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**(RE)READING FANON: TRACING REVOLUTIONARY NEGOTIATIONS  
WITHIN THE ALGERIAN COLONIAL DIALECTIC**

by

**NINA FLOWERDAY ZIETLOW**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR ANDREW AISENBERG  
PROFESSOR HEATHER FERGUSON**

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## INTRODUCTION

*I show solidarity with humanity provided I can go one step further.*

*-Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks*

### **Reading Fanon**

This thesis is a practice in reading and rereading. There is perhaps no work better suited for this practice than that of Frantz Fanon as he embodies and produces complexities which defy a flattened diagnosis. Therefore, rereading Fanon with particular histories and contexts in mind always produces varied meanings. As a political theorist, revolutionary, and, perhaps most importantly, a psychiatrist, Fanon walks a careful line between reproducing traditions of the French and western thought and transcending the limitations of these universalized ideas. His work does not fit neatly into European epistemologies nor does it represent a total embrace of a new revolutionary framework; it occupies the tense space between theory and praxis. Fanon, the man, was an author, researcher, medical doctor, and member of the French intelligentsia. However, simultaneously, he occupied the seemingly contradictory roles of a revolutionary psychiatrist, active member of the Front de Libération Nationale, and political exile. His writing, while most often categorized as critical theory, has also occupied for some the role of a manifesto. In reading (and rereading) all these parts of Fanon—both the work and the man—it becomes clear that to characterize Fanon's work as a monolithic *thing* or the profession of a singular political doctrine does it a disservice. We must read into *all* these complex and seemingly dissonant aspects of his work because the particular value of Fanon lies in his

biographical and bibliographical obliteration of the rigid binaries between Europe and Africa, colonial ontologies and revolutionary newness, and theory and praxis.

This obliteration of dichotomies, which, through rereading Fanon is also the main goal of this thesis, should also structure our approach to Algeria as a site of revolutionary transformation. Algeria, and North Africa more generally, occupy a peripheral space in the western Academy. Often left out of Middle East studies and African studies and systematically excluded from European studies, the study of North Africa is relegated to the tangential realm of regional studies by western scholars and framed as a colