighters, military detachments were hosted, healed or hidden with the cognizance and the active support of the patients. The asylum became a site of encounter of science, philosophy, politics, and art through the convergence of the patients, psychoanalysts, neurologists, immunologists, gestalt psychologists, phenomenologists, religious people, communist intellectuals, playwrights, poets and surrealists. Among them, George Canguilhem, Tristan Tzara or Paul Éluard and their families took refuge in Saint-Alban. The latter wrote a collection of poems there and founded a clandestine publishing house in Saint Alban, whereas his wife, the artist Nusch Éluard, worked with schizophrenics. Surrealists frequented the hospital, notably out of the arrival of Bonnafé, and had a remarkable impact on Tosquelles' thought and in the practices developed in the asylum (Tosquelles, 1987). This constellation of people from different perspectives and disciplines that Bonnafé called the "Société du Gévaudan" was animated by a double impulse of resistance and

creation: resistance against Nazi occupation, against the murder of the mentally ill, against psychiatry as the organized practice of segregation, and against “all forms of inhumanities” (Bonnafé, 1991: 169; my translation<sup>175</sup>). The creative purpose aims at building “a new clinic” that bases its research on quotidian practices, that exposes the “reification, fetishization, thingification” at the level of thought and practices, that departs from dominant clinical models that “erase the subject behind the symptom”, that builds a new institution that generates disalienating relations rather than alienation and that brings to an end the enclave condition of therapeutic practices (Bonnafé, 1991: 212; my translation<sup>176</sup>).

By 1947 there were no agitated patients in Saint-Alban. This was achieved without the use of specific medicines, inexistent at the time, and without applying containment measures. At the time, Phillippe Paumelle, an intern of Tosquelles, wrote his dissertation on agitation. The phenomenon of agitation was commonly thought to be concomitant with madness and an intrinsic part of it, but as Paumelle puts it, such a view is false. The agitated insane person cannot be considered as simply an agitated individual in isolation, but he or she is agitated in relation to the aforementioned total architecture of the asylum, the spatial structure, the hierarchies, his or role and position in the hospital and the meaning of madness and agitation for nurses and doctors (Paumelle, 1953). As Tosquelles (1987) adds, agitation, although does not obey to a univocal cause, is often a psychosis derived from the prison-like condition of the hospital, Thus healing the patient requires treating the hospital, the doctors and the nurses. Jean Khalifa summarizes one of the central tentes of institutional psychotherapy:

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<sup>175</sup> « contre les inhumanites en tout genre »

<sup>176</sup> « nouvelle clinique (...) l’effacement du sujet derrière le symptôm (...) le processus de réification, chosification, fétichisation »

institutional therapy rests on the idea that the institution itself requires treatment if it is to treat its patients. In many cases, the hospital remained a simple place of internment, and patients whose problems were often minor at the start, would react to this environment, generating (Khalifa, 2018:186)

The approach undertaken in Saint-Alban did not reject a priori the use of medicines. For that matter, the articles that Fanon wrote at the time deal with the use of biochemical and shock treatments. The article co-authored with Maurice Despinoy and Walter Zenner explores the monitoring of sleeping therapy techniques as an alternative to sleeping medicines and in order to pave the way for a different therapy. The three articles co-authored with Tosquelles assess the ethic and therapeutic limits and possibilities of electroconvulsive therapies and insulin therapies within the context of institutional psychotherapy in patients suffering from serious neuroses, chronic psychoses, with no re-adaptation to the life outside of the hospital. Tosquelles and Fanon observe the hasty use, and the abuse, of annihilation methods, and their application in cases that could be treated otherwise more effectively, such as agitation, without the danger of permanent harm. The response to this “simultaneously scientific and human problem” that demands a high level of “vigilant prudence and self-criticism”, they argue, has to put efficacy at the center of the research and the therapeutic approach (Fanon, 2018:291). They point out that although there was theoretical criticism of electroshocks in the literature, the existing discrepancies on whether, when and in which cases should be used have their origin in the key theoretical mistake that conceives personality and “so-called constitutions” as fixed. This omits the “dynamism of personality” and impedes to apply these techniques in a hospital designed to reconstruct personality (Fanon, 2018: 293).

Moreover, predating the negative public perception and the regulation of shock treatments, Tosquelles and Fanon assert that such techniques have no therapeutic use outside of the context of institutional psychotherapy. Thus, the Bini or



electroconvulsive therapy, when used, are not the central element but a resource or a complement, a part of a wider process of dissolution and reconstruction of personality. The central elements, they add, are the human relations and the activities that take place in the hospital “during the process of rediscovery of the ego and the world” (Fanon, 2018: 294). The reconstruction of the ego and the world is partly directed through organizing and preparing the activities, the group and the milieu in which the patient is placed, but it also takes place in the spontaneous and collective life of the hospital in which the group is embedded.

Treating patients using this approach, we insist, necessitates granting the greatest importance to hospital arrangements, to the classification and grouping of patients, as well as to the concomitant establishment of group therapies. The co-existence of the workshop, the wards and the social life of the entire hospital is just as essential as the stage of active, interventionist analysis preceding the treatment. Outside the possibility of such therapeutic linkages, the Bini cure appears to us a complete nonsense. (Fanon, 2018: 295)

It is this interplay between organization and spontaneity, the connection between specific activities to the daily life, the simultaneous presence and absence of the therapist that distinguishes institutional psychotherapy from Anglo-Saxon group therapies such as ergotherapies, psychodramas or activities carried out through sessions. The latter attempt to have an impact on the patient’s life “through artificial and short-lived conditions”, whereas institutional psychotherapy takes the patient’s everyday lived experience as the starting point and integrates different activities, sessions and therapies in the daily life of the collective (Fanon, 2018: 296).

Tosquelles observes that the creative and innovative decay of institutional psychotherapy obeyed to a growing corporatism, the distinction of the role of the psychiatrist through the new status of civil servants that rigidified the patient-doctor relations, and the tension with the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus. From the mid 1950’s on, classical psychiatry regained its influence in state structures,

hospitals and sector psychiatry. The technocratic orientation towards the management of mental health institutions and diagnostics was accompanied by bureaucratic requirements, homogenization and standardization measures, and a managerial economy as if a company oriented to increase productivity, contrasted with the diversity and the lack of a single model to reorganize the institution that was intrinsic to institutional psychotherapy (Tosquelles, 1987). Likewise, Tosquelles thinks of the current developments in psychiatry, such as the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) a U.S. promoted system of classification of mental illness and nosographic categories, or the prevalence of cognitive-behavioral methods, as a step back of 200 years.

Today the hospital of Saint-Alban, renamed after Tosquelles, bears little trace of the stay of the Catalan psychiatrist. The place has been described as cold and orderly, tidy and inhospitable; an open warehouse forming a “quilted universe” that sugarcoats aggressiveness and comfortably masks relations of authority. Isolation is back, certain patients are labelled as incurable and out of place in the hospital, and security and control through camera systems have replaced the demolished walls of the hospital (Favereau and Artières, 2016).

In light of the current developments in psychiatry and its dominant tendencies Laure Murat wonders whether this this third symbolic revolution has failed as such, that is, in changing the categories of perception. However, she points out that in contrast to the moral treatment of Pinel and the psychoanalysis of Freud, which, as critics have shown, contained conservative components through the reinforcement of the normative position of the psychiatrist or by readdressing traditional societal elements respectively, the explorations of disalienation, human freedom and reorganization of the institution by the circle of Saint-Alban did not entail a

conservative closure to the crisis in psychiatry. For Murat this suggests its failure as a symbolic revolution, but it also turns it into a “*true* revolution”, which she describes as “a movement in perpetual becoming, in eternal resumption, whose subversive dimension society is not capable to absorb.” (Murat, 2014: 18; italics in the original; my translation<sup>177</sup>) For Fanon and others this would not be exactly so. In the next chapters we will see how institutional psychotherapy focuses excessively on the inside of the asylum and neglects its wider role in society. However, the lack of closure that Murat points out, makes the work of Tosquelles and the circle of Saint-Alban significant beyond its concrete context or historical time, for it also interpellates the present and can help to interrogate current events that exceed the hospital and the psychiatric.

### **Conclusion**

Fanon would move to Algeria with these concerns in mind and determined to implement Tosquelles approach in his psychiatric work in Algeria. The next chapter attempts to contextualize Fanon’s psychiatric work in Algeria and the obstacles he found to facilitate interaction and cure. As we have seen, the origin and the elaboration of institutional psychotherapy were closely related to contexts of war. However, Fanon, arriving before the outbreak of the colonial war found a society structured around the impossibility of interaction and the encounter between humans. In other words, Algerian society itself was premised upon the conditions of the psychiatric hospital which he attempted to transform.

In this setting, psychiatry as practiced in the colonies was instrumental to maintain and legitimize the setting of oppression, through the construction of the Muslim, the pathologization of political manifestations and their role in shaping social policies,

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<sup>177</sup> « une *vraie* révolution, c’est-à-dire un mouvement en perpétuel devenir, dans l’éternelle reprise, dont la société est incapable d’absorber, au fond, la dimension subversive. »

while at the same time conceived itself as an element of modernization and civilization. This elicited an ambivalent relation of the Algerian towards medicine. On one side, the technical superiority was acknowledged, and on the other it was related to suffering and degradation.

## **Chapter 5. Madness and Colonialism**

### **Introduction**

As stated in the previous chapter, the stay of Fanon in Saint-Alban was a formative experience that he attempted to translate to the Blida-Joinville hospital in Algeria. However, at his arrival in Algeria, more than a year before the outbreak of the war, Fanon found a qualitatively different situation than the contexts of war in which Tosquelles had worked. Colonialism was not a form of domination but an ubiquitous form of oppression and exploitation that permeated everyday life, denied the possibility of humanity to colonized subjects and produced specific forms of mental disease. Moreover, the intricate relation between medicine and colonialism elicited highly ambivalent responses in the Algerian populations. Concretely, colonial psychiatry in North Africa and in the rest of the continent was dominated by a racist understanding of the African and the Arab subjects, and was instrumental to dehumanization and repression. This chapter covers Fanon's critical deconstruction of colonial alienation and colonial psychiatry before engaging in his reconstructive work in the next chapter. To provide an account of all these aspects I have structured this chapter in the following way:

The first section situates Fanon's psychiatric practice in colonial Algeria by focusing on the key distinction he establishes between conquest and colonization. The birth of institutional psychotherapy was closely linked to the condition of war, concretely World War II and the Nazi occupation of France. Fanon arrived in Algeria before the outbreak of the independence war and found a qualitatively different situation. The interactions and encounters that Tosquelles and Oury attempted to favor inside the hospital as the central therapeutic element in contrast to the separation and confinement of the traditional asylum, were absent in Algerian society.

Colonialism creates a society of rigid spatial separations and also a fundamental distinction between the human and the subhuman that produces a different set of problems regarding the mental problems that it generates, and also in relation to the role of psychiatry, the function of the asylum and the meaning of health in a society that produces mental disease.

The second section delves into the relation between medicine and colonialism both as exemplifying the double logic of colonialism: medicine rationalizes the humanitarian logic and is at the same time instrumental in conquest and oppression. In “Medicine and colonialism” Fanon describes how for the intricacy of the Western medicine with the rest of the colonial apparatus, whether its military, economic, or administrative aspects, produces an ambivalent response in the colonized. On the one side it is rejected, not because of its foreign origin but because of its active intricacy with colonial power. On the other side, the colonized acknowledge the technological advances and healing possibilities of colonial medicine. This ambivalence, which epitomizes the difficulty of the encounter and the relationship, provokes a crisis in the colonized in the sense that they are forced to make a choice. Through these dramatic choices, which often militate against the colonized themselves, and by developing ethnography of the consultation room, Fanon offers a piercing analysis of colonial alienation in relation to medicine.

The third section draws on the previous account of alienation to explore the relation between power, oppression, subjectivity, the psyche and embodiment in Fanon’s work and also in relation to Judith’s Butler’s meditation of the psychic life of power, and Lewis Gordon’s Fanonian phenomenology of power as empowerment. The notion of power as empowerment is one of the connecting elements of Fanon’s psychiatric and political work.

The fourth section analyzes another of the problems that Fanon encountered in his psychiatric practice in Algeria, the racist and colonial psychiatry. To that effect, I will resort to the primary sources and to the work of historians of psychiatry. Psychiatry in North Africa was dominated by the Algiers School at the epistemic, institutional and organizational levels, and in the British colonial Africa by John Colin Carothers, an expert of the WHO. Their theoretical work on the North African Muslim and the black African respectively was instrumental to the dehumanization, the construction of the Arab and the African stereotype and the legitimization of repression, punitive measures and shaping policies in the colony. Relying on biology and culture, the Arab and the African were similarly denied subjectivity and represented as having low mental activity, emotional, pathological liars, aggressive and violent.

The fifth section addresses the critiques of colonial psychiatry. In France they took place in the beginning of the 1990's, on the basis of their biological essentialism and lack of scientificity. However, Fanon's critiques of Carothers' and Porot in *Les damnés de la terre* and his psychiatric writings point, interestingly, in other direction. He does not denounce the essentialism, the bias or their poor scientific basis. Neither does he directly reject the stereotypes of the Arab and the African. Instead, he subverts them by considering the political and historical context and interpreting the behavior of the colonized as different symptoms of alienation.

### **5.1 Algeria is a large hospital**

At the end of 1953 Fanon was appointed *Chef de Service* of the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria. If the experience of war, both the Spanish Civil War and the German Occupation, had decisively informed the emergence and the development of institutional psychotherapy, the situation that Fanon found at his arrival, one year before the outburst of the Algerian war, was qualitatively different in

terms of the structures that colonialism imposes and its effects on Algerian people at the level of everyday life. Such difference could be explained through his distinction between conquest and the oppression that colonialism entails:

Under the German occupation, the French remained human beings; under the French occupation, the German remained human beings. In Algeria, there is not only domination but the decision to the letter to occupy the sum total of the territory. Algerian men, women wearing 'haïk', the palm groves and the camels form the landscape, the *natural* background for the French human presence. (...) Colonization has succeeded when all this indocile nature has finally been tamed. (Fanon, 1961: 240; italics in the original; my translation<sup>178</sup>)

Besides a form of domination, colonialism requires a systematic redesign and the imposition of structures that aim at reducing the colonized to a state of animality. Again, Fanon's emphasis on temporality helps to shed light on the character of colonialism and the effects of oppression:

Because it is the systematic negation of the other, a fervent decision to deny the other all the attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the dominated people to *constantly* ask themselves the question: 'In reality, who am I?' (Fanon, 1961: 240; own italics; my translation<sup>179</sup>)

As Gordon points out, oppression pushes the colonized into the aforementioned zone of nonbeing, outside self-other relations. Thus, the derived question "Who am I?" could be posed as "What am I?" (Gordon, 2015: 128). This anthropological and existential question addresses not so much the cultural identity of being French, Algerian, black, Muslim, African, a combination of them or all of them, as the challenged belonging to the realm of humanity.

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<sup>178</sup> « Sous l'occupation allemande les Français étaient demeurés des hommes. Sous l'occupation française, les Allemands sont demeurés des hommes. En Algérie, il n'y a pas seulement domination, mais à la lettre décision de n'occuper somme toute qu'un terrain. Les Algériens, les femmes en «haïk», les palmeraies et les chameaux forment le panorama, la toile de fond naturelle de la présence humaine française. (...) (...)La colonisation est réussie quand toute cette nature indocile est enfin matée. »

<sup>179</sup> « Parce qu'il est une négation systématisée de l'autre, une décision forcenée de refuser à l'autre tout attribut d'humanité, le colonialisme accule le peuple dominé à se poser constamment la question: « Qui suis-je en réalité? » »



In the effort to tame what is considered a hostile nature and denying the attributes of humanity, to produce culture, meaning, to establish relations with the environment and with fellow humans, colonialism, Fanon notes, seeps into the bodies and the minds of the colonized. Fanon observes that before colonialism was contested, the constant and accumulated “noxious stimulants” of everyday life produced the collapse of the defenses of the colonized, which leads a great number of them to psychiatric hospitals. As he states, “During this calm period of successful colonization there is a regular and important mental pathology directly produced by oppression.” (Fanon, 1961:240; my translation<sup>180</sup>) In a similar vein, colonial Algeria was described by the Algerian novelist Kateb Yacine as a large hospital (Keller, 2007). Yacine’s statement is not metaphorical, the barriers that Fanon attempted to break inside the hospital through the application of institutional psychotherapy were the defining elements of social life outside of the hospital. As we will see in further detail, this produces not only different types of mental troubles to be treated inside the asylum, but, it also complicates the relation between the framework of psychiatry and society, and what it means to heal in a pathogenic and sick society.

## **5.2 Alienating medicine**

Another decisive element that conditioned Fanon’s psychiatric work in Algeria stemmed from the relation that had been historically established between medicine and colonialism, and particularly from the role that psychiatry played in fostering and maintaining oppression. Fanon faced the paradox of trying to cure in a space that was embedded in a political, administrative, and military apparatus that produced suffering. Historian Richard Keller observes that medicine “constitutes a site of

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<sup>180</sup> « excitations nocives » « Il y a donc dans cette période calme de colonisation réussie une régulière et importante pathologie mentale produite directement par l’oppression »

colonial surveillance and the clinic a means of amassing useful data in the assistance of domination.” (Keller, 2011: 211) Hubert Lyautey, the military and colonial administrator who led the French conquest of Morocco, asserted that medicine “is the only excuse for colonialism.” Yet he later added that the physician, “if he understands his role, is the primary and most effective of our agents of pacification and penetration.” (quoted in Keller, 2011: 216). In these two sentences Lyautey captures the inseparable doubleness of the colonial logic and the role that medicine plays in it. Medicine provided a rationalization for the humanitarianism of colonialism as the carrier of civilization, education, and health, while concurrently it assisted to and legitimized the alienation, torture, and war against local populations.

Fanon’s clinical work in Algeria had to navigate between these two poles, which were not always easily distinguishable. In the chapter “Medicine and Colonialism” from *L’an V de la révolution Algérienne*, Fanon exposes the aforementioned intricacy of medicine with the colonial project: the relation between doctors and the army, the experimentation on Algerian patients, the humiliating behavior of certain physicians, their use of truth serums and electroshocks disregarding their effects, their active participation in tortures, and their complicity of doctors with the police and the tribunals in the elaboration of false medical reports. Keller asserts that Fanon “presents medicine and psychiatry as ideological instruments of colonial power.” (Keller, 2011: 199). Yet this is a fragmentary view of the shaded landscape that Fanon faced in his clinical practice and also captured in that chapter.

Following the trail of “The North African Syndrome”, in “Medicine and Colonialism” Fanon also offers an ethnographic account of the problems of disease and health in the colony by looking at how the structures of meaning, attitudes and responses of the colonized towards symptoms, suffering, disease, hospitalization and

treatment are tragically informed by colonial structures. The double function of colonial medicine that blurs the distinction between health and oppression manifests a crisis. Crisis is etymologically related to *to decide* or requiring a decision in front of a problem. In this situation the colonized faces an “abiding need for vacillation” about their resort to colonial medicine; a decision that would place them in one of the two sides of the poisoned colonial logic (Beneduce, 2016: 17; my translation<sup>181</sup>). As Roberto Beneduce points out, through the hesitations and indecisions of the colonized Fanon elaborates a portrait of different angles of colonial alienation that enable him to shed light on the “grey areas of colonialism”. Besides the frontal opposition to colonial psychiatry, Fanon trudged through this double facet of medicine and, had to develop forms of transborder thinking that reached into these grey areas as a way to reconstruct the practice of psychiatry and envisage medical treatment.

Fanon notices that ambivalence is one of the structural features of the colonial world. Like other technologies, values, practices and ways of being, colonial medicine is perceived with a profound ambivalence. The colonized is aware of the technical superiority of colonial doctors and the potential benefits that Western medicine could offer. However, in a situation that impedes nuanced responses, where “[t]he truth objectively expressed is constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial situation” (Fanon, 1959: 116; my translation<sup>182</sup>), the avowal of this contribution would be interpreted by colonizers as an invitation to reinforce their presence.

The reason for the ambivalent relation towards medicine does not lie in the adamant attachment to local forms of healing, in the clash of modernity against tradition, in the expectations or disappointments regarding the different pace and intensity of healing of biomedicine versus local techniques, or an intrinsic fatalism, as

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<sup>181</sup> « irréductible besoin de vacillement »

<sup>182</sup> « La vérité objectivement exprimée est constamment viciée par le mensonge de la situation coloniale. »

sociologists and anthropologist would argue, but in the direct association of Western medicine, doctors and hospitals to colonial occupation and the concomitant dispossession, exploitation, and humiliation. “The colonized perceives the doctor, the engineer, the schoolteacher, the policeman and the countryside ranger through an almost organic confusion.” (Fanon, 1959: 109; my translation<sup>183</sup>) Accepting colonial medicine would thus reinforce and legitimize the whole colonial system, and it would also imply taking an active part in it (Fanon, 1959).

The dilemma that is tragically posed is that the desire and the need to save the life of a fellow Algerian entail resorting to a space of healing and life and conjointly of oppression and death. This ambivalence “tears the choices and consciousness of Algerians” (Beneduce, 2016: 17; my translation<sup>184</sup>) to the extent of taking self-damaging decisions, of adopting, as Butler puts it, an “attachment to subjection” as the product of operation of power (Butler, 1997: 6). Fanon offers instances of the exacerbated ambivalences, doubts and indecisions of Algerians in life or death cases: the “apparent rejection of the father (...) to owe the life of his child to the intervention of the colonizer” (1959: 116; my translation<sup>185</sup>), the refusal to hospitalization despite the warnings of the doctors that hesitating and postponing the treatment would compromise the life of the patient, or the doubts of the group about the hospitalization of a seriously ill Algerian. The last minute decision to hospitalize the fellow, taken unilaterally and against the will of the group, usually arrives too late. The often demise of the patient would raise feelings of guilt and betrayal, which are followed by reaffirming the position against colonial medicine (Fanon, 1959).

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<sup>183</sup> « Le colonisé perçoit dans une confusion presque organique le médecin, l'ingénieur, l'instituteur, le policier, le garde-champêtre .»

<sup>184</sup> « déchire les choix et la conscience des Algériens »

<sup>185</sup> « ce refus apparent du père (...) de devoir la vie de son fils à l'intervention du colonisateur »

The ambivalence persists when the doctor is Algerian. On the one side the colonized are proud of one of them having mastered the technique of the colonizer; on the other side, the colonized doctor is suspicious of belonging to the side of the oppressor. Fanon observes that the colonized doctor, like other members of the elite, is economically interested in the maintenance of colonialism and often takes sides with the colonizer by directing militias and raids. Likewise, the local doctor looks down to local forms of medicine with special contempt since he feels obliged to reaffirm his “new belonging to a rational universe” (Fanon, 1959: 120; my translation<sup>186</sup>).

Like other colonized intellectuals, the doctor “often finds himself in an unstable position” product of concrete although unsteady circumstances (Fanon, 1959: 121; my translation<sup>187</sup>). In “Racism and Culture” Fanon provides instances of another side of this instability, now during the anticolonial struggle and the intellectuals’ revalorization of the tradition –“another example of ‘withdrawal’, another type of indecision” (Beneduce, 2016; 18; my translation<sup>188</sup>): “the Arab doctors sleep on the ground, spitting anywhere”, “the black intellectuals consulting a sorcerer before taking a decision” (Fanon, 1964: 51; my translation<sup>189</sup>).

As Harry G. West and Todd Sanders collect in the volume *Ethnographies of Suspicion* (2003), the inherent difficulty to identify the location and the direction of the working of power, its ambiguity, opacity and contradictory quality elicits disquieting psychological and social experiences and responses of suspicion. In the visit of the Algerian to the doctor as described by Fanon the consultation room is a

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<sup>186</sup> « sa nouvelle appartenance à un univers rationnel »

<sup>187</sup> « se trouve fréquemment en porte-à-faux. »

<sup>188</sup> « autre exemple de « repli », autre genre de vacillement »

<sup>189</sup> « Les médecines Arabes dorment par terre, crachent n’importe où » « Les intellectuels noirs consultent le sorcier avant de prendre un décision »

space of suspicion and conflict, the continuation of the imposed splits that order the “infernal labyrinth” that is the colonial society (Fanon, 1959:114; my translation<sup>190</sup>).

The doctor-patient encounter is not the meeting of two individualities, Fanon asserts, their characteristics and relations are standardized by the colonial framework. The Algerian is tense and rigid in front of “at the same time a technician and a colonizer.” (Fanon, 1959: 115; my translation<sup>191</sup>) Like in the “North African Syndrome”, the body, the symptoms and the suffering of the patient are opaque to the doctor. The pain is general, diffused and exceeds the *tact* of the doctor. An objective approach to illness, the etiology, symptomatology, or nosology do not enable to recognize the conflict, grasp the tensions that traverse the body of the patient, and the historicity that shapes symptoms, behaviors and the medical encounter itself (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). If the body of the colonized is incomprehensible to the doctor, the words of the doctor are filtered through the doubts of the Algerian. In this atmosphere of mutual mistrust, muddled perception and hampered communication for the colonized the slightest remark is offensive, and will cast doubt on the diagnosis of the doctor.

Fanon adds that for the colonized, to leave the consultation room with the body intact and a few pills as a treatment is felt like a victory. Despite the prescription, the patient does not follow the treatment and only comes back much later when the disease is more acute. If the patient follows the treatment, which implies admitting the colonizer’s approach, in many cases it is compensated and superimposed with local forms of medicine. The patient feels like the embodiment of the clash of mutually excluding values; “the fear of being the battleground of different and opposed forces” gives rise to tensions and stresses that alter the initial clinical picture

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<sup>190</sup> « labyrinthe infernal »

<sup>191</sup> « à la fois un technicien et un colonisateur. »

(Fanon, 1959: 119; my translation<sup>192</sup>). As Roberto Beneduce summarizes, “[e]very ambivalence between imaginaries and epistemologies, every hesitation between values reflect a universe of conflict and lie.” (Beneduce, 2016: 18; my translation<sup>193</sup>)

The ambivalence, doubts, paradoxical positions, and fatalistic choices in relation to the problems of disease and health respond to a situation saturated with violence, hunger, unemployment, cultural contempt, inferiority complex and the lack of future perspectives. For “the disinherited of all the regions of the world” life is not understood in terms of blossoming and fulfillment, but “as constant struggle against an atmospheric death.” Thus, Fanon writes, “[t]he attitudes of refusal or the rejection of medical treatment are not a rejection of life but a *larger passivity* in front of that close and contagious death.” (Fanon, 1959: 116; own italics; my translation<sup>194</sup>)

### **5.3 Power, psyche and body**

Colonial medicine may not only be alienating and an instrument of oppression, but, as Fanon emphasizes, it is embedded in broader and concrete processes and relations of power that shape meanings, expectations, desires, attitudes, symptoms and behaviors. This illustrates in its colonial and racial dimensions what Butler accounts in *The Psychic Life of Power* and is present throughout Fanon’s work in different instances: the infiltration of power into the constitution of the self to the extent of hiding the moment and the process of constitution, and the origin of power. “[P]ower that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the

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<sup>192</sup> « la crainte d’être le lieu de rencontre de forces différentes et opposées. »

<sup>193</sup> « Chaque ambivalence entre imaginaires et épistémologies, chaque hésitation entre des valeurs renvoie à des positions définies par un univers de conflit et de mensonge. »

<sup>194</sup> « déshérités de toutes les régions du monde » « comme lutte permanente contre une mort atmosphérique. » « Les conduites de refus ou de rejet de l’intervention médicale ne sont pas refus de la vie, mais une passivité plus grande devant cette mort proche et contagieuse »

subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity.” (Butler 1997: 3)

Were this Fanon’s only view of power the prognostic of the situation would be a dead-end one. Fanon believed in human liberation and did not understand power just as a force of control and constriction, neither of resistance and opposition to subjection, but as related to creativity and empowerment, as we saw in the previous chapters. The creative aspect is contained in Fanon’s notion of sociogeny, as already stated. Sociogeny addresses the interrelation between the subjective and the objective levels and underlines human agency and creativity in the constitution of the social world. The human establishes relations and generates and gives meaning to structures, institutions, practices, rules and ways of living while in turn it is also constituted by them. Sociogeny analyses the interaction of the subject to the structure, not only for its subjection but how it can participate in changing the structure. At the core of sociogeny lies thus the possibility of the transformation of social structures, institutions and the very human being. This is what Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* calls being “actional” (Fanon, 1952) in opposition to the “larger passivity”, reactivity, or defensive and contracting positions. Being actional is to participate in the collective construction of the social world, or as Lewis Gordon puts it, to have an effect on the world.

Gordon’s phenomenological description of the relation between individual and structures (Gordon, 2006a: 102-105) can help to illuminate Fanon’s understanding of empowerment and oppression, and is pertinent to explain the crisis, the decision of the colonized in relation to medicine. For Gordon, the individual relates to the social structure through a relationship between choices and options. Choices or human actions exceed options, but options condition and limit what humans *can do*.



Oppression results from the reduction of the options available. Under this situation the ability to choose is unaffected but the choices are now redirected towards how to respond and relate to the absence of or the limited options. In other words, choices revolve around the chooser; oppression restricts the domain of reach and influence on the world and produces a movement of contraction. The reiteration and intensification of this inward orientation produces what Gordon calls implosion, when the scope of reach and interaction are limited to one's body and "the choices become entirely about the constitution of the self" (Gordon, 2006a: 104). Hence, Gordon adds, the question "In reality, who am I?", that as Fanon declares, "colonialism forces the dominated people to *constantly* ask themselves" (Fanon, 1961: 240; own italics; my translation<sup>195</sup>). Oppression leads the efforts of groups to self-deprecation, self-questioning, and compulsive self-repair.

The "human world", Gordon notices, "is not only infused with power but also the expression of it" (Gordon, 2018: 20). Oppression and the concomitant inward turn are an expression of power. And also an expression of power is the transformation and the increase of options that would facilitate outward choices and the expansive movement of relationships and interactions that would have an effect on the world. In this situation inward choices, when taken, would not be imposed by a limiting externality. Far from intricate definitions of power Gordon succinctly defines it as "the ability to make things happen with access to the means of doing so." (2018: 20).

Power is the ability to live outwardly, to make choices that would initiate a chain of effects in the social world that would constitute a set of norms and institutions that would affirm one's belonging in the world instead of simulating a flight from it to an infinitesimal, inwardly directed path of madness and despair. (Gordon, 2006a: 105)

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<sup>195</sup> « colonialisme accule le peuple dominé à se poser constamment la question: « Qui suis-je en réalité? »

As Gordon notes, crisis have a component of bad faith, of self-delusion. They inhibit choice by “through the presentation of ossified values” (1995: 22). That is, the problem appears as given and reified instead of having a human origin and human solutions. The way the colonized chose to respond to the imposed limited options, whether through indecisions, passivity, defensive positions, reactivity or withdrawal conceals the origin of the problem and their agency in the formation and the solution of the problem.

However, that the psychiatric is deeply embedded in the wider social and political situation does not imply that they are to be convoluted. Fanon did not see mental illness as uniquely derived from the political situation, nor did he address political issues uniquely through psychiatry. He envisaged his psychiatric work in Algeria as part of the expansion of options and an opening to the world by transforming an institution of oppression into a human and humanizing one that would foster disalienation and the agency of the patients, that is, that brings to the front their role as subjects of disalienation.

#### **5.4 The Algiers School and colonial psychiatry**

The psychiatry that Fanon found at his arrival revolved around the figure of the psychiatrist Antoine Porot at the level of teaching, research, clinical practice and the organization of the mental care system in Algeria, although his influence extended to other regions of the Maghreb, Indochina, Madagascar, and the metropolitan France. Porot and his students set the doctrinal and structural foundations of psychiatry in the colony, yet also the scientific basis for the rationalization of the domination of colonized populations. If medicine in the colonies, as we saw, had this ambivalent character of cure and conquest, healing and killing, psychiatry, although also integral to the civilizing mission functioned less ambiguously by constructing the colonized at

the level of sub-humanity. The understanding of the Muslim as inherently aggressive, impulsive, incapable of truth, reflection and moral discernment, and for whom there was no possible rehabilitation, rationalized the maintenance of the social order through confinement, punishment and force (Keller, 2007a).

Porot taught neuropsychiatry since 1917 and since 1925 hosted the only chair in psychiatry at the faculty of medicine of the University of Algiers, thereby training practically all Algerian psychiatrists and subsequently forming the Algiers School of psychiatry. Besides research and teaching, Porot played a decisive role in the establishment of the mental health system in North Africa following the report of the 1912 Tunis Congress. Therein was set the plan for the provision of mental health care to all members of the population in French North Africa according to the French law of 1838 (Collignon, 2006). In 1929, Porot submits the project for the first hospital exclusively dedicated to mental health assistance, the Blida Joinville Hospital. Following the military model, Porot organized a network of mental care institutions structured on three levels: the university hospital for acute cases, the psychiatric hospital for chronic patients, and the psychiatric hospice for cases of dementia (Kacha, 2009). As Keller's archival work reveals, the project faced numerous economic, political and administrative constraints; the project required negotiating with the French metropolitan government, local authorities and neighboring farmers who showed no interest in investing in the construction of hospitals. The enterprise took shape due to Porot's intense personal involvement, influence and lobbying activity. In light of the obstacles the construction of the Blida hospital acquired a symbolic dimension. Although it was operative since 1933, it was inaugurated in

1938 “in the spirit of exaltation of the French civilizing mission” (Collignon, 2006: 533; my translation<sup>196</sup>).

Porot and the French psychiatrists in the Maghreb conceived themselves as new versions of Pinel, entrusted with the humanitarian mission of freeing the natives from the chains and the imprisonment of the theretofore pitiful conditions of mental health treatment. Moreover, the implementation of a psychiatric system following the French model was part of a strategy of implementing innovations with the aim of enhancing and revalorizing lands, resources and the productivity in French territories. Thus the psychiatric system in North Africa functioned also as a form of deepening the social and territorial control (Keller, 2007a). Until then, mental health patients were treated in the metropolis, mostly in Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. The new hospital entailed a shift in the treatment of mental illness through the incorporation of modern techniques and a focus on mental care instead of confinement (Collignon, 2006; Keller, 2007a).

The psychiatric hospitals, separated by gender and race, enabled the Algiers School to delve into their ongoing theorization on the psychic life and the mental structure of the colonized. Porot retook the pre-colonial orientalist descriptions of the Muslim offered by ethnologists, travelers, merchants, passing doctors and military. In 1843, alienist Jacques Moureau, inquiring on the relation between civilization and madness, had described the Arabs as fatalistic, passive and alien to moral life, on climatic, cultural, religious grounds. Likewise, he argued that climate and Islam are also the reasons for the few rate of mental illness that he found among Arab populations (Collignon, 2006). In 1896, Abel-Joseph Meilhon, a doctor in Aix-en-Provence, publishes his first works on comparative description and classification of

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<sup>196</sup> « l'esprit d'exaltation de la mission civilisatrice de la France »

illnesses. Meilhon emphasizes the difference between the mental structure of the Arabs and the Kabyles. This distinction would be a constant in colonial psychiatry and anthropology. The latter are described as more complex beings whereas the Arab is depicted as fatalistic, impulsive, vindictive, and with a tendency to violence. Meilhon explains that in terms of “a state of cerebral inferiority congenital within the race,” (quoted in Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Meilhon also denounces the conditions of the Algerians patients of mental health, the inhumanity of the transportations and the inadequacy of the treatments provided in France. He emphasized that the lack of access to mosques, the inadequate French diets and the language barriers were obstacles for the improvement of the patients. He proposed the humane treatment of the patients in their lands of origin (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

During colonization psychiatry and its knowledge on the colonized became instrumental for the maintenance of the social order and the repression of dissidence. Since its origin, colonial medicine and psychiatry were intrinsically linked to the army. A case in point is the 1908 « Étude psychologique sur l’Islam » of Maurice Boigey, a military doctor in North Africa. He argues that whereas European culture is dynamic, creative, active and governed by the “Idea”. Muslim nations are halted in their evolution, and fundamentally passive and paralytic in their psychological typology. His answer to his question “What is a Muslim?” is straightforward: a Muslim is someone incapable of thought, of art and beauty, of science, of sailing, of building. A Muslim is frozen, static, and in the same stage of evolution since the times of the prophet Mohammed:

[The Muslim] has the same passions, the same manias, the same vices, the same extravagances, the same zeal, the same instincts the same intellectual

horizons as those coreligionists who were contemporary of Mohammed.  
(Boigey, 1908: 7; my translation<sup>197</sup>)

The whole clinical and military framework that Boigey creates revolves around the idea that Islam is a vital and nervous center that invisibly connects all Muslims. On that basis, he argues that “the koranic mental structure” (Boigey, 1908: 12; my translation<sup>198</sup>) is inherently pathological. It induces the Muslim brain into a “neuropathic state” characterized by the lack of intellectual aptitudes, “perversions of sexual instinct goes hand in hand with perversion of feelings and the aberration of the moral sense” (Boigey, 1908: 9; autor’s translation<sup>199</sup>), withdrawal, choleric outbursts, hallucinations that result in sudden crimes and other types of deliria and follies.

This psychological portrait elicits practical suggestions for the military defeat of Muslims troops. One key element is to remove Muslims from their only vital force: “When a deft hand, foreign to Islam, cuts the threads of the central organ, Muslims, thereby isolated, become paralyzed.” (Boigey, 1908: 10; my translation<sup>200</sup>) Islam is basically the actor and the person is the puppet. Bereft of Islam Muslims have no sense of individuality and initiative and are in a state of constant suggestion. Another practical suggestion is to attack Muslim troops must be attacked according to their cerebral lacunae, that is, not frontally but from different sides at the same time for his brain cannot respond to these simultaneous stimuli.

Informed by these early accounts, the relation between colonial domination, and by the positivist approach to criminology and legal medicine of Cesare Lombroso, Porot and the Algiers School attempted to set the scientific foundations for the study

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<sup>197</sup> « Il a les mêmes passions, les mêmes manies, les mêmes vices, les mêmes extravagances, les mêmes ardeurs, les mêmes impulsions, le même horizon intellectuel que ceux de ses coreligionnaires qui furent contemporains de Mahomet. »

<sup>198</sup> « structure mentale koranique »

<sup>199</sup> « perversion de l’instinct sexuel qui marche de pair, chez le Musulman, avec la perversion des sentiments et l’aberration du sens moral »

<sup>200</sup> « Que la main d’un opérateur habile, étranger à l’Islam, sectionne les fils émanés de l’organe central et les Musulmans ainsi isolés deviennent absolument paralysés. »

of the mentality of the Algerian. In their work, culture, religion or customs as explanative elements of Algerian behavior were not discarded but faded into the background in favor of systematic and scientific approach to the Muslim mental structure. In “Notes de psychiatrie Musulmane” (1918), Porot gathers his observations on the young Algerians recruited for the war, a “shapeless mass of primitives deeply ignorant and credulous in their most” (Porot, 1918: 377). By contrasting with European mental structures, he constructs the North African personality, on the basis of the theory of constitution, as inherently pathological. The “native” is characterized by “the vigorous force of certain primitive instincts”, “religious and fatalist metaphysics” “suggestibility”, “affective life reduced to the minimum”, “passivity”, “mental debility”, “pathological stagnation”, “savage hysteria, brutal and violent crisis”, “mental puerility”, or “lack of scientific appetite” (Porot, 1918; my translation<sup>201</sup>).

The writing of the Algiers school range from addressing hysteria, epilepsy and mental disorders in relation to biological difference, legal psychiatry, sexuality, alcoholism, primitivism and mental disease, to what would be a recurrent thesis in the construction of the North African, “the criminal impulsivity of the North African indigenous” (Porot and Arrii, 1932: 588: my translation<sup>202</sup>).

The question of the violent character of the North African was a central element in the construction of the North African stereotype and a constant concern for defining colonial security policies and social control measures, for the repression of manifestations of anticolonial character, and also affected the metropolis through the increasing migration from the Maghreb. The first scientific account on Algerian

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<sup>201</sup> « bloc informe de primitifs profondément ignorants et crédules pour la plupart », « la force puissante de certains instincts primitifs », « métaphysique religieuse et fataliste », « suggestibilité », « vie affective est réduite au minimum », « passivité », « débilité mentale », « stagnation pathologique », « hystérie de sauvage, crises violentes et brutales », « Nul appétit scientifique »

<sup>202</sup> « l’impulsivité criminelle chez les indigènes de l’Afrique du Nord »

criminality dates back to Kocher's study in 1883. Sextius Arène dedicated to first study on criminality in Tunisia in 1913 as a dissertation on legal medicine. In what is a recurrent pattern in colonial studies, the author detaches the violence and crime of the North African from the framework of colonial violence and of domination. He observes that major crimes have statistically decreased due to the civilizing action of France. However, this has been insufficient to diminish petty criminality. Petty criminality is explained on the basis of the lack of assimilation to French moral and laws, intoxication, or the "strong genital temperament of the Arab" (Arène, 1913: 171-172; my translation<sup>203</sup>) resulting not only in sexual crimes but mostly in vengeful, sudden crimes. Petty crimes are fundamentally violence among Tunisian whereas major crimes such as riots and revolts target French interests and citizens. Noteworthy is the conclusion he draws of the, at the time, recent riots and protests, from which Arène removes any political content: "Recent riots have to be considered as mob crimes and not as signs of a xenophobic hatred, which tends on the contrary to disappear." (Arène, 1913: 171; my translation<sup>204</sup>) In this particular case the author dismisses xenophobia as the reason behind revolts in favor of a mass outburst of rage, although he still considers the framework of xenophobia as explaining the crimes of Tunisian against colonizers.

In colonial psychiatry, xenophobia was used as a "psychiatric label" (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 101). Porot writes that "the observation of all the xenophobic movements shows the role of crystallization almost constant of a mystic, a fanatic or the unrealistic." (Porot and Arii, 1932: 596; my translation<sup>205</sup>) Although they categorize xenophobia as a political crime, they treat the phenomenon as the sudden

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<sup>203</sup> « du fort tempérament génital de l'Arabe »

<sup>204</sup> « Les émeutes récentes doivent être considérées comme des crimes de foule et non comme les indices d'une haine xénophobe, qui tend au contraire à disparaître. »

<sup>205</sup> « le rôle de cristallisation presque constant d'un mystique, d'un exalte ou d'un ambitieux. »



explosions of isolated individuals whose crime is cooked up silently until it suddenly explodes. The authors illustrate it with the case of the case of a 37 years old Algerian man sitting in a café who suddenly jumped against a group of European men and stabbed one of them. During the interrogation

he declared not knowing the victim, but he had wanted to sacrifice a ‘roumi’ despite knowing that he would be guillotined: ‘This double human sacrifice can save the world from the forthcoming five years of misery.’ This indigenous had left his village at the age of 17, living an errant life and oriented towards religious circles. (Porot and Arii, 1932: 596; my translation<sup>206</sup>)

In “L’impulsivité criminelle chez l’indigène algérien. Ses facteurs” Porot and Arii argue that although there are coincident morbid factors with European criminality such as alcoholism, deliria or dementia, the impulsive tendencies of the Algerian are mostly based on their defective psychological constitution and on their mores, social habits and behaviors. Algerian criminality is explained by their lack of value for human life, including their family members’, and a lack of affective and moral life. Their obstinacy, immoderation, tendency to resentment, revenge, and their susceptibility provoke that the slightest vexation or futile dispute unleash dramatic event. Likewise their attachment to ancestral customs, religious life and an acute instinct of possession and conservation elicit defensive attitudes such as delirious, anxious and *passionel* forms of jalousie. In this light, the “genital instinct” and the sense of property over women exacerbate blood crimes of passion. The authors link the manifestations of violence of the Algerian with epileptic episodes: an unforeseen aggressive outburst provokes a choleric and relentless violence which is followed by amnesia. The authors conclude that the virulence of the impulsivity of the Algerian is unseen in Europe. In contrast to the European cases, where impulsive criminality

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<sup>206</sup> « il déclarait ne pas connaître sa victime, mais avoir voulu sacrifier un « roumi », sachant bien qu’il serait guillotine, mais que « ce double sacrifice humain pouvait seul sauver le monde des cinq années de misère qu’il avait à subir ! ». Cet indigène avait quitté son douar à l’âge de 17 ans; pour mener une existence errante, mais orientée surtout vers les milieux religieux. »

results from some sort of impairment or pathological factor, in Algeria this phenomenon is not pathological but obeys to constitutional, social and cultural factors, it is fundamentally normal.

Porot explains hysteric manifestations, which he had previously defined as part of Algerian psychology, as “the liberation of superior activities in favor of more primitive activities” (Porot, 1935; 264; my translation<sup>207</sup>). This obeys to morphological and anatomical reasons that situate the Algerian, as Fanon points out, at in the group of inferior vertebrates (Fanon, 1961: 290). In Porot’s words:

The North African indigenous, with an important mental debility and whose higher and cortical activities are little evolved, is a primitive being whose essentially vegetative and instinctive life is mostly regulated by the diencephalon (Porot, 1935: 264; my translation<sup>208</sup>).

If in his earlier texts Porot envisaged the *rehabilitation* of the North African through education or military service (1918), his subsequent combination of the theory of biological constitution, the racial degeneration theory, which focuses on the hereditary disposition, and the primitivism of Levy-Bruhl, condemns the Algerian to a fixed position closer to animals:

Primitivism is not a lack of maturity, a pronounced cessation in the development of the individual psyche, it is a social condition that has reached the end of its evolution; it is adapted in a logical fashion to a life that is different from ours. It is not only a way of being resulting from a special education: it has far deeper foundations and we even think that it must have its substratum in a particular disposition of the architectonics, of at least of the dynamic hierarchizing of the nervous centers. (Porot and Sutter, quoted in Fanon, 2018: 407)

The Algerian is not considered an infant who can be educated and developed, but has achieved the highest possible degree of maturation that their culture and biology

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<sup>207</sup> « la libération des activités supérieures au profit d’activités plus primitives »

<sup>208</sup> Or, l’indigène, gros débile mental, dont les activités supérieures et corticales sont peu évoluées, est surtout un être primitif dont la vie, essentiellement végétative et instinctive, est surtout réglée par son diencephale.»

allow them. The destiny of the Algerian is thus linked to a race that ties them to an inescapable primitivism. This generates new problems:

The multiple factors determining criminality, fatalism, impulsivity, brutal instincts, the tendency to lie, and so on, were viewed as intrinsic to all North Africans— embedded in their bodies and their traditions. Thus, learning new customs, and importantly the engaging with the civilizing mission itself, only produces new forms of madness (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 102).

André Donnadiou called “civilizational psychosis” (1932; my translation<sup>209</sup>) to the mental disorders of the so-called *evolués*, the colonized who have pursued French formal education and have been in close contact with French law, morality, history, literature and social life. The author established such diagnostic after the clinical framework of severe anxiety and attempted suicide of a Moroccan student. He argues that the pathology derived from the shock of being in close contact with French culture and passing without transition from a world dominated by religion, superstition and ancestral beliefs to the splendor of the French world. Donnadiou advised the patient to abandon his studies and go back to his customs and traditions in the countryside, after which, he reports, the patient did not relapse. Donnadiou concluded by recommending French authorities that only those rare Muslims with an extreme intelligence and higher aptitudes for assimilation and adaptation were prepared to combine these radically different civilizations.

Primitivism, the civilizational psychosis, the ipathology of the Muslim, these understandings complicate education and discipline as means of developing the maturation that the humanitarian mission attempts and paves the way for segregationist measures and drastic forms action which place the North African in a concrete position within the psychiatric institutions and the social order. As Keller

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<sup>209</sup> « Psychose de civilisation »

notes “the essential structure for civilizing North Africans was therefore penal rather than educational, medical rather than cultural” (2007a: 144). In Porot’s words,

It is above all through (...) sanctions that we teach these simple and instinctive beings that human life must be respected, that collective interest prevails over individual interest; a thankless but necessary task in the general work of civilization (Porot and Arii, 1932 : 611 : my translation<sup>210</sup>)

Within this framework, conscious political manifestations, non-political behaviors that signal a lack of docility, mental disorders product of the oppressive conditions or expressions of violence are interpreted as symptoms. An example is the medical report, elaborated by Porot and Guttman (1918) on a Swiss woman imprisoned in Algeria for trying to influence Algerians against the French government, and particularly against inciting the desertion of Algerian soldiers recruited for the wars against Germany and Morocco, for which she had to face a military court. The authors diagnosed her with “Don Quixotism”, “that is, an ardent and altruistic passion, often reformative and socially committed, always in the search of a generous and fair cause to be defended” (Porot and Guttman, 1918: 108; my translation<sup>211</sup>). Among the symptoms of the more concrete diagnosis of “senile Arabophilia” (Porot and Guttman, 1908: 119; my translation<sup>212</sup>) the authors count her insistence to learn Arabic, having conversations with North Africans, visiting Muslim injured soldiers, her conversion to Islam and her marriage to a Muslim man. As Gibson and Beneduce point out, it was the woman not being able to see the evident reality, the inferiority of the Muslim, what triggered the whole pathological apparatus on her (2017: 101).

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<sup>210</sup> « c’est surtout par (...) des sanctions qu’on apprendra à ces êtres frustes et trop instinctifs que la vie humaine doit être respectée, que l’intérêt individuel a ses limites dans l’intérêt collectif ; besogne ingrate, mais nécessaire, dans l’œuvre générale de civilisation. »

<sup>211</sup> « c’est- à-dire une passion ardente et désintéressée, volontiers réformatrice et revendicatrice, toujours à la recherche de la cause juste et généreuse à défendre »

<sup>212</sup> « ‘Arabomanie’ sénile »

As Collignon notes, the dehumanization and denial of subjectivity of the colonized in the colonial context favored the consideration of the North African as a *tabula rasa* upon which chemical and physical experimentations and innovations could be practiced. The reduced ethical, political and administrative limits of the colony in comparison to the metropolis endowed the self-declared ground-breaking psychiatrists with a limitless power which led to an abusive use of experimental techniques and to deepen the gulf between the physicians and the colonized (Collignon, 2006). The field of action of the Algiers School extended beyond their usual physical reach of the clinic and the prisons. The school actively participated in the program of “*action psychologique*” during the colonial war, in which psychological warfare played a central role in the colonial strategy. Such program, framed within the civilizing mission, designed social policies, methods of interrogation, the pacification of populations from the schools to the hospitals in order to “modify unfavorable attitudes, (...) to reshape the Algerian mind by destroying its capacity for resistance” (Keller 2007a: 156, 159).

Keller argues the Algiers school and their practices were “far from marginal”, rather, their “contributions to psychiatric research shifted the direction of the French psychiatry discipline between the First World War and the Algerian struggle for independence.” (2007: 3). However, after the independence of the colonies and their return to France, the members of the Algiers School got a second wind and extended their influence until the end of the 1980’s. The position of the members of the school hosting chairs of psychiatry in universities and important institutions enabled them to continue researching and spreading their theses. The emphasis moved from the native to the migrant, the most controversial aspects of Porot’s theories were toned down, but the humanitarian and the racist elements continued to be interlinked. Without

discarding socio-economic considerations, the pathologies of migration were fundamentally explained on the basis of the pre-existing, psychological elements in the migrant, either latent or manifest. This psychological fragility explained the decision to migrate in the first place and then accounted for the migrant's lack of adaption to the new context. The focus was put on the weak psychological substratum of the migrant, leaving unquestioned psychiatric institutions and knowledge, and the pathogenic role of the hosting society. Their research on migration was not translated into actual practices and devices to address the mental problems of migration (Doray, 2006, Rechtman, 2012). Yet, as Richard Rechtman (2012) notes, this was not limited to the case of the Algiers School. Although different psychiatric approaches and independent initiatives to study and treat the pathologies of migration emerged in contestation to such views, there has been no political will at the state level, in France as in most European countries, to address the health problems of migrant and refugee populations beyond the common health structures and legal framework. No public health plan of data gathering, prevention and treatment of mental health issues of these social groups have been developed despite the prioritization of mental health questions since the 2000 in France. The situation of the Arab migrant in France that Fanon defined in 1952 as "an imbroglio" of which nobody wants to take care of, persists at different levels. The socioeconomic, the legal, the medical, questions of citizenship, the symbolic and the political intersect with the existential situation of the migrant. Rechtman writes

At the level of the state, the health care of migrant populations, besides being a strictly medical question, is first and foremost a political issue in which the principles of the French universalism are regularly reaffirmed. (Rechtman, 2012: 108-109; my translation<sup>213</sup>)

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<sup>213</sup> « En effet, au niveau de l'État la prise en charge sanitaire des populations migrantes en France demeure principalement un enjeu politique, avant d'être une question strictement médicale, où se réaffirment régulièrement les principes de l'universalisme à la française. »

## 5.5 Psychiatry in Africa

In the English colonial Africa the equivalent of Porot and the Algiers School would be the South African psychiatrist John Colin Carothers, who is considered one of the initiators of cultural psychiatry (Giordano, 2011). Supported by important publishing and institutional platforms, Carothers had been medical officer of the British colonial in Kenya, director of the Mathari Mental Hospital and the HM Prison in Nairobi from 1938 to 1950, and psychiatrist at St. James in Portsmouth, England. He was considered an international expert and was consultant for the World Health Organization, who published his 1953 report, *The African Mind in Health and Disease; A Study in Ethnopsychiatry*. In this work, which attempted to study the African psyche, particularly contrasting it with the European, he gathered cases, “that do not fit the European categories”, from different authors, disciplines and different African regions. He observed a coincidence in the psychiatric literature on the study of the African mind across their geographical, cultural, religious and ethnic variations. “Their essential similarity is therefore quite remarkable”, he concludes (Carothers, 1953: 158). Carothers drew on anthropological work, anatomy, psychiatry and electrophysiology. Although Carothers struggles to distance himself from the stereotypical African constructed by other colonial psychiatrists in favor of an objective approach (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017), his conclusions do not differ significantly and his text is rich in methodological and conceptual contradictions, and a convoluted attempt to define race in cultural rather than biological terms.

Carothers refers to studies that affirm the relation between skin and cortex stemming from the embryo, thereby implying that if there are physical differences such as the skin, there are also mental differences (Carothers, 1953: 73). However, comparative electroencephalographic studies indicate that there is no substantial

anatomical difference between the African and the European mind. Therefore, there would not be a direct correlation between intelligence, aptitudes, behavior, mental structure or temperament and the physical constitution of the body. Instead, “most of the significant differences he found might be attributable to the greater complexity of the European’s social, intellectual and cultural background” (Carothers, 1953: 84).

He then points out that the African psyche cannot be studied in isolation, but has to be considered alongside of what he thinks is the African experience. Thus, he brings cultural and historical factors to the forefront, including environmental, nutritional and educational and experiential elements. He argues that in contrast to European cultures which function in a dynamic way, this quality is absent in the African cases: “unlike modern Western cultures, all preliterates are relatively static” (Carothers, 1953: 54). This would be one of the decisive factors behind African psychology, which he characterizes by immaturity, impulsivity, uniformity and stasis, not able to appreciate subtleties, having an infantile affective life and low level of brain activity. There are similarities “between the mentality of the normal primitive African and a certain type of aberrant European mentality commonly included under the title psychopathic” (Carothers, 1953: 138).

Carothers concluded that the main characteristic of the African is his lack of mental activity: “the resemblance of the leucotomized European patient to the primitive African is, in many cases, complete.” (Carothers, 1953: 157) He sustains this argument by pointing out the reduced activity in the frontal lobes, which are responsible for integrating stimuli coming from other parts of the brain. The result of this frontal passivity is the absence of mental synthesis: “The African, with his lack of total synthesis, must therefore use his frontal lobes but little, and all the peculiarities of African psychiatry can be envisaged in terms of frontal idleness.” (Carothers,



1953: 157) Carothers distances himself from Porot's biological determinism of North African mentality in favor of an approach that gives preeminence to cultural factors to explain the African psyche. However, Carothers treats African culture as isomorphic to race. Carothers' graceless oscillation between biological and cultural racism and his equation of culture with race illustrates the continuity between biological racism and cultural racism that Fanon advances in "Racism and Culture".

In *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (1954), a report for the British government, Carothers brings together psychiatry with social policies at the service of the British counter-insurgency tactics against the Kikuyu anticolonial rebellion. Carothers delved into the static quality of African culture, which for him explained the anticolonial revolt of the so-called Mau Mau. The South African psychiatrist insisted that the need in African cultures of a slow, gradual "transition" to cultural changes is disrupted by the contact with European culture. Kikuyu's lack of adaptive aptitudes and their culturally determined obstinacy towards the new foreign element resulted in a "psychologically chaotic situation" (Carothers, 1954: 7). Kikuyu are described as having no interest in the benefits of education, as ungrateful and possessing an egotistic sense of the world that puts the blame on external factors, in this case colonial administration, but does not question the self. But they are also described as potentially the closest to European psychology among all Kenyan ethnic groups. This favored the envy towards the position of Europeans and their power. Neither education nor their economic activities enabled them to achieve their aspirations, which exacerbated the envy and turned into frustration and resentment. In sum, he framed the origin of the conflict in the shock derived from the stubborn attachment to tradition versus modernization and the resulting psychopathology which is manifested in the explosion of the "selfish impulses", and the

anxious conflictual situation in people who, from contact with the alien culture, had lost the supportive and constraining influences of their own culture, yet had not lost their ‘magic’ modes of thinking. (Carothers, 1954: 15)

This anxiety, which could not be mitigated through magic and rituals, unleashes “the highest degree of unconstraint and violence— a common experience in psychiatric practice in Africa” (Carothers, 1954: 6). Carothers denied the historical subjectivity of the colonized and the political character of their manifestations. He instead incorporated the political manifestations as symptoms of the psychopathology of the Kikuyu. He described the anticolonial movement as “recalcitrant” and “psychopathic”, and its leader Jomo Kenyatta as the equivalent of the devil (Carothers, 1954: 19).

Like that of the Algiers School, Carothers’ work also legitimated violent social policies outside of the clinical framework. His final recommendation on “the rehabilitation” of the Kikuyu did not seek to address the consequences of the “emergency”, nor its causes. By “rehabilitation” he meant the return to an improved and more efficient version of the pre-war social order, and the elimination of the traces of “contamination” left by the “Mau Mau” movement on Kikuyu people (1954: 20). To that effect he proposed the “villagization” or relocation of the Kikuyu population from the forest to specifically created and separated settlements. This would ensure the safety of the rest of the populations and, in his view, enhance the level of sociality and integrity of the Kikuyu, which were conceived as inherently fragmented. In practice, this was translated in the confinement of 400.000 Kikuyu on concentration camps, which, according to British officials were “distressingly reminiscent of Nazi Germany” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 108).

### 5.5 Difference, alterity and pathology

Some historians point out that colonial psychiatry was less interested in constructing a mad African than in the reinforcement of human difference by portraying the African as a radical form of alterity in relation to the European (Keller, 2007a; Collignon, 2006). This argument does not accurately capture the relation of psychiatry to racism and what racism does, for it frames the argument in terms of alterity, analogy and difference. Whereas racism, as Fanon puts it, and Gordon (1995, 2015) and Maldonado-Torres (2008), among others, have developed, is not a problem of otherness. The other is a human being, and therefore, carrier of values and with whom ethical relations can be established. In the zone of non-being, however, rather than otherness the colonized subject is placed in a position of non-otherness or “sub-alterity”, that is, not as radical difference, but a perversion of difference that places them below the human. The colonized is not-self and not-other. *It* is denied of subjectivity and of the possibility of ethical relationships, hence its disposability and the violence that psychiatry exerts and contributes to rationalize. In this framework, Fanon points out, race indicates not only the absence but the negation of values. As Maldonado Torres observes, the creation of sub-alterity is instrumental to the formation of “a world to the measure of a community of masters” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 239-240). Thus, the normative framework emerges through the relations of domination that shape notions of value, normality, health, pathology, symptom, nosographic and diagnostic categories. As Gordon observes, in the chapter on the black and psychopathology of *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon exposes the predicament in which the black is trapped in the colonial and racist normative order. In this order where the standard is the white person the black is a phobogenic object, he states, a monster. The problem is not the notion of normality itself, which is

common in every society, but the introduction of the pathological element in it, its normativity. Thus the abnormality of the black is the norm. And to be a normal black human is abnormal. As Gordon puts it, in either case the black fails as a human being in a racist setting. In the first case, failure is the norm; and in the second case, the black fails at failing (Gordon, 2015, 2004). Colonial psychiatry follows the same logic and is instrumental in its creation. Carothers seems to confirm this argument:

The failures were of the usual kinds met in Africa; (...) although such failures occur from time to time in experience of European employees (...) they would only occur frequently in Western civilization in persons who would be considered thoroughly irresponsible, whereas Africans who do not default in ways like these are rather exceptional people. (Carothers, 1953: 93)

In the racist normative framework, the healthy Algerian is the docile and compliant whose psychological and social development fails in relation to the European. The manifestations of suffering derived from the colonial conditions or the open questioning, critique and protest against the colonial regime is interpreted as symptoms of a psychopathological, criminal behavior. Hence, as Gibson and Beneduce note, by isolating the manifestations of social suffering and discomfort from the historical, social and political conditions, fragmenting its causes and reasons, taking biology or a folkloric understanding of culture as explanative elements, “the pathological and barbaric seem to be the only avenues for subaltern protest” (2017: 101). Thus, colonial psychiatry functioned as a means to rationalize the specific and different forms of ruling over the populations, whether, civilizing, educating, punishing, confining, relocating, repressing, or eliminating.

## **5.6 Critique of colonial psychiatry**

In France the first critiques of colonial psychiatry appeared at the beginning of the 1990's. These objections, issued by French psychiatrists, questioned the scientific

basis of the work of the Algiers School. However, such critiques focused uniquely on the ideas of colonial psychiatrists, their biologicism and the scientific foundations of their work, at the expense of the context, the purpose, the function and the effects of such ideas inside and outside the clinic (Collignon, 2006). In Algeria slight divergences appeared in the bosom of the Algiers School. Suzanne Taïeb, a Tunisian student of Porot, submitted under his supervision a dissertation in 1939 which contained discrepant views on the role of Algerian culture and its importance to understand the mechanisms behind mental illness. Concretely, she looked at how belief systems, meanings and the symbolic organization of Algerian social, cultural and religious life shaped local conceptions of madness, its origin, and treatments (Faranda, 2012). Taïeb explored how madness was not attributable to individuals but involved the participation of *djenoun* or spirits, as in other aspects of everyday life. The response to this conception of madness activated social and familiar networks of healing. Although she framed these cultural elements within the primitivism, fatalism, mental debility and the lack of rational and scientific thought of the Algerian, having them into account could enable to rethink attitudes and behaviors of the patient dismissed as psychopathologic and to reconsider diagnostic categories theretofore attributed to the deficits of the race such as delirium or paranoid psychosis. Likewise, her ethnographic work with women patients in Blida sheds light on the social and cultural content of their delusions and hallucinations. Exceeding her initial intention, the stories of women also revealed their experience with the colonial psychiatric system, their expectations, frustrations and misunderstandings derived from hospitalization, confinement and conflicting mental health approaches (Keller, 2007a:117).

Gibson and Beneduce note that certain of these accounts exposed the connection between concrete symptoms and the experience of domination and persecution inside and outside the clinic. Taïeb's work "hesitantly revealed the link between symptoms and social- historical context", but she did not value nor develop forms of diagnosis that could account for such links. Admirer of Porot and endorsing the doctrine of the primitivism of the North African herself, Taïeb's job timidly and implicitly questioned different aspects of colonial psychiatry, while also subscribing to it. Thus rather than a critical perspective it, her innovative work represented an isolated breach within the Algiers School (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 151).

The Algiers School met criticism from different intellectual circles. Openly critical of North African psychiatry were an important group of Tunisian doctors who emphasized the prestige and the richness of the Muslim medical tradition. Political figures like Ferhat Abbas denounced the effects of the *action psychologique*. The relation between colonial oppression, madness and violence is a central element in Kateb Yacine's work. Yacine's mother died in the Blida-Joinville hospital victim of electroshock treatments. She had been hospitalized for years after a crisis derived from the rumors about the execution of his son following the bloody repression of the Sétif demonstrations (Keller, 2007b).

The Nigerian psychiatrist Thomas Adeoye Lambo, addressed Carothers' work in his own explorations on the relation between the mental factors and mental disease among Yoruba. Lambo questions the methodological decisions and the scientific status of Carother's works. For Lambo, his work departs from false premises which he attempts to confirm by endowing them a layer of scientific objectivity at the expense of truth. His work abounds in falsehoods, inconsistencies, gaps and unanswerable questions to the extent that it "can no longer be seriously presented as

valid observations of scientific merit” (Lambo: 1955: 241). For Lambo, Carothers is ill-informed concerning both psychiatric language and the groups of people he was studying; this is not a problem of ignorance, he notes, but of false knowledge. In front of the “the baffling problems of the incomprehensible”, Carothers adopts the “common procedure of making sweeping generalizations behind a veritable smokescreen of technical terms, involved abstractions and semantic confusion” (1955: 245).

Fanon addressed the work of colonial psychiatrists directly in several instances. In *Black Skin White Masks* he had assessed the work of Octave Mannoni. He covered the work of Carothers and Porot directly in the unsigned, short article, “Ethnopsychiatric Considerations”, published in an issue of the journal *Consciences Maghrebines* in 1955. He also addressed them in the last chapter of *Les damnés de la terre*, and in his lectures at the University of Tunis. Indirectly, he referred to them in several other articles written during his stay in Algeria such as the aforementioned “Racism and Culture” or “Conducts of Confession in North Africa”. Likewise he also drew from and held a critical dialogue with Suzanne Taïeb’s work in “Daily Life in the Douars” and “Introduction to Sexuality disorders among North Africans”.

René Collignon points out that in comparison to other critiques, the force of Fanon’s lies in its “flamboyant and radical tone” and in the “vehement character of his denunciation” of the Algiers School (2006: 539-540; my translation<sup>214</sup>). Similarly, Keller argues that Fanon’s indictment of colonial medicine is “hyperbolic, a testament to his personal experience rather than an unvarnished reflection of historical truth” (2007b: 840). Keller here reproduces the aforementioned question of theory and experience in its racial dimensions. Cheikh Anta Diop put it bluntly in his

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<sup>214</sup> « la plus flamboyante et la plus radicale de ton » « Le caractère véhément de sa dénonciation de l'École d'Alger »

message to the Nigerien youth, “for truth be valid and objective, it has to sound white” (Diop, 2013: 215; my translation<sup>215</sup>). Whereas Foucault, who permeates Keller’s historical analysis of colonial psychiatry, offers theory and “historical truth”, Fanon, unable to exceed his own experience through reflection, provides a biased account of personal resentment. The relation between Foucault and Fanon, which adds an ironic twist to the matter, will be briefly covered in the next chapter.

These views reveal themselves as stereotypical in light of the writing of Fanon. Actually, his tone is cold; he summarizes and exposes the ideas of the Algiers School in a way that give the impression of a state of the art of the literature of colonial psychiatry. In my view, the relevance of Fanon’s critique lies precisely in that he does not go into a hand to hand combat with colonial psychiatrists. In “Ethnopsychiatric Considerations”, it is rather through irony and sarcasm that he valorizes their work. Fanon describes as “important monographs” those of Porot and Carothers, and sarcastically notes that “current achievements seem to be sufficiently solid to permit an attempt at systemization.” (Fanon, 2018: 406) He caustically concludes that “This is how the hypothesis of the Algiers School came to be verified: on the psychophysiological level, the Black African greatly resembles the North African – the African is a unity.” (Fanon, 2018: 407).

It is the content rather than the form what differentiates Fanon’s from other critiques. From the content I want to emphasize two main points that will be developed in what follows: first, he does not question the scientificity of colonial psychiatry; and second, as Gibson and Beneduce (2017) remark, Fanon does not counter the claims of colonial psychiatrists about the violent impulsivity, tendency to lie or the passivity of the Africans. Instead, he subverts their logic by placing their

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<sup>215</sup> « pour qu’une vérité soit valable et objective, il faut qu’elle sonne blanche »



conclusions within a political frame, and while he carries out a genealogical work on the symptoms of colonial alienation, ascribing them a political value, he also connects them with the signs, fragments and traces for liberation.

Antonio Gramsci issued a similar critique of criminologist and legal psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso, Porot's methodological and scientific model. For Gramsci, Lombroso's reductionist approach resulted in the criminalization and the pathologization of political movements and peasant populations of Southern Italy:

Instead of studying the origins of a collective event and the reasons for its diffusion, of its collective being, the protagonist was isolated and reduced to a biographical pathology. Too often this was based on unfounded causes, or on motives that could be interpreted differently: for a social elite, the elements of the subaltern groups always contain something barbarian and pathological. (Gramsci, 2000: 175; my translation<sup>216</sup>)

And as Gibson and Beneduce (2017) note, Fanon's critique and subversion of colonial psychiatry, and his clinical and political work, echoes Gramsci's observation that

“the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. (...) Therefore, every trace of autonomous initiative of the subaltern groups should be of inestimable value for the integral historian” (Gramsci, 2000: 178-179; my translation<sup>217</sup>).

In other words, it is by identifying, collecting, and connecting the fragments and episodes of the colonized in their responses to colonialism, to colonial and Muslim medicine, to labor, to European values and technologies, the relation to truth, the social relations, the relations of gender and within the family among the colonized, among other aspects, that Fanon identifies the traces of history and the political in

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<sup>216</sup> “en vez de estudiar los orígenes de un acontecimiento colectivo, y las razones de su difusión, de su ser colectivo, se aislaba al protago; nista y se limitaban a bater su biografía patológica, demasiado a menudo tomando como base motivos no bien averiguados o interpretables en forma distinta: para una élite social, los elementos de los grupos subalternos tienen siempre algo de bárbaro y patológico.”

<sup>217</sup> “La historia de los grupos sociales subalternos es necesariamente disgregada y episódica. (...) Todo rastro de iniciativa autónoma de parte de los grupos subalternos debería por consiguiente ser de valor inestimable para el historiador integral”

their manifestations, both in terms of symptoms of alienation but also as signs of the latent possibility of liberation.

Fanon acknowledges the influence and authority after decades of being taught at the University of the theories that describe the Algerian as a born-criminal, liar, idler and thief. A colleague said to him: “It is a bitter pill to swallow, but it is scientifically established.” (Fanon, 1961: 287; my translation<sup>218</sup>) However, unlike Lambo and contemporary French psychiatrists, Fanon does not question the scientific validity of these racist theories neither labels them as bad science:

If we have exposed at length the theories proposed by colonial scientists, it was less with the aim of showing their poverty and absurdity than of addressing an extremely important theoretical and practical problem. (1961: 292; my translation<sup>219</sup>)

Addressing racism in science or philosophy as bad science, bad philosophy, or directly as unscientific leaves science unquestioned and replicates the theodicean logic identified by Gordon: Science would be a complete system whose errors, contradictions and impurities are located outside of it, in the realm of bad science or the unscientific. For Fanon *the problem* is not the scientific status, but scientific practices and theories that militate against the human and are instrumental to oppressive societies through the pathologization of populations and skewed notions of normality, which exacerbate madness:

The important theoretical problem is that it is necessary at all times and in all places to make explicit, to demystify and to hunt down the insult to humanity which is in oneself (1961: 293; my translation<sup>220</sup>).

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<sup>218</sup> « C'est dur à avaler mais c'est scientifiquement établi. »

<sup>219</sup> « Si nous avons longuement repris les théories proposées par les hommes de science colonialistes, ce fut moins pour montrer leur pauvreté et leur absurdité que pour aborder un problème théorique et pratique extrêmement important. »

<sup>220</sup> « Le problème théorique important est qu'il faut à tout moment et en tout lieu expliciter, démystifier, pourchasser l'insulte à l'homme qui est en soi. »

Fanon rejects the theories of the Algiers School but does not oppose their arguments; he instead attempts to show that the violence, the laziness or the lies of the Algerian have their origin in the colonial society that the Algiers School portrays as normal. In the colony, alienation is the norm. He also connects the school with metropolitan and Anglophone psychiatrists. The dependency complex of the Malagasy, the laziness of the Hindu, the savage obedience of the Senegalese soldier, the jalousie of the Kikuyu, the mental debility of the Algerian, are interconnected to forms of domination and exploitation throughout the Third World and to the conditions of blacks in Europe and in the United States.

In his lectures at the University of Tunis Fanon argues that the typical laziness of the colonized is a mechanism of self-defense against the exploiting conditions of labor in the colonies. Labor is understood as “forced labour in the colonies, and even if there is no whipping, the colonial situation itself is a whipping” (Fanon, 2018: 530). Idleness is fundamentally non-collaboration; it is the response of the colonized to the rapacity of the colonizer, he affirms. He argues that the temporal horizon of the colonial enterprise is the short-term extraction and materialization of benefits. It does not set the conditions for the future profits of the following generations of colonizers. Instead, it aspires to “amass the biggest possible profit in the shortest possible time.” (Fanon, 2017: 529) In this understanding, the colonized is seen as a replaceable mass of laborers. The unemployed colonized, he points out, is not unemployed, instead “they are natives whose energy has not yet been claimed by the colonial society. They form a reserve in case the other workers fail to appear”. For Fanon, Porot’s theory of the premature senility, around 35-40 years of age, is instrumental to the conception of the colonized as a disposable and replaceable mass of labor. In this framework, “[u]nemployment is not a human problem; it is an everlasting reserve (...) for

replacing cases of early senility” (2017: 530). The laziness of the colonized is both a mechanism of self-defense and non-collaboration, a form of protecting one’s life and of hindering the unbridled accumulation of the settler.

In *Les Damnés de la terre* he insisted on the political character of the behavior and attitudes of the colonized and how laziness for the colonized subverts colonial logics: “in the colonial regime a zealous working fellah, a *nègre* who refuses to rest would simply be pathological individuals.” (Fanon, 1961: 284; my translation<sup>221</sup>). Although he understood these attitudes as forms of refusal rather than consciously political resistance, he added that “[t]he duty of the colonized who have not yet matured their political consciousness and decided to reject of oppression is to have the slightest movement literally extracted from them.” (Fanon, 1961: 284; my translation<sup>222</sup>)

Fanon remarks that the relationship of the colonized to labor is extended to the legal system, taxes, the bureaucratic apparatus, the collective values and the ethical universe of the colonial society, in which “gratitude, sincerity, honor are empty words.” (Fanon, 1961: 284; my translation<sup>223</sup>) In the article “Conducts of Confession in North Africa” (1955), co-presented with his colleague Raymond Lacaon at the *Congrès des médecins aliénistes et neurologues de France et des pays de langue française*, the authors show that the depiction of the Algerian as a pathological liar demands a more complex explanation. The authors examine this phenomenon from their position as legal doctors who, before the trial, have to evaluate the mental state of the Algerian accused of having committed a crime.

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<sup>221</sup> «en régime colonial un fellah ardent au travail, un nègre qui refuserait le repos seraient tout simplement des individualités pathologiques. »

<sup>222</sup> « Le devoir du colonisé qui n'a pas encore mûri sa conscience politique et décidé de rejeter l'oppression est de se faire littéralement arracher le moindre geste. »

<sup>223</sup> « la gratitude, la sincérité, l'honneur sont des mots vides. »

The authors observe that in eight out of ten cases the detained denies the accusation. Yet also in the cases where there has been an initial confession, after a lapse of time the accused retracts his testimony and denies his participation in the crime. “He does not try to prove his innocence. He claims his innocence. If the court decides it, then let it kill him. He accepts everything.” (Fanon, 2018: 416) In spite of the evidence, the witnesses (who also frequently retract, Fanon adds), and the initial confession, the lack of appropriation of the act by the detained puzzles the legal doctor, who, however, faces a “lucid, coherent man, whose judgement is unimpaired” (2018: 416). Without the truth of the perpetrator, the case is reduced to a file devoid of a proper criminological understanding.

The dominant explanation provided by colonial doctors, the court and the police is that the North African is a pathological and compulsive liar, incapable to distinguish true from false and to take responsibility. Fanon and Lacaton’s argument, however, follows a different logic, and leads them to propose a phenomenology of the penal process with a marked political character. Although they point out that this is a preliminary inquiry that demands further study, they argue that in order to assess the sanity of the accused and the question of criminal responsibility it is necessary to explore “the lived experience of the act (...), otherwise said, the facts as seen by the accused.” (2017: 413) By that he does not refer to the motives of the crime or to a purely psychological understanding of it. He rather affirms that in order to understand the subjective act it is necessary to resort to the intersubjective world and the meaning of the act in social terms. As he puts it, it implies to explore the values, the ideas, and mental attitudes, how the act is experienced and appears to consciousness, what is the relationship of the accused to the act.

Fanon and Lacaton make reference to Sartre's play *Dirty Hands* where the main character takes responsibility for his crime and thereby gives coherence to the act and endows meaning to his life. The denial of the act and not taking responsibility for it would be alienating for the accused and a condemnation to absurdity. Through Bergson, Fanon adds that a crime entails a sense of guilt, self-condemnation and the segregation of the individual from the group. The confession and assumption of responsibility before a judge is a form of acknowledging and opposing the wrongdoing, which entails the acceptance of the sanction and the reintegration into the group. In these circumstances, "subjective assent founds and gives the sanction a meaning." (2017: 414) Fanon observes that this "denouement" presupposes and requires the prior and reciprocal recognition between the wrongdoer and the society. For social contract philosophers, confession (*aveu*) has a moral dimension, sincerity, and relatedly, has a civic dimension, consent, which is the avowal and endorsement of the social contract. Confession and assuming responsibility for one's wrongdoing imply consenting with the attitudes and the principles that link the individual to the collective values and the ethical world of the social ensemble. According to the European understandings, confession would be associated with the moral, legal and civic dimensions of belonging to a society.

However, Fanon notices that the accounts of Sartre, Bergson, Rousseau or Hobbes are inadequate to explain the zone of non-being of the colonial situation. Colonial society is characterized by disproportional power relations, which inform not so much the absence of shared values between European and Algerians, as the very absence of values and ethical treatment in the relation between both groups.

In the particular case of the Algerian Arab, does no such duplicity exist? Has the native contracted a commitment? Does he feel bound? Does he feel excluded by the misdemeanour? What is the lived meaning of the crime? Of the investigation? Of the sanction? (2017:415)

The denial of the crime and confession of the Algerian is not a matter of insincerity or the unwillingness to integrate to society, since there is no prior and reciprocal recognition and integration to the colonial society, but of refusal. Confessing the crime would be consenting with the legal process; the lack of ownership of the crime, the refusal to take responsibility for it is a form of rejecting the investigation, the trial and the sanction, that is, the legal and juridical system of an oppressive and alien regime. As Fanon would repeat in *Les Damnés de la terre*, being dominated and oppressed does not necessarily entail the acceptance of such domination and oppression. The disallowance of the colonial system

through the refusal to authenticate (...) the social contract proposed to him, means that his often profound submission to the powers-that-be (...) cannot be confounded with an acceptance of this power. (Fanon, 2018: 412)

As in the case of their relationship with medicine addressed above, for the colonized, accepting the penal procedure implies legitimizing and complying with the whole colonial system. In that article he pointed out that “[t]he truth objectively expressed is constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial situation.” (Fanon, 1959: 116; my translation<sup>224</sup>) As we will see in chapter seven, in *Les Damnés de la terre* Fanon asserts that “the problem of truth” in the conflicting political landscape of the colonial world deserves careful consideration: “To the lie of the colonial situation the colonized responds with an equal falsehood.” (Fanon, 1961: 52; my translation<sup>225</sup>) As Gibson and Beneduce observe, there is an element of truth in the silence or the retraction of the accused, for it lays bare the actual absence of reciprocal recognition, of collective values, of a shared ethical universe in the colonial society, and the lack of consent with the social contract. Truth and falsehood have not only different

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<sup>224</sup> « La vérité objectivement exprimée est constamment viciée par le mensonge de la situation coloniale. »

<sup>225</sup> « Au mensonge de la situation coloniale, le colonisé répond par un mensonge égal. »

meanings for the different groups, but also the criteria and the authority that determine what is true and what is false are antithetical. If truth is what will kill the colonized, the Algerian will respond with a falsehood. Thus, “the colonized is not lying but simply refusing to authenticate the proposed social contract and drafting another script.” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 249)

In the last chapter of *Les Damnés de la Terre* he dedicates a section to the question of the criminal impulsivity of the Algerian as framed by Porot and Carothers. He observes that the idea of the criminality of the Algerian does not only have influence over settler populations and policies but also over the colonized themselves. It is both a social and an individual problem, a constitutive element of “the kernel of despair crystallized in the body of the colonized” from which the colonized has to be liberated at the individual and the social levels (1961: 283; my translation<sup>226</sup>). He notes that the image created by European lawyers, psychiatrists, anthropologists, journalists, policemen and legal doctors was acknowledged and ingrained in the psyche of the Algerian to the extent of generating narcissistic and ambivalent forms of self-identification “as manifestation of an authentic virility” (1961: 293; my translation<sup>227</sup>).

Like, laziness, the criminality and the tendency to violence of the Algerian is a manifestation of the conflict. Fanon notes that the criminality of the Algerian in France is less frequent and of a different character, and in other Maghreb countries criminality has drastically decreased after their independence. The violence of the Algerian, he argues, is a direct product of the conditions of colonial society, and is mostly directed against a fellow Algerian.. Fanon relates the behavior of the

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<sup>226</sup> « noyaux de désespoir cristallisés dans le corps du colonisé. »

<sup>227</sup> « comme manifestation de l'authentique virilité »



Algerians to the ones he witnessed in concentration of camps during War World II, where the struggle to survive turns the fellow into enemy. He writes:

The French are down on the plain with the police, the army and the tanks. In the mountains there are only Algerians. Up above there is Heaven and its promises of an afterlife; down below are the French with their concrete promises of prison, beatings and executions. Inevitably you strike against yourself. Here lies the core of the self-hatred that characterizes racial conflict in segregated societies (1961: 296-297; my translation<sup>228</sup>).

As we will see in further detail in Chapter seven, the violence between Algerians is an important concern in Fanon's thought on the Algerian situation. Fanon explains how this intra-community violence, is related to the symbolic, labor exploitation, the spatial structures of confinement and segregation, the technologies of dehumanization, which constitute what Fanon calls the atmospheric violence of the colony.

## **Conclusion**

Taking this chapter as the historical and theoretical context in which Fanon developed his psychiatric work, the next chapter delves into the reconstruction of psychiatry in North Africa in its epistemic and practical dimensions. Fanon attempted heal the clinic and humanize psychiatric practices by implementing institutional psychotherapy in the Blida-Joinville hospital, but the initial idea encountered different obstacles and varying results, mostly related to the issues presented in this chapter. This led Fanon to delve into the understanding and treatment of mental disease in Algerian society, its relation to colonial society, to economics, the gendered aspects of mental health, and to question the therapeutic process in relation

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<sup>228</sup> « Le Français est dans la plaine avec les policiers, l'armée, et les tanks. Sur la montagne il n'y a que des Algériens. Là-haut le ciel avec ses promesses d'outre-tombe, en bas les Français avec leurs promesses bien concrètes de prison, de matraquage, d'exécutions. Forcément, on bute sur soi-même. On découvre ici le noyau de cette haine de soi-même qui caractérise les conflits raciaux dans les sociétés ségréguées. »

to wider cultural social and political dynamics. Fanon also questioned the complicity of psychiatry, the psychiatric hospital and the role of the psychiatrists regarding oppression and also its emancipatory possibilities.

Fanon resigned and joined the Algerian liberation movement, but his militant side is not incompatible and did not entail the abandonment of psychiatry. In Tunis, Fanon initiated a pioneering work through the creation of an open psychiatric hospital. Fanon goes beyond institutional psychotherapy and the recreation of a society in the hospital towards an approach that involves society in the healing process and a more radical interrogation of the violence of the psychiatric hospital, and the violence that it generates.

## **Chapter 6. Healing the clinic, healing with the clinic**

### **Introduction**

Many readers of Fanon have interpreted his transfer to Algeria as a move to join a revolution. In these teleological understandings of Fanon's life psychiatry was contingent and secondary. However, Fanon arrived in Algeria more than a year before the outbreak of the war with the intention to apply the avant-garde techniques learnt in Saint-Alban and continued to practice psychiatry well into the war in Algeria and Tunis (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). The previous chapters situated Fanon's psychiatric work at the crossroads of three stories, French psychiatry, institutional psychotherapy, and colonial psychiatry, concretely the Algiers school (Murard, 2008). This chapter covers his effort to reconstruct the theoretical and practical basis of the psychiatry practiced in North Africa.

During his stay in North Africa, Fanon published a series of articles that reflected the process of humanizing psychiatry, turning the asylum from a site of dehumanization and generation of mental illness into a space of disalienation, and attuning the healing process to the cultural, social and political context of Algeria and Tunis. The relevance of such writings lies first in their psychiatric significance extending beyond the colonial context. Second they also help to see the intricacy between his political and psychiatric thought. Third, as Gibson and Beneduce (2017) note, the psychiatric writings, despite being open and incomplete studies, enable to shed light in the process itself of rebuilding a cultural and political psychiatry. This was not a linear process; during this time Fanon faced different challenges and experienced diverse setbacks that demanded rethinking and questioning at the methodological and epistemic level. It also reflects the changes in his understanding

of the role of culture in relation to healing, the functioning of the clinic within society, and the limits of psychiatry in contexts of oppression.

Fanon's trajectory as a psychiatrist in the matter of the psychiatric hospital moves from healing the institution by recreating a society within it, to healing with the institution by including society within the therapeutic process through the open psychiatric hospital. In order to explore these elements, I have organized this chapter accordingly:

The first section briefly presents the social context, the conditions and the deficiencies of the Blida-Joinville Hospital, in which Fanon was one of the *chefs de service*. The hospital was poorly equipped and insufficient to host the clinical boarders and their activities. Furthermore, the equipment was conceived for a punitive and coercive treatment of the patients, who were in separated pavilions by gender and race. This required not only the reconfiguration of space but also the relations between medical staff and the patient, the training of the former, new modes of interaction, and the questioning of the assigned roles.

The second section covers Fanon's attempt to introduce institutional psychotherapy in the asylum. But what functioned in the ward of European women, failed in the ward of Muslim men. This initiates a process of reflection and self-critique, which leads to the study of the social, political, cultural and religious organization of the Kabyle and the implementation of changes in the asylum accordingly.

The third section explores Fanon's understanding of the intricacy between politics, culture and history. Although there were problems of language and cultural difference which had an influence in the aforementioned initial failure, for Fanon the problem did not uniquely lie in the application of a European technique to a different context.

One has to take into account how colonialism has an impact on the relation of the Algerians to their own culture. Institutional psychotherapy, he argues, is not a technique or a method but it is itself political and inseparable from conflict. In this line, his article on the study with Algerian women on the Thematic Apperception Test (T.A.T) explores how perception and imagination are imbricated with concrete the political and historical conditions.

The fourth section addresses Fanon's exploration of Algerian approaches to mental health, the understanding of madness, the institutions of mental health, their relation with the social organization, gender dimensions, and the efficiency of the practices related with religion, magic and dances of possession.

The fifth section addresses the efforts to modify the asylum through the writings of Fanon on the internal journal of the hospital. The editorials of Fanon enable to see the inner life of the hospital and expose Fanon's main concerns and doubts on the communication with the boarders, the engagement of the nursing staff, the need to create a specific nursing training, and to change what he called sadistic attitudes. The subsection 6.5.1 addresses this aspect from a theoretical perspective by focusing on an important article that Fanon wrote on the phenomenon of agitation and the asylum. In the article Fanon distances himself from Tosquelles understanding of agitation and hints the limits of institutional psychotherapy.

The sixth section covers Fanon's letter of resignation. In it, he issues a critique of the social role of the psychiatrist and the psychiatric hospital, its complicity with the dominant regime and its functioning as separating non-normative populations. The letter is treated as a manifesto on the intersection between psychiatry and politics, on the complex relation between healing and freeing, and the tensions and the

contradictions of a political psychiatry. It is by delving into these contradictions that Fanon links his position as a doctor, intellectual and a militant.

The seventh section is dedicated to the lectures at the University of Tunis in 1959-1960, after being expelled from Algeria. In those lectures Fanon delved into the relation between psychiatry and society, and analyzed different forms of colonial alienation but also alienation in Europe in relation to labor derived from mechanisms of discipline and surveillance.

The eighth section covers his psychiatric work in Tunis, where he changed his approach to healing and the psychiatric hospital by opening an open mental health clinic. This pioneering experience entailed a shift in the therapeutic approach which focused on the connection between the clinic and society, and increased the distance with institutional psychotherapy without breaking definitely with it.

The ninth section covers Fanon's influence on the critical approaches to psychiatry emerged internationally in the following decades, and also on the relevance of his approach in relation to current, hegemonic psychiatric theories and practices.

### **6.1 The Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital**

Fanon arrived in Algeria in November 1953 as Chef de Service or section director, a task he shared with other four doctors, Jean Dequeker, Raymond Lacaton, M. Micucci, F. Ramée. The arrival of Fanon enabled to slightly relieve the overload of work and a better distribution of the boarders in an oversaturated and ancient hospital, untouched since its inauguration, and facing serious problems of space, infrastructure, personnel, and funding. Despite their different backgrounds and sometimes conflicting views of psychiatry, political positions and understanding of the psychology of the Algerian and the colonial situation, the five co-directors agreed on the fundamental problems of the hospital and of the situation of mental care in

Algeria. In an article co-written soon after Fanon's arrival, "Current aspects of mental care in Algeria" (1955), the five authors exposed the poor conditions of the hospital – which was "moving slowly but surely toward total paralysis" (Fanon, 2018: 401) – made of it an ineffective space for the therapeutic praxis.

Initially designed for 1200 patients, the hospital hosted 2500, and 850 were pending for admission. The authors pointed out that to face the overcrowding every possible space, including corridors or bathrooms, was set up as dormitories, thereby reducing the possibilities of leisure, workshops, labor or meetings. When not in the dormitories the boarders had to spend their time in the yards. The question of space, and its heterogeneity, as we saw in the previous chapter, is one of the central concerns for the transformation of the asylum and the development of institutional psychotherapy. The authors asked, "What hope can there be to perform therapeutic activity in a ward of one hundred and seventy beds?" (Fanon, 2018: 399) The problem of overcrowding was exacerbated by the lack of funding, which manifested itself in an insufficient staff, lack of space and therapeutic facilities, and shortages of electricity and water.

The authors noted that, in contrast to the metropolis, the acceptance of admissions in psychiatric hospitals was not obligatory in the colonies; admissions depended on the space available and the eventual vacancies. The resulting delay causes that by the time of the hospitalization the condition of the patients is aggravated. In some cases this manifests itself in the aggressive behavior of the patient or of the family towards the patient. Some patients are left at the gates of the hospital until his or her admission. In other cases the aggressive behavior of the patient follows a judiciary process rather than medical and waits in prison rather than in a hospital. Likewise, discharging patients from the hospital faced a variety of difficulties. The hospital

hosted patients from remote areas and encompassed a larger region than what was initially conceived for. The contact with distant families of the boarders is difficult and has to be done by the administration in the absence of medical facilities in all areas. The absence of an extended network of mental care facilities that reaches far away areas impedes to follow up the progress of the discharged patients, to guide their re-adaptation into society and to provide aftercare services. The authors also observe a gender element that hinders the discharge of Muslim women:

The Muslim wife's status, which allows the husband instant remarriage, is an insurmountable source of difficulties. After repudiation, cured women remain in hospital for several months before being able to reintegrate into a family household, which, in the absence of any precise information, it is necessary to find without any available help from a medico-social service. (Fanon, 2018: 402)

The Blida-Joinville hospital had some annexed buildings in hospitals located more than one hundred kilometers away. These buildings were run by underqualified staff and did not count on the presence of doctors or intern but depended on the monthly visits from the doctors of Blida. In response to the persistent administrative, organizational and economic constraints the authors proposed to release the tension upon the larger psychiatric hospitals, being Blida-Joinville the largest of them by developing a proper network of mental care that reaches all levels of the therapeutic process, that enables an expanded provision of services, and is aware to the sociocultural elements of Algerian life. Starting from the qualified training of nursing staff, creating local mental care facilities, aftercare organizations and increase the number of social worker.

## **6.2 Success and failures of institutional psychotherapy**

Fanon was responsible of a ward comprised by 165 European women and another ward of 220 Muslim men. The policies of mental care separated boarders by gender and race. In spite of the dominant position of the Algiers School and the skepticism,



reticence or distrust of his fellow section- directors, Fanon enjoyed enough autonomy to apply the knowledge and experience acquired in Saint-Alban in the two wards he was in charge of. As we saw in the previous chapter, institutional psychotherapy explores the different dimensions of alienation and seeks to reform and humanize the institution, to turn the asylum into a place of disalienation and therapy, to create a collective life reducing the hierarchies, roles and barriers between boarders, orderlies, nursing and doctors, to restore the freedom of the mentally ill and turn them into agents of the whole social and therapeutic process so that they can be reintegrated into society (Cherki, 2011; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

In Blida-Joinville, such efforts initially yielded unequal results. Whereas in the ward of European women the application of institutional psychotherapy quickly succeeded, it failed in the ward of Muslim men. In a self-reflective article, “Social therapy in a ward of Muslim men: Methodological difficulties”, published in 1954 in *L'Information psychiatrique*, Fanon and his intern Jacques Azoulay describe in detail the process of applying institutional psychotherapy, the responses of the patients, analyze the reasons behind their failure, which paved the way for a new direction in their psychiatric work. This failed experience was not the end of the project, it instead brought about a self-reflection and critical evaluation which

enabled us to orient our research in a wholly other direction. We have adopted greater modesty faced with the culture presented to us. We took some steps towards it, fearful and attentive. And the extraordinary thing is that the few indistinct notes that, at the start, awoke our interest, little by little came to form a coherent whole. (Fanon, 2018: 354)

The authors introduced ward meetings, newspaper meetings, regular celebrations and festivities, created committees for the recreational evenings, the printing and editing of a newspaper, the film club or the record collection, introduced workshops of ergotherapy on embroidery, tricot, basket making, dressmaking. In the ward of

European women the boarders actively engaged in the adequate decoration of the space, its adaptation and transformation for each activity. The patients and all the staff participated in the celebrations; the boarders assumed the responsibility for the organization of the activities and took the initiative in the creation of their own regular events, where the medical staff attended as spectators. The authors point out that these activities only constitute “the framework of an increasingly enriched social life”. The patient is not alien to what surrounds her; the new environment elicits responses and modifies the relation of the patient with the asylum and also the way that her madness is lived. One of the first consequences was the disappearance of the so-called agitation:

the very atmosphere of the ward had changed, and we were able to return all the restraint equipment without needing to fear any major difficulties. Not only had asylum life become less distressing for many, but the rhythm of discharges had already markedly increased (Fanon, 2018: 357).

In contrast, the application “of the same methods” in the ward of Muslim men was qualified as a “total failure” (2018: 357). Fanon and Azoulay had previously carried out seminars and preparatory meetings with the nurses. They “carefully prepared” the first meeting with the doctors, nurses, the staff, and some patients. They arranged the scene, selected a skilled interpreter, and prepared every detail. During the meeting, “we tried to take an interest in each of the patients, to transform that abstract and impersonal multitude into a coherent group driven by collective preoccupations.” The response of the patients was silence and lack of interest. The following meetings would gradually become shorter, they became “only a ceremonial devoid of meaning, absurd and, after some hesitation, we decided to break them off.” (Fanon, 2018: 358) Alternatively, Fanon and Azoulay attempted to promote evening discussions, games and songs guided only by nurses. But interest soon decreased and patients progressively retired to their beds. The change of the nurses in charge of the activities

yielded equal results. Indifference was also the response of the patients to oriental music on the radio, domino games, and ward parties with music and theatre. The authors reasoned that since they could not lead the patients to participate they would instead try to entertain them by attending the activities of European women and the film club. But patients would not attend unless being directly invited to the events or they would leave during the projection of a film. Fanon and Azoulay kept providing options for the Algerian men but the latter refused any engagement on the basis of being tired or feeling pain. Their participation in the newspaper also failed. Their involvement in working activities in the yard was irregular and was not considered as having a proper therapeutic value since it was taken as a distraction, or a temporary form of escaping the wards and avoiding other therapies. Neither the creation of ergotherapy workshops elicited the attention of the patients, who refused “to enter into dialogue”. Fanon and Azoulay observed that

not only were we unable, after three months, and despite much effort, to get the Muslim patients interested in the beginnings of collective life that was being organized in the European sector, but the ward atmosphere remained oppressive, stifling. (Fanon, 2018: 361)

The environment in the ward of Muslim men was loaded with mistrust and fear. The frequent arguments, quarrels and screams of the patients raised the fear of the nurses who had to mediate between them and sometimes were aggressed, and the alarm of the staff in the ward. Nurses demanded the adoption of confinement and punitive measures, patients were isolated or tied up not only after an incident but also as a preventive measure. Fanon and Azoulay point out that the “vicious circle – agitation, restraint, agitation – always kept up a veritably concentration-camp mindset”, but their attempts to minimize the punitive structures met the “inertia”, irony, or the frontal opposition of the nurses (Fanon, 2018: 361). The authors conclude their description by emphasizing the “striking” contrast between the two

wards after three months; the climate of the European women's ward was therapeutic whereas that of the Muslim men remained constricting and punitive.

In the subsequent analysis, Fanon and Azoulay acknowledged their responsibility for this failed experience and turn their critical gaze toward themselves. They recognize the limitations of their understanding of the condition of the Algerian patient, question their methodological decisions, their assumptions on Algerian society, and outline the importance of the sociocultural dimension. The authors assert that one of their main errors was to take the part for the whole, that is, to conceive the process of institutional psychotherapy on Algerian patients on the basis of the outcomes with European patients.

We had wanted to create institutions and we had forgotten that all such approaches must be preceded with a tenacious, real and concrete interrogation into the organic bases of the indigenous society. By virtue of what impairment of judgement had we believed it possible to undertake a western-inspired social therapy in a ward of mentally ill Muslim men? How was a structural analysis possible if the geographical, historical, cultural and social frames were bracketed? (Fanon, 2018: 362)

Fanon and Azoulay notice that the need to have two interpreters altered the relation between the psychiatrist and the patient, in which language plays a fundamental role. To engage in a meaningful dialogue, to overcome the mistrust and the reserves of the patient while ignoring the multiple elements that go hand in hand with his language represented an additional obstacle. Fanon repeats what he had advanced in *Black Skin White Masks*, "to speak a language is to bear the weight of a culture" (Fanon, 2018: 368). That is a language cannot be separated, from its historical, contextual, social, affective and somatic elements. The figure of the interpreter was absent in the everyday life of the Algerian and was associated with the encounter with the colonial administration and the legal system. The presence of the Kabyle and Arabic interpreters in the hospital incited the mistrust of the patients

which makes “all communication difficult”. In the rare cases where trust between doctors and patients had been built the patient expressed directly, in detail and with enthusiasm his situation. He omitted the presence of the interpreter and considered it incapable to convey what he had to express. Fanon and Azoulay add that “a study of this three-way dialogue would reveal a disruption of the phenomenon of the encounter.” (Fanon, 2018: 367). For the doctors, the need of an interpreter represents an obstacle for the doctor’s comprehension of the patient, for it breaks the synchrony between prosody, body language and the content of the language<sup>229</sup>. The doctor is deprived of the ten-minute statement of the patient, which is summarized in two minutes by the interpreter. Often, they add, the interpreter takes the liberty to translate the patient’s speech “according to some stereotyped formula, depriving it of all its richness: ‘He says that he hears *djnoun*’ – indeed, one no longer knows if the delusion is real or induced.” (Fanon, 2018: 368; translation modified).

Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce highlight that to delve into the meaning of different and foreign expressions of suffering in a setting of oppression requires a special attitude and sensitivity on the part of the doctors, and a unique alertness to both the traps of translation and diagnosis. In their own words:

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<sup>229</sup> Out of this experience Fanon started taking Arabic lessons. Fanon was also probably acquainted with Tosquelles particularly intuitive approach to language. Tosquelles argues that a proper psychiatrist has to be a foreigner to the patient or pretend to be one. However, the distance between French and Catalan and French and Arabic may complicate Tosquelles’ view. Although versed in French, Tosquelles held a marked Catalan accent until the end of his life and causally mixed both languages in conversation. Alice Cherki remarks that Fanon, who spoke a careful and proper French, was astonished by Tosquelles’ strong and tenacious accent after having spent more than ten years in France (Cherki, 2011). Tosquelles stated that “it is not a frivolity on my part to speak such a bad French”. For him, the fact of being foreign confused the patient and raised her curiosity since it broke with the assumptions of what is supposed to be the proper language of a doctor. More importantly, he adds, this strangeness facilitates the psychiatrist to enter into the world of the mentally ill since it required the effort of the patient, who in order to understand is obliged to translate and to take an active position. Tosquelles also declared that when listening to a patient he pays more attention to the music, the rhythm, the accents, the tone, the inflection, the articulation, the silence and the cuts than to the content of the words. (Tosquelles, 1991)

‘Real or induced’: in just three words, Fanon and Azoulay foreground the responsibilities and attitudes a clinician has to keep in mind when listening to unfamiliar experiences or ‘cultural’ idioms related to suffering. Above all, they argued, clinicians have to question the meaning of delusion in a context such as colonialism, where this can literally translate the experience of ‘being acted on.’ By acknowledging their limited access to the nature of patients’ delusions, and admitting that the risks associated with translation might result in a stereotypical interpretation of their content, Fanon and Azoulay demonstrated the subtlety of their analysis, laying bare some of the dynamics of institutionalized medicine as well as the challenges posed in “intercultural” settings. (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 316)

In hindsight Fanon and Azoulay qualified their initiatives in the ward of Muslim men as naïve. The ergotherapy workshops proposed activities which were usually carried out by Algerian women. Likewise, the failure to participate in the musical and dramatic activities was due to the fact that singing and performing were activities carried out by specific characters. In Algerian society the actor and the singer were a professional external to the group. Theater was at the time limited to the main cities whereas in the villages the figure of the itinerant storyteller had concrete functions such as spreading news or tales. The celebrations that were proposed in the ward of men did not have the family or religious component that informed Algerian festivities. Playing games may be part of the process of socialization, but Algerian children quitted the school at a young age to help with the cattle or carry out small jobs. Also, the entertainments proposed by doctors and nurses “were not for the Muslim patients a practically ‘vital’ need as they were for the Europeans” (Fanon, 2018: 369). The movies shown, their plots and the characters were unfamiliar to their systems of reference. In the case of *Les Noces de sable*, based on the character of an Arab prince and set in North Africa, “the psychological framework remained western” and Muslim patients did not “participate fully in the action or identify with the personages.” (Fanon, 2018: 370). The elaboration of the newspaper did not consider the high illiteracy rate, the importance of the oral tradition, and omitted the role of the *taleb* or public writer of letters.

Fanon and Azoulay observe that their initial approach was unreflectively framed within the politics of assimilation. This assumed that the Algerian must not be understood, and instead it is the Algerian who has to do the effort to understand and to adapt to the proposed framework. “Assimilation here does not presuppose a reciprocity of perspectives. It is up to one entire culture to disappear in favour of another.” (Fanon, 2018: 362). The failure of institutional psychotherapy can be interpreted as form of resistance of the Algerian patients and staff towards the disappearance of a culture (Cherki, 2011). Yet for Fanon’s psychiatric project the relation between the politics of assimilation and psychiatry exceeded the terrain of culture. The authors argue that “a revolutionary attitude was essential” at the level of theory and practice. The existing theories of the Algiers School offered a poor understanding of the psychiatry of the Algerian, mostly limited to physiological aspects. This situation demanded a renewal and a re-construction of the theoretical body. By referring to Marcel Mauss’ total social fact, Fanon affirms that such theoretical work needed to “grasp the North African social fact” in its “totality”, that is, to encompass the biological, psychological, institutional, cultural, aesthetic, cognitive, political, economic, religious, moral, affective, aspects of Algerian life, its social constitution and the modes of sociability (Fanon, 2018: 363). It is by grasping the total social fact and placing the asylum within it that Fanon shifted the orientation of his work. This experience led Fanon and Azoulay to do anthropological and sociological research and to visit Arab and Kabyle villages. In parallel to the Arabic lessons and the anthropological and sociological approach to Algerian society and to his activities in the asylum Fanon attended ecstatic ceremonies and nights of dances of possessions, rituals conducted by marabout to expel the djinn or evil spirits, he got translated ancient Muslim treaties of medicine and mental health. (Cherki, 2011)

In this article the authors sketch the ethnic composition of the region, the distribution of land, the role of religion, the institutions that regulate social life and the patriarchal character of the family and social life. They fundamentally emphasized the changes that were taking place during colonialism, the disruption taking place in the Algerian economic modes, the problems of farming and the changes in the collective property of land, the regression of nomadism and the consequences of settling down in the renting of labor, the migrations to the city, the creation of a proletarian class without a proper industrialization, the traditional authorities and social and economic institutions, the formation of shanty towns. It is this changing setting and in this concrete time where they have to situate the asylum and reconsider their psychiatric orientation. In “Daily life in the douars”, an unpublished ethnography from 1954 co-written with Azoulay, the authors sought to capture the spaces, institutions, customs, and the worldview which inform social life in a Kabyle village. The douar is both a geographical and human community. It is strongly based on the intricacy of religious, social and cultural practices and beliefs that link individuals to a collectivity through strong relations of solidarity, a common notion of time and understanding of the present and the future as in the hands of god, a harmonious and free of disturbances view of life, a common approach to illness, adversities, or by clearly defined patriarchal and gerontocratic hierarchies. Although the author’s emphasize its traditional and relatively stable character, they do not portray the douar as a timeless and fixed cultural, social and human structure, but rather attempt to locate and describe the douar within the more marked changes taking place in cities and larger villages, or in nomadism and agricultural regions. The urban dweller is more strongly exposed to the economic, technological and cultural changes derived from colonialism, but despite their pronounced differences both the



rural and the urban Algerian recognize each other “as belonging to one and the same cultural community.” (Fanon, 2018: 375).

Following these analysis Fanon set up different institutions and structures in the ward of Muslim men. Namely, the creation of a nursing school and a nursing degree in mental health care, a Moorish café as a meeting place for men, the reactivation of the mosque, the habilitation of a football stadium and the formation of football teams, the introduction of suitable ergotherapy workshops, and the creation of a small open section. Blida’s mufti reticently attended several of the first religious celebrations that were introduced in the hospital. But his presence gradually became more frequent and his dialogues with the boarders functioned like actual group psychotherapies. The hospital became another stop for the itinerant storytellers passing through the region, and for the performances of a musician, Abderrahmane Azziz who would eventually become part of the nursing staff. To the special performances of the Blida Orchestra also attended Algerian women; it was the first time that the ululations were heard in the hospital. These changes increased the social tissue in the ward of men and the involvement of the Algerian staff in the process, and patients progressively started to take charge of the activities (Murard, 2008; Cherki, 2011).

### **6.3 “Psychiatry has to be political”**

The story of the initial failure and the successful redirection of the situation may be understood as such if cultural difference was the crux of the issue and Fanon’s dilemma lied in how to translate the experience of Saint-Alban to the setting of Algeria through a form of intercultural dialogue. But the matter was more complex (Murard, 2008). Just like in his critique of Mannoni’s psychology of the Malagasy in *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon asserted that the Malagasy does not exist anymore, his analysis of Algeria does not resort to a folkloric view of culture and society as a

solution, but he puts the focus on the “*new fact*, born of the colonial situation”. That is, in the concrete changes taking place and the fragmentation and exhaustion derived from the impact of colonialism in the Algeria of 1954. Fanon and Azoulay concluded that “[t]his society, which is said to be rigid, is fermenting from the base.” (2018: 367). As he put it later, “[c]olonialism disrupts all the references of the local society”, it “impairs the relations that the colonized have with their own culture. In many cases the practice of tradition is a troubled practice.” (Fanon, 1959: 118; own italics; my translation<sup>230</sup>)

Later, in a conversation with his intern Charles Géronimi on the failure of implementing institutional psychotherapy Fanon provides an angle of the problem that was not addressed in the article with Azoulay. Géronimi was surprised concerning the “impairment of judgement” of the one who had written *Black Skin White Masks* or “The North African Syndrome”, to which Fanon answered:

It was not simply a matter of imposing external methods more or less adapted to the ‘indigenous mentality’. I had to demonstrate several things: that the values of Algerian culture are different than those of colonial culture, that these structuring values must be embraced without any complexes by the carriers of such values—the Algerian medical personnel and the Algerian patients. In order to have the support of the Algerian medical staff I had to incite them a sentiment of revolt of the sort: we are as competent as the Europeans (...) Psychiatry must be political. (Cherki, 2011: 130; my translation<sup>231</sup>).

Institutional psychotherapy is not a technique or a method to be applied or adapted, “but rather about owning a process that is implicitly political” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 157). This passage illustrates Fanon’s understanding of culture as

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<sup>230</sup> « d’un fait nouveau, né de la situation coloniale » « le colonialisme bouleverse toutes les données de la société autochtone » « dénature jusqu’aux relations qu’entretient le colonisé avec sa propre culture. Dans un grand nombre de cas, la pratique de la tradition est une pratique troublée »

<sup>231</sup> « Il n’était pas question pour moi d’imposer de l’extérieur des méthodes plus ou moins adaptées à la ‘mentalité indigène’. Il me fallait démontrer plusieurs choses : que la culture algérienne était porteuse de valeurs autres que la culture coloniale ; que ces valeurs structurantes devaient être assumées sans complexe par ceux qui en sont porteurs –les Algériens soignants ou soignés. Il me fallait pour avoir l’adhésion du personnel algérien susciter chez eux un sentiment de révolte sur le mode : nous sommes aussi compétents que les Européens (...) La psychiatrie doit être politique. »

embedded in conflicts, history and politics. It also exemplifies his dialectical view of conflict as intrinsic to human interaction and to some extent a necessary element to forge human relations. Conflict makes explicit the political process, lies bare inertias and self-concealed positions by posing a challenge and compelling a response in the form of the affirmation of the dignity and self-respect of the challenged. In this view, conflict activates critical reflection, action, and the building of alliances to change the conditions.

This intricacy of culture, history, politics and the psyche is patent in another self-critical article, “TAT in Muslim women: Sociology of perception and imagination” presented at the *Congrès des médecins aliénistes et neurologues de France et des Pays de Langue Française* in 1956. The article, co-authored by Fanon and Geronimi, is a preliminary study of the larger project of using the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Algerian patients. In this case, the subjects were a group of Algerian women who were part of the small open service and did not present serious disorders. As in the case of introducing institutional psychotherapy the authors describe their attempts to apply the test as a “systematized failure” (Fanon, 2018: 432). The failure in therapeutic terms again served to initiate a process of self-critique and interrogation of the methodological assumptions and the epistemological basis of psychiatry as part of the redirection towards a critical and sensitive psychiatry attuned to the experience of the patients.

The TAT is a projective personality test consisting in a series ambiguous images and pictures. The patient or the customer is asked to freely interpret them and to elaborate a story out of them, to construct the characters, develop a plot and present an ending to the story. Among the objectives of the test, it enables the doctor the access to traits of the personality and to unconscious mental processes and needs, it

sheds light on problem solving skills, and also stimulates the imagination and creativity of the patient or customer. Fanon and G eronimi briefly mentioned a study on the adaptation of the TAT to the Congo, and a study that calls to take into account the different social, cultural and temporal variations within Europe in using the test. In their experience with Algerian women Fanon and his coauthor follow these lines of thought while at the same time deviate from them.

The authors noticed that Algerian women tenaciously strived to describe the pictures, but did not establish a connection between them. Their responses were basically enumerations and descriptions. They tried to enumerate all the things they knew, or meticulously described the image providing excessive and unrequested details. The responses were fragmentary, unorganized, and devoid of coherence, structure or a narrative thread. “There is no stage, no drama. (...) Despite our precise instructions, the Muslim patients did not tell us about what was happening in the cards but instead what was in them.” (Fanon, 2018: 429). Fanon and G eronimi describe in detail the reactions of the patients, their perplexity before the unfamiliar images, the silences, hesitations, the perceptual mistakes, and the efforts to discern and the problems to identify the objects. The authors point out that

by asking them to describe, to live a scene elaborated by westerners and for westerners, we immerse them in a different, foreign, heterogeneous and non-appropriable world.(...) The lines of force organizing perception are missing: the patients ‘spell out’ the card without ever living it. (2018: 430; translation modified)

In regard to the imagination and creativity of the patients, the authors encountered similar difficulties. The patients refused to provide a background or to anticipate the ending of the story by simply saying that they could not know it, that lying is forbidden, or by appealing to religious prohibitions, since anticipating the future would entail taking the place of God. Acknowledging their methodological error,

Fanon and G eronimi noted that the test required an adjustment. But the failure of the test could not simply be attributed to the cultural difference of the Algerian in regard to the western origin of the test, or to the credulity and the deficiencies associated with primitivism as the Algiers School would rationalize. The authors affirmed that the responses provided were “devoid of psychoanalytical value”, that is they did not enable the psychiatrists to elucidate the personality and the psychic life of the Algerian women, but in such responses there “is an attitude that demands we seek what lies beyond it” (Fanon, 2018: 431). In other words, as the title of their article suggests, the responses of the patients were more indicative of the sociological forces shaping perception and imagination, of the concrete social, cultural and historical world in which they lived than about the patients themselves. As the authors put it,

The incoherent, inappropriate, vague and disjointed replies; the apparently caricatural perceptions – all indicate that our method has something wrong with it. The dynamisms flowing within Maghrebin society, the lived experience of the surrounding European world, the Muslim’s marginalized existence, which leads to a scotomization, a disinterest, the cultural truth, ought to have been thematized. Our patient’s inadaptation is the correlate of the method’s inadequacy. (Fanon, 2018: 430)

In hindsight, it was not surprising for the authors that the Algerian women could not *live* the images of the test. The methodological inadequacy consisted in detaching perception from the social conditions, the existential dimensions, the experience of marginalization of the subjects, and from their “precise, demanding, and in a sense, spasmed, cultural world”, (Fanon, 2018: 430), namely the impact of colliding forces on symbolic forms and on arresting the very production of symbols. In his psychiatric praxis, Fanon attempts “to set the psychological suffering of many of the patients within the flux of historical events and the net of symbols that contained their existence.” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 159).

Similarly, the absence of creativity and imagination was not addressed as an issue of cultural or religious difference. Fanon and Géronimi assert that the absence of imagination and the attitudes of the patients towards fictional activities require examining the concrete and real world, where the imaginary life is nourished from and draws its foundations. Rather than an isolated phenomenon, imagination, like thought or reason, is connected to the apprehension of the real and the active engagement with the concrete world. Imagination is intrinsic to participating, bringing meaning, and constituting the world. The authors affirm that “[t]he imagination, the imaginary, are only possible to the extent that the real belongs to us<sup>232</sup>.” (Fanon, 2018: 431) Thus, what was at stake for Fanon and Géronimi was the condition of these women as free agents to participate in the constitution of the world.

Faced with unusual objects, with unidentifiable situations, rejected by hostile because heterogeneous viewpoints, the Muslim woman is unable to elaborate any imaginary existence. The rare stories gathered did not restore us a world. (2018: 431-432).

As Gibson and Beneduce add, the proposed images did not trigger the imagination of the patients not simply because their content and connotations were culturally different to the patients, but because they mirrored their condition of dispossession: “The women were humiliated by images that reflected the full extent of their extraneity; they had no means of recognizing themselves in the test.” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 431) In contrast, Fanon and Géronimi note, when these patients were presented a blank card the foreign and constraining element disappeared, the

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<sup>232</sup> Fanon and Géronimi’s thought echoes Sartre’s phenomenology of the imaginary world. Sartre posited that the condition of possibility for consciousness to imagine is “being-in-the world” or “to be situated in the world”. That is, although it seems as a flight from the real, imagination is motivated and conditioned by the concrete and *particular* apprehension of the real by a free consciousness (2004:185). Sartre argues that there is a reciprocal relation between the apprehension of the real and surpassing it “towards the imaginary”. Imagination “appears on the ground of the world”, but the world is apprehended as world by surpassing it through imagination. Thus, imagination is not secondary and contingent but an “essential and transcendental condition of consciousness.” There is no consciousness without imagination, as there is no consciousness without cogito, he concludes. (2004: 188)

absence of images unleashed the imagination of the patient: “Not running up against a world that excluded them, our patients formed rich and varied stories.” Fanon and G eronimi concluded that after this experience, in order to capture the different dimensions of the patients’ lives, to seize the instability of a human made world, their following trials would be situated within “a spatio-temporal framework, animated by cultural dynamisms that are homogeneous to the psycho-affective forces under examination.” (Fanon, 2018: 432)

As Gibson and Beneduce note, the failed experiences in sociotherapy or with the TAT did not led Fanon to adopt a cultural relativism or a condescending approach towards local culture, but to develop a political phenomenology of these failed attempts, supported by a notion of culture “immersed in history, in which relations of sense are always bound up with relations of force, power, and resistance. (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 156). Yet, this view of culture did not prevent Fanon to explore and take seriously the local imaginaries, the expressions of suffering in the local systems of reference, the meaning of madness in Algerian society, the understanding of the mentally ill, her position within with the family circle and within the broader and changing social setting, the traditional approaches and treatments of mental illness, and the central role of religion, in which the cultural and symbolic elements of madness and health were ingrained.

#### **6.4 Local approaches to mental health**

Fanon’s explorations of the local understandings of mental health and disease did not run parallel to his work in the asylum but intersected with it in the overall task of reconstructing a psychiatric practice attuned to the singularities of the patient. In the above commented “Daily life in the douars” Fanon and Azoulay described how the cultural, the social and the religious aspects are overlapped in Algerian society. This

is also the case when it comes to the understanding of disease and cure. Social life in the douar revolves around the Moorish café, the *djema* or assembly, the public square, the markets, the family celebrations, and the religious feasts. Yet, the authors observe that social life is spatially separated by gender. “Women live in a closed society that remains in the shadows of the men’s society.” Woman lived “a largely cloistered existence” (Fanon, 2018: 376), fundamentally reduced to the domestic ambit, whereas man’s social life is public, “open to the world” and bereft of constrictions (Fanon, 2018: 377). Women have their own social life, consisting in meeting with other women, receiving visits from relatives or they play a specific role in religious feasts. Inside the household the roles and spaces of husband and wife are clearly defined, the authors equate their relation to that of master and servant. The wife is usually hosted in the house of the husband and represents the foreign and unknown element in the household. Yet, they also noticed that this situation is not exempt of ambiguity,

on the one hand, her position is a subjugated one and, on the other, it stymies the power of the man. The wife participates in the occult, she stands in relation to a world that throws the man, she knows a lot of secrets; she must therefore be taken good care of. The man fears his servant; the wife thus gets her revenge. (2018: 378)

Women have access to a world knowledge that escapes the sphere of influence of men. Among other things, women are the first instance in the treatment of disease. They have access to the world of the djinn, “and know the power of the word and of desire.” They are acquainted with curing recipes, which the authors describe as effective (2018: 383). Besides women, there are two superior instances to which the sick person can resort to, the *iqqachs* and the saints. The *iqqachs* mediate with the spirits through their knowledge of the mystical character of words and recitations. The *iqqach* is a sort of Koranic sorcerer acquainted in the sacred texts and out of



which he can animate transcendental forces (Desparmet 1993: 73). The saints stand next to God and their healing power needs to be invoked by a marabout. The ill person can also resort to other sorcerers, but this is seldom done since they are not physically part of the community and live in distant places, and they are also foreign to the beliefs of the douars. They possess a specific and personal science considered obscure and dangerous, which is not based on Koranic wisdom and can be at the very root of the disease or bring new disease.

The authors note that the harmonious existence in the douar and the order of things that stems from the divine can be altered by external adversities such as natural catastrophes, economic crises or cataclysms. These events do not entail a breach between the individual and the collective, the personal history is still linked to the history of the community. This does not apply in case of disease, since illness alters the fundamental adherence of the individual and the community. Putting the emphasis on the temporal and spatial consequences of illness, the authors observe that the sick person is isolated, cut off from the community; there is a split between the personal history and the history of the collective. The sick person becomes an individual, “powerless, alone with an evil that is strictly his” (2018: 382).. In a long passage that I will not quote at length, Fanon and Azoulay switch to the first person in order to narrate in detail the inner dialogue of the sick person who has been disconnected from the community:

Whether God is testing me through illness, whether he favours me (..) all this escapes me, the ways of God being foreign to me. (...)So I will consult those privileged beings able to help me. and this with all the more hope as I know man is able to affect me in my health, Thus the illness that man may have contributed to inflicting upon me, he can also take part in removing. In the society that surrounds me, several categories of individuals may come to my aid. First, the women (...) (2018: 382-383)

The turn to the perspective of the sick person reflects the beginning of a personal history, of becoming and individual once the ties with the community have been altered. Here the authors do not simply describe a behavior or an event but put the focus on the lived experience of disease and cure, that is, on how they appear for consciousness, as an object of thought. By approaching objects of thought that are “phenomenologically real” Fanon and Azoulay attempt to grasp how the self and the world are mutually constituted and thereby to understand how values are lived and focus the production of meaning of disease and cure in social terms. In this movement there is an implicit bifurcation from the rationalizations of the Algiers School which would treat the behavior of the Muslim in terms of fatalism or credulity. At the outset Fanon and his co-author observed that considering the “thrilling and generous reality of genies” (2018: 373) in North Africa the psychiatrist is tempted to order and classify what is complex and does not follow a linear progression. The concern of comprehending the meanings instead of capturing or seizing reality is a constant in Fanon’s thought since his dissertation. As he put it in *Black Skin White Masks*, “[t]he essential for us is not to accumulate facts or behaviors but to draw their meaning.” (1952: 164; my translation<sup>234</sup>)

This initial study had an impact on the changes introduced in the hospital, and also paved the way for further and more specific research on madness in Algeria “from the inside” (Fanon, 2018: 421), as Fanon and his intern François Sanchez put it in “Maghrebi Muslims and their Attitude to Madness”. In this article, published in 1956, the authors emphasize that mental care practices in the Maghreb are deeply rooted in culture and endowed with a humanistic character, which itself requires special

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<sup>234</sup> « L'essentiel pour nous n'est pas d'accumuler des faits, des comportements, mais de dégager leur sens. »

attention, and that is absent in Europe despite its roots date back to Muslim approaches to mental care in the Middle Ages.

The authors compare Maghrebian to Western representations of madness. In the West, they notice, there is an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards the patient. On the one hand the mentally ill is considered as an ill person whose behavior is associated to the pathology at hand. On the other hand, it is common to consider the mentally ill as responsible for her actions and her illness. They point out that it is recurrent among relatives or medical and nursing staff the suspicion that the mentally ill indulges or takes advantage from her condition to coerce, exploit, or commit aggressive behaviors. Alternatively, in the Maghreb mental illness is determined by the external action of genies or djnoun. The responsibility for the pathology lies in the genie and not in the patient, who is “absolutely alienated”, an “innocent victim of the genie or genies that possess him” (2018: 422). The authors emphasize that the attitude to the mentally ill is “guided by a concern to respect the human in the person.” (2018: 424) The patient is never dehumanized and the group never loses sight of the human side and the dignity in the patient, who “preserves intact the image of a person’s normality despite the existence of the illness.” (2018: 424) Hence the respect and veneration are not directed towards madness itself, neither towards the mentally ill, but towards the human in the mentally ill. Likewise, the social dimension of the patient is also kept intact. Mental disorders do not elicit embarrassment and do not provoke the isolation or aggressive behavior towards the patient. It is strongly determined by the temporary intervention of the djinn, once is over and the patient is cured, she can resume her activities and reincorporate into the group without raising mistrust or ambivalence. The authors outline that mental disorders are considered accidental and contingent, they are attributed to the external

intervention of the djinn and are considered curable, do not affect the basic structure of the personality, and there is no notion of a chronic disorder.

Fanon and Sanchez observe “a harmonious articulation of beliefs in the Maghreb, enabling the creation and implementation of ‘mental care’.” (2018: 424) Namely, there is a dynamic balance between the cultural, the symbolic, the ethical, the religious, the view of the human, the social values and structures and the therapeutic of psychotherapeutic practices. Although in quantitative terms these practices do not effectively address the problems of mental illness, the authors see in the “profoundly holistic spirit” of such practices the explanation for the humanistic character of Maghrebian mental care, which, “at the human level it possesses a great value that cannot be limited to the mere efficacy of Maghrebi therapy.” (2018: 424)

If in the article on the Muslim attitude to madness the authors attempt to “reconstitute the historicity of suffering”, in “Introduction to Sexuality Disorders among North Africans” Fanon insists on the perspective from the inside in order to explore the “local idioms of suffering” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 151). This article, co-written by Fanon, Azoulay and Sanchez in 1955 following their ethnographic research in Kabyle villages, responds to the need to account for the influence of the *djinn* or genies in the expression of mental disorders, and how they inform and structure different aspects of everyday life. To that effect the authors relied on a “well-reputed” *taleb* specialized in treating impotence –although the authors point out that “his explanations seemed somewhat confused to us” (Fanon, 2018: 386). The authors also drew from the primary sources of the *taleb* and marabouts such as the *Book of Clemency on Medicine and Wisdom*, a Middle Ages treaty by Al-Suyuti that describes carefully the origin and the treatment of sexual disorders.

Fanon and his co-authors noticed that there was a recurrent and frequent association between mental disorders and sexuality, mostly impotence and vaginismus. The article explore how that the significance of the troubles of sexuality required addressing their origin in “normal consciousness, the nodes of belief” (2018: 385), that is, to look at the cultural, social, religious aspects imbued in the understanding of sexual disorders. The authors point out that sexual disorders are understood in relation to magical practices “and have to be treated as such.” (2018: 386) The origin of sexual impotence may lie in the punishing responses of the *djnnoun* after having been offended or annoyed. In these cases the impotent man must resort to a *taleb* in order to mitigate the *djnnoun* through invocations or amulets with magic formulae. Another source of sexual impotence lies in acts of sorcery and magic which are used to *bind* a man. Some of these magic practices are licit and fall within the moral domain of the community such as the cases of selective impotence where the wife who has been cheated binds the husband to herself and turn him impotent to other women. However, there are other cases that society rejects and equates to black magic such as the spells coming from the revenge of a jealous or repudiated woman that produce the total impotence of the man. The cure of the impotent man may take place either when the woman renounces to the binding, or through the intervention of the *taleb* who counterbalances the spell with another form of magic.

Fanon and the co-authors emphasize the “essential value of speech” in the magic and healing practices; Incantations, invocations, recitations, verbal prescriptions, formulae, utterances instructions or Koranic verses have a capacity to bind and a power to affect the body (2018: 389). As it was stated, throughout Fanon’s work there is an implicit reflection on the performative character of words and language, on the

relation between language and embodiment, on the power of words to move the sensory and the affective corners of the human being beyond their semantic meaning.

The binding and the magic practices do not only target men, they can also be directed at women. Families may want to protect the virginity of the daughter before marriage, or to maintain the celibacy of a repudiated woman. Husbands who doubt on the fidelity of the wife may also bind her by turning impotent other men or by annihilating the desire of the wife. The cases when a woman binds another woman in revenge of being abandoned are rejected by society. The spells and magic practices that society prohibits and that considers licit are indicative of gender relations and power dynamics in Algerian society. As Fanon had referred in “Daily Life in the Douars”, there is a marked gender demarcation in Algerian rural societies which also informed the social, religious, and cultural imaginaries of health and disease. Women’s lives were described as “cloistered”, and “subjugated” in relation to the husband’s open social horizon. Yet, the active participation of women in healing and magic practices enlarged their sphere of influences and conferred them power through their access into the world of the unknown, the occult and the invisible, which was restricted and unsettling to most men. In this case, the recurrent cases of sexual impotence linked to mental disorders among Muslim men were a “preoccupying problem, since Muslim society is founded on the authority of men.” (Fanon, 2018: 385) There are traces of conflict and politics in the suffering body of the Algerian men which are to be explored; the troubles of masculinity in a patriarchal society were indicative of a broader social trouble affecting the roles, reference systems and symbolic and power structures of a society fractured by colonialism. This external disruption reached all aspects and spaces of social life – relations between neighbors, within the family, and intimate relations– “so that even spirits speak like colonizers.”

(Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 151) Thus, beyond the efficacy of the spells and psychotherapeutic treatments, what Fanon, Sanchez and Azoulay describe is a society filled with fear, suspicion, envy, anxieties, feelings of humiliation and of being constantly threatened and persecuted, where the closest other is posited as a threat and there is no clear distinction between the enemy, the relative, the neighbor or the wife. This situation raises a sense of vulnerability that gives give rise to “delirium of persecution” and what would later be called “cultural paranoia”, something which, Fanon, Sanchez and Azoulay hinted, yet did not completely elaborate. (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 145).

As Alice Cherki affirms, Fanon’s concern in the articles on institutional psychotherapy for Muslim men or on the TAT for Muslim women, among others, was to “enable authentic speech by reestablishing an environment that allows each subject to take up again the traces of real or psychological events.” (Cherki, 2017: xi). Simultaneously, in the latter examined articles on Algerian representations of madness his main concern was rather to *listen* to the expressions of suffering and pain and to trace back their historicity. As it was stated, Nigel Gibson and Roberto Beneduce (2017) notice that this required a special medical sensitivity, and also towards politics and culture: Fanon did not approach the expressions of suffering through cultural relativism, romanticism, paternalism, or taking culture as a sign of pathology. Instead, his listening entails a form of bracketing so that he can traverse the complexity of experience, culture, politics embedded in suffering, find their traces and expressions in the body of the patient, and to delve into the meaning of the symptoms, to discern what the patient is saying, what he is asking for, and also what the patient does not and cannot express. He maintained a critical distance towards traditional forms of healing as much as he was suspicious of the diagnostics,

discourses, and categories of European medicine. Although he did not treat both approaches to health symmetrically, he was alert to the alienating potential in both.

Besides the therapeutic role of traditional practices, in his writing on the Algerian war Fanon is concerned in how the culture of the colonized contains elements that can contribute to resistance and liberation, but also alienating practices and values that impede action, lock the colonized into defensive and reactive positions, and impede the openness and motion characteristic of a living culture. In *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, accounting on the individual, social and cultural changes taking place during and because of the decolonization struggle, Fanon optimistically writes that the “old superstitions begin to collapse” referring to marabouts, sorcery and the belief in the *djinn* informing all aspects of life (Fanon, 1959: 132; my translation<sup>235</sup>). This view is modified in his scathing critique in *Les Damnés de la terre* of the persistence of the “harmful genies” and the “magical superstructure” “that create around the colonized a world of prohibitions, barriers and inhibitions far more terrifying than the world of the settler.” (Fanon, 1961: 56; my translation<sup>236</sup>) Fanon’s critique is not so much based on pitting tradition against modernity as in terms of liberation against alienation. The world of genies and sorcery bind the colonized to a tradition, a history, a group, and to an immutable world by creating a parallel reality of fear and phantasms where the colonizer becomes insignificant, he posits. And although in this work Fanon paid less attention to gender relations and the specific situation of women, he clearly stated that the emancipation and empowerment of women could not rely on their access to the invisible and occult world of genies:

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<sup>235</sup> « les vieilles superstitions commencent à s’écrouler »

<sup>236</sup> « génies malfaisants » « superstructure magique » « dispose autour du colonisé un monde de prohibitions, de barrages, d’inhibitions beaucoup plus terrifiant que le monde colonialiste. »



The underdeveloped country must refrain from perpetuating the feudal traditions that prioritize men over women. Women will have exactly the same place as men, not only in the articles of the constitution, but in daily life, at the factory, in the school and in the assemblies. (Fanon, 1961: 191; my translation<sup>237</sup>)

As we will see in further detail in the next chapter, Fanon's treatment of magic and sorcery differs from how he approached the ecstatic dances of possession. Although in the context of the revolution he did not see political and emancipatory value in these practices, which functioned as forms of evasion from the conflict, he conceived them as psychologically significant, and not intrinsically alienating, but as a way of releasing aggressiveness and channeling the accumulated violence in the body.

### **6.5 Healing and care**

The editorials that Fanon wrote for *Notre Journal*, the internal weekly newspaper of the wards, enable to see from within his attempt to reform the institution, the obstacles encountered, the doubts concerning institutional psychotherapy, the decisions taken, the setbacks, the accomplishments, and the elements that inform life inside of the hospital that escaped to the control of the doctors. In these editorials, addressed to the patients and the personnel, he expresses in layman's terms and with a didactic intention his understanding of building a healing institution and the efforts to put it into practice in the daily life. Fanon's entries also show how elements that are implicit and undergird his social and political work and his overall philosophy appear explicitly in the journal and in plainer language.

In his editorials Fanon brings to the forefront the importance of *care* in mental health care, in its different meanings. He insists that healing entails a work of care in the sense of nurturing the other through cultivating different attitudes which produce

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<sup>237</sup> « Le pays sous-développé doit se garder de perpétuer les traditions féodales qui consacrent la priorité de l'élément masculin sur l'élément féminin. Les femmes recevront une place identique aux hommes non dans les articles de la Constitution mais dans la vie quotidienne, à l'usine, à l'école, dans les assemblées. »

different human relations. Care is also present in the sense of being cautious and alert, that is, to be attentive to what the boarders express. And care also takes the meaning of the concern or the anguish that the encounter with the other elicits.

In one of the first editorials, upon an observation of a patient, Fanon addresses the relation between the institution and society exemplified by the peripheral location of the hospital, far away from everyday social life :

Future generations will ask themselves with interest why we were persuaded to build psychiatric hospitals remote from any centre. Several patients have already asked me: ‘Doctor, will we *hear* the Easter bells ring? – I don’t know’. I didn’t want to answer the question, because, though I was only new in this hospital, I felt responsible for the fact that we are unable to hear the bells from here. (Fanon, 2018: 318; own italics)

The peripheral of the asylum is not only a geographical location but also a social condition. The appeal to the sensory reflects how the patient in internment is separated from time, from the cyclical festivities that mark the calendar, from the sounds of human interaction, the rhythm of a city and the social life. Fanon’s initial evasive response to the patient reflects the tension between the asylum’s therapeutic function of curing and its broader social function of separating and containing groups of people. In “The North African Syndrome”, where he addressed the relation between medicine and politics concerning North African migrants in France, Fanon emphasized the relation of medicine with political dynamics and appealed to the responsibility of the doctor:

Actually it is our fault. As it happens the fault is YOUR fault. Men come and go along a corridor that you have built for them, where you have arranged no bench on which they can rest, where you have crystallized a bunch of scarecrows that furiously smack them in the face, and they hurt their head, their chest, their heart.  
Where they find no room  
where you leave them no room  
where there is absolutely no room for them  
and you dare to tell me that it does not concern you!

That it is not your fault! (1964: 23; my translation<sup>238</sup>)

In both passages, despite their differences in tone and in the addressee, Fanon uses at the start the first person plural to directly involve himself in the complicity of medicine with alienation. In the latter he was a recently graduate doctor and in the former a newly arrived doctor. This was the only time Fanon explicitly addressed the relation between politics and the psychiatric hospital in the newspaper, although succinctly dealt, it is latent in other editorials. The rest of the editorials sought to explain the boarders and the orderlies the meaning of the therapeutic project and the activities that aimed at turning a place destined to accumulate and exclude depersonalized patients, “all piled on top of one another” (Fanon, 2018: 317), into a therapeutic establishment “whose self-declared goal is the organization of a social life for its boarders” (Fanon, 2018: 323), as he explains in another entry. This goal contains two basic, interrelated elements, elevate the patients into humanity and foster their agency. In the successive editorials he insists that is necessary to eliminate the sense of imprisonment of the patients, to mitigate their mistrust towards the institution, and to contribute to maintain their social ties and their place in society of those who have been recently interned through their contact with the outside world. He explains the importance of participating in the journal and the value of writing against self-abandonment and solitude. Against the inertia and the indifference derived from the internment he dedicates an editorial on the importance of time, schedule and the organization of activities, not for the sake of keeping patients busy,

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<sup>238</sup> « Justement, la faute vient de nous. Justement, la faute est TA faute.

Comment, des hommes vont et viennent le long d'un couloir que tu as construit pour eux, où tu n'as ménagé aucun banc où ils puissent se reposer, où tu as cristallisé un tas d'épouvantails qui leur giflent rageusement le visage, où ils se blessent la face, la poitrine, le coeur.

Où ils ne trouvent pas de place  
où tu ne leur fais pas de place  
où il n'y a absolument pas place pour eux  
et tu oses me dire que cela ne t'intéresse pas !  
Que ce n'est pas ta faute ! »

but to create a rhythm of life through the meaningful participation of all the personnel of the hospital. He announces the opening of the Moorish café, the oriental salon for Muslim women, the *guingette*, an open-air café and dance hall, and the celebration of Christian and Muslim feasts. In the editorials he also takes charge of the critiques of the patients and their different complaints about the quality of the food, or the lack of communal activities involving all the boarders. An article in the newspaper of a visiting doctor, Doctor Albert Gambs, seemed to confirm the accomplishments of the therapeutic environment:

in your establishment that atmosphere struck me. No sterile restlessness, no throng of people around the doctor as he passed through a ward: each person is busy with his or her work and interested in it. Your nurses do not monitor you, but really 'live' among you, side by side, participating in the same activities as you. (Fanon, 2018: 331)

In his response to Gambs, Fanon exposes his understanding of the institution, which echoes institutional psychotherapy, yet it also contains important philosophical elements that which would undergird his political thought, his understanding of culture and the political and administrative organization of the postcolonial state and their risks of solification and reification. For these reasons the following passage warrants a lengthy quotation:

The 'institution' was the central issue of the previous editorial; and the great merit of the definition put forward of it was the importance granted to movement. The equilibrium between the team game, regular training, and ordered and creative work confers on the institution both its solidity and its plasticity. From there, the following question must be asked and is asked: is every institution not in constant danger of vitiating? Or again: does not every attempt to give body to an institution risk taking directions that are fundamentally opposed to the open, fecund, global and nevertheless qualified character of the institution? You have to place yourself at the heart of the institution and interrogate it. If it is a generous source, it must enable multiple personalities to be manifest in it. It has to make possible interminable and fruitful encounters. It has to be multiplied constantly. It has to be at the disposal of its members, at their service. If it does not radiate, if it fails to achieve its essential duty, which is constant dialogue between its members, if it permits 'collective monologue', and if, lastly, it does not foster its members' responsibility, then its time is up. (2018: 334-335)

A living institution, the one that enables human flourishing, is characterized by motion, plasticity, interaction, and is attuned to the fact of it being constituted and composed by human beings, who “have the extraordinary quality of being in constant renewal.” (Fanon, 2018: 339) A persistent inquisitive eye is essential to maintain the delicate equilibrium between the openness of the institution and the forces, attitudes, inertias that take life away from it and lead to stagnation and closure. One of the forces that militate against the dynamic character of the asylum from within are automatism, the mechanic repetition of gestures, and “doubtless habits” (Fanon, 2018: 338). Fanon insists on the necessity of “infusing life into each committee” (2018: 341), rather than a formalistic accumulation of organization structures, hierarchies and roles that tend to rigidify and lose their meaning.

This was also a matter of everyday attitudes. Fanon emphasizes the importance of creativity, imagination and everyday care and alertness. The hero, he explains, is not the one who performs epic deeds and then lies down to rest, but the one who tenaciously and daily “gets through his or her task with conscientiousness and love.” (Fanon, 2018: 336) Fanon addressed several editorials to the nursing staff. Initially nurses at Blida had no specific training until a program was organized, and they also were sent to France for workshops. The relationship between doctors, nurses and boarders is essential for the functioning of the asylum yet always complicated. Fanon notices how the recommendations of the doctors to the patients are turned into orders and prohibitions through the intervention of the nurses; part of the role of the nurse is to understand the patient and to help the patient to understand, to avoid their rejection of the institution and to contribute to their engagement in the social life.

Fanon dedicated several editorials to the question of the sanctions and rules of the sports activities. He was particularly content of the construction of a stadium, the

formation of teams, the training, and the implications of the sports activities for the overall life of the asylum (Cherki, 2011). Yet, the issue of the punishments and punitive measures, the role and the attitude of referees raised certain questions about the overall functioning and the understanding of the institution. Fanon seemed initially sympathetic to the Sport committee's elaboration of rules and a disciplinary code with sanctions and penalties for the sport activities. Aggressions, insults, offense, provocation or any non-sporting conduct should be penalized on the grounds of accountability and the patient's assumption of responsibility for their actions, as it occurs in the outside world. "These sanctions prepare the boarder for life on the outside", he affirms (2018: 342). But he enigmatically concludes that this does not reach the core of the issue and the question of sanctioning is more complex: "where does the desire to penalize come from?" (2018: 343) In the following editorial Fanon briefly looks at the role and the functioning of authority and punishment at the family and the broader community levels. But for Fanon the question of sanctions lays bare two problems. First, regarding the conception that the asylum should mimic or recreate the society outside of the hospital, which is not necessarily a therapeutic environment. And second, sanctioning does reproduce paternalistic and authoritarian attitudes of the hospital staff towards the patient instead of caring ones. The disciplinary code risks creating the conditions for the re-appearance of the attitudes in the patients that the therapeutic structure seeks to eliminate. Fanon concludes in his last editorial that introducing sanctions, punishments and a disciplinary code is "a therapeutic absurdity" (2018: 348) and what is at stake is care and understanding.

Otherwise said, if care is not taken, the hospital establishment, which is above all a curative establishment, a therapeutic establishment, is gradually transformed into a barracks in which children-boarders tremble before parent-orderlies. (...) Here, at hospital, all this changes. (...) We do not punish our patients; we are obliged to understand each one of their attitudes. Each time we disregard our profession, each time that we give up our

attitude of understanding and adopt an attitude of punishment, we are mistaken. (Fanon, 2018: 346)

## **6.6 Violence in and of the asylum**

Fanon's aforementioned concern for enabling speech of the boarders through the environmental conditions becomes patent in "The Phenomenon of Agitation in the Psychiatric Milieu: General Considerations, Psychopathological Meaning", a technical article co-written with his intern Slimane Asselah and published in 1957. In this essay the authors tackle one of the central arguments of institutional psychotherapy, that is, the violence that the psychiatric institution engenders and is manifested in the so-called agitation. The authors express their divergences with Tosquelles' article "Introduction à une sémiologie de l'agitation". The Catalan psychiatrist distinguished between expressive and perceptive-reactive agitation, proposed several steps to observe agitation, and advocated for a semiology of agitation that would enable to understand and treat agitation. Although Tosquelles did not view agitation, in contrast to dominant psychiatry, as a symptom or pathology, but, exceeding the psychological and related to institutionalization and the attitudes of the staff, contradictorily his semiotic approach to observe it and understand it, did not exceed the medical framework. Tosquelles compared agitation to a wound turned into gangrene produced by the action and attitudes of the hospital staff (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Fanon and Asselah argue that agitations present multiple and different manifestations yet they are both expressive and perceptive-reactive at the same time.

Agitation is not merely an excrescence, a 'psycho-motor' cancer. It is also and above all a modality of existence, a type of actualization, an expressive style. Agitation disarms, since it is what reunites the structures. (Fanon, 2018: 447)

Like Tosquelles, they deny treating agitation as a disease, but rather than a state, as Tosquelles put it, for Fanon and Asselah agitation is also a mode of existence within

concrete environmental conditions. Beyond a problem of cruel attitudes and repressive practices what the authors call into question is the asylum, which “itself is sadistic, repressive, rigid, non-socialized, and has castrative aspects.” (Fanon, 2018: 440). Thereby they put the focus on the structural character of agitation, which is fundamentally the reflection and the return of the violence of the asylum.

The notions of ‘façade psychosis’, of ‘morbid mental persistence’ (*persistence mentale morbide*), as well as spectacular reactions of posture, provocations with a strongly aggressive charge such as those encountered in concentration-camp environments, the sadomasochistic nodes so easily brought about in the asylum framework – all these things demand veritable vigilance. (Fanon, 2018: 439)

In other words, the persistence and transmutations of mental disorders, aggressive behaviors, furious outbursts, or what is interpreted as the “willful malice” of the patient, which are a response “to a type of concentration-camp structure of an essentially repressive character”, indicate that the observation has to be shifted towards the therapeutic setting. (Fanon, 2018: 439)

The authors point out that the coercive, immobilization and isolation measures are “a second internment” once the patient “has already been expelled by the social milieu, which has requested its sectioning under the 1838 law.” (Fanon, 2018: 440) The first internment entails a “dis-adaptation”. The second internment, with its concomitant motor restraint and the disruption of the body schema, that is the dialectical relation between the body and the world, brings about a set of different and complex manifestations, choleric outbreaks, delusions, furious reactions, further agitation, and notably, hallucinations, to which the authors pay special attention, and which is not a claim to reality, but “an abrupt annihilation of perceived reality” (Fanon, 2018: 442). The authors point out that all these manifestations are not to be



explained in neurological terms, but are the organisms' response to the conditions of rejection and exclusion:

In practical terms, then, isolation, immobilization, and the use of coercive methods through the sadistic instruments brought into play, provoke, or at least precipitate, and deepen the regression. Thought in flight is caught in the flow of images without any possibility for it to escape through the benevolent and realistic (*actualisant*) help of another (*autrui*). Shutting the patient in a cell, isolating him, fixing him to the bed – this amounts to printing the conditions of existence for hallucinatory activity. Starting with anxiety, solitude and the psychobiological feeling of catastrophe that features in nearly all mental illness, and is here fuelled by the aggression typical of rejection, of reclusion, an evident 'complication' of the clinical treatment of hallucinations arises. (Fanon, 2018: 442-443; translation modified)

Fanon and Asselah do not understand agitation as a substantial clinical entity, neither is a chronic condition. But in contrast to Tosquelles' semiology and his proposal to observe agitation, they point out that agitation cannot be explained mechanically, but dialectically, that is, in the interaction and the "reciprocal foundation" between the institution and the patient. The borders transform and give back what they receive from the clinic. Thus, agitation is a product of human relationships, a reciprocal response to the violence of the hospital setting. They outline that agitation "appears within a human framework – the clinical service itself. (...) A fitting expression is agitation as asylum putrefaction." (Fanon, 2018: 444) By bringing the human element to the forefront—a central element in Fanon's philosophy since his dissertation and the earliest pages of *Black Skin White Masks* up to his vision of the postcolonial world—the authors recall that the hospital is not a thing neither an abstraction, but a product of human actions and of human relationships. Besides the evasion of responsibility, treating the hospital as inert and ossified impedes responding to the concrete challenges that it poses, and hinders the transformation of the institution through the creation of new human relationships,

activities and practices, which in turn will constitute new types of boarders and hospital staff.

If the hospital setting forms a knot of social relations, of ambiguous encounters, then agitation loses its resonance as an entity, as irresponsible behaviour, as something incomprehensible. From a dialectical viewpoint, agitation then enters into the primordial cycle of the reflecting-reflected mirror: you give to me, I receive, I assimilate, I transform, I render to you. It is certainly not the case that all catastrophic reactions, of which agitation is only a modality, will disappear. But these attempts of organisms at explanation are restored to their value as significations. The second internment that isolation represents is dispensed with once and for all. (...) This notion of rigorous skill, of armed suppleness, of fully articulated institutions, breaks with the vicious circle in which the patient tends to settle. (Fanon, 2018: 445)

The human element is not to be confused with a mere ethical approach. Fanon and Asselah are suspicious of reformist attempts of the institution which, out of humanity, focus uniquely on the attitudes of the staff, or on the mere suppression of the straightjackets, coercive and punitive tools and practices or isolation units. The authors portray an asylum where, besides the meals and the sleeping times, the days of the “not bed-ridden” boarders are spent in the courtyard roaming in “Brownian motion” (2018:440). They point out that the quick setback after the elimination of coercive measures leads to the demands of the staff to reincorporate them, thereby re-initiating the aforementioned vicious circle of agitation-restraint-agitation. The chain of reactions affects all levels of the hospital: the claims of the staff are perceived by the doctors as fueled by the sadistic behavior of the nurses, which vitiates doctor-nurse relations and elicits the distrust within the hospital personnel.

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: 440)

Likewise, the authors are highly critical of therapeutic understandings of the asylum in terms of the outside social life:

(...) notions such as ‘the village-hospital’, ‘the hospital, a reflection of the outside world’, ‘inside the hospital is like outside’, ‘the patient should feel at home’, and so on. Such expressions, you will surmise, are an attempt to mask the reality beneath falsely psychotherapeutic humanitarian concerns. (2018: 446)

The authors point out how mere humanitarian arguments veil the violence of the institution, whose problems are of a deeper character. In order to understand agitation one has to consider the concreteness of the institution. That is, first, the relation between the hospital and society; and second, the relationships established within the asylum. Fanon does not delve into the first element in this article but he does during his lectures in the University of Tunis. With reference to the second point, the organization of the institution as a therapeutic environment, the rebuilding of a social life within and “establishing a general framework for de-alienating encounters”, requires a “plasticity” in the institution so that that would absorb the manifestations of the patient without crumbling down, and that enables the “reconciliation between the existing being and his manifestations. It ought not to refuse anything from the patient.” (2018: 445) Fanon insists that agitation is not to be calmed down through medication nor repressed, neither can the problem be solved through a telephone consultation and looking up in a medical textbook. Instead, it requires to understand the patient in the concrete setting, which is at odds with isolation, exclusion and coercion. In turn, a proper therapeutic organization leads to it “being lived by the patient as that which ‘understands at last’, and not as that which amputates” (2018: 439). It is in setting the conditions that lead to this reciprocal understanding where the transformation of the institution shall be oriented towards. This idea of the institution in motion is at odds with a mechanistic and endogenous view of agitation. As a mode of existence, agitation is not a senseless form of stasis but is involved in the building of meanings and relations within the clinical setting:

In actual fact, the agitated individual at once does and does not know what he is doing. Or if you will, he does not know what he is doing but he is trying to find out. These are the attempts that clarify here and there the scene, leaving the observer with the disagreeable impression of being fooled. Thus, even at the bottom of these disordered, anarchic behaviours, which are stamped with the seal of nonsense, the fundamental ambiguity of existence is integrally assumed. (2018: 447)

Alice Cherki notes that this article “is a jewel of modernity for our time, when isolation cells and restraints are once again being prescribed in France.” (Cherki, 2017: ix). Yet, the relevance of this article also has implications outside the walls of the asylum. Fanon’s understanding of the “lines of force” that define and order the asylum as a pathogenic site and are at the root of the violence that originates in it, informed and helped him to think what he called the Manicheism of the colonial situation in his analysis of the “physical and metaphysical segregation” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 81) derived from the particular spatial disposition of the colonial city, and to his treatment of racism and colonialism as everyday spatial and historical relations (Kipfer, 2007). In the chapter on violence of *Les Damnés de la terre*, Fanon insists how colonialism and racism are also forms of spatial organization that “obey to the principle of reciprocal exclusion” (Fanon 1961: 42):

The colonial world is a compartmentalized world. It is surely unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans, in the same that way it is unnecessary to recall the apartheid in South Africa. However, if we delve into the intimacy of this compartmentalization we will be able to reveal *the lines of force that it implies. This approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical disposition* will allow us to define the threads out of which a decolonized society will be organized. (Fanon, 1961: 41; my translation<sup>239</sup>; own italics).

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<sup>239</sup> « Le monde colonial est un monde compartimenté. Sans doute est-il superflu, sur le plan de la description, de rappeler l'existence de villes indigènes et de villes européennes, d'écoles pour indigènes et d'écoles pour Européens, comme il est superflu de rappeler l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud. Pourtant, si nous pénétrons dans l'intimité de cette compartimentation, nous aurons au moins le bénéfice de mettre en évidence quelques-unes des lignes de force qu'elle comporte. Cette approche du monde colonial, de son arrangement, de sa disposition géographique va nous permettre de délimiter les arêtes à partir desquelles se réorganisera la société décolonisée. »

As we will see in the next chapter, Fanon carefully describes the rigid Manichean logic that orders and separates the native and the colonized town. This form of domination through radical separation is as coercive as directly repressive and is both physical and metaphysical (Sekyi-Otu, 1996). It restricts, isolates, excludes, and is also linked to the less visible “perspective of eternity” in which colonialism “has installed itself” (Fanon, 1959:35; my translation<sup>240</sup>). Through stasis and repetition, colonial space and time “produces forms of homogeneity that are embedded in daily spatial practices” with an impact on the bodily, affective and imaginative experience of the colonized (Kipfer, 2007: 711). Fanon describes the effects of everyday life colonial space and times as follows:

The native is a confined being. The apartheid is just a modality of compartmentalization of the colonial world. The first thing that the native learns is to stay in his place, not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are muscular dreams, dreams of action, aggressive dreams. I dream that I jump, that I swim, that I run, that I climb. I dream that I burst into laughter, that I jump over the river in one leap, that I am chased by a group of cars that never catch me. During colonization, the colonized never stop liberating themselves between nine o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning. This aggressiveness, sedimented in the muscles, will be initially manifested against his fellows. (...) Faced with the colonial ordering, the colonized are in a state of permanent tension. (1961: 53-54; my translation<sup>241</sup>)

Architect Massimo Paolini affirms that the asylum, the abattoir and the concentration camp are the three paradigmatic spaces to understand the violence of the modern world for their opacity, inaccessibility and falling outside of the realm of rights (Paolini, 2019). Fanon more than once associated the responses to the structure

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<sup>240</sup> « (...) colonialisme qui s'est installé dans une *perspective d'éternité*. »

<sup>241</sup> « L'indigène est un être parqué, *Y apartheid* n'est qu'une modalité de la compartimentation du monde colonial. La première chose que l'indigène apprend, c'est à rester à sa place, à ne pas dépasser les limites. C'est pourquoi les rêves de l'indigène sont des rêves musculaires, des rêves d'action, des rêves agressifs. Je rêve que je saute, que je nage, que je cours, que je grimpe. Je rêve que j'éclate de rire, que je franchis le fleuve d'une enjambée, que je suis poursuivi par des meutes de voitures qui ne me rattrapent jamais. Pendant la colonisation, le colonisé n'arrête pas de se libérer entre neuf heures du soir et six heures du matin. Cette agressivité sédimentée dans ses muscles, le colonisé va la manifester d'abord contre les siens. (...) Face à l'arrangement colonial le colonisé se trouve dans un état de tension permanente. »

of the asylum to those found in concentration camps settings. The correlation between the concentration camp and the psychiatric hospital would be a recurrent argument of the anti-psychiatry and anti-institution movements in the following decades (Foot, 2015). In several instances, Fanon also compared the concentration camp to colonial societies, but rather than the *exceptionality* that Paolini implies in his argument, Fanon's account of everyday life under colonial forms of domination reflects, as it was argued in previous chapters, how in the colony the extraordinary is imposed as the ordinary condition of everyday existence. The forms of contention and separation in the asylum and in colonial society can also be read as descriptions of security politics viewed from the underside, of those who suffer them. Besides the political character of Fanon's psychiatry, this essay is another example of how his medical and political thought rather than running parallel or superimposing one over the other, they nourish each other. Their mutual imbrication, in this concrete case, also enables to shed lights on debates within Fanon scholarship on the role of space and time in his thought<sup>242</sup>.

Although in the article on agitation Fanon's view of the psychiatric hospital is still within the framework of institutional psychotherapy, he exposes certain theoretical

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<sup>242</sup> There is an overall agreement that Fanon anticipated a "spatial turn" in the analysis of oppression. But the role and the importance of Fanon's focus on space is approached differently. Postcolonial thinkers and cultural theorists have mostly emphasized the spatial dimension in Fanon's work at the expense of the historical, dialectical, existential phenomenological and Marxian elements of his work. In their textualist, and in some cases psychologizing readings, space in Fanon enabled to overcome what they perceive as binaries and essentialist positions, and to explore "the spatialization of cultural politics", third spaces and non-representability. On the other hand, Ato Sekyi-Otu understands space as a moment in Fanon's dialectical narrative (Kipfer, 2007). Leaving aside their marked ideological considerations, and although my reading is in general closer to the latter, both approaches miss Fanon's point. Fanon's thought, as stated in Chapter two is clearly rooted in time and temporality, as he explicitly puts it. Besides, connecting his thought on the asylum and agitation with his phenomenology of violence, although considering their different contexts, problems and developments, shows that for Fanon space is not necessarily non-dialectical but neither a relative moment to be overcome. Instead space and time overlap and intersect in the constitution of social relations to be transformed both in the asylum and in the decolonization process.

and practical divergences, contradictions and breaches in relation to the thought of the group of Saint-Alban that would eventually grow deeper.

### **6.7 Fanon's letter of resignation: dealing with the contradiction**

The anticolonial war started in November 1954, and around mid-1955 Fanon, who was known for his psychiatric work and his anticolonial positions, was contacted by the National Liberation Front (FLN) to provide mental care treatment to combatants. The assistance was arranged through the open service that Fanon co-directed with Lacaton, who did not oppose. The initial psychiatric care extended to surgical care, the provision of medicines, which were severely controlled by the colonial regime, the elaboration of reports of torture and the logistic support of the local and regional cells such as the storage and of weapons and sheltering combatants in the hospital and his private house (Cherki, 2011). The undercover activities of Fanon with the FLN went unnoticed to the intelligence services. Only his support to a strike whose highest rate of support in the hospital was reported in the wards under his direction and his protest against the imprisonment of a trade union leader appear in the archival records of the police (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 175). As we saw in the previous chapters, Saint-Alban during the World War II became a site of resistance and insurrection against fascism. In the case of the Blida-Joinville hospital, the involvement of Fanon and other members of the staff, Algerian and French, with the anticolonial revolution was secret and private. The intensification of the war, episodes such as the Battle of Algiers, the repression of protests, and the ordinary character of the colonial oppression had a growing impact on the daily life of what was envisaged as a space of disalienation and humanization. Fanon started treating both torturers and the tortured (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). In one of the case studies on the disorders of colonial violence in *Les Damnés de la terre* Fanon details the random encounter

inside the hospital of a policeman who was being treated privately with an Algerian patient who had been tortured by him. The policemen who suffered from depression derived from his activities in the police had an anxiety attack and eventually resigned and left Algeria; the tortured Algerian patient ran away, hid inside a toilet and attempted to commit suicide. The situation acquired tragic dimensions with the increasing pressure of the police over the hospital, which was considered a “nest of fellaghas” (Cherki, 2011:161). The nurses strike in July 1956 was severely repressed. Fanon’s colleague, Raymond Lacaton was arrested and tortured. Lacaton warned that new and mass arrests were to follow. Alice Cherki notes that Fanon’s resignation in December 1956 and his subsequent expulsion from Algeria probably saved his life. Around that time, other nursing and hospital staff were also detained. Doctors with whom Fanon had co-written articles in Algeria, François Sanchez and Slimane Asselah would be also detained and tortured in the beginning of 1957. The latter was at the time working in Algiers, and to this day his body is still missing (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 175).

Fanon’s resignation letter to Robert Lacoste, the governor-general of Algeria, condenses in a poetic and resolute tone his views on madness, psychiatry, and the dilemmas that arise from the entanglement of psychiatry and politics. Fanon starts the letter by acknowledging his attempt to reform the asylum and the dominant psychiatric approach:

Although the objective conditions of psychiatric practice in Algeria were already a challenge to common sense, it seemed to me that efforts should be undertaken to render less vicious a system whose doctrinal bases stood opposed daily to an authentic human perspective. (...) There is not an ounce of my activity that has not demanded as its horizon the unanimously desired emergence of an acceptable world. (Fanon, 2018: 433-434)



However, Fanon notices that what was to be questioned was more than the functioning of a therapeutic approach, but the broader social framework in which the doctor, the institution and the psychiatric practices take place. This required questioning what a successful therapeutic act means in an oppressive society. Fanon's early self-critique of the assimilationist policy that he had been following by applying institutional psychotherapy to a different cultural setting takes a new and broader turn when he considers the political dimensions of the clinic:

Madness is one of the ways that humans have of losing their freedom. And I can say that, placed at this junction, I have measured with terror the extent of the alienation of this country's inhabitants. If psychiatry is the medical technique that sets out to enable individuals no longer to be foreign to their environment, I owe it to myself to state that the Arab, permanently alienated in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. What is the status of Algeria? A systematic dehumanization. Now, the absurd wager was to want at whatever price to ensure the existence of some values whereas lawlessness, inequality, and multiple daily murder of humanness were erected as legislative principles. The extant social structure in Algeria stood opposed to any attempt to put the individual back in his or her place. (2018: 434)

Dehumanization and madness is the red thread that connects the asylum to the colony. By bringing social oppression to the forefront Fanon not only questions a particular therapy, but problematizes the medical framework and its relationship to oppression. Since his medical dissertation Fanon adamantly associates madness to the loss of freedom and conceives psychiatry as one of the means to restore it. Yet, what health, healing and a successful therapy means cannot be thought in isolation following a medical model, but have to be understood in the relationship of the clinic with social structures, power dynamics, social interests and mechanisms and institutions of regulation. Hence, for Fanon in Algeria to cure means to adjust the person to a system that he defines as a "systematic dehumanization". As Filippo Menozzi puts it, Fanon grasped the kernel of any political psychiatry: "in a society where there is no freedom, to cure is not to free, but to restore the patient to the

discipline, to comply with oppression.” (2017: 370) In line with the sociogenic approach, improving the conditions of the patients and the innovations brought to the reform of the asylum are insufficient and a form of compliance, instead it is necessary to intervene in the social structure in which psychiatry is embedded so that to cure and to free can be reconciled:

The function of a social structure is to set up institutions that are traversed by a concern for humankind. A society that forces its members into desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society that needs replacing. (Fanon, 2018: 435)

In the letter Fanon does not only examine medical and social realities, but there is also an intimate reflection and an exercise in self-questioning that emerges from the interrogation of the duty of the psychiatrist when confronted with the limits of his praxis, and of the social commitment of the psychiatrists as an intellectual. Fanon concludes the letter:

There comes a time when silence becomes a lie. (...) For long months, my conscience has been the seat of unparadigmatic debates. And their conclusion is the will not to lose hope in man, that is to say in myself. My decision is not to bear a responsibility, at whatever cost, on the false pretext that nothing else is to be done. (2018: 435)

Many readings interpreted his rupture with French administration and his departure from Algeria as the abandonment of psychiatry in favor of politics and thereby becoming the anticolonial and Pan-African revolutionary. Henri Ey told Fanon in 1957 “to stop doing politics and to concentrate on psychiatry, we need him” (Cherki, 2011: 137). Franco Basaglia, the leading Italian psychiatrist of the anti-institutional movement acknowledges in *L’Instituzione Negata* the influence of Fanon in his work<sup>243</sup>. Basaglia, who quotes Fanon’s letter almost at length, outlines

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<sup>243</sup> Basaglia, who undertook a revolutionary experience in the Gorizia hospital between 1961 and 1968, was, like Tosquelles and Fanon, an antifascist militant in his youth. His imprisonment under Italian fascism informed his views of the asylum. Besides Fanon, his thought was also influenced by Foucault and, like Fanon, by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty. He defined himself as a phenomenologist (Foot, 2015). He was a central figure of the movement *Psichiatria Democratica*; his work against the asylum

that the political character of Fanon's psychiatry starts from the realization that the doctor-patient relation, like that of white and black and those with power and the powerless is an institutional relation, which in turn is defined by the social system. For Basaglia, Fanon understood that the reform of the institution or the therapeutic act within the framework of a system that militates against freedom entails the silent acceptance of the system and the acquiescence with oppression. In this framework, to cure meant to reinsert the patient into a society without freedom and to comply with the systematic dehumanization. Basaglia argued that the problem of madness required broader and deeper social changes than the mere intervention in the asylum. But, he concludes, that whereas Fanon could choose joining the Algerian revolution in order to take action, he and the Gorizia team, sharing similar views and facing similar problems, had to remain within the institution that they negate, and whose violence they mask and perpetuate through their therapeutic acts.<sup>244</sup> (Basaglia, 2010)

For Françoise Vergès, Fanon conceived psychiatry as “a means among other means of political and social emancipation” (1996, 94). However, Vergès observes in Fanon's work an irreconcilable contradiction between the “committed activist” and the “professional psychiatrist”: “This tension between two practices, whose goals seemed similar, resulted in Fanon's voluntaristic rhetoric, a form of rhetoric that was contradicted by his professional practice”. (Vergès, 1996: 95) Vergès raises an

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culminated in the 1978 law, known as the Basaglia law, which put an end to the proliferation of psychiatric hospitals in Italy and its progressive dismantlement.

<sup>244</sup> There are different biographical inaccuracies in Basaglia's account and also important theoretical divergences. Fanon's political understanding of medicine was being formed before Algeria, as Basaglia contends, and is explicit in his first published article, “The North African Syndrome”. Basaglia seems to be unfamiliar with Fanon's medical work and his more radical forms of intervention in the asylum in Tunisia, which would ironically bring both thinkers and psychiatrists closer in regards to what Basaglia called the negation of the asylum. There are, however, important differences in their conception of the mental disease and psychiatry in general, which we will briefly expose in the following section. On other matters, Basaglia carefully unveiled how the psychiatric framework, in connection with other institutions, operated in Italian society in relation to the division of labor, exclusions, and the distribution of power. However, he did not consider how psychiatry doubled its function and intensity in colonial societies, and unlike Fanon, Basaglia did not think colonial societies and metropolitan societies together, as related and mutually constitutive entities.

interesting point, that of the contradiction between the doctor's duty to cure and the oppressive social framework in which it takes place. However, the tension to which Vergès alludes is explicitly addressed in *Black Skin White Masks*, "The North African Syndrome", "Medicine and Colonialism", in his resignation letter and in his initial engagement with the FLN as a doctor.

Rather than voluntarism, a chasm, and an unsolvable contradiction between the doctor and the militant, it is by taking responsibility for the contradiction and by "making the contradiction the site of a real social change", rather than avoiding it, that the professional doctor becomes a committed intellectual (Menozzi, 2018: 376). Filippo Menozzi explains through Sartre's conception of the intellectual how Basaglia and Fanon similarly approached the contradictions and tensions between psychiatry and politics. For Sartre, the committed intellectual is the one who is aware of the contradiction that emerges between possessing a technical and practical knowledge, which in principle is to be put at the service of all, and the actual and limited use of that knowledge by the ruling and dominant class. In other words, the committed intellectual is characterized by the awareness of the contradiction between the universality of the work and the particular interests to which it serves. This entails not only a critique of society but also a critique of the epistemic and institutional foundations of their knowledge, and a self-questioning of their role, status, identity and position as intellectuals. The intellectual positions herself within these contradictions and tensions, assumes responsibility for them and responds to the false universality through her engagement with the concrete needs and demands of the society. For Menozzi, both Fanon and Basaglia "inhabit the borderline between the clinical and the critical, medicine and militancy, the necessity of cure and the exigency of freedom." (Menozzi, 2015: 361) They used the contradiction in which

they were caught to interrogate the role of the psychiatrist in society, the ideological functioning of the asylum, to expose the dominant and disguised ideology of the society, to reveal its contradictions, and to rebuild their knowledge and practices accordingly (Menozzi, 2015).

Thus, the dilemma is not about medicine or anticolonial militancy, psychiatry or revolution. Fanon does not think in terms of inside or outside of medicine, as he shows its limits and how medicine can simultaneously be in both sides of the oppressor/oppressed divide. The issue is rather about reflection, responsibility and commitment. In “Letter à un Français”, probably addressed to his colleague Dr. Raymond Lacaton who left Algeria for France after being arrested and tortured, Fanon takes his colleague to task for turning a blind eye and appeals to the responsibility of the doctor:

When your brothers ask you: ‘What happened in Algeria?’ What will you answer them? More precisely, when people will want to understand why you left this country, what will you do to extinguish the shame that already afflicts you? The shame of not having understood, of not having wanted to understand what has happened around you every day. For eight years you were in this country. And no part of this enormous wound has prevented your departure! (1964: 56; my translation<sup>245</sup>)

In “Medicine and Colonialism” Fanon reflects how, in a war where medicine and access to medicaments played a central role, the theretofore suspicious figure of the Algerian doctor and the relation between Algerians and Western medicine were reshaped by the political engagement of doctors, nurses and pharmacists, and their attunement to the new reality:

Sleeping on the ground with the men and women of the *mehctas*, living the drama of the people, the Algerian doctor becomes a part of the Algerian

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<sup>245</sup> « Quand tes frères te demanderont : qu’est-il arrivé en Algérie ? Que leur répondras-tu ? Plus précisément quand on voudra comprendre pourquoi tu as quitté ce pays, comment feras-tu pour éteindre cette honte que déjà tu traînes ? Cette honte (de n’avoir pas compris, de n’avoir pas voulu comprendre ce qui autour de toi s’est passé tous les jours. Huit ans durant tu fus dans ce pays. Et pas un morceau de cette énorme plaie qui t’ait empêché ! »

body. There is no longer the constant reticence that characterized the period of uncontested oppression. It is no longer 'the' doctor, but 'our' doctor, 'our' technician. (Fanon, 1959:130-131; author's translator<sup>246</sup>)

## 6.8 The Tunis lectures

Fanon did not abandon psychiatry after resigning from his post in the French administration. During his exile in Tunisia, where he arrived in March 1957, he combined his militancy in the FLN first as editor/journalist of the journal *El Moudjahid* and later also as ambassador in West African countries with his writing, his teaching for the FLN cadres and at the University in Tunis, and his psychiatric work at the Charles-Nicolle Hospital and in refugee camps.

In 1959 and 1960 he offered a series of lectures at the University of Tunis for students of sociology and psychology entitled "The Meeting between Society and Psychiatry". The notes taken by a student were first published by the University of Oran in 1984. In these lectures Fanon briefly covers disparate topics and also establishes connections between them. Some themes were dealt in previous works, such as the sociocultural elements that intervene in racism, the problems derived from black people seeking white recognition, the psychopathology derived from racism, black music, the critique of colonial psychiatry and the possibilities and limitations of institutional psychotherapy. He talked about racial segregation and black and white relations in the United States, specific mental problems derived from new mechanisms of surveillance and control in the workplace in metropolitan, industrialized societies and the difference with colonial forms of labor, ego formation and socialization of the child, or the attitude of the colonized towards Nazism. As the

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<sup>246</sup> « Couchant sur la terre avec les hommes et les femmes des mechtas, vivant le drame du peuple, le médecin algérien devient un morceau de la chair algérienne. Il n'y a plus cette réticence, constante dans la période d'oppression incontestée. Ce n'est plus « le » médecin, mais « notre » médecin, « notre » technicien. »

title of the lectures suggests, in all these cases he links psychiatry with social theory and different forms of alienation with social diagnostics. The question of psychiatry and its role in monitoring the social order is also explicit in these lectures:

The mad person is one who is 'foreign' to society. And society decides to rid itself of this anarchic element. Internment is the rejection, the side-lining of the patient. Society asks the psychiatrist to render the patient able again to reintegrate into society. The psychiatrist is the auxiliary of the police, the protector of society. (Fanon, 2018: 517)

The psychiatrist is endowed with the task of securing society and in turn "society strives to control the psychiatrist's work practice." This leaves the doctor in a position of intermediary between society and the patient, he points out. Fanon sees psychiatric treatment as aiming at the socialization or re-socialization process of the patient. Yet, this raises the question of what is understood as normalcy and deviance: "Is the aim of a human being never to present a group with problems?" Fanon rejects criteria of normality based on adaptation to a group, the capacity to work, or the conflict-less functioning of a society (Fanon, 2018: 518). Here he puts the emphasis on the conundrum of the psychiatrist who is caught again between the demands and the control by society and his own work with the mentally ill.

In hospitalization settings, he observes, "the essential instrument was the key." (2018: 518) The key compartmentalizes, separates units, wards, cells, spaces within the asylum and sets a frontier with the outside world. By way of sociotherapy, he argues, one can reach to a different understanding of madness:

*Madness is prohibited at the hospital.* Up to now, when a patient began to cry out, it was said that he was fulfilling his function as a mad person. Every pathological manifestation must be tackled; reason must be set against the unreason of the patient. This is an extremely rich experience for the person engaged in this practice. One cannot be sick with a healthy brain, with clear neuronal connections; through the connections, there is a sort of open pathway through which the doctor has *to introduce himself with innovative principles, so madness is permitted.* (2018: 519; italics in the original)

Fanon distinguishes between physical brain damage and madness. The mad is not a sick person, but he does not deny the existence of madness despite the ideological considerations and the social function of psychiatry. For him, the role of the psychiatrist is to access into what seems an unintelligible sphere. This new psychiatric treatment that Fanon was envisaging at the time bore resemblances with that of Basaglia (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Fanon also pointed out some shortcomings of sociotherapy, such as the incorporation of police officer in the Anglo-Saxon world and the problems of creating a new society. In other articles written in Tunis he would extend in these and other limitations.

Fanon dedicates a section to the mental disorders produced by capitalist working conditions and concretely by the mechanisms of control and surveillance in different workplaces. In capitalist societies, the subject is formed through the gathering of data, records, and the elaboration of reports and files. “Modern times, it has been said, are characterized by the individual’s being put on file.” (2018: 522) Fanon examines how in factories and contexts of industrial production control through time management binds the worker to the time clock machine and gives rise to a series of psychopathologies. There is a constant fear of reprimand and the feeling of guilt in the worker, there is no possibility to apologize or justify a delay to the machine, he points out.

Being a good worker means you have had no trouble with the time clock.  
The workers’ relations with the apparatus are strict, timed. For the worker, to  
be on time means being at peace with the time clock. (2018: 522)

The subjection to time through the relation with the machine provokes anxiety, outbursts of anger, tensions, nightmares: a train that departs, a door that cannot be opened, “the boss has vanished, leaving the time clock in his place” (Fanon, 2018:



522) Alienation is manifested in absenteeism, obsessive attitudes around time, boredom, feeling of estrangement, loss of reflexes and accidents. Following the work of psychiatrist Louis Le Guillant, Fanon looks at the mental troubles of telephone service workers. The mechanical character, the intense rhythm of phone calls, the constant use of headsets, and the fact of being listened and monitored by a supervisor produce insomnia, somatic problems, difficulties to concentrate, frequent pain and illness that can end up in suicide.

the employee feels as though she is constantly being spied upon, she must control herself constantly; the body insofar as it is manifest is persecuted with hallucinations by auditory perception (Fanon, 2018: 523).

He adds the in telephone operators of public services, where the conversations are not controlled or listened, certain symptoms vary. Fanon posits that the installation of cameras and closed circuit television in large department stores in the United States are not only focused on thieves but also on monitoring the activity of workers. The employees are not notified but they are aware of being followed, which results in similar neuroses to those of telephone operators. The time sheets, the records of working hours and productive hours, the devices of surveillance, as he puts it, are forms control through quantification by employers which have different effects on the bodies and the psyche of the laborers and provoke distinct disorders at the individual and family levels. Fanon observes that the relation between the worker and the machine is not “the only thing that has reified, the employee has, too (...) [w]ithin the technological milieu, the tendency is to reduce communications and transform the human being into an automaton” (Fanon, 2018: 522-524). His analysis of labor in the colonies provides a very different landscape. The colony is the state of nature until the arrival and the intervention of the colonizer. “Work, insofar as it fecundates man, is the privilege of the colonist”; the colonizer treats the colonized as he treats nature

or as he treats malaria, as an obstacle to be conquered and to be tamed through violence (2018:528). As stated before, the inherent laziness and apathy that are attributed to the colonized are for Fanon forms of protection and non-collaboration with the plunder of lives and land that is labor in the colony. “The colonized who resists is right”, he adds. Fanon concludes that labor can serve and can be recovered for the “humanization of man”, which implies fostering “relations of generosity” where the modification of nature is necessarily accompanied by the modification of the human (2018: 530).

During the lectures Fanon also spoke about “the color bar” that defines black and white relations in the United States. The division is firm and constant, it is a spatial demarcation and it is lived in the flesh. Divided societies generate certain forms of behaviors characterized by “nervous tension leading quite quickly to exhaustion, (...) control of the self is permanent and at all levels, emotional affective...” Police repression and the different value ascribed to black lives are intrinsic elements of the social compartmentalization: “When a Black kills a Black, nothing happens; when a Black kills a White, the entire police force is mobilized.” (2018: 525) From the novels of Chester Himes Fanon outlines the aggressiveness that permeates black lives and social relations. One of its manifestations is, “by a sort of introjection, the Black man’s aggression turns back upon the Black man.” (2018: 524) The aggressiveness is also manifested in the desire of escaping and of being white. The themes of flight and evasion and of aggression and suicide, he adds, are recurrent in Black American music. In this setting, Fanon asks, “to what extent can a Black encounter a White?” (2018: 525) As he expressed in relation to the colonial situation, in the United States the relations between blacks and whites are mediated by a lie. The black cannot be true towards the white: “When a Black addresses a White, first he has a particular

voice, as well as particular demeanour and style.” (2018: 526) The meeting with the other is obstructed by the stereotype, by conflict, by different codes and values. The difference is not ontological, but marked by the lie which is the situation itself: “there is a lie which is the lie of the situation.” (Fanon, 2018: 525) In the vitiated relations of a context of domination the black “cannot be required to engage in human behaviour.” (2018:526).

The common thread of these different topics are the varied forms of regulations, disciplining and control that seize minds and bodies: the social control on the work of the psychiatrists to discipline the mentally ill, the “anarchic element” and “the strangers to society”, the different technologies of control and surveillance of workers, the time clock, the audio and the video surveillance, the self-control derived from the color line. Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that Fanon’s work on the asylum and his concerns on the forms of control and discipline anticipated the writings of Foucault on these topics. Foucault taught at the same university in Tunis between 1966 and 1968 a course on “Madness and Civilization”. Mirzoeff wonders how could Foucault not be acquainted with Fanon’s work, writing and teaching in Tunis (Mirzoeff, 2012). Moreover, Fanon’s and Foucault’s trajectories intersect in other points. Different aspects raised by Fanon on the debate between organogenesis and psychogenesis of his dissertation were also followed by Foucault several years later (Khalifa, 2018), and Foucault must have been familiar with institutional psychotherapy group of Tosquelles in Saint-Alban and of Guattari and Oury in La Borde. The Working group for Institutional Psychotherapy and Sociotherapy was created in 1960 around these figures (Gibson, 2015). Julian Bourg argues that, “Much postwar French intellectual interest in madness, normality, and pathology had its roots in the Saint-Alban ‘ambience.’” (quoted in Gibson, 2015: 8) As stated in the

previous chapter, in the growing field of history of colonial medicine Foucault occupies a central role in the theoretical framework. Fanon is approached as an anticolonial theorist or militant and a doctor whose experience is given sense through the French thinker, despite the latter's active omission of the former in his own work, and of the colonial context in which he theorized. The lack of acknowledgement is, however, not limited to Fanon. Thinkers of the Black Panther Party like George Jackson or Angela Davis were also unacknowledged influences on Foucault's conceptualization of power/knowledge, genealogy or biopolitics (Heiner, 2007). Foucault led the "*Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*" which translated some of their works and wrote on Jackson's assassination (Weheliye, 2014). It has to be noticed that Fanon was recognized by the Black Panther Party as one of their reference thinkers. The implications of these omissions go beyond ethical issues in regard to citations or intellectual honesty. The silence of Foucault on Global South thinkers accentuates "the active elision and active disavowal of racism, colonization, and ethnic racism" in his lectures in the mid 1970's (Weheliye, 2014: 62). For Brady Heiner, these denied influences in Foucault's work raises political and epistemic questions about their different reception, their distinct value and legitimacy as knowledge, and, therefore, about the disciplines and organizations and structures of knowledge in which these thinkers are erased:

Given the formative role that black power plays in Foucault's elaboration of the concepts of power-knowledge, genealogy and biopower, why is it that the enunciative force of black power is met with social, civil and biological death while that of power-knowledge is subject to canonization in a host of academic disciplines? Why is Foucault's brand of genealogical discourse incorporated by the 'will to truth' of contemporary knowledge regimes, while the insurgent knowledges of black power movements remain largely unassimilable to these regimes of knowledge? (Heiner, 2007: 315)

## 6.9 Healing with the clinic

The Charles-Nicolle Hospital was the largest general hospital in Tunis. There Fanon continued to question the asylum and attempted to attune his work to his critical psychiatry through the creation of a day psychiatric service. The ordinary psychiatric establishment that formed part of the general hospital was turned into the Neuropsychiatric Day Center (hereafter, CNPJ). At the time this became the second open psychiatric hospital in Africa and a rarely explored structure in Europe except for certain variations of it in the Anglo-Saxon world (Cherki, 2011). Currently, day hospitalization has lost its innovative character and it has become an administrative device that “it is often seen alongside incarceration, as part of the neoliberal alternative to the old model of psychiatric internment.” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 206). Fanon approached it differently, as his last psychiatric article attests. Published at the end of 1959 in *La Tunisie médicale*, “Day hospitalization in psychiatry: Value and limits”, it has a second part subtitled “Doctrinal considerations” co-written with Geronimi.

In the first part Fanon contextualizes the CNPJ within other open doors and day hospitalization experiences in Canada, Denmark or Britain. Concerning the methodology of the day care hospital the Fanon poses two basic questions. First, with the gaze upon the postcolonial world he asks whether such approaches could be carried out in an unindustrialized country, which, in light of the positive experience in Tunis he responds affirmatively. Second, whether this initiative is suitable for all kind of psychiatric disorders. For Fanon the value of day hospitalization lies in that it addresses two basic needs: it facilitates the early diagnosis and treatment of disorders, and it maintains the patient in contact with the outside world “to a maximum” (2018: 474). This avoids the transmutation and the “magical disappearance of the neurotic

attitude, of the conflictual situation” that occurs in the security settings of hospitalization (2018: 475). By abstracting the patient from her milieu, the original site of conflict, the asylum disguises and transforms the symptoms. Hospitalization apparently relaxes certain pathological manifestations and offers an atmosphere of security, a “protective coat” to the patient, but this is a false protection since it numbs the patient into a “sort of wakeful sleep in which the patient led a vegetative life.” (Fanon, 2018: 474). For Fanon the goal of the day hospital is not only to avoid the separation of the patient from the social milieu, but also to integrate and to embed therapy within social life.

Fanon thoroughly analyzes the almost two year experience of organizing the hospital, its functioning, the composition of the patients, their age, occupation, family status, economic situation, their length of stay and the results obtained. The authors observe that the hospital was set for 80 patients. During the analyzed period more than 1000 patients were admitted with a gradual decreasing length of staying.

For Fanon, the predominance of unemployed patients or with unstable jobs and difficult material conditions exposes a fundamental “problematic” of mental illness, “namely that tomorrow’s uncertainty and material negligence foster the hatching of disruptions to an individual’s equilibrium, and thus problems with harmonious group insertion.” (2018: 482-484). The question of instability and misery of the patient was corroborated with the increasing admissions of Algerian refugees to the hospital. One of the main obstacles in the everyday of the hospital was the pervasive repressive attitudes and the perception among the personnel that the patients were “the enemies of the staff’s tranquillity.” (2018: 476) As in the article on agitation Fanon observes that this is not exceptional but a common attitude in psychiatric structures based on a conception of security based on punishment. This required a specific training and to

undertake spatial modifications to undo the structures of what up to then was a classic psychiatric hospital. An important part of the work of the nurses was the reception of the patients in the morning. For Fanon that first conversation of the day was a crucial element around which the rest of the day would be organized. Inquiring about their previous evening, about the family and their social life ; demanded special care: “The orderlies are asked to take a benevolent attitude, especially when the oneiric material provided is spectacularly anguishing”, and should also avoid asking the family in front of the patients” Fanon, (2018: 477).

The daily routine consists in psychotherapeutic work in the mornings, mostly psychoanalytically inspired. However, biological treatments such as insulin therapy, sleep therapy and seismotherapy were not discarded. Yet Fanon points out that

The main guideline of our therapeutic interventions is that *consciousness is to be affected as little as possible*. Whence the rarity of narcoanalysis or amphetamine shocks. We do not believe in the curative value of dissolutions of consciousness. The service is oriented toward awareness, verbalization, explanation and strengthening the ego. (2018: 493)

The day hospital also provided neurologic services, which were absent in the general hospital. After the meal time, the afternoon was dedicated to collective psychotherapies such as dramatization or workshops. The dramatic activities were not based on representations of a fictional scene. Since one of the aims of the day hospital was to impede the concealment of symptoms and to keep the conflictual aspects in all living environments, therapy was oriented towards the open treatment of the conflicts (Cherki, 211: 210). Thus dramatization consists in the patient’s presentation of a biographical situation, which was ensued by a collective and open discussion:

This presentation during which the patient shows, comments upon and takes up his or her responses to conflicts, provokes the listeners to take a stance, make criticisms and express reservations. Correlatively, the patient tries to justify him- or herself through his or her behaviour, which reintroduces the priority of reason over fantasmatic and imaginary attitudes. (2018: 493)

In the second part, “Doctrinal considerations”, Fanon and G ronimi critically situate the day hospital in relation to the open service, the internment and institutional psychotherapy, from “the plane of the patient’s lived experience” (2018: 498). The authors describe how in hospitalization settings therapy and the administration of medicines usually ends around 18h. At that time the doctors, nurses and hospital staff change their clothes and get ready to resume to their lives outside the hospital. For the boarders, this sense of abandonment is a distressing experience:

Outside life filters into the hospitals along with the staff’s plans (...) Outside life assumes an increased density in the patient’s eyes, who remains confined in the silence and the boredom of large rooms. This experience is already painful enough for a patient immobilized by a fracture, typhoid or asystole. For the mental patient, who literally only feels immobilized by the coercion of the establishment, protest, an attitude of revolt against hospitalization, arises several times a day. (Fanon, 2018: 498)

For the authors, institutional psychotherapy attempts to mitigate these tensions and maintain the social dimension of the patient through the creation of a “neo-society” within the hospital, and the establishment of different roles, relationships, duties and hierarchies. This led to a shift in the understanding of madness. Within this framework, there was a change in the classical symptoms and manifestations of mental illness as they appear in the internment settings. The patient needs “to verbalize, to explain, to explain himself, to take a position. (...)Social therapy wrests patients from their fantasies and obliges them to confront reality on a new register.” (Fanon, 2018: 498-499) This new relation to reality that institutional psychotherapy fosters is still pathological, it still takes places at the level of the imaginary, they argue, but it facilitates the doctor’s understanding and follow up the mechanisms and the process of mental disease through the efforts of the patient who now strives to maintain the unity and coherence of the ego. However, for Fanon and G ronimi institutional psychotherapy and the creation of society within the asylum, in spite of



the emphasis on motion and sociality, cannot avoid the ossification and stagnation of the institution:

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that with institutional-therapy, we create fixed institutions, strict and rigid settings, and schemas that are rapidly stereotyped. In the neo-society, there are no inventions; there is no creative, innovative dynamic. There is no veritable shake-up, no crises. The institution remains that 'corpse-like cement' of which Mauss speaks. (Fanon, 2018: 499)

The society that this approach attempts to recreate within the walls of the asylum is abstracted from other institutions, spaces, social mechanisms, principles and laws, and it is still lived as a form of imprisonment. Overall, this produces a pseudo-society, a petrified society with limited disalienating possibilities. Although they set a clear distance from the postulates of Tosquelles, the authors do not reject institutional psychotherapy *per se*. Referring to their experience in Blida, they add that this approach favors the social dimension of the patients and is "indispensable" against "chronicization, asylum putrefaction and patient decline" that arise in large institutions of internment. It also helps the doctor to understand what takes place *outside*. "But it rarely cures. (...) This is why we think today that the veritable social-therapeutic milieu is and remains concrete society itself." (Fanon, 2018:499-500)

In day hospitalization there is no cut between the patient and society, no form of internment. The patient leaves the hospital as an employee leaves work and can go home, to the café, or to the cinema. The patient takes public transportation, shares spaces with other workers returning home, and meets other people in the route. The expanded options that interaction fosters and the choices and negotiations of his place in the world inform the personality of the patient, his affective responses, and the social dynamics. These encounters, the authors note, become now fruitful in combination with the therapy. The doctor does not meet an excluded person whose

ties with the social life are severed, but a person who is active in the world and in the ongoing process of negotiating its insertion in it. The social world, the professional or the family spheres, other people, are not perceived as a threat, or an obstacle against freedom, but the site where freedom is exerted and expanded. This goes hand in hand with Fanon's notion of madness as a pathology of freedom that he maintains since his dissertation. As Fanon and Geronimi put it:

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. (2018: 497)

In the coercive conditions of internment, with its strong restrictions on movement, interaction and sphere of action, the freedom of the boarder is limited to the realm of fantasy. Thus, the patient "feels free only in his opposition to the doctor who has withheld him." (2018: 497) For the authors, the open services bestow a certain freedom to the patient by allowing them to leave the hospital. But this freedom is limited and formal. In many cases the possibility of leaving the hospital is rejected by the doctor despite the evident negative effects of hospitalizations in the patient. Freedom and the rupture with forms of coercion is one of the central elements of day hospitalization. In this setting, there is no blackmail, the patient does not depend on the "doctor's benevolence", rather, the attendance to the hospital is felt as a temporal visit to the therapist, and the existing hierarchies are more malleable:

The a minima master/slave, prisoner/gaoler dialectic created in internment, or in the threat thereof, is radically broken. In the setting of the day hospital, the doctor-patient encounter forever remains an encounter between two freedoms. *That condition is necessary for all therapy*, but especially in psychiatry. (2018: 497; own italics)

In contrast to internment, in the context of day hospitalization the doctor is not the exclusive beholder of the symptoms. Instead the doctor faces the illness "as lived by a

patient, a personality in crisis within a present environment. This makes for a concrete, dynamic, in vivo examination of the illness.” (Fanon, 2018: 501) By having access to the illness as lived by the patient, the doctor can think dialectically rather than focusing on semiology, and approach it in existential rather than in nosological terms. That is, through the dynamic and immediate approach to illness, it is understood and treated as a whole, as a multiplicity of relations, not as a set of symptoms manifested in and reified by the internment setting. In classical hospitalization, they argue, forms of being were put into question, now, with the day hospital what is put into question are forms of existence: “There is no pointillist approach to different symptoms, but a global tackling of a form of existence, a structure, a personality engaged in current conflicts.” (Fanon, 2018: 502)

The displacement from ontology to an existential ontology was an important move in *Black Skin White Masks*, as we saw. Internment and hospitalization equate the conflict with the patient, and locate the pathology *in* and as the patient. This view reifies the patient and the illness, the authors observe. The detachment of the family and the rupture with society concomitant to internment is experienced by the patient as “an authentic condemnation of his essence, of his truth” (Fanon, 2018: 503). The rejection of the mentally ill elicits the question that, as stated above, is also a question *constantly* posed by those whose humanity is challenged: “Who am I, ultimately? Is that not the nagging question that the mental patient repeats to us at multiple levels and on different registers?” (Fanon, 2018: 503) Rather than restraining their field of action and possibilities, and locking them onto themselves, the day hospital fosters the continuity with the world and enables the patient to “be ever a bearer of meanings, a pole of activities, a dynamic element” within the family and the social

milieu (Fanon, 2018: 504). Therapy can then take into account all these elements and the multiple relations that form and inform the reality of the patient:

An ill brain cannot return to health by denying reality. Internment diminishes the violence of the conflict, the toxicity of reality. But the cure – the ordered calling into question of the established pathological structures – must proceed precisely at the core of the syncopated dialogue established between the overall personality and its environment. Action upon reality – and the patient is one of the elements of reality – is unifying. (2018:504)

Fanon and Geronimi clearly distinguish the day hospital from private psychiatric practice and therapy. The day hospital functions as mediator between the social milieu and the patient. It limits the exposure to the source of the conflict while it reconstructs and reinforces the personality of the patient towards his intervention in the everyday life. The authors also point out the limits of the day hospital. To the problems of distance, transportation and the economic costs that these imply for the patient, the fundamental problem lies in that it is not a suitable setting for all kind of disorders. The authors observe that the day hospital is not adequate in cases where the organic damage is significant, in cases of acute delusion, dementia, or certain types of psychosis, patients with aggressive reactions, and patients who are subjected to legal measures. The authors note that there is still a considerable sector of the population who requires psychiatric care that are excluded from the day hospital, but also that many of such cases can be treated once the most acute phase has receded.

Fanon and Geronimi conclude their reflection on their two year experience by posing questions that turn their reflection towards matters of public health. Fanon was already thinking in terms building the psychiatric care services, structures and policies of the new independent nations. The articles affirmed that this setting could be implemented and function efficaciously in poor countries, and presented the limits and the possibilities of the day hospital. To address its deficiencies without altering

its underlying philosophy requires establishing relations between different and complementary structures, policies and forms of healing, to combine them and multiply them, but taking the day hospital as point of departure. They posit that this demands a “strict legislation” that connects psychiatric care to other medical centers, regulates the duration of hospitalization, avoids turning day hospitals into open services, impedes the “creation of those monsters that are traditional psychiatric hospitals” and endows “the patient a maximum of freedom by removing all the carceral and coercive aspects” of psychiatric care (Fanon, 2018: 508-509).

#### **6.10 Psychiatry, antipsychiatry, critical psychiatry**

People asked me: ‘What do you want to change? It’s not possible.’ But, day by day, things changed. Then they asked me. ‘Where are you going with this?’ and I said, ‘I don’t know’. And it was true. I didn’t know. (Franco Basaglia; quoted in Foot, 2015).

These was Fanon’s last article on the asylum and madness and his last words on psychiatry, besides the chapter of *Les damnés de la terre* on the mental disorders of colonial war and his work on Algerian refugees that appeared elsewhere, which will be covered in the next chapter. Fanon was an influence and anticipated many themes in anti-psychiatry, radical psychiatry and critical ethnopsychiatry of the following decades (Cherki, 20011; Yousseff and Fadl, 1996; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Giovanni Pirelli argued that Fanon was not aware of the influence that he would have on European psychiatry (Menozzi, 2015). His colleague Alice Cherki points out that Fanon would not have endorsed anti-psychiatry because he believed in the existence and the universality of madness and in the healing possibilities of psychiatry despite its manifold forms of violence. Fanon did not conceive mental illness as uniquely a product of politics to be addressed through politics (Cherki, 2011). The interruption

of his life at a young age places us in the prickly terrain of speculation, but to ask how Fanon would have oriented his psychiatric work rather than providing firm answers requires to take into account that psychiatric practice was a daily open question for him and for other radical psychiatrists. And there probably lies their radicality. On one side, anti-psychiatry was not simply the denial of madness and psychiatry<sup>247</sup>. On the other side, from his writings in Algeria and Tunis one can discern that the adamant attachment to a fixed methodology, to a specific therapeutic model, or to a fixed institutional setting were not the guides of his work. Instead, his commitment was rather to an ongoing critical and self-critical questioning process that enabled him to be suspicious without discarding any element and to challenge and look beyond the existing theoretical and practical frameworks.

What can be asserted without speculation is that Fanon's questioning of the asylum and of the political, social, legal and administrative entanglements of psychiatry was cruder than that of the circles of Saint-Alban and La Borde, without radically breaking with them. Yet his approach to mental illness was not based on systematically negating it and attributing it directly to the political, but in attempting to understand it. In this sense, Fanon skipped and overcame the polemics during the 1960's between Gorizia and Saint-Alban. Basaglia criticized the obstinacy of

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<sup>247</sup> The term anti-psychiatry is today derogatorily associated with a radical psychiatric movement of the 1960's and 1970's that was based on the denial of the existence of mental illness. Yet this is a distorted and ahistorical portrayal of a heterogeneous current in terms of the ideas, positions, experiences, practices and figures from different geographical origins. In light of this simplification many of the proponents of anti-psychiatry, such as Basaglia and the Gorizia group, ended up distancing themselves from the term. Although some of its proponents argued that mental illness was itself a product of psychiatry, the different positions within the movement were more nuanced and varied, which makes difficult to establish a narrow definition of it. Such diversity was both its strength and its weakness. First coined by David Cooper in 1967, anti-psychiatry encompassed a wide array of critical and self-critical approaches to psychiatry that located mental illness within broader social and political structures. Overall, anti-psychiatry questioned the asylum, the biological theories of mental illness, the inhumanity of psychiatric treatments, or the social consequences of ascribing the label mad. Questions were shared but the answers varied. Some proposed the abolition of psychiatry, others issued critiques within psychiatry, others advocated for a scientific revolution within the field, whereas others a revolution against science. (Foot, 2015)

institutional psychotherapy on the treatment of the mentally ill in and through the institution by abstracting the therapeutic act and the asylum from the socio-political contexts and functions. The reform and modernization of the asylum was illusory since they did not call into question many of psychiatry's assumptions and definitions. Whereas institutional psychotherapists such as Félix Guattari argued that anti-psychiatrists' a priori prevalence of the political could trigger new forms of repression. It was necessary to address mental alienation without immediately referring to the political and the social. Understanding madness is a much slower and difficult process than negating the institution (Tosquelles, 1987).

Besides the matter of Fanon's legacy and influence on different medical movements, there are also aspects in which the world of psychiatry has not yet caught up with the work of Fanon, Tosquelles or Basaglia. The Basaglia law issued in 1978 that put an end to the construction of asylums in Italy and enforced their progressive dismantlement is considered a partial success (Menozzi, 2015). In France, as noted above, the repressive conditions of the asylum persist, to which new technological elements of surveillance and control have been added that bestow such conditions with a colder and more hygienic outlook. Yet their thinking and their work on the asylum can help to think other institutional settings and the forms of alienation and violence that they produce. Basaglia extended his analysis of the asylum to the university, another "total institution" (Foot, 2015). Detention and internment centers, refugee camps, the spatial structures to host refugees and migrants in Europe, United States or Australia follow a colonial logic and use colonial language.

Current dominant psychiatric orientations are based on the conception of the discipline as a techno-science. The definition and classification of mental illness and the standardization of diagnostic categories fostered by the American Psychiatric

Association through the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* was described by Tosquelles as a step back of 200 years (1993). The reliance on the biomedical and pharmacological psychiatry, the dominance of cognitivism and behavior practices take away the anthropological and psychopathological elements to address suffering (Cherki, 2017). In this framework of medicalization and decontextualization, deviancy is individualized and treated biomedically, and “with genetic accounts of racial and ethnic differences providing a scientific rationale for racially targeted medical care” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 14). The links between racism and medicine, and between racism and mental illness have not been broken. The ties between race and pathology continues to travel from medical schools to the consultation room. “The Puerto-Rican syndrome” or other “culture-bound syndromes” that do not consider the historical and social dimensions of suffering, that put threatening populations of color under suspicion are translated into overdiagnoses, underdiagnoses and the mistrust of the patient (Suite et al. 2007). The association of black protests with schizophrenia (Metzl, 2009) exemplifies the continuing role that psychiatry has played in “pathologizing revolt” (Lazreg, 2008; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). This also takes place by individualizing “the effects of political violence (for both perpetrators and victims) so that revolt and agitation are seen as symptoms” of pathological individuals rather than the behavior of oppressed groups (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 15). The language of colonial psychiatry haunts the present, notably after 9/11, in the construction of Muslims as new groups “problem people” in terms of madness and irrationality. The figure of the “mad muslim terrorist” is also explained pathologically and psychoanalytically in a reductive way without considering the pathogenic relations, spatial and historical, in which terrorism raises (Patel, 2014).



Simona Taliani finds striking resemblances in the accounts, the language and the manifestations of the colonized with the postcolonial refugee, the migrant, the victim of human trafficking, those whose humanity and identity is questioned and self-questioned, who are overdetermined and deprived of otherness. As we will see in the next chapter when talking about colonial trauma, the history of colonialism, even if it is not personally lived, and the experience of migration intersect in the postcolonial world in these figures. For Taliani, they suffer from a “double alienation” (2012: 290), coming from the remnants of *their* colonial history and from the postcolonial European societies (Taliani, 2012). The role, status and the place of culture, and its concrete elements and subjects, in healing and in psychic suffering upon which Fanon reflected helps to question culturalist and interculturalist approaches in the treatment of mental disease in refugee and migrant populations in Europe that treat their system of reference as self-contained and static. This does not take into account that the situation of the migrant in the homeland, the causes of migration, the migratory process, and the arrival to the new country have disrupted and dislocated the home culture itself, and it omits the colonial traces expressed in the language of the patient, and in the hosting institutions and societies. This folklorization of culture also risks falling into the linear logic and a univocal cause to explain the symptom of the medical model. Fanon shows that a thoughtless use of medical diagnostic categories can be as alienating as the discourse of sorcery (Taliani, 2012, Beneduce, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

The next chapter turns to Fanon’s treatment of violence in the opening chapter of *Les damnés de la terre*, one of the most addressed and controversial aspects of his work. But as we have seen throughout this dissertation, Fanon’s questioning, understanding and addressing violence, in its different forms and manifestations

cannot be reduced to that chapter, since it is a constant in his work. As this chapter has shown, Fanon analyzes the different forms of violence, covert and overt, taking place in the healing process. From method, diagnostics, staff attitudes, hierarchies and structures that militate against humanity of the patient and against the possibility of their active participation the social world and human interaction, to the identification of the covert traces of violence, politics and history in the speech and the body of the patient, or the by interrogating the healing process within wider societal dynamics.

At the same time, Fanon's thought on violence and his theorization of violence in *Les damnés de la terre* cannot be understood without other elements –already covered in this dissertation – that are both present in the chapter and are also constant in his work: the poetic and dramatic dimension of the text, the sociogenic analysis, the interrogation of the violence of the asylum and the psychological dimension, his existential phenomenology of embodiment, temporality, spatiality and oppression, the meanings and values attributed to the colonized, the zone of non-being and the absence of ethics in racist societies that compromises the relation between ethics and politics, and the question of the universal and the particular. It is not only a reflection on revolutionary violence, as it has been usually read, but he brings up a connected set of themes and problems related to violence, including questions of nonviolence and the aftermaths of violence. In any case, I treat Fanon's work on violence in *Les damnés de la terre*, not at the core of his thought, but nevertheless as helping to think and illuminate on the problems of living amidst violent conditions.

## Chapter 7. Concerning Violence

We must analyze, patiently and lucidly, each one of the reactions of the colonized, and every time we do not understand, we must tell ourselves that we are at the heart of the drama, that of the impossible encounter in any colonial situation. (Fanon, 1959)

### Introduction

The opening chapter of *Les damnés de la terre*, “Concerning Violence”, has elicited widespread discussion to the extent of eclipsing the rest of his work. On the basis of the 71 pages of the opening chapter Fanon is reduced to a thinker of violence and revolution or considered an “apostle of violence” in other cases. There is also many debates on whether he conceived violence as a means or as an end in itself, or whether the violence of the colonized is the same as the violence of the colonizer, (Roberts, 2004), whether violence was part of a dialectical process, or violence is understood for Fanon in purely psycho-affective terms. Any reductionist position risks missing the point.

At a personal level, his colleague Alice Cherki observes, Fanon was not a violent person (Cherki, 2011: 304). For that matter, Simone de Beauvoir evokes in her autobiography that Fanon was “horrified” by both colonial violence and the counter-violence of the liberation struggles in Africa. “Above all, I would not like to be a professional revolutionary”, she recalls him saying (Beauvoir, 1963: 424; my translation<sup>248</sup>). By the time he was writing “Concerning Violence” he was well acquainted with and experienced in dealing with the psychological damages and the consequences of the war. Fanon most probably wrote “Concerning Violence” in Tunis while treating the Algerian refugees and the orphan children running away from the war (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). In his writing, Fanon did not valorize violence, neither positively or negatively. He did not justify violence, nor was he

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<sup>248</sup> « elle lui faisait horreur (...) ‘Surtout, je ne voudrais pas être un révolutionnaire professionnel’ »,

apologetic about it. Instead he issued a series of warnings and sheds light on the different problems related to violence. His personal position on violence was, for him, secondary. This does not amount to a position of detachment or as ambiguous observer. His position was clear since he joined the anticolonial revolution. Instead, the suspension of his personal position and the absence of value judgements on violence are more related to his commitment to the decolonization project, that is, a cause larger than himself. But it is clear throughout “Concerning Violence” and “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” that violence unavoidably produces pain and suffering, as Gordon (1995) puts it, for Fanon, violence has a tragic character.

“Concerning Violence” is, as its title indicates, a chapter on violence, but it is not a digression on violence as an abstract concept, mainly because for Fanon violence is not abstract and is not conceived as a thing, but as a relational phenomenon. Neither it is a handbook of revolution and does not uniquely address revolutionary violence. Fanon analyzes the many dimensions of violence and its manifold manifestations in the colonial context that constitute what he called “the atmosphere of violence”.

At the same time, it is not a chapter only on violence. Fanon explicitly affirms that violence is a “*problématique*”, that is, violence is linked to a complexity of issues. Thus, violence cannot be conceived in isolation and, as he usually does, he juxtaposes themes and connects a set of concerns while talking about violence. While discussing violence, Fanon elaborates on the relation of ethics to politics (Gordon, 2015), on questions of maturity and maturation, on problems of agency and corporality, the problem of the universal and the particular, he also makes an existential phenomenological description of the spatial dimensions of oppression, of life under segregation, of how it is lived by the colonized, what kind of subjectivity, imagination, relation to one’s body and to the world does it elicit, what it means to

live under violent conditions, what kind of liberation does it foster, what does it occlude, and what limits does it impose. He brings up the conundrum of nonviolence, and he also assesses that the history of colonial violence does not end with counter-violence, independence and liberation.

The aim of this chapter is to unpack these issues, which he implicitly and explicitly addresses especially in “Concerning Violence” and in “Colonial War and Mental Disorders”. Besides the anticolonial thought and the context of anticolonial revolts of the time, Fanon’s account of violence cannot be understood without considering the different elements that appear throughout his work, and the different dimensions of Fanon’s thought, the aesthetic, the humanist, the phenomenological, the existential, the psychiatric, his dialogues with Hegel, Sartre, Marx or Césaire, his understanding of the asylum, of the violence that it produces, and his attempts to transform it.

I have structured this chapter as follows. The first section focuses on the aesthetic dimension of “Concerning Violence”. As Lewis Gordon (1995) points out, violence in Fanon has a tragic character. Such tragic element does not take place at the level of content but also of form. As stated in chapter 4, the poetic element in Fanon is connected with methodological, political and pedagogic concerns. In theatrical terms, Fanon presents an initial scene of two figures, the colonized and the colonizer in a world that he describes as Manichean, divided in two. Yet this initial scene hides a complexity that will unfold throughout the chapter and the book. As Ato Sekyi-Otu points out, it is important to take into account the dramatic dynamics of the text and the narrative that he builds and develops throughout the rest of book, and also to distinguish Fanon’s voice as the author, his exercises of ventriloquism, and the unfolding complexity of the plot. The second section explores how the Manichean colonial framework epitomizes the false universality of European claims, and how

black and anticolonial struggles disrupts the universals and the particulars. This is not tantamount to a rejection of the universal, but to its suspension as the starting point of the struggle. The third section addresses Fanon's description of oppression in relation to the spatial organization of the colonial town and the violence that it produces. The Manichean structure that colonialism attempts to impose is lived in the flesh and the affectivity of the colonized and is manifested in the aggressiveness, and violence between the colonized. Fanon's first concern is what to do with this violence and reorient it in a political form. The fourth section briefly unpacks Fanon's more controversial position on violence, referring to the psychological benefits of violence, and relates his view to similar accounts such as that of Frederick Douglass and Jean Améry. The fifth section addresses the core of Fanon's argument on the subject of violence. Namely, as Lewis Gordon points out, Fanon considers violence as intrinsic to the "appearance" of the colonized. This is related to symbolic violence, racist structures of meaning and normative life which make the political emergence of the colonized violence to the system. This understanding of violence which, has not been properly grasped by commentators such as Sartre, Hannah Arendt or Judith Butler moves away from the paradigms of violence as a means or violence as an end in itself. The sixth section addresses Fanon's critique of a particular approach to nonviolence and pacifism based on the avoidance of violence and linked to class interests. The seventh section examines how the aforementioned understanding violence as the intrinsic appearance of the colonized also moves away from the dichotomy of violence versus nonviolence. I illustrate the point with the cases of the Civil Rights or the anti-Apartheid struggles which have been addressed in terms of such dichotomy. The eighth section explores Fanon's last chapter of *Les damnés de la terre* on the clinical case studies of the traumatic effects of the colonial war. The ninth

section explores Fanon's anticipation of postcolonial violence and mental disorders as the legacy of colonialism and the problems of current psychiatric approaches to address them. The tenth section examines his concluding call for decolonization and a new humanism

### **7.1 At the heart of the drama**

Many readings of *Les Damnés de la terre*, notably of its opening chapter, "Concerning Violence", fail to take into consideration the aforementioned aesthetic dimension and the poetics of Fanon, which as stated, does not play an ornamental role but is imbricated with methodological, political, anthropological and pedagogical considerations. In *Les damnés de la terre*, the dramatic elements through which Fanon builds his argument (Sekyi-Otu, 1996; De Oto, 2003) is accompanied by the tragic character that for Fanon has colonialism and violence (Gordon, 1995). Such chapter may probably be the most commented and controversial of Fanon's work and has made him known as an "apologist of violence", "glorifying violence" by his detractors, or associated and reduced him to a thinker of revolutionary violence. In *Black Skin White Masks* he qualified as "absurd drama" the relation between blacks and whites in racist societies, and in *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* he had explicitly affirmed the dramatic character of the colonial situation and linked it to its epistemic and ethico-political dimensions:

We must analyze, patiently and lucidly, each one of the reactions of the colonized, and every time we do not understand, we must tell ourselves that we are at the heart of the drama, that of the impossible encounter in any colonial situation (Fanon, 1959: 113; my translation<sup>250</sup>)

His demand to understand not only emphasizes the complexity of the colonial order, it also issues a firm appeal to humility in approaching its study. This entails to

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<sup>250</sup> « Il faut, patiemment mais lucidement, analyser chacune des réactions du colonisé et chaque fois que l'on ne comprend pas, il faut se dire qu'on est au cœur d'un drame, celui de la rencontre impossible dans toute situation coloniale. »

consider the perspective of the colonized, to look at the drama from different angles, it involves a sustained effort at posing questions, revising the questions themselves and the whole framework of inquiry.

As Sekyi-Otu notes, without considering, among others, the aesthetic dimension of *Les Damnés de la terre*, its interpreter can extract isolated sentences, paragraphs or whole pages of the text, confer them a conclusive and prescriptive character and mistakenly presume Fanon's authorial voice and a conclusive position (Sekyi-Otu, 1996). Illustrative of this is the criticism that philosopher and literary critic Tzvetan Todorov (1995) issues of anticolonialism in the works of Aimé Césaire, Wole Soyinka or the Black is Beautiful movement for what he sees as cultural relativism and hostility to universalism, but it is in Fanon, he points out, where the "similarity between colonialist and anticolonialist discourse reaches its extreme" (Todorov, 1995: 56). Todorov affirms that in Fanon's thought "only the actors change in the move from colonialism to anticolonialism: their attributes, like their actions, remain the same." (Todorov, 1995: 56) He takes Fanon's statements such as "We are nothing like you", "To the saying 'All natives are the same' the colonized person responds: 'All settlers are the same'", or "The violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity" (Fanon quoted in Todorov 1995: 56) to mean that anticolonialism, like colonialism, is premised upon the refusal of truth, a regressive particularism, weaponizing difference, and hence, racism, and totalitarianism. When the literary critic reads in Fanon "by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force" (Fanon as quoted in Todorov; 1995: 56), Todorov sees "no irony", but "repetition, pure and simple" (Todorov: 1995: 56). The stakes would be clearly



defined according to Todorov's reading, for Fanon "all the good people are on one side, and all the bad on the other" (Todorov: 1995, 56). He writes:

Fanon's response to all these questions is that no absolute values exist. Something is good when it serves my ends, and bad when it opposes them. This is why violence is good when it is in the hands of the oppressed and serves their struggle, while the colonizers remain forever detestable. Here again (ironically?), Fanon imitates the theoreticians of racism and imperialism. (Fanon, 1995: 57-58)

Hence Todorov's bewilderment about Fanon's defense of decolonization and condemnation of colonialism while presenting what for him is a symmetrical and bloody landscape: if for Fanon colonialism is "violence in its natural state" and it "can only be called into question by absolute violence" (Fanon; quoted in Todorov, 1995: 57), Todorov wonders why "would one be preferable to the other" considering their resemblance and "Fanon's fascination with violence" (1995: 57). The outcome, he tells off to the postcolonial world, "was predictable since the start" (1995: 56), for "one reaps what one has sown", something that Fanon seems to ignore or assumes with "incomprehensible joy" (1995: 57). The moral relativism, pure irrationality and reactivity that Todorov sees in Fanon makes him squirm in his armchair, to the extent that he likens Fanon's statement, "[w]hen the native hears a speech about Western culture, he pulls out his knife " (quoted in Todorov; 1995: 58) to "Goebbels's revolver" (1995: 58).

Ironically, Todorov's equating of Fanon with the Nazis and his caricature-like portrayal of anticolonial thought as reactive, resentful and hostile to truth is not distant from the colonial tropes –as examined before concerning colonial psychiatry that Fanon had to deal with in Algeria– that were used to rationalize domination, war and the preservation of the colonial regime. "Challenge to colonial rule was defined as anticolonialism, which was reduced to a condition of resentment, resulting from a

personality built on negative values and emotions, principally ‘hatred’.” (Lazreg, 2008: 66) Fanon, as Du Bois, was cognizant of the risks of collapsing people into problems rather than exposing and addressing the problems that they suffer. His call to “to analyze, patiently and lucidly, each one of the reactions of the colonized” echoes Du Bois’ warning, which fell on deaf ears in Todorov’s analysis. Fanon was very explicit on this point: “It is necessary to reflect on the *problématique* of violence.” (1961: 72; my translation<sup>251</sup>) In French he uses the term problematic not as an adjective but as a noun, thereby referring to a whole set of problems related to violence.

Instead of pathologizing anticolonial thinkers, a more searching point of departure might be to question, as Sekyi-Otu sensitively puts it, what history or form of domination, and what relation to that history and form of domination, would elicit Fanon’s account and the virulent response to colonialism. In his own words:

What must the experience of human bondage be like in order to give rise to this manifestly unbridled voluntarism in the rhetoric of revolutionary agency? *What manner of apprehending history* would yield this radical catastrophism in the representation of social transformation? (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 48; own italics)

As we will see, this is one among the different aspects that Fanon explores in the statements that Todorov emphasizes and in the chapter on violence. Leaving aside the *ad hominem*, the false equivalence and the oversimplification through which Todorov builds his argument, his analysis does not reach “the heart of the drama”, which as Fanon put it, is the impossibility of a human encounter, of a meeting ground in the colony. Todorov presupposes that the colonial world is formed by symmetrical human relations between already formed universal and abstract subjects, and sustained by an ethical background, that although being disrespected its restoration

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<sup>251</sup> « Il faut réfléchir à cette problématique de la violence. »

would enable to deal with a political problem. Yet, as we saw, it is precisely the absence of values and the expulsion of the colonized from self-other relations and, therefore, from the realm of ethics what Fanon exposes as characterizing the colonial and racist world. As we saw it, in *Black Skin White Masks* he called it “the zone of nonbeing”. For Lewis Gordon Fanon poses a challenge to liberal political theory:

This critique of presuming the presence of a Self–Other dialectic leads, however, to a critique of normative political theory. For such theory, most represented by modern liberalism, the claim is that it is about theorizing what should be, but the thought in fact presupposes the very political reality it needs to construct for its condition of possibility. To put it differently: For those who rule, they prefer ethics to precede politics since they presuppose an already just and humane, although often hidden, environment as the de facto context of their inquiry into what ought to be. (Gordon, 2007b: 6)

The tragedy of the colonial situation is that in a world without values responsibility falls by the wayside and everything can be done to the human. When the colonized, the subhuman, claims his or her entrance into the domain of ethics and human relations their appearance, which as noted is etymologically related to existence, is conceived as violence, that is, the violation of a theodicean system that premises its justice and legitimacy in the dehumanization of the colonized. The conundrum that for Fanon colonization and racism poses is how to address a political issue, without the ethical conditions that sustain politics, so that through political intervention ethical relationships can be created and cultivated (Gordon, 2015).

We will explore these considerations throughout the present chapter. But now, if we focus on the dramatic form, it has to be asked what is Fanon saying, doing and meaning in the statements that Todorov extracts and singles out if they are considered as part of “the *moving body* of verbal and representational acts” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 34; italics in the original) through which Fanon builds his narrative? In this light, Fanon’s statements lose its closed, univocal, exhortative tone. When treated as part of a plurivocal narrative, with shifting perspectives, where Fanon is “the dramatist, albeit

in the role of a passionate participant and interlocutor” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 5), such utterances reveal themselves as open, ambiguous and equivocal. An instance of many could be when Fanon says that colonial violence can only be crushed by a greater violence (Fanon, 1961: 61) and ten pages later, in apparently a blatant contradiction, he issues the following statement:

We see that everybody is aware of this violence and that the question is not always to respond to it with a greater violence, but rather to see how to ease the crisis. What is in reality this violence? (Fanon, 1961: 72; my translation<sup>252</sup>)

The aforementioned question on “the manner of *apprehending* history” (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 47) may shed light on what Fanon assesses in parts of the text through these intertextual plays. In the opening page of the book Fanon states that “[d]ecolonization, which intends to change the order of the world, (...) cannot be the result of a magic wand stroke, a natural tremor, or an amicable agreement.” Instead, he adds,

Decolonization, as we know, is an historical process: That is, it can only be understood, it can only find its intelligibility or become transparent to itself insofar as we discern the historicizing movement which gives its shape and content. (Fanon, 1961: 39-40; my translation<sup>253</sup>)

Fanon conceives decolonization as an historical process, which appears opaque as an object of thought, which is to be disclosed and understood as such in the very process –a process bound by its historicity. Yet, this statement plays an intra-textual role when considered within the dynamics of the text. As Sekyi-Otu (1996: 53) notes, such quote can be grasped as initiating an internal dialogue taking place within the

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<sup>252</sup> « On voit donc que tout le monde est conscient de cette violence et que la question n'est pas toujours d'y répondre par une plus grande violence mais plutôt de voir comment désamorcer la crise. Qu'est-ce donc en réalité que cette violence? »

<sup>253</sup> « La décolonisation, qui se propose de changer l'ordre du monde, (...) elle ne peut être le résultat d'une opération magique, d'une secousse naturelle ou d'une entente à l'amiable. La décolonisation, on le sait, est un processus historique: c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne peut être comprise, qu'elle ne trouve son intelligibilité, ne devient translucide à elle-même que dans l'exacte mesure où l'on discerne le mouvement historicisant qui lui donne forme et contenu. »

text, and functioning as the basis according to which the pages that follow it are going to be analyzed, questioned and revised. In the ensuing pages Fanon does not provide an account of an historical process but starts his narrative in media res and brings the reader without preliminary into the “heart of the drama” (Aching, 2013). He presents a scene of two paradigmatic figures, the colonizer and the colonized, two “different species” (Fanon, 1961: 43; my translation<sup>254</sup>), mutually and asymmetrically constituted, “the colonizer has made and *continues to make* the colonized. He draws his truth, namely his wealth from the colonial system.” Within this system the colonized is a ““thing””, “spectators crushed by inessentiality”, who achieves their humanity “in the very process of liberation” (Fanon, 1961: 40; italics in the original; my translation<sup>255</sup>). The setting of the initial scene is the “Manichean” world of colonial Algeria, “a world divided in two” (Fanon, 1961: 43; my translation<sup>256</sup>), not only spatially, also at the level of human worth, of ethics, and values: “the colonizers turns the colonized into the quintessence of evil”, “impermeable to ethics”, the “absence of values, but also the negation of values” (Fanon, 1961: 44; my translation<sup>257</sup>). The intermediary between both sides, the spokesperson of the colonial order is the soldier, who uses “the language of pure violence” and “carries the violence to the homes and the brains of the colonized” (Fanon, 1961: 42; my translation<sup>258</sup>). These two sides, he adds, “are not complementary”,

The two zones oppose each other, but not at the service of a higher unity.  
Ruled by the Aristotelian logic of reciprocal exclusion, they obey to the

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<sup>254</sup> « espèces différentes »

<sup>255</sup> « C'est le colon qui a fait et qui continue à faire le colonisé. Le colon tire sa vérité, c'est-à-dire ses biens, du système colonial.(...) transforme des spectateurs écrasés d'inessentialité (...) la chose » colonisée devient homme dans le processus même par lequel elle se libère. »

<sup>256</sup> « monde coupé en deux »

<sup>257</sup> « le colon fait du colonisé une sorte de quintessence du mal. (...) imperméable à l'éthique, absence de valeurs, mais aussi négation des valeurs. »

<sup>258</sup> « utilise un langage de pure violence. (...) porte la violence dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé. »

principle of reciprocal exclusion: there is no possible conciliation, one of the terms is *de trop*. (Fanon, 1961: 42; my translation<sup>259</sup>)

Fanon points out that this is not a dialectical moment, but rather an antidialectical one, characterized by fixicity and lack of reciprocity. Yet at the utmost manifestation of a rationale of opposites, segregation, and its concomitant compartmentalization and elimination of *human* relations, Fanon emphasizes the relational nature of the colonial system, for both the colonizer and colonized are ineluctable figures for defining and maintaining a broader system, colonialism. The *disappearance* of either of them entails the elimination of colonialism. And as we will see in further detail, the appearance of the colonized, that is, the affirmation of the colonized as human agent, *is* violence to the system.

Critics of Fanon have dismissed such analysis as binary or dualistic thinking and, therefore reductive (Gilroy, 2000). However, Fanon's description of the colonial world as Manichean is not accidental, it obeys to a double reason: First, he argues that the structure that colonialism attempts to impose is a Manichean one based on a drastic antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized. Second, it is in *relation with* this unequal Manichean structure and power differentials whereby the colonized emerges politically, ceases to be a *thing* or a spectator, and initiates the process of decolonization. Before developing this aspect, a brief clarification on the recurrent critique of binaries might be pertinent. As Gordon (2008) notes, the *a priori* rejection of binaries as such, a repeated trope in postmodern and poststructuralist thought, is not short of irony for such thought is also grounded on anti-essentialism. It is, instead, the context at hand which should guide the mode analysis and depending on it one can decide whether a binary analysis is relevant and generative or *wrong*, reductive or

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<sup>259</sup> « La zone habitée par les colonisés n'est pas complémentaire de la zone habitée par les colons. Ces deux zones s'opposent, mais non au service d'une unité supérieure. Régies par une logique purement aristotélicienne, elles obéissent au principe d'exclusion réciproque: il n'y a pas de conciliation possible, l'un des termes est de trop. »

leading to absolutist forms of closure. Further, treating an analysis premised on black *and* white, colonizer *and* colonized, or oppressor *and* oppressed as binaries endows a normative symmetrical value to both terms that does not adjust to a reality where only one of the terms has a normative status. Besides, as Gordon adds, the distinction between being and being-not, an epistemic resource that enables human cognition to discern differences, is not a binary. In this light, the normative and the non-normative, the white and the non-white, cannot be considered a binary, for the possibilities of the formers are finite whereas those of the latter are infinite.

Fanon, as stated, uses the expression Manichean to describe the colonial world intentionally. He is not arguing that the reality under colonialism is a binary one, as the complexity will unfold throughout the same chapter and in the rest of the book. Alternatively, first, he is pointing out that the colonial and racist logic and structure that colonialism and racism attempt to enforce onto the relations in the colony is a binary one. As we will see below, Manicheism in Fanon is similar to what Gordon called the theodicy of racist systems, and what Fanon called in *Black Skin White Masks* called the “zone of non-being”. It is the expulsion from the realm of ethics, sociality and humanity of groups of people, and their total disposability, while such society considers itself peaceful and just precisely on the grounds of violence and injustice. Second, and importantly, it is within this Manichean framework in which the decolonization struggle takes place and the *thing* is turned into an actor. That is, the colonized achieves historical self-consciousness and becomes a political subject within this Manichean framework. This is one of the things that Fanon is doing in “Concerning Violence”, a phenomenology of historical consciousness (Sekyi-Otu, 1996). He states, “When the colonial context *is apprehended in its immediacy*, it is obvious that what divides the world is the fact of belonging to a certain race, to a

certain species.” (1961: 42; own italics; my translation<sup>260</sup>) By appealing to Hegel’s immediate knowledge Fanon approaches social life in the colony as directly lived, as it is sensuously grasped, as it appears to consciousness to the colonized. The approach of immediate knowledge is not comprehension but the apprehension of the object. This standpoint epistemology, inherently partial, but not any less legitimate and substantial, does not entail a conclusive and comprehensive claim on the social life under the colonial regime. It requires being further questioned and subjected to revision and completion (Sekyi-Otu, 1996: 51-52). Likewise, what has been understood as Fanon’s convinced demand for decolonization, that the last shall be the first (Aching, 2013: 26), when considered within the level of immediacy, is endowed with a static albeit fleeting character: “[t]he colonized can perceive in *an absolute immediacy* whether decolonization has taken place or not: the minimum required is that the last shall be the first.” (Fanon, 1961: 48; my translation<sup>261</sup>) It is within this framework of immediate knowledge that decolonization is conceived as “a program of absolute disorder” (Fanon, 1961: 39; my translation), through which the colonized “has already decided to replace the colonized, to take his place”.

Therefore, in those statements Fanon is not so much talking about violence than describing and problematizing an initial stage of decolonization, and revealing how Manichean colonial discourses, practices and structures are inextricably linked to the colonial subject to the extent that they inform the process of becoming a subject, the desires, the imagination and the emancipatory responses of the colonized. As he explicitly puts it, the dichotomy that colonialism and racism impose upon the world continues during decolonization (1961: 52), and this stage of decolonization “unifies

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<sup>260</sup> « Quand on aperçoit dans son immédiateté le contexte colonial, il est patent que ce qui morcelle le monde c'est d'abord le fait d'appartenir ou non à telle espèce, à telle race. »

<sup>261</sup> « Ce qui veut dire que le colonisé a la possibilité de percevoir dans une immédiateté absolue si la décolonisation a lieu ou non: le minimum exigé étant que les derniers deviennent les premiers. »



that world, by the radical decision to remove its heterogeneity and unifying it on the basis of nation, and sometimes, of race.” (Fanon, 1961: 48; my translation<sup>262</sup>) This transformative activity is what he means when he says that “for the colonized this violence represents the absolute praxis.” A praxis that he qualifies as “totalizing” (Fanon, 1961: 82, 90; my translation<sup>263</sup>)

Were this Fanon’s prescription and his last word, decolonization would merely consist in inheriting colonial Manicheism, in a brutal reversal and the Africanization of the colony. Things are more complex, he writes:

However, everything was simple. The good ones were on one side and the bad ones were on the other side. The idyllic and unreal clarity of the beginning is replaced by a penumbra that dislocates consciousness. (Fanon, 1961: 139; my translation<sup>264</sup>)

He then proceeds to unfold the multiple contradictions and relations that the colonial framework occludes and cannot be grasped by the sensuous directedness of immediacy: the class relations, the role and the model of the trade unions, the different positionality and attitudes of the colonized intellectuals, the distinction between the rural and the urban, the rural exodus, the conflicting role of political parties, the relation of the metropolis with the European settlers, or the European who support the anticolonial struggle. Sekyi-Otu points out the text moves from the immediate knowledge and the apprehension of the colonial world to a form of “rational knowledge” that seeks the comprehension of the world (1996). The second *act* of decolonization is a move beyond the initial world of opposites as perceived at the level of immediate experience; it entails a process of psychological, political and social maturation of consciousness in which the complexity, the contradictions, the

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<sup>262</sup> La décolonisation unifie ce monde en lui enlevant par une décision radicale son hétérogénéité, en l’unifiant sur la base de la nation, quelquefois de la race. »

<sup>263</sup> « Pour le colonisé, cette violence représente la praxis absolue. »

<sup>264</sup> « Tout était simple pourtant, d’un côté les mauvais, de l’autre les bons. À la clarté idyllique et irréaliste du début se substitue une pénombre qui disloque la conscience

shadows and the grey areas of the colonial and postcolonial situation are unveiled and addressed. Once the world of the colonizer and the colonized is dissolved an open dialectic is set in motion.

## **7.2 The universal and the particular**

In Todorov's own reading it might be justifiable that he understands Fanon as anti-universalist relativist, but is Fanon actually saying so? Before addressing this aspect, it might be important to notice that Todorov extends his critique of relativism, racism, and a reactive particularism to anticolonial discourse in general, and concretely to the work of Soyinka, Césaire or the movement of Black is Beautiful. If we take the case of the latter, for Todorov it might be more virtuous and universal to claim Everybody is Beautiful. But, what the Black is Beautiful points out is the normative disparity in the standards of beauty and ugliness. To draw a contemporary parallelism, the Black Lives Matter movement against white supremacy and police violence against black people would also be a reactive particularism since the universal would be All Lives Matter. However, the latter is the argument employed by white supremacists, and maintains the actual disparity on the value of lives. Thus, what the movement of Black Lives Matter exposes, out of the concrete and the particular of black existence, is the contradictions of the abstract universal, reveals that it actually does not work as an universal under the concrete conditions of racism, and issues a more universal claim on the value of lives, for it encompasses the false universal and exceeds it. This "universalizing potential" can generally be discerned in black and anticolonial thought (Gordon, 2000:141).

Étienne Balibar (2016) reminds that every universal in spite of its timeless self-understanding is enunciated from somewhere, from concrete, historical, social, cultural geographical and political conditions, and concrete interests. This entails that

universals do not only clash with particulars but also with other universals. They are bound to notions of identity, community, belonging and inclusion, and concomitantly, exclusion. For this reason, Balibar points out, universals do not have a strictly ecumenical character; it is misleading to conceive them in terms of unity and harmony, instead of in terms of difference, conflict and division.

Césaire and Fanon do not address these conflicting universals, but the oppressive and racist dimensions of European universalism, its constraining and narcissistic character which rejects human difference and exclude them from the possibility of belonging to the universal. In the preface to Fanon's book, Sartre puts it by adopting the voice of the colonized: "You are making monsters out of us; your humanism claims our universality and your racist practices locks us into the particular." (Sartre, 1961: 18: my translation<sup>265</sup>) In the same vein, Balibar observes that the exclusion from the universal is rationalized on the basis of the refusal of universalism by those who are excluded or in their incapacity to understand universalism. He adds that universalism is not intrinsically racist, but racism and universalism are neither opposite, instead they have been intrinsically connected in the Euromodern world. Balibar concludes that although it can rationalize discrimination and oppression, the discourse of universalism can also articulate resistance, revolts and insurgent struggles, as the case of feminists or black or anticolonial struggles for emancipation, which challenged dominant constructions of universalisms and their institutionalization (2016).

The discourse of Césaire and Fanon was both situated in the universal and rooted in the particular struggles and conflicts derived from the condition of the black and the colonized. What they do is to expose the fakeness of the alleged universal,

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<sup>265</sup> « vous faites de nous des monstres, votre humanisme nous prétend universels et vos pratiques racistes nous particularisent. »

challenge it by showing its contradictions and its particularity, and dialectically, and paradoxically, construct a larger universal rooted in the concrete struggles. This is made explicit in Césaire's letter of resignation from the French Communist Party. Besides his divergences with the party's position towards Stalin, Césaire argues against reducing racism to the class struggle and against treating the colonial question "as a part of a more important whole" (Césaire, 2010: 147). He adds:

I shall anticipate an objection.  
Provincialism? Not at all. I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the "universal." My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars. (Césaire, 2010: 151)

When Fanon reiterates that the colonial world is a Manichean world, that they are not two different worlds, but a single world divided in two, he is pointing out that it is a consequence of the false universalism and the inapplicability of the universal to one side of that world. Decolonial and international relations theorists concur that the ascription of universal rights obeyed to such asymmetrical division of land, lives and humanity that Fanon described as Manichean and anti-dialectical (Suarez-Krabbe, 2015; Aching, 2013).

In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon had anticipated the predicaments of human relations in colonial and racist societies by questioning the inapplicability of Hegel's dialectics of lordship and bondage in colonial and racist settings. The metaphorical account of human interaction described by the German philosopher in *Phenomenology of Spirit* has elicited much discussion and is at the basis of contemporary debates of political philosophy, understandings of subjectivity and conflict, such as those revolving around the struggle for recognition. For Hegel, the condition for one's attainment of self-consciousness is realized through the presence

of the other. The other is an external to the self who can negate me or exclude me, but in the awareness of my own negation lies also the possibility of a consciousness that is aware of itself. Thus, it is through the recognition of the other that one achieves self-consciousness. The desire for recognition triggers what Hegel called a life and death struggle. By risking one's life one gets rid of superfluous elements and can unveil what one is. But such life and death struggle does not literally take place for the death of the other would deprive me from the possibility of being recognized. The one who abandons the struggle becomes the slave. The master is a consciousness that exists for-itself, he has control over the slave and over his work. He has power over everything. However, the master is not satisfied with obtaining recognition from a downfallen and a dependent self-consciousness. The consciousness of the slave is the form of a thing. The slave, out of fear, moves away from the master and focuses on the object of his work. Through the objectification and the production of his work he becomes aware of the things he creates, of the world and of the relationship with the master. Through his work he understands his existence in his own right and attains self-consciousness, as a being-for-itself. In the end it is the master who is dependent and obtains a flawed recognition whereas the slave is an independent being. For Hegel, this is not the end of the story, since this is to be overcome by the unfolding of the Spirit, but it is here where Fanon's account of Hegel stops (Hegel: 1977: 111-119).

Fanon questions Hegel's account of recognition from its point of departure. Instead of abstract subjects devoid of history and social conditions, he locates them in the colonial setting and takes into account the relations of subordination and the absence of reciprocity between the master and the slave. Here, the master is the European colonizer and the slave is the colonized black. For Fanon, at the basis of

Hegel's account there is a reciprocity between master and slave, which is absent in the colonial world. The master despises the consciousness of the slave and does not seek his recognition, since the latter is not the other of the master. What the master demands from the black is not recognition but work. The black, instead, wants to be like the master. Instead of turning towards the object, the black turns toward the master and abandons the object. Therefore, the black is dependent from the master (Fanon, 1952, 213-214). In Fanon's treatment of the colonial master and slave there is no reciprocity, no dialectical movement, no conflict, or at least there is a different type of conflict than in Hegel's meeting of two equals. Or, as Gordon (2007, 2015) clarifies, in the zone of non-being, the conflict is not between self and other, but about trying to be the other.

Maldonado-Torres argues that applying Hegel's reasoning to the problems of the black "would entail getting lost in the particular and contingent when the idea is rather to focus on the truly universal." Fanon had, instead, another approach: "The urgent thing is to rediscover what is important beneath what is contingent." (Fanon, 1964: my translation<sup>266</sup>) Thus, while Hegel seeks the eternal in the development of the Spirit, Fanon "takes the opposite road: situated in time he focuses on the ruptures with what presents itself as the universal or eternal." (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 103)

"Concerning Violence" describes a rigid, anti-dialectic world that epitomizes the contradictions of the alleged universals. Fanon rejects abstracts universals and turns towards those excluded by the universal. This entails an "ethico-political movement from slave to slave" as the starting point of political action (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 153). Ciccariello-Maher points out that by temporarily inhabiting the particular, the colonized assumes a defensive position which defers the universal; "subjective

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<sup>266</sup> « Retrouver l'important sous le contingent, telle est l'urgence. »

autonomous action” and an “identitarian moment” are “necessary steps” in order to go beyond such rigid Manichean world and to set in motion an open-ended dialectics (Ciccariello-Maher, 2014: 32). In *Les damnés de la terre* the dialectical movement takes the form of the social consciousness of the independent nation, beyond narrow conceptions of identity and nationalism:

The people realize then that national independence puts at stake multiple realities which, sometimes, are divergent and antagonists. Clarification, at this concrete moment of the struggle, is crucial since it helps the people to move from a global and undifferentiated nationalism to a social and economic consciousness. The people, who at the beginning of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manicheism of the colonizer—the black against the white, the Arab against the Infidel—realize *en route* that a black can be whiter than the whites and that the eventuality of the national flag and the possibility of an independent nation do not imply that certain layers of the population will renounce to their privileges and interests. (Fanon, 1961: 138: my translation<sup>267</sup>)

In short, the universal is not the starting point of the struggle, neither is something fixed, but is what animates and where the struggles are directed to. Yet, the “identitarian moment” in Fanon is not so much the defense of a concrete identity, the content of a culture or claiming the value of a specific tradition. Alternatively, as Maldonado-Torres points out, Fanon seeks to create the material conditions of possibility for self-expression, cultural production and reproduction, and the formation of human communities. Blackness and the colonized are understood by Fanon in relational rather than in substantive terms. In their exclusion from universality they are turned into “the locus of dehumanization and inhumanity” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 153). This means that being excluded from the realm of

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<sup>267</sup> « Le peuple comprend alors que l'indépendance nationale met au jour des réalités multiples qui, quelquefois, sont divergentes et antagonistes. L'explication, à ce moment précis de la lutte, est décisive car elle fait passer le peuple du nationalisme global et indifférencié à une conscience sociale et économique. Le peuple, qui au début de la lutte avait adopté le manichéisme primitif du colon: les Blancs et les Noirs, les Arabes et les Roumis, s'aperçoit en cours de route qu'il arrive à des Noirs d'être plus blancs que les Blancs et que l'éventualité d'un drapeau national, la possibilité d'une nation indépendante n'entraînent pas automatiquement certaines couches de la population à renoncer à leurs privilèges ou à leurs intérêts. »

the universal and the human does not amount to a position of complete exteriority, but instead they are in a relationship with it.

In the journal of Saint-Alban Fanon wrote: “If you want to go deeper into the structure of a particular country, you have to visit its psychiatric hospitals.” (Fanon, 2018: 279) And in *Les damnés de la terre* he expressed a similar point in a more polemic way, “the fellah, the unemployed and the hungry do not lay claim to truth. They do not say that they represent truth, because they are the truth in their very being.” (Fanon, 1961: 51; my translation<sup>268</sup>) This is not a relativistic position or a claim to the intrinsic righteousness of the colonized. It is a shift of the locus of enunciation that enables to critically assess the values and the ideals of the society from below. In other words, what he called the *damné* embody and lay bare the contradictions and the lies of the society which are presented as truth: the double standards, the violence and the very absence of truth in the colonial context as the defining elements of colonial society, which the colonized is bound to and shape their response: “To the lie of the colonial situation the colonized responds with an equal lie.” (1961: 52; my translation<sup>269</sup>)

### **7.3 Atmospheric violence and the social contracture**

It is not because the Indo-Chinese have discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. They revolted simply because, for many reasons, they could no longer breathe. (Fanon, 1952: 220; my translation<sup>270</sup>)

To understand the aforementioned processes of the construction of subjectivity and the colonized as a historical agent within such Manichean framework Fanon delves into “the intimacy of the compartmentalization” (1961: 41; my translation<sup>271</sup>). As

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<sup>268</sup> « le fellah, le chômeur, l'affamé, ne prétend pas à la vérité. Il ne dit pas qu'il est la vérité, car il l'est dans son être même. »

<sup>269</sup> « Au mensonge de la situation coloniale, le colonisé répond par un mensonge égal. »

<sup>270</sup> « Ce n'est pas parce que l'Indochinois a découvert une culture propre qu'il s'est révolté. C'est parce que tout simplement il lui devenait, à plus d'un titre, impossible de respirer. »

<sup>271</sup> « dans l'intimité de cette compartimentation »



stated in the previous chapter, his description of the spatial arrangement of a divided world and its effects on the body and the mind of the colonized, and the violence that it produces in return, reflects his understanding of the borders, the relations, the layout and the spatial disposition of the psychiatric hospital that organize its repressive character. In both cases he uses the expression “lines of force” to refer to the physical and figurative or invisible threads and references which order and define a field of phenomena.

Fanon illustrates such world of rigid separations in his careful description of the colonial city. The European town is well-lit, paved, and lavish, whose rubbish bins are filled with objects that are unknown for the colonized. The native town is a starving town, where people live on top of each other and looks with envy the European town. He observes that the European town is an area of robust shoes. “The feet of the colonizer are never seen, except, perhaps by the sea, but one is never close to them.” (Fanon, 1961: 42; my translation<sup>272</sup>) The European town is a zone in motion, mostly a movement of exploitation, he notes, whereas the native town, is a “solidified zone”, an exhausted town, a town on its knees. (Fanon, 1961: 52; my translation<sup>273</sup>) The division between the two areas is defined by the police station and the checkpoints. As he puts it, the policeman is the spokesperson of the colonial regime in the sector of the colonized.

As stated, this spatial organization according to race is as coercive as it is repressive, and its effects are both physical and metaphysical (Sekyi-Otu, 1996). Fanon’s focus shifts from the spatial organization to the political traces that it leaves on the body of the colonized. This “narrow world, infested with prohibitions” (Fanon,

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<sup>272</sup> « Les pieds du colon ne sont jamais aperçus, sauf peut-être dans la mer, mais on n'est jamais assez proche d'eux. »

<sup>273</sup> « zone figée »

1961: 41; my translation<sup>274</sup>) is suffered in the flesh, the psyche and the imagination by the colonized. He observes that within such framework of segregation and constriction the colonized lives in a state of “permanent tension”, the muscles are tetanized and they are only untightened in their sleep: “the native dreams are muscular dreams, dreams of action, aggressive dreams.” (Fanon, 1961: 53; my translation<sup>275</sup>) Throughout his work Fanon makes constant references to breathing, in certain cases as a metaphor of expansion and connection, as in his conception of the “rehabilitated *nègre*, (,,,) ‘porous to all the breaths of the world’” (Fanon, 1952: 124; my translation<sup>276</sup>). But breath, as the most vital element for life, is one of the intersecting points of his medical and political concerns. Under colonial and racist conditions the most fundamental physiological activity, and thus life, is regulated and threatened: “the breath of the individual is an observed, occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing.” (1959: 48; my translation<sup>277</sup>)

Rigidity, shortness of breathing, lack of movement, fear, envy and desperation; the colonial order is incarnated in the muscular contraction of the *damné*. Roberto Beneduce notices similar political signs in the bodies of oppressed people in the *banlieues* and the urban peripheries, taut facial expression, lost gazes and muscular tensions which objectively are devoid of meaning to the doctors. He adds, “the colonial *contract* is *signed* by a muscular *contracture*, a lie, or a smile showing the teeth, a grin” (2017: 104; emphasis in the original; my translation<sup>278</sup>). Fanon writes:

In the colonial world, the affectivity of the colonized is kept on the edge like an open wound that escapes the caustic agent. The psyche retracts, obliterates itself and releases through muscular demonstrations which leads

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<sup>274</sup> « monde rétréci, semé d'interdictions »

<sup>275</sup> « les rêves de l'indigène sont des rêves musculaires, des rêves d'action, des rêves agressifs. »

<sup>276</sup> «le nègre réhabilité (...) ‘poreux à tous les souffles du monde’ ».

<sup>277</sup> « la respiration de l'individu est une respiration observée, occupée. C'est une respiration de combat. »

<sup>278</sup> « le *contrat* colonial a été *signé* par une *contracture* musculaire, un mensonge, ou un sourire montrant les dents »

the experts to classify the colonized as a hysteric. (Fanon, 1961: 57; my translation<sup>279</sup>)

Fanon points out that the aggressiveness accumulated in the muscles will be unleashed firstly against their own fellows: violent explosions, fratricidal or “tribal” feuds, self-destructive expressions, suicidal behavior, vengefulness. As stated, what was rationalized as the inherent criminality of the North African and overwhelmed the police and the judges (Fanon, 1961: 53), is for Fanon both a sign of alienation and fragments that anticipate a latent insurgency (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Fanon’s attention to the violence taking place among the oppressed was also one of Malcolm X’s concerns with the non-violent approach of Martin Luther King. For Malcolm X, King’s non-violent approach addressed the relations between blacks and whites, and disregarded the relations between blacks. Thus, the first injunction to non-violence should address black relations for the sake of unity and solidarity (Dorlin, 2017).

Fanon examines what to do with this aggressiveness and turns to the cultural and religious resources of the Algerian. Through religion, he argues, the colonized puts the responsibility for the situation in the hands of God. Thereby, the colonized forgets the colonizer, and resigned, achieves “the serenity of a stone.” (Fanon, 1961: 56; my translation<sup>280</sup>) The world of magic, spirits and their “terrifying myths” also tames the aggressiveness of the colonized. Yet, he argues that the world populated by evil spirits, zombies, giants, and ruled by superstitions, creates a life filled with prohibitions and barriers, and produces a stronger fear than the colonial world itself, “in terrifying me, it behaves like an unquestionable reality.” (Fanon, 1961: 56; my translation<sup>281</sup>) This nightmarish reality, he notes, provides a sense of security and

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<sup>279</sup> « Dans le monde colonial, l'affectivité du colonisé est maintenue à fleur de peau comme une plaie vive qui fuit l'agent caustique. Et le psychisme se rétracte, s'oblitére, se décharge dans des démonstrations musculaires qui ont fait dire à des hommes très savants que le colonisé est un hystérique. »

<sup>280</sup> « sérénité de pierre. »

<sup>281</sup> « en me faisant peur, se comporte comme une réalité indubitable. »

belonging, and integrates the Algerian within a collectivity, a tradition, a history. Against the backdrop of the forces of magic and myth, colonialism appears extraneous and irrelevant: “everything is reduced to a constant confrontation at the level of fantasy.” (Fanon, 1961: 57; my translation<sup>282</sup>) The third possibility that Fanon explores in order to liberate the colonized from the aggressiveness and incorporated violence are the ecstatic dances. For Fanon, in contrast to the world of magic and spirits, the dances of possession are not based on fear and control but on permission and release. The dances of possession have for Fanon a positive impact on the affectivity and the personality of the colonized:

The native’s relaxation is precisely this muscular orgy through which the most acute aggressiveness, the most immediate violence are channeled, transformed, and exorcized away. The circle of the dance is a permissive circle. It protects and authorizes (...) This disintegration, splitting and dissolutions of the personality play a crucial role in the stability of the colonized world. When they set out, the men and women were impatient, suffocated, stamping their feet. On their way back peace, calm and stillness return to the village. (Fanon, 1961: 57-58; my translation<sup>283</sup>)

His description of the ecstatic rituals reflect what has been called energetic practices of peace, in which harmony or “the resonance of the divine breath” is the primordial element, and are based on a holistic understanding of the relation between the self, society, nature and the supernatural. In such understandings, breath is considered the primordial element of life and an expansive and connecting element between humans and with the world (Dietrich, 2012: 48). However, Dietrich does not consider what impedes breathing and how these practices may address such obstacles. After the dances of possession peace returns to the village, but Fanon bluntly affirms that during the war such rituals are less and less practiced: “The back to the wall, the

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<sup>282</sup> « Tout se résout, on le voit, en affrontement permanent sur le plan phantasmatique. »

<sup>283</sup> « La relaxation du colonisé, c'est précisément cette orgie musculaire au cours de laquelle l'agressivité la plus aiguë, la violence la plus immédiate se trouvent canalisées, transformées, escamotées. Le cercle de la danse est un cercle permissif. Il protège et autorise. (...) Ces effritements de la personnalité, ces dédoublements, ces dissolutions remplissent une fonction économique primordiale dans la stabilité du monde colonisé. À l'aller, les hommes et les femmes étaient impatients, piétinants, « sur les nerfs ». Au retour, c'est le calme qui revient au village, la paix, l'immobilité. »

knife at his throat, or to be more precise, the electrodes on his genitals, the colonized is forced to stop telling stories.” (Fanon, 1961: 58; my translation<sup>284</sup>) As stated, Fanon does not reject the therapeutic potential of the dances of possession. In his exploration of the theory and practice of mental health in North African societies he noticed the success of therapies related to religion, magic and possession in contrast to the failure of Western psychiatric approaches. The reason behind this for him was that they were developed having into account the conception of the subject, the community, health, disease, the supernatural world, and human relations in everyday life, the social organization and including the gender dimension. However, in the context of the anticolonial struggle, meanings, practices, values, conceptions of the self and relations with others, hierarchies and technology were changing, including those of medicine and of what therapy means.

Hence for Fanon, in the context of the anticolonial struggle, he raises two main concerns against these practices. First, in spite of their possible psychological effect such practices have limited political use since what they do is to prevent the engagement with reality. Taming the aggressiveness and violence through religion, evading it through the world of spirits and magic or liberating it through the ecstatic rituals follows the same logic that the fratricidal violence of the colonized that such practices sought to address, namely to deny the origin of violence and to postpone the confrontation with oppression:

the colonized try to persuade themselves that colonialism does not exist, that everything happens as before, that history continues. Here we clearly discern, at the collective level, the well-known behaviors of evasion. It is as if plunging into this fraternal blood enabled them to ignore the obstacle (Fanon, 1961: 55; my translation<sup>285</sup>).

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<sup>284</sup> « Le dos au mur, le couteau sur la gorge ou, pour être plus précis, l'électrode sur les parties génitales, le colonisé va être sommé de ne plus se raconter d'histoires. »

<sup>285</sup> « le colonisé tente de se persuader que le colonialisme n'existe pas, que tout se passe comme avant, que l'histoire continue. Nous saisissons là en pleine clarté, au niveau des collectivités, ces

Second, and relatedly, these practices are not only a form of political retreat, but also of cultural retreat. In “Racism and Culture” he notes that colonialism and racism do not only petrify the bodies of the colonized but also the imagination and systems of references and meanings. It does not attempt to eliminate the preexisting culture, but to “mummify” it, to preserve it in a state of “permanent agony” while claiming respect and apparently honoring tradition and cultural specificity (Fanon, 1964: 42). “The culture of the dominated people is sclerotized, dying. Life no longer circulates in it. Or more precisely, the only existing life is dissimulated.” Under such conditions culture becomes tantamount to tradition, and for the colonized culture becomes a site of retreat and closure instead of fertility and openness. (Fanon, 1964: 50; my translation<sup>286</sup>). In the context of the anticolonial struggle a living culture functions as “the awakener of the people (...) the voice of a new reality in action”; rather than a retreat, it expands by connecting people and disputing the public sphere (Fanon, 1961: 211-212; my translation<sup>287</sup>).

The problem, Fanon observes, is “to seize this violence that is being reoriented.” But this raises other problems. The change of orientation requires specific conditions, the maturity of the people, the organization, intellectuals and political parties, and the urgent decisions “about the means, the tactics and conduct of the organization. Without this there is only blind voluntarism with the subsequent risk of being terribly reactionary.” (Fanon, 1961: 59; my translation<sup>288</sup>)

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fameuses conduites d'évitement, comme si la plongée dans ce sang fraternel permettait de ne pas voir l'obstacle»

<sup>286</sup> « La culture du peuple asservi est sclérosée, agonisante. Aucune vie n'y circule. Plus précisément la seule vie existante est dissimulée. »

<sup>287</sup> « réveilleur de peuple (...) le porte-parole d'une nouvelle réalité en actes. »

<sup>288</sup> « de saisir cette violence en train de se réorienter. (...) à décider des moyens, de la tactique, c'est-à-dire de la conduite et de l'organisation. Hors cela, il n'y a plus que volontarisme aveugle avec les aléas terriblement réactionnaires qu'il comporte. »

#### 7.4 Violence and detoxification

Before exploring Fanon's main point of violence, it has become almost compulsory to have one's say on one of Fanon's most quoted and polemic statement concerning violence: "At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force." (Fanon, 2004: 51) Indeed many commentators take this sentence as the central element of Fanon's view of violence, which is missing the point (Gordon, 1995). To begin with, it is necessary to note that in the French original Fanon did not use the expression "cleansing force", but the term detoxification: "At the individual level, violence detoxifies." (Fanon, 1961: 90 my translation<sup>289</sup>) Detoxification is a medical term frequently used at the time (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017), and it was also a term employed by the French government in their strategy to divide Algerian population, that is, to *purge* the hearts and the brains of Algerian people from the poisoning of the anticolonial movement (Klose, 2013). But the more important element of the mistranslation may be that in the original sentence Fanon refers to what violence *does* whereas the English version is turned into an ontological assertion that refers to what violence *is*.

The issue of the psychological benefits of perpetrating violence in contexts of oppression and dehumanization has not only been raised by Fanon. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass describes an episode in which, in his days as a slave, he fought back Edward Covey, a particularly cruel farmer. Douglass had taught himself to read and write and was sent to Covey by his owner, Thomas Auld, in order to discipline the slave. After six months of severe punishments, physical abuse and performing humiliating tasks under Covey, Douglass writes, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit." (2009: 70) Douglass

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<sup>289</sup> « Au niveau des individus, la violence désintoxique. »

complained to Auld and asked him for protection, but the protection was denied, he was threatened by his legal master, and was sent back to Covey. At this point, Douglass decided to fight back the abuses of the master. The long fight with his master, he writes,

was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me. (Douglass, 2009: 78)

Douglass was aware during and after the fight that confronting his master could have cost him his life, but more important than his life was his dignity, his sense of self-worth, and his humanity, that he won in that fight. Bernard Boxill notices in Douglass narrative a theme that is also present in Fanon's account of liberation: Douglass, although aware of the risks, acted but did not anticipate the consequences of the fight. He did not engage in the fight *in order to* obtain psychological benefits, self-respect, to awake his determination to be free, or to end physical abuse. He put his life at risk without knowing in advance what would happen. He found himself in a desperate situation, but he did not act out of desperation. As Douglass explicitly put it, before the fight he had *reflected* and was determined to respond to the physical abuses of his owner (Boxill, 1997). As Gordon notes, enslavement and racist dehumanization entailed the construction of the black as a thing, an animal, it denies the possibility of interiority, of a point of view and the subjective life of the black. If Douglass was an animal, a thing or fully dehumanized, he would not have been able to reflect, decide and act. Thus, Douglass became human through the very act of



reflection, the decision to act, the exertion of one's agency, and the assumption of responsibility to change the situation. (Gordon, 2000)

The philosopher Jean Améry similarly describes an autobiographical episode of his confrontation with the prisoner overseer in Auschwitz. The single punch against that “professional criminal of horrifying vigor” (1980: 90) entailed the psychological and ethical restoration of a “disjointed personality” (1980: 91), despite the severe retaliation of the guard. Améry affirms that what he later read in *Les damnés de la terre* mirrored his own assertion of dignity and humanity through his fight with the abusive prisoner foreman. Like Fanon, Améry also puts the emphasis on the embodied dimensions of oppression and liberation. His agency was limited to what he could do with his body: “there are situations in life in which our body is our entire self and our entire fate. I was my body and nothing else” (1980: 90-91). He points out that being a Jew in a concentration camp was a death sentence. One could deny and evade such situation by “withdrawing into one's self”, but its acceptance concomitantly entailed the “physical revolt” against the condition of the Jew: “I became a person not by subjectively appealing to my abstract humanity but by discovering myself within the given social reality as a rebelling Jew and by realizing myself as one.” (1980: 91)

The statements of Douglass and Améry share several layers with Fanon's position, not only about achieving self-respect and asserting their humanity through acts of physical violence but also on matters of agency, embodiment, responsibility, identity, or the indeterminacy of the act. A significant difference, however, lies in the fact that the former referred to individual acts of revolt whereas Fanon was in a context of armed struggle and of a collective struggle against a social structure. One can reasonably wonder how the individual psychological benefits can be transferred to a

political level (Gordon, 1995). Paying a closer look to Fanon's statement may shed some light:

At the individual level, violence detoxifies. It rids the colonized of his inferiority complex, of his contemplative and desperate attitudes. It emboldens him and restores him to his own eyes. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if the colonized is demobilized by a rapid decolonization, the people have the time to realize that the liberation has been the matter of each one of them, that the leader deserves no special merit (Fanon, 1961: 90-91; my translation<sup>290</sup>).

Considering the longer statement, Fanon does not restrict the restorative element of violence to armed insurrection—as we will see in the next section, he does not equate violence with armed struggle. The catharsis results from the revolting act of confronting colonialism. It turns the spectator into agents, independently of whether they are the perpetrators of a violent act or other individuals who, by extension, become agents of decolonization and assume their different responsibilities in transforming the social structure, this is one of the themes that he had developed in the previous book. However, as he shows throughout *Les damnés de la terre* and notably in the closing chapter on the trauma of war, the violent moment is a negative one, and is far from being the end of the story, also at the individual level; individuals will also have to take responsibility for the acts of violence and for building new social structures, institutions and relations that reconstruct the damaged humanity derived from colonial and anticolonial violence.

### **7.5 Violence as violation.**

Fanon uses the concept of violence with different meanings and to refer to different types of violence throughout the text. However, besides the vicissitudes of

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<sup>290</sup> « Au niveau des individus, la violence désintoxique. Elle débarrasse le colonisé de son complexe d'infériorité, de ses attitudes contemplatives ou désespérées. Elle le rend intrépide, le réhabilite à ses propres yeux. Même si la lutte armée a été symbolique et même s'il est démobilisé par une décolonisation rapide, le peuple a le temps de se convaincre que la libération a été l'affaire de tous et de chacun, que le leader n'a pas de mérite spécial. »

the war and the armed struggle, the core of Fanon's understanding of violence can be discerned in the opening statement of his chapter:

National liberation national renaissance, restoration of the nation to the people, commonwealth, whatever the terms used or the new formulas introduced, *decolonization is always a violent phenomenon*. (...) decolonization is simply the replacement of a 'species' of men by another 'species' of men (1961: 39; authors translation<sup>291</sup>; own italics).

Fanon is not saying that decolonization is to be achieved through violence, but rather that decolonization *is* itself violent. Violence arises from the replacement of a species of humans by another. As we have pointed out, the replacement, and the notion of decolonization as replacement, as a mere inversion of the colonial logic, raises another set of problems that Fanon discusses throughout the book. Yet the threat of replacement, this change that is "willed, claimed, demanded" by the colonized, is lived by the colonizer "as a terrifying future" (Fanon, 1961: 39; my translation<sup>292</sup>). In the narrow and rigid Manicheism of the colonial project these two species are the colonizer, who is closer to god, and the colonized which is located at the level of subhumanity or animality. Every aspect of the colonized points to their "constitutional depravation" (Fanon, 1961: 45; my translation<sup>293</sup>), the colonizer turns the colonized into

the quintessence of evil. Colonized society is not only described as a society without values (...) the native world is presented as impervious to ethics, the absence of values, but also the negation of values (...) the enemy of values. In this sense, the colonized is the absolute evil. (Fanon, 1961: 44; my translation<sup>294</sup>)

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<sup>291</sup> Libération nationale, renaissance nationale, restitution de la nation au peuple, Commonwealth, quelles que soient les rubriques utilisées ou les formules nouvelles introduites, la décolonisation est toujours un phénomène violent. À quelque niveau qu'on l'étudie: rencontres inter-individuelles, appellations nouvelles des clubs sportifs, composition humaine des cocktails-parties, de la police, de conseils d'administration des banques nationales ou privées, la décolonisation est très simplement le remplacement d'une « espèce » d'hommes par une autre « espèce » d'hommes.

<sup>292</sup> « voulu, réclamé, exigé (...) sous la forme d'un avenir terrifiant »

<sup>293</sup> « dépravation constitutionnelle »

<sup>294</sup> « de quintessence du mal. La société colonisée n'est pas seulement décrite comme une société sans valeurs. (...) L'indigène est déclaré imperméable à l'éthique, absence de valeurs, mais aussi négation des valeurs. (...) l'ennemi des valeurs. En ce sens, il est le mal absolu. »

Fanon makes reference to the part on *Black Skin White Masks* where he detailed how the black is historically constructed through sociocultural, literary, scientific and philosophical elements as “a phobogenic, anxiogenic object”, that is, it induces fear, terror and anxiety (1952: 148 my translation<sup>295</sup>) Fanon describes that there is a system of meanings, symbolic forms, legal elements and cultural which do not have merely a symbolic function but have a material and existential impact. Pierre Bourdieu later labelled “symbolic violence” to the form of power “which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force,” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: xv). In *Les damnés de la terre* he does not stop to explain such process, but brings the reader straight to the present.

As stated, the description of the colonial world that Fanon offers epitomizes what he had called “the zone of non-being”, a zone “neither of appearance or disappearance” (Gordon, 2007c: 10), where the colonized exists, but exists as subhuman. In this zone, the relations established are not between self and other, but in the absence of the ethical realm, the other is a non-other. The black, the colonized can establish self-other relations among themselves. As Lewis Gordon puts it, “Where ethics is derailed, all is permitted.” (2007: 11). In the Manichean logic of racist and colonial systems, Gordon points out, the attempt to make both species meet, the claims of justice or appealing to the ethics of the system fail because the system presumes itself legitimate and just on the basis of the dehumanization, and the arbitrary death of the racialized. The attempt of the racialized to *appear*, is a violent act to the system that has produced such framework: “As neither self nor other, the

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<sup>295</sup> « un objet phobogène, anxiogène »

effort of blacks to appear in such a system becomes its violation. They thus suffer from illicit appearance” (2015: 114). Fanon writes:

Confronted with a world arranged by the colonizer, *the colonized subjects are always presumed guilty*. The colonized do not accept this guilt, but rather take it as a sort of curse, a sword of Damocles. Yet, deep down the colonized acknowledge no authority. They are dominated but not domesticated. They are made to feel inferior, but not convinced of their inferiority (Fanon, 1961: 54: my translation<sup>297</sup>; own italics)

The guilt of the colonized is not a psychological complex, as Bhabha (2004) insists, and Fanon explicitly denies, but a structural condition of the *damnation*, that, as Gordon, notes, eliminates any possibility of innocence of the colonized:

the blackened lives the disaster of appearance where there is no room to appear nonviolently. Acceptable being is nonexistence, nonappearance, or submergence (...)To change things is to appear, but to appear is to be violent since that group's appearance is illegitimate. Violence, in this sense, need not be a physical imposition. It need not be a consequence of guns and other weapons of destruction. It need simply be appearance. (Gordon, 2007: 11)

There are two juxtaposed levels of violence here: the symbolic violence of the colonizer that imposes an ontological difference that separates the human from the non-human, and the existence of the colonized as violence to those very structures of violence. As George Ciccariello-Maher notes, in Fanon the symbolic violence of racialization has a deeper reach than the more indiscernible violence that Bourdieu describes; colonial and racist symbolic violence has an ontological impact, for it attempts to exclude the colonized from the realm of humanity. In spite of this, the “symbolic ontological violence” in Fanon is not an imposition on a powerless, passive subject. As stated the sociogenic analysis entails both the diagnostic and the active intervention of the human in the world, the possibility of change. Thus, in his

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<sup>297</sup> « Face au monde arrangé par le colonialiste, le colonisé est toujours présumé coupable. La culpabilité du colonisé n'est pas une culpabilité assumée, c'est plutôt une sorte de malédiction, d'épée de Damoclès. Or, au plus profond de lui-même le colonisé ne reconnaît aucune instance. Il est dominé, mais non domestiqué. Il est inférieurisé, mais non convaincu de son infériorité. »

methodological and anthropological perspective the “racialized-colonized subjects always find the symbolic violence which imprisons them to be within the reach of their fingertips, available for appropriation, to be wielded against its creators” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2010:7).

In the Manicheist framework, the only way that the colonized can avoid being violent is not to move, to accept and remain in the place designated for him or her: “The first thing that the colonized learns is to stay in his place, not to go beyond the limits.” (Fanon, 1961: 53; my translation<sup>298</sup>) These limits are spatial, legal, political, economic, symbolic, sexual, and at the level of senses and imagination, they shrink the body and the mind, the land and the bread, the desires, the expectations and the imagination of the colonized. In the colony, the relation between colonizer and colonized, Fanon points out, is mediated by the police, checkpoints, physical segregation, prohibitions, exploitation, and torture. These are not considered violence, but legitimate force:

The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is a mass relationship. Against the greater number the colonizer opposes its force. The colonizer is an exhibitionist. His concern with security leads him to remind the native out loud: ‘Here, I am the master’ (1961: 55; my translation<sup>299</sup>)

Fanon implicitly brings up the distinction between violence and force. The violence exerted against the colonized is not considered violence, but the legitimate use of force, and any action of affirmation undertaken by the colonized is considered violence. In the colonial order violence is the legitimate use of force, and in turn, “the colonial regime draws its legitimacy from force” (Fanon, 1961: 8; my translation<sup>300</sup>).

For Fanon the normative value of each group is not symmetrical and the normative

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<sup>298</sup> « La première chose que l’indigène apprend, c’est à rester à sa place, à ne pas dépasser les limites. »

<sup>299</sup> « Les rapports colon-colonisé sont des rapports de masse. Au nombre, le colon oppose sa force. Le colon est un exhibitionniste. Son souci de sécurité l’amène à rappeler à haute voix au colonisé que « Le maître, ici, c’est moi ». »

<sup>300</sup> « Le régime colonial tire sa légitimité de la force »

assessment of their actions cannot be endowed in abstract, but sociogenically. Enrique Dussel's distinction between "compulsion" and "violence", informed by Gramsci and Fanon, illuminates this aspect. He warns that such distinction is changeable and contextual. Compulsion refers to "all use of force that is grounded in the 'government by law'." (2008b: 104) That is, compulsion is the legal and legitimate use of force, based on consent. Violence, in turn, is defined by Dussel as the use of force exerted by individuals or groups "which does not rely on the consensual, collective, and critical support of the new system of legitimacy." Violence can also be the coercive action over the rights of others. The appearance of social movements that struggle for new rights "creates a new legitimacy" that turns what was legitimate compulsion into illegitimate violence (2008b: 105).

As Fanon observes, for the colonizer the alternative is not between an Algerian Algeria and a French Algeria, but between an independent Algeria and a colonial Algeria (Fanon, 1961: 86). He writes,

The colonizer makes history. He is the absolute beginning: 'We have made this land'. He is the ongoing cause: 'If we leave, everything is lost, this land will return to the Middle Ages'. In front of him, the numbed beings possessed by fever and 'ancestral customs' constitute an almost mineral framework to the innovative dynamism of the colonial mercantilism. The colonizer makes history and he knows it. (Fanon, 1961: 52-53; my translation<sup>301</sup>)

In the colonial narrative, the colonizer is the alpha and omega of all human activity in the colony. The native is indistinguishable from the landscape, static, inert, unproductive, mineral at best, or a wild nature to be tamed at worst. The settler has endowed himself the right and to seize lands and lives. As we saw in the previous section, in this setting of repression and constricted agency, the colonized, who accept

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<sup>301</sup> « Le colon fait l'histoire. Sa vie est une épopée, une odyssée. Il est le commencement absolu: « Cette terre, c'est nous qui l'avons faite. » Il est la cause continuée : « Si nous partons, tout est perdu, cette terre retournera au Moyen Âge. » En face de lui, des êtres engourdis, travaillés de l'intérieur par les fièvres et les « coutumes ancestrales », constituent un cadre quasi minéral au dynamisme novateur du mercantilisme colonial. Le colon fait l'histoire et sait qu'il la fait. »

their own illegitimacy, direct their violence against themselves. As Jean Anna Gordon notes, in Fanon the anticolonial struggle started from the premise that the constant and open use of force of the colonizer is illegitimate and worthy of being labelled violence. This is the first disruption of the Manichean framework, and challenges

who and what constitutes ‘collective support’, ‘legitimate representatives’ and ‘the people’ through forging an alternative hegemony (...)Redefining their foci of force or ceasing to commit collective suicide requires an outright challenge to the force of settlers *as* violence. (Gordon, 2014: 137-138; italics in the original)

Fanon points out that the discovery by the colonized that their lives, their breath, their heart beating are no different from the settlers’, that their skin is not of less value than that of the settler, produces “a fundamental jolt in the world. All the new and revolutionary assurance of the colonized stems from it” (Fanon, 1961: 48; my translation<sup>302</sup>) The jolt in the world is the refusal to stay in their physical and metaphysical place, to accept the inferiority; the refusal to see oneself through the negative eyes of the colonizer entails the shattering of the “ontological walls of being” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2010: 9-10). The assertion of their humanity, the constitution of the colonized as a political subject and their capacity to question the existing legitimacy trigger a “conflicts of rights” between two competing and mutually exclusive legal and moral claims, in which the prevailing side would represent a violation:

The criteria that would constitute suitable means for the settlers, for the colonial government, would be the absence of challenges to it. This is because such a system does not see itself as unjustified and unjust, which means its overturn would be, from its perspective, unjust, unwarranted, a violation of decency and order—in a word, *violent*. (Gordon, 2015: 118; italics in the original)

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<sup>302</sup> « une secousse essentielle dans le monde. Toute l'assurance nouvelle et révolutionnaire du colonisé en découle. »



This situation, Gordon adds, “is no less than *tragic*: One side must lose.” The defeat of colonialism would be, to the colonial regime, “violence incarnate”; the defeat of the anticolonial movement would imply the persistence of violence. (Gordon, 2015: 118; own italics).

### **7.6 Violence: Beyond means and ends**

Fanon’s account of violence is not conceived in terms of means and ends. Violence is not an end in itself and neither is instrumental to achieve independence, decolonization, psychic liberation, or to forge a new humanity, but is intrinsic to the colonial situation and to the colonized subject. Neil Roberts argues that Fanon is talking from a different paradigm that he defines as: “Intrinsic violence, in contrast to instrumental violence”, which Roberts defines as “a metaphysical concept in which the act of either random irrational or calculated rational violence itself contains inherent value.” (Roberts, 2004, 146) But there are two main limitations in Roberts’ account. First, Fanon did not endow any value to violence. Second, Roberts’ articulation draws more on Sartre’s preface than on Fanon’s text, and Sartre was talking about violence as a means. As Alice Cherki points out, Sartre was justifying violence whereas Fanon was analyzing it; Sartre was talking about killing whereas for Fanon violence was not only killing (Cherki, 2011). Roberts rightly affirms that most of the intellectual debates on this chapter from the 1960’s to current times have read Fanon as calling for the necessity of violence in the anti-colonial struggle. Whether “they are supporting or rejecting Fanon, critics remain stuck in the conceptual paradigm of instrumentalism.” In this view Fanon’s alleged *theory of violence* is mostly explained along a “means-ends continuum” (Roberts, 2004: 145-146).

One of the first and most prominent critics was Hannah Arendt, who posited that Fanon “glorified violence for violence's sake” and read Fanon’s text as nihilistic and

anti-political (1970: 65). Arendt's criticism of Fanon is contradictory and mostly based on personal opinions than in an actual engagement with the text. Nevertheless, she raises issues that Fanon had already addressed. Arendt links power to the political and locates violence as their opposite, as an illegitimate means to address conflicts. She argues that it is necessary to differentiate between power, force, authority and violence. A propos of the latter, she writes:

*Violence*, finally, as I have said, is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it. (Arendt, 1970: 46)

Arendt thinks violence as the rational means to exert a physical damage such as killing or injuring. She obliterates that Fanon had already addressed the instrumentalist view of violence in what he called the “puerile position that Engels adopted”. Engels conceived violence in reference to a confrontation of technical tools and the calculation strengths (Fanon, 1961: 63; my translation<sup>303</sup>). Sidestepping the problems of the instrumental definition, Vicent Martínez Guzmán emphasizes the relational element when he points out that violence entails the rupture of intersubjectivity (2001). Gordon posits that, along with its normative assessment, there is also a “relative intentional” element in violence. Reflecting on Fanon, he points out that, “where there is no subjectivity, there is no violence. There has to be consciousness of an imposition that is not, or has not been, requested. In violence, or violation, there is a crossing of a threshold” (Gordon, 1995b:77). Norman Ajari builds upon both Fanon and Gordon and also phenomenologically defines violence as “the

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<sup>303</sup> «la position puérile qu'Engels adoptait »

imposition by force of the passing from one state to another state onto a being who intended to persist in the previous state” (Ajari, 2015; my translation<sup>304</sup>)

Roberts notes that Arendt’s definition of violence omits that violence, as Fanon shows, is not restricted to physical forms of damage but also to the impact of psychological violence<sup>305</sup> (Roberts, 2004). Yet for Fanon there is more than the physical and the psychological. In a speech in Ghana he talks about the different layers of violence in terms of temporality and existence:

Violence in the everyday behavior, violence with regard to the past, which is devoid of substance, violence with regard to the future, because the colonial regime presents itself as eternal. As we see, the colonized is trapped in a network of a tridimensional violence, a meeting point of multiple violences, diverse, repeated, accumulated (...) The violence of the colonial regime is not only lived at the level of the soul, but also at the level of the blood and the muscles (...) the violence of the colonized is simply a manifestation of its strictly animal existence (Fanon, 1964: 172-173; my translation<sup>306</sup>).

Fanon talks of violence in terms of layers and dimensions. Colonial and racist violence have an impact at the level of being, of subjectivity, of the relation to time and space, to one’s body and to others. And as we have seen in this and previous chapters, besides the symbolic, the ontological, the psychological, Fanon also questions coercive and subtle forms of violence, that make the use of force unnecessary since violence itself is invisibilized and incorporated.

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<sup>304</sup> « L’imposition par la force du passage d’un état à un autre à un être qui entendait persister dans l’état antérieur »

<sup>305</sup> On this issue, the other side of the coin would be Homi Bhabha’s position in the preface to the book. He reads the violence of the colonized as “part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival” (2004: xxxvi). Although Fanon addresses this psycho-affective dimension in the chapter, Bhabha’s reduction to the psychological revolves around how the colonized handled with the “guilt complex”, something that Fanon only mentioned in passing and in order to discard it (1961: 54). Indeed for Bhabha the whole book whether violence, national consciousness, decolonization or humanism, is rooted on an exploration of the “psycho-affective” (2004: xix).

<sup>306</sup> « Violence dans le comportement quotidien, violence à l’égard du passé qui est vidé de toute substance, violence vis-à-vis de l’avenir, car le régime colonial se donne comme devant être éternel. On voit donc que le peuple colonisé, pris dans le réseau de violences multiples, diverses, répétées, cumulatives(...) Cette violence du régime colonial n’est pas seulement vécue sur le plan de l’âme, mais aussi sur celui des muscles, du sang (...) la violence du colonisé devienne tout simplement une manifestation de son existence proprement animale. »

Lastly, Arendt's radical opposition between violence and politics is not only problematic because it discards the covert or overt political character of violent actions, whether spontaneous or organized, rational and irrational, but also because she excludes the violence that is connected and emerge from politics, institutions, laws, or the different forms of violence that are exerted by the state<sup>307</sup>. The violence that arises from institutions, for Étienne Balibar, is as "extreme" as the one that arises against them. Balibar argues that "it is not possible to escape this circle by 'absolute' decisions such as choosing between a violent or a nonviolent politics, or between force and law." Balibar's way out is "to invent a *politics of violence*", which is at the same time a "politics of civility". This entails introducing the question of violence, "its forms and limits, its regulation and perverse effects on agents themselves, *into the concept and practice of politics.*" That is, introducing the question of violence and "anti-violence" in emancipatory politics (Balibar, 2002: xi-xii; italics in the original).

Judith Butler offers a more nuanced reading of Fanon than Arendt, but her interpretation also shares the weaknesses of an instrumental understanding of violence. She affirms that violence in Fanon is "an instrumentality in the service of invention". She notes that Fanon is not necessarily arguing for violence, "although he will also oppose both nonviolence and compromise as political options" (Butler, 2008: 225). This is another deficit of not delving into the character of violence and resorting to the instrumentalist thesis: the false opposition between violence and

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<sup>307</sup> The relationship between violence and law is one of the themes in Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence", a complex and open essay that Arendt excluded in her compilation of posthumous works of Benjamin (Goodman, 2017). Benjamin writes: "Among all the forms of violence permitted by both natural law and positive law there is not one that is free of the gravely problematic nature, already indicated, of all legal violence. Since, however, every conceivable solution to human problems, not to speak of deliverance from the confines of all the world historical conditions of existence obtaining hitherto, remains impossible if violence is totally excluded in principle, the question necessarily arises as to other kinds of violence than all those envisaged by legal theory." (Benjamin, 1978: 293) To put it very succinctly, Benjamin distinguishes between a violence that preserves law, and another violence, that is not physical and instrumental but has a metaphorical character that creates law.

nonviolence, the latter considered as the ultimate means of political action. On the next section we will return to this aspect. Following other literary-critic feminists, Butler argues that in Fanon violence as a means of self-creation has a hypermasculinist character. She affirms that this violence functions as a compensatory mechanism in his male normative understanding of colonial dehumanization as emasculation and decolonization as the restoration of masculine values, although she concedes that Fanon seems to be aware of this. Instead, Butler points out that there are elements in *Black Skin White Masks* which have a more universal scope, and that enable to go beyond the particularities and the constrictions of race and of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 2008). However, as stated, Fanon does not attribute an inventive value to violence in the chapter at hand, neither a revolutionary nor a positive value (Gordon, 2015; Marriott, 2018).

The question of masculinism that Butler raises is justifiably posed considering that the gender dynamics within emancipatory movements have tended to reproduce the normative gender politics of the society which they question. Other feminists have noted that the possible masculinism in Fanon is not tantamount to male superiority, misogyny or anti-feminist positions but is instead compatible with his pro-feminist stances<sup>308</sup> (Sharpley-Whiting, 1998; James, 1996; Elia, 1996). The absence of the gender dimension and the predominance of the masculine element are patent in *Les damnés de la terre*. This is not the case of his previous work, *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, where he describes the social changes taking place in Algerian society

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<sup>308</sup> Sharpley-Whiting (1998) has explored the almost conflicting readings of Fanon in different currents of feminism. She notices that whereas postmodern feminists, related to cultural studies and literary studies, have taken Fanon to task on the grounds of his gendered language that replaces the normativity of white Man by black men, and posited that Fanon reduced agency from women, Algerian feminists argued that Fanon exaggerated the agency of Algerian women. Black feminists have in their turn examined the influence Fanon in their theory and practices and exposed that the possible limitations in his treatment of gender are not incompatible with a pro-feminist reading of Fanon or with the use of Fanon for feminist concerns. Likewise, Marxists feminists such as Silvia Federici and Mariarosa Dalla Costa show “how his thought is foundational for a contemporary Marxist analysis of capitalist patriarchy” (Bohrer: 2015, 379).

during the decolonization struggle at the level of agency, attitudes, values and social relations. In factual terms this is the work where Fanon failed most and where the ensuing developments did not accompany his analysis. But if instead of a sociological study, the book is taken as a “critical vision” of a society to come (Sekyi-Otu, 1996; Cherki, 2011), the question of gender would play a central role in a decolonized society, not by bypassing masculinity and femininity as Butler advocates, but through the reconfiguration of gender roles and by associating a decolonized society with the feminine elements. As covered in last chapter, in his psychiatric writings Fanon delved into the social and psychic troubles of Algerian men and women in relation to the disruption of Algerian patriarchal structures, and the consequent displacement of the status and authority of men, by an external force. In *Parallel Hands*, a theater play written in 1949, Fanon associated violent and destructive forms of addressing social conflict with masculine values. The play is set as a Greek drama with Oedipal and Hamletian overtones where a hyperbolic hero seeks self-creation and the transformation of the society from a millenary social order. Through the murder of the king, who is also his father, the hero aspires to unleash chaos and destruction, which would eventually lead to the renewal of the society. But there is no rebirth; neither self-affirmation nor social reconstruction end up taking place after murder and havoc. Although the rest of the characters are critic of the hero, their reasons obey to their particular interests. It is Dhràna, the mother of the hero, who not only issues the strongest critiques of her son, but also of masculine’s narcissistic and ego driven ambitions that disregard the damaging effects of their violence, and put their aspirations and actions ahead of mutual needs and reason. She declares:

To what summits will you lead me, dissatisfied men?  
(...) Excessively resounding men, for each one of your intoxications we are made to pay. So when, full of scorn for impossible glories, will you hang from maternal havens? (...)

Vainglorious males, stop with the powerless edifice of your agitation. Your darkening acts hurt and the dreams animating you, hopelessly unachievable, flay our lips.

I am tired. Tired of living for men. Tired of waiting, anxious, for the splendour of their feats.

Men who barely listen, pity for your female companions! Pity! (Fanon, 2018: 121-122)

Alas Sire! Will we ever know from which un conveyed sources man brings back the tenacious fevers with which he annihilates cities? Strewn at the whim of the world's hot breaths, women strive to defend a shred of root. We are the ones from whom the universe is organized, but the men, ridiculous creatures torn from ourselves, whip our faces with their homicidal hands. Yesterday, women, eternally powerless, tilted combustible eyes toward the noons in act. (Fanon, 2018: 124)

The play concludes with the hero asking for forgiveness to the women, who have now taken the reins of the reorganization of the society. Robert Young emphasizes the influence of Simone de Beauvoir in one of the subthemes of the play, a feminist critique of masculinist values and forms of leadership. After the destruction and the defeat of the hero, what emerges is the unexpected reconstruction of society manifested in the change of its gender politics, whereby the women assume the new direction of the society (Young, 2018). In *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon does not bring up the feminist critique of violence, but he is also presenting a different understanding of violence than that of the heroic individual who aims at setting the world on fire in order to restart again. Instead he is describing ontologized humans whose *appearance*, which as noted before, is related to standing out and to exist, is violence incarnated.

Butler also asks whether violence “as a pure instrument” can be kept as such or whether “it comes to define, haunt, and afflict” individuals, the community and the ensuing political project (Butler, 2008: 226). She adds that Fanon did not put this question, but this is precisely one of Fanon’s central elements in his understanding of violence: that there is no easy disentanglement from violence once one is embedded in it. Butler seems to see violence in Fanon as a tabula rasa, but for Fanon

decolonization does not obey to a linear logic. He pointed out throughout the book, violence would haunt the postcolonial world both at the socio-political and the psychological levels. As David Marriott affirms, “Fanon’s concern is with how anti-colonial revolution, far from producing emancipated subjects, can also produce subjects who are radically dispossessed.” (Marriott, 2018: 23) And this violence is, again, not only physical, but he also warns how the new legitimacy that emerges from the anticolonial struggle, whether armed or not, is appropriated and sclerotized through symbols, flags, slogans, mummified understandings of culture, reification of ethnic divisions, the fetishization of the liberator and anticolonial leaderships, and rigid political and bureaucratic structures, which come into conflict with the role of the people and the required democratic process of what he called national and social consciousness. In sum, the understanding of violence in Fanon as tragic in character, intrinsic to the colonized subject and a violation of the colonial order helps to sidestep the traps that adamantly populate the secondary literature on Fanon and violence. As Gibson and Beneduce poignantly put it:

It is amazing to us that there has been such insistence on reading the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (titled “On Violence”) as an apology for violence, and that so much time has been dedicated to discussing Fanon’s supposed theory of violence. Meanwhile, what has been overlooked is his desperate analysis of the violence that the colonized are condemned to act out and repeat. (...) This horizon of destitution and ‘wretchedness’ is what Fanon described so viscerally. (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 254)

### **7.7 Critique of nonviolence**

Contrary to what is commonly held Fanon did not oppose to nonviolence. He was acquainted with the philosophy of nonviolence, with Kwame Nkrumah and his work, and with the experience of the African countries that achieved independence without armed struggle. In 1960 Fanon took part in the Positive Action Conference held in



Ghana that gathered international advisors seeking to train African anticolonial movements in nonviolence. The nonviolent activists Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer recall the strained atmosphere of the meeting and the heated presentations and debates. The conference took place right after the massacre of Sharpeville in South Africa and the French nuclear tests in Algeria. The proposals of the advisors were generally not well received; at the peak of extreme colonial violence, African delegates saw in the nonviolent international activists a naïve understanding of their situations and an attempt to coopt and interfere in the independence struggles. I quote at length:

Fanon, who represented Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN)-involved in the most intense armed conflict on the continent- spoke in a quiet and sober voice explaining his view of the regrettable necessity for armed struggle. Outside of the conference hall, Fanon described to the nonviolent advisors the attempts to attain Algerian independence by nonviolent means: 'We tried this method, but the French came into the Casbah, broke down door after door and slaughtered the head of each household in the center of the street. When they did that about thirty five consecutive times, the people gave up on non-cooperation'. (Sutherland and Meyer, 2000: 40-41)

As Lewis Gordon (1995) observes, at the strategic level Fanon stood at a half-way point between the idolization of armed struggle and the strict adherence to nonviolence as the only means to achieve independence. In the chapter on violence of *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon offers a critique of a specific form of nonviolence associated with the class interests of the nationalist elites and also with a certain function and purpose of nonviolence. At a certain moment, Fanon says, the colonial bourgeoisie introduces the notion of nonviolence as way to appeal to the shared interests of the intellectual and economic elites of the colonized. "Nonviolence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem around the negotiating table before any bloodshed, before the irreparable gesture or the regrettable act is committed." (Fanon,

1961: 62; my translation<sup>309</sup>) The colonized elites demand a reform and their assimilation into the colonial system; they become the self-appointed interlocutors between the metropolis and the “terrorists”. In the negotiation the notion of compromise becomes the central argument in order to avoid the violence of the revolt. But for the colonized, colonialism “is not a thinking machine, not a body endowed with reason. It is violence in the state of nature.” (Fanon, 1961: 61; my translation<sup>310</sup>). Violence is the constitutive element of colonial relations, and, he adds, colonialism does not concede anything without exhausting all its possibilities. Based on their fear of violence, and through their privileged position, the colonized elites search for a compromise that for Fanon amounts to a “politics of immobilism” where the irreversible is to be avoided, while the bloodshed and the regrettable act are quotidian elements of colonial life (Fanon, 1961:63; my translation<sup>312</sup>). The colonized intellectual, in their compliance with the status quo, reproduce in such a way the unequal value of colored and white lives and their compliance with the status quo.

Fanon’s critique of the understanding of pacifism and nonviolence as a clean hands approach that seeks to sidestep violence does not differ from what Gandhi called cowardice, the use of nonviolence in order to avoid violence. For Fanon, “proof of the native's humanity consisted not in the willingness to kill settlers, but in the willingness to risk his or her life.” (Mamdani, 2001: 34) This is not grounded on a blind heroism, exemplary martyrdom or an ethical superiority, but on the impossibility to disentangle oneself from violence when one opposes it. As stated above, the nonviolence of colonized intellectuals and economic elites is complicit with colonial violence and contributes to maintain it.

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<sup>309</sup> « La non-violence est une tentative de régler le problème colonial, autour d'un tapis vert avant tout geste irréversible, toute effusion de sang, tout acte regrettable. »

<sup>310</sup> « Le colonialisme n'est pas une machine à penser, n'est pas un corps doué de raison. Il est la violence à l'état de nature. »

<sup>312</sup> «politique d'immobilisme»

## 7.7 The conundrum of nonviolence

To the above deontological critique of nonviolence, Norman Ajari points out, Fanon adds an ontological critique: “non-violence does not exist.” (Ajari, 2014: 229; my translation<sup>313</sup>) Ajari argues that non-violence always presupposes violence as the defining relation, and without it, its contestation by non-violence would have no object and no *raison d’être*. Yet, Ajari understands non-violence as the passive and willful reception of violence and locates the receiver of the violence as the victim, which is not how all proponents of non-violence, both as a moral principle or a political strategy, understand it. Besides, the fact that there is a deontological critique already implies there is such a thing as non-violence –a particular disposition or attitude towards violence– something which Ajari concedes. However, I concur with Ajari that in Fanon, besides the explicit critique of a concrete approach to non-violence, there is also an implicit assessment of nonviolence through his conception of the existence of the racialized as violence or violation.

As stated, his conception of violence as violation of the system and the intrinsic violence of the appearance of the colonized transcends the debates on means and ends and also simplistic divisions between violence and nonviolence. When he says that decolonization is always violent, independently of there being armed struggle or not, Fanon is questioning what is recognized as violence, against who an act is considered violence, what does nonviolence mean, whether is it possible to be nonviolent, and what is the point of declaring oneself nonviolent when one is already violence. To put it more bluntly, he points out that the self-assertion as nonviolent when the appearance of the black or the colonized is violence and their death is not considered violence is fruitless. The notion of violence as violation and the mere appearance and

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<sup>313</sup> « la non-violence n’existe pas. »

existence of certain groups as violence sidesteps the antagonism between nonviolence and violence as used in the discourse on violence by the hegemonic power. There is a form of violence in such division through the imposition and the determination of the limits of what is possible.

These considerations are not limited to Fanon's immediate context. Instead, he helps us to think about other moments and movements that today are spoken in terms of nonviolence, such as the Civil Rights struggle in the United States (Gordon, 2007c), in which the economy of violence was racially and asymmetrically distributed. The impossibility of nonviolent appearance was also the case of other movements which did not declare themselves non-violent but neither resorted to armed struggle nor offensive violence, such as the Black Panther Party, hip-hop movements (Ciccariello-Maher, 2010) or the current global movement of Black Lives Matter (Gibson, 2016). It also sheds light on the problems of the different movements of the South African struggle against apartheid, or the current situation in Palestine (Alessandrini, 2014). In a 2010 study of Associated Press and Stanford University, 20% of the respondents "openly" admitted to consider blacks as violent (Ciccariello-Maher, 2010). A brief but closer look to such movements can shed light on how the opposition between violence and nonviolence and framing it in terms of choice does not reflect the situation, and is part of the imposed framework.

One of the most important advocates of nonviolence, Martin Luther King, who today is considered a national figure in the United States did not enjoy the same reception during his lifetime. A sanitized and depoliticized version of King has become the standard according to which black leaders and political movements are measured and considered deviant or violent. Yet during his lifetime the reception of King by different sectors of white United States was highly ambivalent. On the one

side, his nonviolent strategy was praised, supported and demanded as the condition for black political action, while the white counterpart did not act accordingly. On the other side he was considered a threat when he addressed social and economic issues and the question of Vietnam (Jones, 1983). In mainstream media King's image was represented as the radical opposite of Malcolm X in terms of personal identity, ideology and purposes. King was portrayed as a nonviolent and a honest leader, whereas Malcolm X was conceived as bitter, violent, fanatic, power thirsty and animated by dark motives, black supremacist and anti-Christian (Powell and Amundson, 2002). Malcolm X received less coverage and a less respectful treatment, thereby diminishing role of Malcolm X in the civil rights struggle. Despite their actual differences with respect to nonviolence and other aspects, such antagonism could not be backed up by their thought and actions; Malcolm X argued for equality, not supremacy, and did not advocate nor committed violence. But this opposition was instrumental to secure the hegemonic racial order and power structures by shaping which claims, aspirations, practices and forms of protest are acceptable and (Grimm, 2015). As novelist James Baldwin put it, "The real reason that non-violence is considered to be a virtue in Negroes (...) is that white men do not want their lives, their self-image, or their property threatened." (Baldwin, 1962: 68-69) Baldwin notes that the history of conquest and violence of the United States is turned as a history of heroism and innocence except in the case of black political action. Nonviolence serves to relieve the white liberal consciousness (Baldwin, 1962: 68) and offers the same virtuous and self-congratulatory image as that of the founding power that declares itself just and not violent (Ajari, 2014).

Besides, the treatment and the public perception of King changed as King's and X's ideas became closer throughout the years, and also as King related the black struggle to Vietnam and to the Third World, and expressed socialist and anti-militarist positions. William C. Sullivan, Head of the Division Five of the FBI called King in 1963, "the most dangerous Negro in the future of this Nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro, and national security" (Churchill and Wall, 1990: 96-97) After the murder of Malcolm X, the FBI counterintelligence reports that King was considered one of the contenders to the position of the black "messiah", "should he abandon his supposed 'obedience' to 'white, liberal doctrines' (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism." (Churchill and Wall 1990: 131)

There is this constant ambivalence in King's reception; he is accepted as a valid and respectful leader insofar as he is limited to the nonviolent strategy and ethics. Yet the nonviolent movement appeared as violent and was responded as such. Activists of the nonviolent movements recall that their advances "could not have been achieved without the complementary and still underappreciated practice of armed self-defense." (Cobb Jr, 2014: 1) Against the constant terrorism, African-American individuals and groups within and outside the movement organized patrols and guards to protect their leaders, the communities and the participants in the acts. After the bombings and the attacks suffered, King's house was described as "an arsenal" (2014: 7), and he made clear that the question of armed self-defense did not pose an ethical or strategic contradiction to nonviolence<sup>314</sup>. Survival was the basic condition for

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<sup>314</sup> The question of organized self-defense and gun ownership cannot be dissociated from the particular history of the United States where they played a constitutive role. But this does not fully explain the dynamics of organized self- defense. Elsa Dorlin distinguishes self-defense from legitimate defense, noting that the latter is a right that functions like a privilege. Certain groups are legitimated to defend themselves, will be defended by the state and the state delegates on them for the defense of its interests, whereas others are not defended, they cannot resort to violence for their own defense and will be constrained in self-defense (Dorlin, 2017). Martin Luther King was denied the permit to carry weapons (Cobb Jr. 2014), and as we will see this would be one of the first issues that the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense problematized.

protests to be carried out. Charlie Cobb Jr., former member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) points out:

The dichotomy between violence and nonviolence so often imposed by historians and other analysts is not very helpful for understanding either the use of guns in local black communities or contemporaneous movement discussion and debate about self-defense. (2014: 10)

Yet, in 1965, coinciding with the murder of Malcolm X and the revolts in Watts, the nonviolent strategy was considered in a stalemate, the debates regarding the nonviolent strategy were open, and pacifist views were questioned within the different Civil Rights movements (Dorlin, 2017). Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the SNCC and later an important member of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), raised the historical appeal to the Black Power after the murder of the civil rights activist James Meredith during a march in 1966, which changed the dynamics of the Civil Rights struggle. Carmichael did not see non-violence as a passive response. He later put it that King's non-violence had taught them to face the enemy and enabled the political engagement of a larger number of African Americans, but "in order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience – the United States has none." (quoted in O'Donnell, 2017: 178)

For Fanon resorting to nonviolence did not depend so much on the goodwill of those in power, but it was intrinsically linked to the relations of force:

To raise the problem of a non-violent decolonization is less to postulate the sudden humanity of the colonizer than to believe in the sufficient pressure of the new force relations at the international level. (Fanon, 1964 : 173 ; my translation<sup>315</sup>)

However, Carmichael's words echo Fanon in two elements. First, he puts the question of how can you be nonviolent when you are intrinsically violent; it is

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<sup>315</sup> « Poser le problème d'une décolonisation non-violente, c'est moins postuler une soudaine humanité du colonialiste que croire à la pression suffisante du nouveau rapport de forces à l'échelle internationale. »

fruitless to declare oneself nonviolent amidst the ongoing racist, innocent, violence. This does not amount to the rejection of non-violence per se, but it notes the sterility of the debate regarding the *choice* between violence and nonviolence. Second, and concomitantly, he points out the need to cease appealing to the master, and instead, in an affirmative move, to turn towards the black communities in order address their needs, promote their humanity and build different forms of organizing political life.

This is clear when one examines how the BPP was not a non-violent movement but neither used violence as a means for political action. The BPP monitored police brutality against black communities and took the armed self-defense in a more ostensible way than the nonviolent movement, but also strictly rejected the display and the use of weapons for non-defensive purposes. In 1968 the group removed the term “self-defense” since that led them to be labelled as a paramilitary group (Nelson, 2011), and, although rooted in the historical tradition of politicized African-American armed self-defense groups, their internationalist character and their ideological orientation and praxis, which included thinking and writing, exceeded such definition (Dorlin, 2017). They did not only provided immediate physical protection, but also different medical, food or education programs, anti-heroin campaigns, transportation, legal services, community organization, intellectual production and research, and affective self-defense through celebrations, community meals and feasts. Despite their actions being entirely legal and complied with the constitutional right to carry arms<sup>316</sup>, the intelligence services considered them as “violence-prone and making efforts to perpetrate violence in the United States”. In 1968, the director of FBI J. Edgar Hoover declared that the BPP posed "the greatest [single] threat to the

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<sup>316</sup> The Panthers claimed the right of black Americans to carry arms as any other citizen of the United States. One of the first campaigns of the movement was against the modification of the second amendment in California that sought to ban the carrying of weapons to African-Americans as a measure to contain self-defense groups. Weapons in public spaces were banned in the state of California in 1969 (Dorlin, 2017)



internal security of the country" and added that 1969 would be the last year of the BPP (Churchill and Wall, 1990: 123). The actual threat was the improvement of the material and spiritual conditions of black communities, the organizational autonomy of black ghettos, and the activation and politicization of what the BPP called the "lumpen", the most oppressed and alienated sectors of society, such as sexual workers, convicts, or street gangs (Churchill and Wall, 1990). The FBI COINTELPRO program of surveillance and neutralization of dissidents, which had previously targeted the Communist Party, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, the SNCC or the Deacons for Defense and Justice, achieved unprecedented proportions in their task of discrediting, infiltrating, disorganizing and the selective killings of members of the BPP. Yet, as Elsa Dorlin points out, the program of the FBI has to be thought alongside the social imaginary and the symbolic framework that represented the black man as violent, criminal, hyper-virile and a sexual predator, and the black woman as a bad mother, an uncivilized matriarch and complicit and responsible for the crimes of their sons (Dorlin, 2017).

The opposition against South African apartheid is also spoken in terms of nonviolence versus violence. But this simplifies the opposition against colonial violence and reduces it to the dichotomy of choosing between violence and nonviolence. Frank Chikane a religious leader of the United Democratic Front put it as follows:

The question of violence is not important to the people of the townships. They are confronted every day by troops in the townships. There is not 'a violent option.' It is the necessity of the situation. You have to defend yourself. More people say that the ANC is not doing enough. It is a logical consequence of what the state is doing to people. (quoted in Williams, 2014: 22)

Chikane himself was imprisoned and after his release on bail in 1985 his house was bombed and his family attacked. The community of Soweto organized volunteers

to protect Chikane's house. "I was obliged to admit that I was only able to continue preaching non-violence because others were prepared to use violence to create this space for me." (quoted in Williams, 2014: 22) Nelson Mandela's declaration at the Rivona Trial exposed the history of the struggle of his organization against the South African state. He posited that the African National Congress (ANC) had led a nonviolent strategy for the rights of Africans since its foundation in 1912 until the establishment of the apartheid regime in 1949. "But White Governments remained unmoved, and the rights of Africans became less instead of becoming greater." (Mandela, 1965: 165) With the constitutional apartheid and the increasing repressive legislation and police violence, the persisting peaceful resistance through strikes and demonstrations of the ANC was responded with greater violence. A turning point in his account is the killing of 60 unarmed men in Sharpeville in 1960, the declaration of the emergency state and the illegalization of the organization. Mandela recalled the court that the creation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, a separate organization from the initially nonviolent ANC, was not based on love of violence, but on the failure of all the previous attempts. It was not an ethical nor strategic choice but it was rather predicated upon the realization that "there was simply no space of compromise in the colonies, no space of common feeling, no space, prepolitical or otherwise, that could serve as the basis for negotiation" (Williams, 2010: 14). The violent resistance that Mandela advocated was very restricted, nuanced and measured, it ruled out attacks against civilians, but was also responded with state violence and the imprisonment or killing of its leaders and those of the ANC. Because of his statement in the trial Mandela was removed from Amnesty International's list of prisoners of consciousness in 1964. For the NGO, subscribing to the "nonviolence clause" was a sine qua non condition for being qualified as prisoner of consciousness and therefore

as worthy of human rights defense (Williams, 2014). There are different layers in this episode<sup>317</sup>. For the aims of this section chapter I want to outline how it illustrates not only the inadequacy of the antinomy between nonviolence and violence as abstract, ahistorical and absolute principles or strategies to oppose a violent order, but also the violence inherent in such division. Such division, presented as a choice, omits the conundrum of how to appear nonviolent when the affirmation of one's existence transgresses the boundaries, that is, is violence to the system. Thus, the violence of the nonviolence/violence divide consists in that, through the imposition of moral conditions onto historical political practices, it enables the dominant power to categorize who is the violent and to criminalize their political appearance.

### **7.8 Colonial war and mental disorders**

Fanon dedicates the final chapter of *Les damnés de la terre*, entitled “Colonial war and mental disorders” to the aftermath of the war on the bodies, the psyche, and the social world. Fanon introduces the chapter with a caveat. He points out that the clinical cases presented in the final chapter “may seem untimely and out of place”, in the context of a political work, but, he adds, “there is nothing I can do.” (Fanon, 1961: 239; my translation<sup>318</sup>) In the previous chapters, combining both the utopian and the realistic, he analyzed the possibilities of the creative work of building a new society, and warned against the tremendous hindrances that the postcolonial nations would face. From the class relations and the formation of a parasitic elite to the fratricidal violence, the division between the rural and the urban, the relationship with

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<sup>317</sup> For Randall Williams (2014), it illustrates both how human rights discourse becomes the “default ally” of the state, and the discrepancy between two different logics of postwar internationalism, human rights based on a new international consensus that goes beyond Westphalia and the decolonization politics rooted in the history and practices of decolonization. The decision of Amnesty International takes the question of the political into an ahistorical and moral terrain. It denies recognition to the subject who advocates violence and effaces the historical context in which he is embedded. Like the South African court, it focuses on the innocence or not of the subject.

<sup>318</sup> « On trouvera peut-être inopportunes et singulièrement déplacées dans un tel livre ces notes de psychiatrie. Nous n'y pouvons strictement rien. »

the metropolis, the role of culture and intellectuals, or the function of the political party in cultivating or precluding the political and social conscientization of the people and their participation in the decision making and the building of the institutions, Fanon delves throughout the book on the political and organizational aspects that can lead to a radical democracy or to the imitation and reproduction of colonial institutions under a different guise.

Thus, the fact that Fanon thought that he had to justify, and finally included, the psychiatric notes, despite their apparent untimeliness and extraneity in a political work, indicates the relevance of the chapter. Fanon warns that the human substratum upon which the postcolonial world is to be built suffers from “multiple and sometimes indelible wounds” (Fanon, 1961 239; my translation<sup>319</sup>), produced by colonialism and the colonial war, and whose effects will remain for several generations. The psychic and mental suffering does not end with formal decolonization, but needs to be addressed as part of the decolonizing process. If the opening chapter is not an apology of violence, the closing one shows the atrocities derived by the use of violence to sustain or overcome the colonial order, it is not a critique of violence, but a warning of the psychological, social and ethical work to be done.

“These borderline cases bring up the question of responsibility in the context of the revolution.” (1961: 243; my translation<sup>320</sup>) He puts the focus on the wounds that the postcolonial societies will inherit. “Our acts never cease to haunt us. (...) Who dares to claim that vertigo does not haunt every life?”, he writes concerning the militant of a recently independent country who, each year towards the anniversary of the killing of ten people by the bomb that he placed in a colonialist café, suffers from insomnia,

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<sup>319</sup> « plaies multiples et quelquefois indélébiles »

<sup>320</sup> « De tels cas limites posent le problème de la responsabilité dans le cadre révolutionnaire. »

anxiety and self-destructive ideas (Fanon, 1961: 243; my translation<sup>321</sup>). But the militant, although suffering for the possibility of having killed innocent people did not disown his action, Fanon adds, he assumed that the vertigo and the anxiety were the price that he personally had to pay for the independence. The chapter epitomizes what Gordon identifies as the tragedy of the colonial condition, its constant violence: in situations where there are no ethical relations what is in danger – whether oppressor or oppressed, victim or perpetrator – is “the possibility of a human being.” (Gordon, 1995: 80) But, Gordon adds, “it is only human beings who are capable of tragedy”. That is, the human being is responsible for producing, maintaining or transforming the structures, practices, institutions and relationships that forestall humanity. Thus, the last chapter was a warning to the postcolonial nations that the pervasive suffering of the liberation struggle must be treated if societies do not want to become stagnant at the level of revenge and reactivity. This also entails taking responsibility for creating institutions, practices, and relationships that produce different human beings and lead to their growth (Gordon, 1995: 83)

Fanon recalls that colonialism was already a significant source of psychiatric troubles which were difficult to heal within the colonial order, but the particularities of the colonial war would exacerbate and cause new forms of mental troubles with long-lasting and tragic consequences. Fanon writes that “an entire generation of Algerians immersed in gratuitous and collective homicide, with the psycho-affective consequences this entails, will be the human legacy of France in Algeria” (Fanon, 1961: 241; my translation<sup>322</sup>), “and in France”, he added in private (Cherki, 2017: xiii).

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<sup>321</sup> « nos actes ne cessent jamais de nous poursuivre. (...) Qui oserait prétendre que le vertige ne hante pas toute existence ? »

<sup>322</sup> « toute une génération d'Algériens, baignée dans l'homicide gratuit et collectif avec les conséquences psychoaffectives que cela entraîne, serait l'héritage humain de la France en Algérie. »

In contrast to the literature on the trauma of war, he noticed that in the Algerian case there is no trace of the relative benign evolution of the disorders studied in other settings; the colonial war produces particular and hitherto unseen pathologies characterized by a notable malignancy. The trauma produces a persistent “fragility almost discernable to the naked eye. It is quite clear that *the future of these patients is mortgaged.*” (1961: 242; my translation<sup>323</sup>; own italics) Fanon posits that psychiatrists have tended to treat the psychic consequences of war under the category of psychotic reactions. In such view the pathology is triggered by a clearly defined event, although the subject and the context are minimally taken into account. For Fanon the origin of the disorders cannot be traced back to a single triggering event, but to the “bloody, pitiless atmosphere, the generalization of dehumanizing practices and the people’s lasting impression of living a veritable apocalypse.” (Fanon, 1961: 241; my translation<sup>324</sup>).

The first series of disorders, which he calls mental disorders of a reactional type, brings to the forefront the question of responsibility and the ethical choices of Algerians and French. The first case is that of an Algerian militant who suffered from sexual impotence, depression, anorexia and insomnia. It took a while to uncover the origin of the symptoms: his wife had been raped while the colonial soldiers were looking for him. The wife told him to annul the marriage because she had been dishonored. The therapy is tangled up with the ethical question of taking responsibility for a situation that was not strictly individual but also involved social values and gendered dimensions which were changing during the revolution (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). The patient resists to face the situation: “Was she obliged to

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<sup>323</sup> « une fragilité pratiquement discernable à vue d'œil. De toute évidence, l'avenir de ces malades est hypothéqué. »

<sup>324</sup> « atmosphère sanglante, impitoyable, la généralisation de pratiques inhumaines, l'impression tenace qu'ont les gens d'assister à une véritable apocalypse. »

inform me about all this?” (Fanon, 1961: 248; my translation<sup>325</sup>) The marriage was arranged, the husband explains, there was no love between them and with the war they had distanced themselves further. Yet, after hearing multiple accounts of other raped women and the responses of their husband “his dignity of derided husband was pushed into the background”, writes Fanon. He saw how other men supported their wives and how other men offered themselves to marry single, pregnant women raped by French soldiers (Fanon, 1961: 245; my translation<sup>326</sup>). The husband felt guilty for his wife and acknowledged that she had been protecting him. He said that his wife was a “tenacious woman” who was raped because she did not confess where the husband and the cell of fighters hid. “It is because of me that she was dishonored.” (Fanon, 1961: 246; my translation<sup>327</sup>) But he asked Fanon:

‘-What would you do if this had happened to you?

-I do not know...

-Would you take back your wife?

-I think I would...

-Ah, you see... you are not so sure.’

He takes his head with his hands and after a while he leaves the room. After that day he gradually accepted to hear political discussions and the migraines and anorexia receded significantly. (Fanon, 1961: 248; my translation<sup>328</sup>)

The patient finally decided to continue with the relationship once the war would be over, but, as in other cases in the chapter, there is uncertainty about a future nourished

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<sup>325</sup> « était-elle obligée de me mettre au courant de tout cela? »

<sup>326</sup> « sa dignité de mari bafoué restent au second plan. »

<sup>327</sup> « d'une femme têtue » « C'était à cause de moi qu'elle était déshonorée. »

<sup>328</sup> « Qu'est-ce que tu ferais si cela t'arrivait?

-Je ne sais pas...

- Reprendrais-tu ta femme?

-Je pense que oui...

- Ah, tu vois... Tu n'es pas tout à fait sûr...’

Se prend la tête dans les mains et après quelques instants quitte la chambre. À partir de ce jour, accepte progressivement d'entendre des discussions politiques, tandis que les migraines et l'anorexie régressent considérablement.»

by the burden of the past: “I have decided to take her back, but I do not know how I will react when I see her.” (Fanon, 1961: 248; my translation<sup>329</sup>)

The second case discusses an Algerian peasant who survived the massacre and the burning of his village. After the first aid services he asked for a gun, despite being a civilian and not involved in politics, and shot against Algerian soldiers. During hospitalization the patient attempted to kill other patients. He suffered from overexcitement, presented constant aggressiveness, hostility, violent outbursts and a fragmented speech. “There are French among us. They are disguised as Arabs. We have to kill them all. Give me a machine gun. All these so-called Algerians are French... and they do not leave me in peace” (Fanon, 1961: 250; my translation<sup>330</sup>) After several weeks the hostility decreased and the patient went into a phase of solitude and reticence that alerted the psychiatrists from possible acutest symptoms. In his psychiatric writings Fanon shows that in the colonial world suspicion is a recurrent element in colonial relations. In this case, for the patient everyone was an enemy, a possible traitor, he was unable to distinguish the foe from a friend or an ally. In this situation of pathological mistrust the only way to be safe was to be alone, that is, outside of the social world made of enemies. However, after a month the patient was willing to leave the hospital and learn a job. Guided by the social services the patient’s trouble receded significantly.

The third case covers a young Algerian militant with insomnia, suicide attempts, depersonalization and hallucinations. “He begs us to stop the hemorrhage, and not to let *them* suck their blood even in the hospital” (Fanon, 1961: 251; my translation<sup>331</sup>). He talks of a woman that constantly appears and haunts him. He says that he knows

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<sup>329</sup> « J'ai décidé de la reprendre, mais j'ignore encore comment je réagirai en la voyant. »

<sup>330</sup> « Il y a des Français parmi nous. Ils se déguisent en Arabes. Il faut tous les tuer. Donne-moi une mitraillette. Tous ces soi-disant Algériens sont des Français... et ils ne me laissent pas tranquille. »

<sup>331</sup> « Il nous supplie d'arrêter l'hémorragie, de ne plus tolérer qu'on vienne le « vampiriser « jusqu'à l'hôpital. »



the woman, that he killed her himself. Fanon initially associates the symptoms to a Freudian guilt complex; his mother, to whom he was closely attached, was killed and his sisters disappeared during a French attack. But after several interviews the patient reveals an episode of an FLN operation. They went into the estate of an active settler who had killed several Algerians. The French man was absent, only his wife was at home, and the team decided to wait for him, but he killed the French woman. He was interrogated by his superior, legal proceedings were initiated against him by the FLN. “I thought I was going to be executed, but I did not care.” (Fanon, 1961: 252: my translation<sup>332</sup>) Gibson and Beneduce notice that, as in other cases in this set, symptoms emerge from the ethical conflict derived from violent acts of a war where the distinction between the enemy and the friend, innocent and the guilty is blurred and rendered ambiguous to the extent of compromising the sense of the self, the community and the feeling of belonging. In contrast to the article on confession where what was rejected was the external judge and a whole legal system, here the conflict revolves around an “internalized judge”: “What Fanon pointed to was that the internal (and infernal) judge continues to haunt (and question) our conscience, reason, and sense of personal responsibility.” (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 235)

The legal process against the patient was abandoned on the basis of the medical examination. From then on, the woman appeared every night claiming for his blood. Other women also harassed him claiming for their blood, the floor was filled with blood until their wounds begin to close and he woke up agitated. After several weeks of therapy the nightmares disappeared, but “a great rift remains in his personality” (Fanon, 1961: 253; my translation<sup>333</sup>), as soon as he thinks of his mother the ghostly

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<sup>332</sup> « Je croyais que j'allais être tué, mais je m'en fichais. »

<sup>333</sup> « une grande faille se maintient dans sa personnalité »

woman reappears. Fanon's prognostic is uncertain: "As unscientific as it may seem, I think only time may improve the dislocated personality of the young man." (Fanon, 1961: 253; my translation<sup>334</sup>) Fanon's conclusion, vague and unscientific, precisely reveals that what is required exceeds the purely medical. Time is required for the reconstruction of the human at the individual and social levels. Simona Taliani points out that time also refers to the specters of the past informing present choices and the future orientation. As in the case above of the husband and the raped wife, time is what is needed for situating oneself and it is also what the other needs to be given in order to distinguish what is psychological, cultural and political in the relationship (in Beneduce, 2017).

The two following cases deal with the troubles of two French police torturers. The first one is willing to return to France and to quit his job, which he did. The second one displays an aggressive behavior towards his wife and his children. He argued that he was not like this before, it all started after the "events". Torture and obtaining information from the tortured had become a question of personal success and of competition among his colleagues. Fanon writes that "this man knew very well that all his troubles were directly caused by the type of activity developed in the interrogation rooms, even though he tried to put the blame on 'the events'." (Fanon, 1961: 258; my translation<sup>335</sup>) He did not consider quitting his job. Instead he asked Fanon to help him torture Algerians more effectively, with peace of mind, without guilt consciousness and behavioral disorders. The prognostic for both policemen was very different. Whereas the first policeman acknowledged the origin of the problem and acted accordingly, the cure was almost impossible in the case of the second one.

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<sup>334</sup> « Aussi peu scientifique que cela puisse sembler, nous pensons que seul le temps pourra apporter quelque amélioration dans la personnalité disloquée du jeune homme. »

<sup>335</sup> « Cet homme savait parfaitement que tous ses troubles étaient causés directement par le type d'activité déployée dans les salles d'interrogatoire, encore qu'il ait tenté d'en rejeter globalement la responsabilité sur « les événements. »

His reluctance to treatment, to reflect on the question, to recognize the origin of the problem and to abandon the practice of violence would lead to the failure of every treatment. There was no healing for the second policeman, instead he was trapped in an escalade of violence that went in every direction. Fanon points out that torture is “a coherent system that leaves nothing intact”. After a first stage where torture is compatible with a serene appreciation of beauty and of the little pleasures of everyday life, there is a stage where the whole existence of the torturer is imbued in “a radical and absolute sadism.”( Fanon, 1961: 258; my translation<sup>336</sup>)

By linking responsibility to trauma, both of the victim and of the perpetrator, Fanon presents a more complex scenario than the one described by Karl Jaspers in *The Question of German Guilt*. In such work, Jaspers discussed how the acknowledgement of guilt and the individual and collective assumption of responsibility for the crimes committed by the Nazi regime was a necessary condition for the collective, moral and political restoration of Germany. He outlined four dimensions of guilt and their corresponding responsibilities: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical as means to individual and collective transformation. Criminal responsibility is held by individuals towards the law. Political responsibility is the responsibility held by citizens for the actions of their governments. Ethical responsibility is held towards one’s own conscience. Metaphysical responsibility refers to the accountability of one’s actions before God. It points to the responsibility by action or omission of the violence exerted on any other human being (Jaspers, 2001: 25-26). In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon makes reference to the metaphysical responsibility of Jaspers, although he shows his reticence about its religious overtone. Yet, Jasper’s notion of responsibility is one of the influences on Fanon’s compelling

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<sup>336</sup> « un système cohérent qui ne laisse rien intact (...) un sadisme radical et absolu. »

understanding of solidarity as co-responsibility for the other that exceeds oneself (Fanon, 1952: 87). But in the psychiatric case studies of *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon does not appeal to Jasper's notions of responsibility and the reasons behind this may be interesting to briefly examine.

Although the colonial case is not analogous to Jasper's object of thought, applying a cursory look to his model of responsibilities may reveal the different approach of both authors. First, Fanon puts the political responsibility of citizens, the metropolis, not in terms of aid, but in the due reparations of former colonial powers to the new independent nations. Second, Fanon's point of departure is not the defeated or the victor of the war, but the "borderline cases", the patient, either victim or perpetrator, who must take responsibility for his actions and his recovery. He does not treat the ethical as an individual question; the patient's agency and responsibility exist in relation to the broader community, the changing social values and relations derived from the anticolonial struggle. The relation of the ethical and the political discussed above, returns here. Third, and most important for the scope of this section, Jaspers notably omits the question of trauma in his account of responsibility. The assumption of responsibility seems to transcend the action and relegate it to the past. However, by taking into account the position of the patient, and linking trauma to "responsibility in the framework of the revolution", Fanon introduces a temporal dimension absent in Jaspers' thought. The past is not only memory in the present, but with trauma the past haunts and embodies the present. Decolonization, and the path to create a new humanity, as Fanon concludes the book, is not a magical process, it is a more tortuous and not straightforward process. The possibility of failure and setbacks is not to be excluded and responsibility here means first taking responsibility for responsibility itself. Erica Burman (2018) notes that the case of the husband whose wife had been

raped and he finally decided to rebuild the relationship ends, in an illustrative ambiguous way: “When independence comes, I’ll take my wife back. If it doesn’t work out, I’ll come to see you again in Algiers” (1961: 248; my translation<sup>337</sup>)

The second series of cases revolve around the atmosphere of war as the trigger of violent acts. The first case addresses two young Algerians, 13 and 14 years old, who killed their playmate, a French boy. Both had no problems in admitting their crime, they did not show repentance or discomfort. They argued that they had nothing against him, they used to play together.

Why had he killed? He did not answer the question, but he asked if I had ever seen a European in prison. Had there ever been a European arrested and sent to prison after killing an Algerian? I answer him that in fact I had never seen any European in prison. (Fanon, 1961: 260; my translation<sup>338</sup>)

One of the adolescents explains that his relatives had been killed in the attack to the village of Rivet by French militias. Forty Algerian men were killed as retaliation of a FLN attack, and the village was burnt down. This was part of a strategy of civil militias involving thousands of French who sought to depopulate areas by burning down villages and settlement camps, terrorizing the population, and shooting whoever ran away (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). In the poisonous atmosphere, notions of justice and fairness, legal and moral, are not only asymmetrically distributed, that is what the boys point out, but they become irrelevant. “And yes, I have killed him, now do what you want”, says one of the boys, defiant and unperturbed, to Fanon (Fanon, 1961: 261; my translation<sup>339</sup>).

The Algerian patient of the second case was sent to the psychiatric hospital by the French legal authorities in a state of severe confusion, experiencing “paranoid

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<sup>337</sup> « À l’indépendance, je reprendrai ma femme. Si cela ne marche pas, je reviendrai te voir à Alger. »

<sup>338</sup> « Pourquoi a-t-il tué ? Il ne répond pas à la question, mais me demande si j’ai déjà vu un Européen en prison. Y a-t-il jamais eu en prison un Européen arrêté après le meurtre d’un Algérien? Je lui réponds qu’effectivement je n’ai pas vu d’Européens en prison. »

<sup>339</sup> « Eh bien, je l’ai tué. Maintenant, faites ce que vous voulez. »

delusion” and with suicide attempts. Fanon notes that this was not an isolated case; patients with similar symptoms were recurrently seen during the early stages of the war. During the first weeks the patient does not communicate. Then the patient explains that he had been focused on his job, on developing his skills, and did not pay attention to the liberation struggle. One and a half years after the beginning of the war, the patient has the impression that his relatives treat him as a traitor. From then on, he spends as much time alone as possible, avoiding every contact. One day on the street he hears someone calling him a traitor but he does not see anyone. He locks himself in his room and hears voices: « Traitor... coward, all your brothers are dying, traitor... traitor... » (Fanon, 1961: 262; my translation<sup>340</sup>) He lost appetite, suffered from anxiety and spent his days in a prostrated position. At the fourth day he goes into the European town. Looking like a European, he is not controlled, but he sees other Algerians being stopped, insulted, frisked and arrested. He then leaps on a soldier and tries to grab his machine gun while screaming ‘I am an Algerian’. After interrogation he is sent to the psychiatric hospital.

What I wanted, (...) was to die. Even at the police station, I thought and I hoped that after the tortures they would kill me. I was happy to be beaten up because that proved that they also thought of me as an enemy. (...) I am not a coward, I am not a woman, I am not a traitor (Fanon, 1961: 263-264; my translation<sup>341</sup>)

Fanon asks in the first chapter how to move from the atmospheric violence, a violence that goes in every direction, to political violence (Fanon, 1961: 70). Many of the case studies that Fanon presents in the last chapter, particularly the two boys killing his friend, the young militant killing the French woman, or the latter one, are reactive forms of violence shaped by colonial relationships. They reveal that the

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<sup>340</sup> « Traître... lâche... tous tes frères qui meurent... traître... traître... »

<sup>341</sup> « Ce que je voulais (...) c'était mourir. Même à la police, je croyais et j'espérais qu'après les tortures ils me tueraient. J'étais content d'être frappé, car cela me prouvait qu'ils me considéraient moi aussi comme leur ennemi. (...) Je ne suis pas un lâche. Je ne suis pas une femme. Je ne suis pas un traître.»

demarcation between the pathological and the political violence is blurry and equivocal. Fanon was not romanticizing when he wrote in the first chapter that this atmosphere of violence – “this violence which is under the skin” (Fanon, 1961: 70; my translation<sup>342</sup>)– enables to identify the enemy, or when he points out that violence in its totalizing character unifies the people (1961: 90). “An atmosphere of drama reigns where everyone wants to prove that he is ready for anything.”( Fanon, 1961: 70: my translation<sup>343</sup>) In this atmosphere of violence the individual is depersonalized, there is no possibility of everyday life, he points out, one cannot be an alcoholic, a *fellah* or a pimp as before (Fanon, 1961: 85), and there is also a collective depersonalization at the level of social structures, at the level of mutual trust and the sense of belonging (Fanon, 1961: 283).

The third case discusses the symptoms of a young French girl after the death of her father in an ambush. Fanon emphasizes the coldness of her account of the death of her father, devoid of feelings and remarkably lucid. Her father was a high civil servant who was in charge of the centers of interrogation of the region. He was deeply involved in the repression of the anticolonial struggle to the extent that his own house had become a center for torture. Living in another village, she avoided going home and meeting her father, but he informed her enthusiastically of the new detentions. She knew all the Algerian families of the village, and their children had been her friends. She was trapped within the atmosphere of hatred and fear: “In the end I would not dare to walk on the street since I was completely sure to find hatred everywhere. Deep inside myself I agreed with the Algerians. If I was Algerian I would be in the maquis.” (Fanon, 1961: 265; my translation<sup>344</sup>) At the funeral his

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<sup>342</sup> « cette violence à fleur de peau »

<sup>343</sup> « Une atmosphère de drame s'installe, où chacun veut prouver qu'il est prêt à tout. »

<sup>344</sup> « À la fin, je n'osais plus marcher dans la rue tellement j'étais sûre de rencontrer partout la

father was praised for his “high moral qualities that had won the hearts of the native population”, while being responsible of dozens of deaths everyday (Fanon, 1961: 265; my translation<sup>345</sup>). She felt sick, ran away to the village and rejected any help from the French administration.

The last two cases of this set are dedicated to the troubles of refugee populations. In Tunis Fanon had been treating Algerian refugees in the Tunisian camps and envisaged writing more extensively on the topic. “The pathology of refugees, which is highly polyvalent and always very serious, will have to be the focus of a later work.” (Fanon, 2018: 488) An extended work on the topic did not come about, but this issue was treated in different works and with different formats. In the psychiatric notes in *Les damnés de la terre* he briefly exposes the different pathologies of refugee pregnant women and refugee orphan children. He affirms that there are 300.000 Algerian refugees in the camps of Tunisia and Morocco who live in precarious conditions and exposed to the frequent attacks of French military. In this situation, he notes, there are few refugee women who do not suffer from acute disorders before or after giving birth, ranging from depression and anxiety, to violent agitations or deliriums. Fanon notices that different treatments can mitigate the symptoms and improve the condition of the patients, but the pathogeny lies in the experience of migration, family dislocation and the conditions of poverty and insecurity.

In the introduction of *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, Fanon mentions the case of a seven year old child from a refugee camp who had been injured and forced to witness the murder of his family. The child said, “I have only one wish: to chop a French soldier into little pieces”, Fanon comments:

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haine. Au fond de moi-même, je leur donnais raison à ces Algériens. Si j'étais algérienne, je serais au maquis. »

<sup>345</sup> « "les hautes qualités morales avaient conquis la population indigène" »



Does anyone believe it is easy to make this child of seven forget both the killing of his parents and his enormous revenge? Is this orphaned childhood growing up in an apocalyptic atmosphere the sole message that the French democracy will leave? (Fanon, 1959: 8; my translation<sup>346</sup>)

The impact of war on children required special attention because of the particularities on their age, and because their compromised future is also the horizon of the nation. In the camp, Fanon notices in the children “a great thirst for calm and affection”, and also sadistic tendencies (1961: 266; my translation<sup>347</sup>). A program of schooling, entertaining and receiving follow up care was implemented. The experience of the refugee children was captured in the 1961 short documentary *J'ai huit ans*, directed by Olga Poliakoff and Jann Le Mason and co-prepared by René Vautier and Fanon himself. The film is based on the stories and the drawings of the children, mostly orphans. And although the film may have other goals such as denouncing and exposing French violence and torture, it was “the product of a new therapeutic strategy of visualization that Fanon was experimenting” (Mirzoeff, 2011: 7). Giovanni Pirelli, the militant, intellectual and Fanon’s publisher in Italy proposed Fanon to collect the testimonies and the drawings of the children in the book *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria* (“Stories of Algerian Children”), which appeared in Italy in 1962. The drawings and the written and oral stories aimed at expressing and dealing with the traumatic experience of forced displacement and the memories of violence. Linking art with therapy is today a generalized practice, for Fanon it was not a closed method to be applied, but another way to take into account the singularity of the patient so that through the sensory and the visual he or she can grasp and transmit what could not be expressed through words. As Alice Cherki notes, this was also part

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<sup>346</sup> « ‘Je ne désire qu’une chose : pouvoir découper un soldat français en petits morceaux(...)’ Eh bien cet enfant de sept ans, croit-on donc qu’il soit facile de lui faire oublier à la fois le meurtre de ses parents et sa vengeance énorme ? Cette enfance orpheline qui grandit dans une atmosphère de fin du monde, est-ce là tout le message que laissera la démocratie française ? »

<sup>347</sup> “Grande soif de calme et d'affection.”

of the changes that he was introducing in his clinical practice in Tunis, in his conception of the asylum, and his growing interest in psychoanalysis through the work of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, whose s pioneering work on the trauma and neuroses of war and the active technique of psychoanalysis drew Fanon's attention (Cherki, 2011).

The third set of the case studies deals with the effects of torture on the tortured. Fanon already had written about the direct involvement of psychiatrists in the legitimation, the development of techniques and in the practice of tortures. In "Algeria Face to Face with the French Torturers", Fanon observed that torture already took place frequently before the outbreak of the war; torture was intrinsic to colonialism and coherent with the colonial logic. It was "a mode of the occupant-occupied relationship" (Fanon, 1964: 73; my translation<sup>348</sup>). Torture was both a means and an end itself, not only to obtain information, but also part of the terror and dehumanization that shaped colonial relations. He writes that in a context "in which the excuse of the end tends more and more to become detached itself from the means, it is normal that torture becomes its own justification" (Fanon, 1964: 77; my translation<sup>349</sup>). Despite the denunciations and the multiple reports that attested it at the time, the systematic use of torture in Algeria was only openly admitted in France in the 2000's, after the confession of leading military and police officers (Klose, 2013). Historian Pierre Naquet-Vidal (1998) notes that the declaration of the state of emergency and then of the *Pouvoirs spéciaux* in Algeria did not legalize torture but cleared the path to repress any form of native resistance and insurgency in the name of the French republic and national security. The organized repression was not limited to the Algerian territory but also encompassed the metropolis. Torture was part of an

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<sup>348</sup> « La torture est une modalité des relations occupant-occupé. »

<sup>349</sup> « Dans cette perspective où l'excuse de la fin tend de plus en plus à se détacher des moyens, il est normal que la torture devienne sa propre justification. »

official and informal, military and civil, system of repression that included secret centers of interrogation, and detention, relocation and settlement camps. The question of torture in Algeria came into public debate in France at the beginning of the 2000's coinciding with the Iraq war and the War on Terror, conflicts where the use of torture and detention centers was also systematic. Studies have shown how the colonial order and the decolonization wars, notably the Algerian and the Kenyan wars, have been viewed as an "uncanny foretaste" (Klose, 2013: 4), and studied as models for the repressive practices in Iraq and the War on Terror (Klose, 2013; Rejali, 2009). Darius Rejali exposes that the War on Terror was less about land and wealth than "about affirming our way of life, our fundamental identity of liberal democratic society." (Rejali, 2009: 548) Fanon provides the underside of this discourse when he asserts that torture is a "lifestyle" and asks whether the torturer "is in contradiction with the 'values' of its group and the system he defends" (Fanon, 1964: 73-74; my translation<sup>350</sup>).

Fanon classifies his psychiatric notes on torture according to the technique employed, he points out that besides the general and deep ravage on the personality, each technique of torture has different pathological effects on the body and the psyche of the victim. Fanon notes that torture usually targets directly the subjectivity in order to modify the attitudes of the individual, but it can also target the body without direct physical violence by using the absence of physical pain, or by allowing to eat as a reward, as it is used in certain techniques of brain washing.

As a consequence of certain forms of torture, he notices that "the most painful sequel found in this war" was "the impossibility of explaining and defending a given position. Thinking takes place in antithetical couples. Anything that is affirmed can,

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<sup>350</sup> « La torture, style de vie » « le policier tortionnaire est-il en contradiction avec les 'valeurs' de son group et du système qu'il défend ? »

in the same breath, be denied with the same force.” (Fanon, 1961: 277; my translation<sup>351</sup>) Yet Fanon notices that torture does not only have long term physical and mental consequences, but part of the purpose of torture is to make ever present the act of torture itself to the victim. In the same vein, philosopher and Auschwitz survivor Jean Améry recalls that “torture has an indelible character. Whoever was tortured, stays tortured. Torture is ineradicably burned into him, even when no clinically objective traces can be detected.” (Améry, 1980: 34) Fanon points out that doctors who do not fully understand their patients affirm that ““All this will disappear once this damned war is over.”” (Fanon, 1961: 279; my translation<sup>352</sup>) But what he shows is that among the different and adamant consequences, torture seeks to be remembered by the victim: The feeling of guilt and permanent dread and uncertainty after the truth serum, or the obsessive troubles after brain washing. The policeman torturing a suspect realizes that he was not involved in politics: ““Don’t let him go like that. Push a little bit more, so that when he gets out he will keep quiet’.” (Fanon, 1961: 272; my translation<sup>353</sup>). Or, when the policeman tells the raped woman: “If you see the bastard of your husband again, above all don’t forget to tell him what we have done to you.” (Fanon, 1961: 245; my translation<sup>354</sup>) As Gibson and Beneduce observe:

Fanon revealed that, apart from the effort of masking the somatic consequences of trauma, the paradoxical injunction of not forgetting is among the most psychically ruinous and long-lasting effects of this specific form of violence. (...) This injunction to remember the scene of violence, to remember what the victim would like to forget, introduces a block in the tension between forgetting and remembering, rendering the victim literally

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<sup>351</sup> « Impossibilité d'expliquer et de défendre une position donnée. La pensée se déroule par couples antithétiques. Tout ce qui est affirmé peut, dans le même moment, être nié avec la même force. C'est certainement la séquelle la plus douloureuse que nous ayons rencontrée dans cette guerre. »

<sup>352</sup> « ‘Tout cela finira avec cette sacrée guerre’. »

<sup>353</sup> « ‘Ne le lâchez pas comme cela. Serrez-le encore un peu. Ainsi quand il sera dehors, il restera tranquille’ »

<sup>354</sup> « Si tu revois un jour ton salaud de mari, n'oublie surtout pas de lui dire ce qu'on t'a fait. »

*possessed* by their memories. (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017: 236; italics in the original)

The fourth series covers the psychosomatic troubles mostly examined in patients coming from concentration camps. Fanon emphasizes a particular pathology in Algeria that was not reported elsewhere and was already present before the outbreak of the war, the contract body. Generalized muscle spam, increasing rigidity, impossibility of movement, constantly tense and incapable of release, the face is stiff but expressing bewilderment. This is different from “hysterical contraction”, he notes, “the patient seems to be made of one piece. (...) ‘You see, I am already stiff like a corpse’”, says a patient (Fanon, 1961: 282; my translation<sup>355</sup>).

### **7.9 A New Humanity, violence and the traces of history**

Fanon’s understanding of the traumatic effects of violence differs substantially from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the dominant approach introduced by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1980. The influence of the PTSD extends beyond the psychological and psychiatric circles to the legal and humanitarian domains, or emergencies and crisis management. PTSD is an umbrella notion that encompasses, and occludes, a disparity of symptoms that constitute the syndrome, and is applied to multiple and unrelated distressing human experiences, from war, rape, divorce, dismissal, natural disasters or childbirth. For that matter, Fanon’s approach prefigures the criticisms of PTSD issued in the mid 90’s on the basis of its reductionist cognitivism that locates the trauma *inside* the human mind, its individualized, apolitical, ahistorical, decontextualized and deculturalized understanding of traumatic experiences, and its linear treatment of human suffering and healing. Also, in its global scope and application, and its

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<sup>355</sup> «le malade semble fait d'une pièce. (...) Vous voyez, je suis déjà raide comme un mort. »

apparent neutrality, PTSD homogenizes diverse experiences through a universal model of interpretation of suffering, diagnostic and treatment (Cherki, 2011; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

Fanon introduced the chapter of the case studies by remarking that it does not attempt to be a scientific work where semiological, nosological and therapeutic considerations are discussed. However, he actually delves into these dimensions, starting by his description of the particularities of the Algerian war and continuing by his classification of the case studies into four series and in his observations of the cases. His thematization and the criteria to classify the case studies, exceeding purely medical classifications and categories, is itself an epistemological intervention. The whole analysis of the case studies from diagnostic, prognostic and treatment brings to the forefront the political, and the individual and collective responsibility in the response to the circumstances. Gibson and Beneduce incisively note that Fanon does not connect the mental troubles “to a vague notion of war-related violence”, but instead he links them with the particularities of torture, the concrete atmosphere of colonialism, acknowledges the “continuum that exists between suffering and its historico-political matrix”, and builds thereby “a *political nosography* of traumatic disorders that is structurally linked to people’s social role and agency.” (2017: 235; italics in the original).

Alice Cherki points out that the young Algerian psychiatrists trained in the violent decade of the 1990’s attempted to apply the PTSD techniques and, besides the therapeutic inadequacy, they “returned almost as wounded as the victims they were to treat” (2011: 396: my translation<sup>356</sup>). Instead, she writes, Fanon

describes the effects on the subject of the confiscation of language, of the violences of history redirected from generation to generation, of the

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<sup>356</sup> « en sont revenus presque plus meurtris que les sinistrés dont ils avaient à s’occuper »

rejection, of the deprecation and exclusion of referents and genealogies, of blocked traumatism, fixed in an impossible elaboration because of denial and silencing. (Cherki, 2011: 397; my translation<sup>357</sup>)

Thereby, and since his doctoral dissertation, Fanon delved into what Beneduce calls the “psychic life of History”, that is, a genealogical work that looks at the relation of subjectivity to history, politics and culture, takes into account the historicity of the symptom, the concrete experience of the subject, its embeddedness in the political context and the role of historical events in shaping concrete experiences and the building of meaning. This is not tantamount to placing the psychical before or over the political, or affect over History, but is the way he actually escapes from these recurrent oppositions and shows their intricacy (Beneduce, 2012). In Fanon “the political is located within the psychical as a powerful shaping force (...) [and] the psychical operates precisely as a political formation.” (Fuss: 1999: 322)

Fanon did not explicitly theorize about it, but interrogating alienation from multiple angles enabled him to anticipate the disorders and the different manifestations in which the colony would haunt the postcolony, the continuities and transfigurations of colonialism, whether at the economic level, the fratricidal violence, the charismatic and despotic leaderships or the deep and lingering effects of alienation and mental disorders derived from the colonial wounds (Cherki, 2011; Gibson and Beneduce, 2017).

The *damned* of the postcolonial world, whether in the *banlieu*, the ghetto or in the medical consultation rooms, whether the refugee, asylum seekers or migrants –whose

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<sup>357</sup> « Il décrit les effets sur le sujet des confiscations de langue, des violences de l’histoire reconduites de génération en génération, du rejet, de la dévalorisation et de l’exclusion des référents et des généalogies, des traumatismes arrêtés, figés dans une impossible élaboration pour cause de déni et de silenciation. »

movement and experiences are often treated as disconnected from colonialism and racism— or in the conflicts of racist societies, one can find repeated the same defensive positions, hypersensitivity, angst, ideas of persecution, and explosions of gratuitous violence (Gibson and Beneduce, 2017). Roberto Beneduce identifies today in those whose presence is suspicious and whose existence is precarious and threatened the “painful sign of past events, of disappearance and separations rising against an oblivion deprived of all redemption.” Such colonial wounds do not appear linearly and explicitly, but can be discerned in their faltering speech, the silences, denials, hesitations, their adamant demands, the ambiguous memories, the memories of numbed practices that appear suddenly, and that contain the possibility of the emergence of an unconceivable violence (Beneduce, 2012: 280; my translation<sup>358</sup>).

Fanon had no crystal ball. But as we saw, for Fanon the psyche is not a part of the body, the psyche is constituted by, and constitutes, the history of human relations in their economic, cultural, political, social or sexual dimensions. Since *Black Skin White Masks*, trauma, like alienation, is not an individual matter, but a relational and historical one, and as Simona Taliani puts it, Fanon asks “what does it mean to (re)live the trauma of someone else without managing to get rid of the phantasms, which one does not know anymore to whom they belong?” (Taliani, 2012; 288; my translation<sup>359</sup>) Trauma for him was an encysted knot in human relations derived from the effects of centuries of dehumanization, exploitation and the manifold forms of violence of the colonial world. Thus, that the colonial trauma haunts the postcolonial world is indicative that formal decolonization, national sovereignty, and the establishing of borders has not been accompanied by the repair or a radical

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<sup>358</sup> « l’indice douloureux d’événements passés, de disparitions et de séparations s’élevant contre un oubli privé de toute rédemption. »

<sup>359</sup> Que signifie le fait de (re) vivre le trauma de quelqu’un d’autre sans parvenir à se débarrasser de fantasmes dont on ne sait plus à qui ils appartiennent ?



transformation of the structural damage of colonialism, but accompanied by new forms of exploitation, subordination and humiliation in the postcolonial condition. In the conclusion to *Les damnés de la terre* he poetically puts the individual and collective task at hand thusly:

Let us take up the question of the human. Let us take up the question of the cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connections must be multiplied, whose networks must be diversified and whose message must be re-humanized. (Fanon, 1961: 303; my translation<sup>360</sup>)

Fanon closed *Black Skin White Masks* with a prayer to the historically constituted black body: “My final prayer: O my body, make me always a man who questions!” (1952: 225; my translation<sup>361</sup>) Interrogation entails adopting an active stance and is here a liberating movement that turns a closed, overdetermined object into an active subject of decolonization. As Alejandro de Oto points out, it is not only a subject who interrogates, but the subject himself embodies the interrogation, and as such, locates himself outside of the colonial subjectivity without falling into solipsism (De Oto, 2003). The interrogation turns a site of closure, of sedimented colonial discourses and practices, into a site of openness towards oneself and towards the other. Yet, in the beauty and the insight of such statement may also lie its limitation: the absent others. Despite *Black Skin White Masks* being an effort to articulate a form of liberating knowledge, to understand the intricacy between history, culture, society and subjectivity, showing the failures of individual attempts at transformation through white recognition, and emphasizing the society as the pathogenic site to be transformed, Fanon ends by praying to his own body. The liberating efforts from the weight of history remain at the individual level, without articulating the dialectic

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<sup>360</sup> « Reprenons la question de l'homme. Reprenons la question de la réalité cérébrale, de la masse cérébrale de toute l'humanité dont il faut multiplier les connexions, diversifier les réseaux et réhumaniser les messages. »

<sup>361</sup> « Mon ultime prière : Ô mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge ! »

between the individual and the collective of the historical process of decolonization. *Les Damnés de la terre* also ends up with a universal appeal to openness: “For Europe, for ourselves, for the humankind, we have to restart [*“faire peau neuve”*, literally translated, to create a new skin], develop a new thought, and try to build a new humanity.” (1961: 305; my translation<sup>362</sup>) Here Fanon is not talking about liberation, but about freedom, that is, the responsibility to create a future away from the vicious circle of colonialism. As Gordon notes, Fanon distinguished clearly between liberty and freedom. Liberty is the absence of a constraint; freedom refers to taking responsibility for building ethical human relations. Liberty can be granted by others, whereas freedom is a constant activity oriented towards human blossoming through which one obtains one’s dignity and self-respect (Gordon, 2008).

In contrast to the statement that opens the book, decolonization is not the replacement of one species of men by another, neither is only about land and bread, but rather about “introducing new relations in a society and introducing new relations means negating the colonial system.” (Fanon, 2018: 530) Decolonization and the creation of new human beings will not be brought automatically by the anticolonial revolution or independence, it is instead an ongoing and open process of creating institutions, rules, epistemic practices, of transforming and producing new meanings. It is in this interplay between the human as creator and concomitantly being created, which Fanon explores since his first work, that the new humanity comes into being.

Decolonization and the new humanity disrupt colonial temporality and introduce new temporalities. This is what he points out in the conclusion of *Les damnés de la terre* when he calls not to imitate Europe, to move away from European institutions, states and societies and to create new institutions and a new thought. The European,

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<sup>362</sup> « Pour l'Europe, pour nous-mêmes et pour l'humanité, camarades, il faut faire peau neuve, développer une pensée neuve, tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf. »

the white man, is no longer the end of history, that is, following Gordon's definition of modernity, the only legitimate present that is oriented and belongs to the future; the black and the colonized are no longer overdetermined by the past and whose only possibility of being connected to the future is by becoming or aspiring to be white. European humanism, he declares, has provided solutions to many of the problems of humanity, but has simultaneously killed the human everywhere while talking about and extolling the human. In contrast to European humanism, the new humanism, which in his work is being crafted since the earliest pages of *Black Skin White Masks*, is not constituted out of murder, but neither by ignoring violence and war. The "new beginning of the story of the human" has to take into account both the "sometimes prodigious theses" and the systemic crime against the human in the form of slavery, exploitation, or genocide that have co-constituted European humanism (Fanon, 1961: 304; my translation<sup>363</sup>). The new temporality of the new humanism some authors have understood it as a form *tabula rasa* (Marriott, 2018; Beneduce, 2012). David Marriott (2018) has built his reading of Fanon around his alleged notion of decolonization as a *tabula rasa* at the explicit expense of Fanon's own dramatic narrative. For Marriott, the *tabula rasa* "as the figure for a teleology without telos" (Marriott, 2018: 29) captures the complexity and multiplicity of temporalities of the decolonization struggle, but he relates it to the inventiveness and a "radically new beginning" (Marriott, 2018: 2) following a destructive process: "From social death to *tabula rasa*, for Fanon, destructive violence is the process through which the socially dead acquire a new symbolic form." (Marriott, 2018:71). For Beneduce, the *tabula rasa* is a tense and instable temporality from where to think the healing of the colonial wounds and the "healing of History", as he understands Fanon's project (2012: 281). Fanon

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<sup>363</sup> « recommencer une histoire de l'homme (...) thèses quelquefois prodigieuses »

conceived the anticolonial revolution as an open and indeterminate process rather than an overimposing telos, as Marriott points out about temporality. However, in Marriott's view, Fanon's account of decolonization as a moment of pure creation following one of pure destruction would not only be naïve but it would also replicate the colonial logic. As Fanon repeats throughout the book, colonialism saw itself as a *tabula rasa*. Instead, Fanon explains that there is no shortcut to decolonization; building a new society and human institutions involves many steps, facing different sets of contradictions and pitfalls, and dealing with a legacy of wounds derived from violence that the directness of the logic of the *tabula rasa* as destroying the destructive does not take into account. In *Notre Journal*, the journal of the Blida-Joinville hospital, Fanon differs with the view of setting ablaze as the way to start anew. Although in a totally different setting this passage may help to understand his notion of decolonization as a new beginning:

To relearn. I find this expression very beautiful. Let's understand by it that what is at issue is not to give to the boarder a stock of movements, attitudes and words. At issue is not to add onto an inexistent personality a sum of behaviours. At issue is not to create, to produce, to refine, to finish. It is a matter of enabling the boarder to reprise, to begin again by helping him or her to understand better, to grasp things better, that is to say, to grasp him- or herself better again. The point cannot be to say: that is all worthless, it must all be destroyed. At issue, once again, is to provide the boarder with frames, groups and occasions within which it becomes possible for him or her to *rediscover* what has existed. It is necessary to induce the boarder to rediscover the meaning of freedom, which is the first milestone on the way to responsibility. (Fanon, 2018:332)

## **Conclusion**

If Fanon's view of decolonization in *Les damnés de la terre* could be simplified as moving from not being able to breath to the creation of a new humanity, "porous to all the breaths of the world", the question of revolutionary violence is merely a minor and negative moment in the unfinished process of building mature relationships of

connection and reciprocity between humans. One of his main concerns on such process was the possibility of reactivity, imitation, dependency, replacement and the repetition of the colonial logic and structures by the newly independent countries. This concern, which permeates the book, is present since the first paragraph, in which he says that violence is the defining element of colonialism and thus, unavoidable in the decolonizing process. Thus, as a thinker of the colony but also of the postcolony, Fanon as a clinician and political thinker delved into the different aspects of violence and its multiple shadows.

Although, or maybe because, his analysis is rooted in a concrete context and historical period, his thought on violence has this travelling capacity, as Edward Said puts it, and helps to illuminate the different forms and the functioning of violence in other contexts in the contemporary world –not necessarily revolutionary contexts or questions of armed struggle– but the different forms of violence and dehumanization that coloniality entails, and both the political and pathological responses which it elicits. This chapter has attempted to take both directions. First, elucidating what he understood about violence, its challenges, possibilities and limitations taking into account the historical conditions of his thought; and second, it has timidly traveled with his thought to other contexts and historical times.

## Conclusion

I have conceived this dissertation as an opening or an invitation for peace studies to engage and dialogue with Fanon's work and the diverse intellectual and activist communities connected to his work. Among these include thinkers and scholar-activists in Black and Decolonial studies, race theory, Africana and Caribbean philosophy, and critical psychiatry and medicine. As I have stressed in this dissertation, it is not a matter of incorporating the excluded or the absent, but also questioning at the level of knowledge and politics what have constituted such exclusions. That is, it entails questioning and transforming the structures and the organization of knowledge, what counts as knowledge, one's narrative and self-understanding, the relation to other disciplines, while also interrogating the related political assumptions behind the exclusions.

Race does not function as a mere category to describe human difference, but it is rooted in colonial histories of subordination and exploitation. Considering race as the measure of humanity and sub-humanity and a constitutive anthropological element of European modernity entails taking into account the production of new groups and types of people, implies addressing the problems of dehumanization, but also its role in the formation of institutions, economic relations, legal frameworks and modern forms of knowledge. The question of human difference in the colonial framework conceptualized through race was a central element of the origin of modern social sciences: to define what is a human being and need to distinguish between the human and the subhuman. Therefore, at stake is not only about how race is studied, or to add race into the study, but connecting race to the formation of modern knowledge production. In this light, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, Firmin, Du Bois, Fanon, Gordon y Henry show that the study the predicament of black people in racist

societies, and to build forms of knowledge oriented towards freedom, required questioning paradigms, disciplines' presuppositions and separations, their understanding of the human being, methods, language, and the foundations of thought. Dominant political, philosophical, sociological or medical theories are not only insufficient to study racism, but following them risks to turn the black and the colonized into problems, to put it in Du Bois' terms.

In this dissertation I have explored the work of Fanon in its different interrelated dimensions, the political, the clinical, the aesthetic, the anticolonial militant, and the philosopher of science, of the human being, and the social world. These aspects intersect in Fanon's concern against dehumanization and the restoration of humanity, against the obstacles that impede human encounter and interaction, and on the relation between history, politics, and alienation.

Fanon's reformulation of the zone of non-being, like his questioning of the master-slave dialectic and other theories of recognition serve him to account for the condition of the black and the colonized in racist societies. In the zone of non-being, they find themselves below the level of humanity, and outside of the sphere of sociality and ethics. As Gordon (2015) points out, this displaces political philosophies and theories that presuppose a self-other relation, and an underlying yet concealed ethical basis, upon which political life is built. The *appearance* of the colored people, as non-self and non-other, the affirmation of their humanity and their aspiration to enter into ethical relations is violence to a system that treats itself as just. The challenge faced by decolonization is to generate political action so that the conditions for an ethical realm can be established.

Throughout this dissertation I have emphasized that, starting from an understanding of the human as movement and relation, all the work of Fanon, inside

and outside the clinic, revolves around the exploration of the obstacles, the pitfalls and the possibilities to build a world of human interactions. His account of alienation, subjectivity and psychic disorders is deeply social, historical and political: from language, to romantic love, the visit to the doctor, and the everyday embodied consciousness attempting to move and act in the world, perception, imagination, the relation with medicine, with technology with one's culture, racism ensnares and thwarts the possibilities of meaningful intervention in the social world, expansion, the dimension of being-for-others of the human being, which he constantly brings to the forefront. This elicits reactive, self-deceptive, self-deprecating and evasive responses, which seal the human in his or herself.

Individual initiatives seeking recognition from the white, trigger a pathological circuit. Instead, it is through a creative work and in the transformative action of time and history, social relations, meanings, values, structures and institutions. Fanon barely theorized about love explicitly, but is a constant theme in his work. His demanding sense of commitment, solidarity and love for the dispossessed and the fellow oppressed are more than ethical positions, they are constitutive elements of a healthy, relational constitution of the self: "I am for the other" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). It is in this process of turning towards the suffering other, and going beyond the self, that the self is co-constituted.

The body plays a central role in Fanon the philosopher, the doctor and the writer. The body is understood as a site of the sensory, as the open and frail site of contact with and for others and the world. It is also the most visible marker of race; in the epidermis lie the traces of what is hidden beneath it: the accumulated histories of its constitution by colonial practices, discourses, diagnostics, and violences, the daily weight of the white gaze sealing the person into a mere body, making his or her



inferior and also invisible. The body is also as the site suffering, where the political and the medical intersect. Racism is lived in the flesh. It threatens life and forms of living, produces mental disease, and informs affect, perception, senses, imagination and thought. Fanon concluded *Black Skin White Masks* with an appeal to touch the other, to reach the other and to reveal oneself to the other and a prayer to his own questioning body. Although expressed differently, his medical thought and practice is animated by similar concerns: how to touch, to listen and reach the patient. Listening, touching and seeing as a doctor are in Fanon not so much driven by empathy, but neither is approached as an objective psycho-anatomical structure with its correlative objective diagnostic. Alternatively, it is a form of listening and touching sensitive to the historical and the political, driven by the need to understand and to identify the overt and the sedimented expressions and manifestations of suffering and alienation.

As I pointed out, throughout his work violence is analyzed from different angles, in its different forms and expressions: at the level of knowledge and thought, in relation to time and space, symbols, structures, institutions, the *atmosphere*, its impact on the psyche, the muscles, the breath, the imagination, subjectivity and at the level of being. Concerning violence and decolonization, he does not affirm that the anticolonial revolt has to be carried out by violent means, that violence is therapeutic, or violence has a creative aspect; he says that the anticolonial revolt, the appearance of the colonized, is considered violent and is itself violence. The importance of violence and decolonization does not lie in its revolutionary use, but in how it is related to a series of problems, and is inseparable from and informed by the very colonial framework it seeks to liberate oneself from, including the formation of the colonial and postcolonial subject. Rather than a justification or a critique what Fanon

does is to issue a set of warnings related to violence. In any case, Fanon's conception of the violence in the colonial situation goes beyond means and ends and beyond the distinction between violence and nonviolence.

Yet, this is merely the beginning of a historical process. As I pointed out in Chapter 7, decolonization is not tantamount to liberation, independence, or a *tabula rasa*. He closes his last book with a call for a new beginning and to build a new humanity. The new beginning I understand it, in his terms, as a form of healing through re-learning and re-discovering and cultivating what freedom and responsibility mean. In my view, a new humanism already started from the earliest pages of his first book. This new humanity to which he appeals is not to be constituted through violence, like European humanism, but neither turning its back to the inherited violence. The new humanity of decolonization entails the introduction of a new temporality, the building of human institutions that distribute power, produce forms of knowledge and establish new and different types of relations that generate new types of human beings.

As I outline in Chapter 1, although in the last years there is an intensification of the engagement with Fanon's work, it is not a reemergence; the discussion and the uses of his work have been consistent. This is neither a romantic or nostalgic driven retrieval of the past, but it points to the mutations and the persistence of the questions and the urgencies that Fanon addressed in his time. At the same time, I do not treat Fanon as providing all the answers to the problems of his time and context, and of the current world. This also has required bringing to this thesis answers from our time also based on his work. However, I treat him as posing the significant questions, some of them are unfortunately not yet closed. Hence, the work of Fanon is useful to think with

when the human being is abused, constricted, sealed, separated from her humanity and from fellow humans.

## **Conclusión (versión en español)**

He abordado esta tesis como una apertura o una invitación a los estudios de paz a abordar y dialogar con el trabajo de Fanon y las diversas comunidades intelectuales y activistas conectadas con su trabajo. Estas incluyen pensadores en Black studies, pensamiento anticolonial y decolonial, teoría crítica de raza, filosofía caribeña y de la diáspora africana, y enfoques críticos de psiquiatría y medicina. Como he enfatizado en esta tesis, no se trata tanto de incorporar las ausencias y las exclusiones, sino también de cuestionar a nivel político y de conocimiento qué ha constituido esas ausencias. Es decir, esto conlleva interrogar qué cuenta como conocimiento, qué criterios, la propia narrativa y comprensión de sí misma, la relación con otras disciplinas y las presuposiciones metodológicas y políticas tras estas exclusiones.

La raza no funciona como una categoría que describe la diferencia humana, sino que está anclada en historias coloniales de subordinación y explotación. El tratar la raza como medida de humanidad y sub-humanidad y como un elemento antropológico constitutivo de la modernidad Europea conlleva tener en cuenta la producción de nuevos grupos y tipos de humanos, conlleva abordar el problema de la deshumanización, y también su papel en la formación de instituciones, relaciones económicas, marcos legales y formas modernas de conocimiento. La cuestión de la diferencia humana en el marco colonial conceptualizada a través de la raza fue un elemento central en el origen de las ciencias sociales modernas: definir qué es el ser humano iba acompañada de la distinción entre el humano y el subhumano. Por lo tanto, lo que está en juego no es solo añadir la raza al estudio, y estudiar la raza, también está conectarla a la producción intelectual moderna desde su formación. En este sentido, como apunté en el capítulo 2, Firmin, Du Bois, Fanon, Gordon y Henry muestran que el estudio de los problemas de los negros en sociedades racistas, y la

producción de formas de conocimiento orientadas a la libertad requería cuestionar paradigmas, presuposiciones y separaciones disciplinarias, métodos, lengua, los fundamentos del pensamiento, y sus correspondientes concepciones del ser humano. Las teorías políticas, filosóficas, sociológicas o médicas no solo no son insuficientes para estudiar el racismo, sino que su aplicación puede convertir al negro y al colonizado en problemas, diciéndolo en términos de Du Bois.

En esta tesis he explorado el trabajo de Fanon en sus distintas, aunque imbricadas, dimensiones: la política, la clínica, la estética, la del militante anticolonial, la del filósofo de la ciencia, del ser humano, y del mundo social. Estos aspectos se entrecruzan en su preocupación por la deshumanización y por la restauración de la humanidad, por su pensamiento sobre los obstáculos que impiden el encuentro y la interacción humana, y en su análisis de la relación entre historia, política y alienación.

La reformulación de Fanon de la zona de no ser, al igual que su cuestionamiento de la dialéctica del amo y del esclavo u otras teorías del reconocimiento, le sirvieron para dar cuenta de la condición del negro y el colonizado en sociedades racistas. En la zona de no ser, estos se encuentran en el nivel de sub-humanidad y fuera de la esfera de la socialidad y la ética. Como apunta Gordon (2015), este movimiento desplaza teorías y filosofías políticas que presuponen una relación entre el sí mismo y el otro, y una base ética subyacente aunque escondida, sobre la cual edificar la vida política. La *aparición* del negro y el colonizado, como no-otro y no-sí mismo, la afirmación de su humanidad, y su aspiración a establecer relaciones éticas es violencia a un sistema que se considera justo. El desafío de la que enfrenta la descolonización es la de producir una acción política que produzcan relaciones éticas.

A lo largo de esta tesis he enfatizado que, partiendo de una comprensión del ser humano como movimiento y relación, todo el trabajo de Fanon, dentro y fuera de la

clínica, gira alrededor de los obstáculos, las trampas y las posibilidades de construir un mundo de interacciones humanas. Su enfoque de la alienación, la subjetividad y los trastornos psíquicos, su concepción de la psique son profundamente sociale, políticos e históricos: desde el lenguaje, el amor romántico, relaciones familiares, la conciencia corporalizada intentando moverse y actual en el mundo, la relación con la medicina, con la tecnología, el análisis de la imaginación y percepción, el racismo traba y frustra las posibilidades la intervención significativa en el mundo social, la expansión y la dimensión del ser-para-otros del ser humano, que él pone en primer plano. Esto provoca respuestas reactivas, de autoengaño, evasión y autocrítica, que encierran al ser humano en sí mismo.

Las iniciativas individuales que aspiran al reconocimiento blanco activan un circuito patológico. En cambio, Fanon busca el trabajo creativo y la acción transformadora sobre el tiempo, historia, relaciones sociales, significados, valores, estructuras e instituciones patogénicas. Fanon apenas teorizó explícitamente sobre el amor, aunque es un tema constante en su trabajo. Su exigente sentido del compromiso, solidaridad y amor por el desposeído y el oprimido son más que posiciones éticas, son elementos constitutivos de una constitución relacional y saludable del sí mismo: “Yo soy para el otro” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008) Es en este proceso de volverse hacia el otro sufriente, e ir más allá de uno mismo, en el que el sí mismo se co-constituye.

El cuerpo juega un papel central en Fanon el filósofo, el doctor y el escritor. El cuerpo entendido como el lugar de lo sensorial, como sitio abierto y frágil de contacto con y para otros y el mundo. El cuerpo es también el marcador más visible de la raza; en la epidermis se encuentran las trazas de lo que yace debajo: las historias acumuladas de su constitución por las prácticas, discursos, diagnósticos y violencias

coloniales, el peso cotidiano de la mirada blanca que sella a la persona en un mero cuerpo, haciéndola inferior e invisible. El cuerpo es también el lugar del sufrimiento, donde se entrecruzan lo médico y lo político. El racismo se vive en la carne. Amenaza la vida y las formas de vida, produce enfermedades mentales y conforma la percepción, sentidos, imaginación y pensamiento. Fanon cerró *Piel negra, máscaras blancas* con una llamada a tocar al otro, a alcanzar al otro, a revelarse al otro, y con una oración a hacer que su cuerpo interrogue. Aunque expresado de manera diferente, su pensamiento y trabajo médico está motivado por las mismas preocupaciones: cómo tocar, escuchar y llegar al paciente. Escuchar, tocar y mirar como doctor no están en Fanon animadas por la empatía, ni tampoco por una mirada objetiva a una estructura psico-anatómica con su correspondiente diagnóstico. Al contrario es una forma de escuchar, mirar y tocar sensible a la historia y la política, animada por la necesidad de comprender e identificar las expresiones visibles y las sedimentadas de sufrimiento y alienación.

Como apunté, a lo largo de su trabajo Fanon analiza la violencia desde diferentes ángulos, en sus distintas formas y expresiones: a nivel de conocimiento y pensamiento, en relación a la temporalidad y al espacio, violencia simbólica, de estructuras e instituciones, en la *atmósfera*, su impacto en la psique, los músculos, la respiración, la imaginación, la subjetividad y a nivel del ser. Respecto a violencia y decolonización, Fanon no afirma que la revolución anticolonial debe llevarse a cabo por medios violentos, que la violencia es terapéutica o que tiene un aspecto creativo. Él dice que la revolución anticolonial, la *aparición* del colonizado, es considerada violenta y es violencia en sí misma. La importancia de la violencia y la decolonización no reside tanto en su uso revolucionario, más bien en que está ligada a una serie de problemas relacionados con la violencia del marco histórico colonial que

conforma y del que es inseparable el momento de liberación, incluyendo la propia formación del sujeto colonial y postcolonial. En vez de una justificación o una crítica lo que hace Fanon es emitir una serie de advertencias. En todo caso, la concepción de la violencia en la situación colonial va más allá de medios y fines y más allá de la distinción entre violencia y no violencia,

De todas maneras el momento de la violencia es solo el inicio de un proceso histórico. Como apunté en el capítulo 7, la decolonización no equivale a la liberación, la independencia o es una tabula rasa. Fanon concluye con una llamada a un nuevo comienzo y a edificar una nueva humanidad. El nuevo comienzo lo entiendo, en sus propios términos, como forma de cura a través de volver a aprender, descubrir y cultivar el significado de la libertad y la responsabilidad. En mi opinión el nuevo humanismo empezó en las primeras páginas de su primer libro. Esta nueva humanidad a la que él apela no debe ser constituida mediante la violencia como el humanismo Europeo, y tampoco debe darle la espalda a la violencia heredada. La nueva humanidad de la decolonización conlleva la introducción de una nueva temporalidad, la creación de estructuras que distribuyan el poder, la producción de otras formas de conocimiento y cultivar nuevas y diferentes tipos de relaciones que generen nuevos tipos de seres humanos.

Como argumenté en el primer capítulo, aunque en los últimos años está habiendo una intensificación en el abordaje del trabajo de Fanon, no se trata de una reemergencia; las discusiones y los usos de Fanon han sido consistentes durante décadas. Esto no se debe a una recuperación nostálgica o romántica del pasado, sino que apunta a las mutaciones y a las persistencias de las urgencias que Fanon trató en su tiempo. Al mismo tiempo, no me acerco a Fanon como ofreciendo todas las respuestas a los problemas de su tiempo, ni del actual. Esto ha requerido traer a esta



tesis respuestas de nuestro tiempo, también a partir de y en conversación con su trabajo. Sin embargo, si lo trato como planteando preguntas significativas, algunas de ellas, desafortunadamente, no han sido cerradas. De ahí que el trabajo de Fanon ayude a pensar cuando el ser humano es abusado, sellado, restringido, separado de su humanidad y de otros humanos.

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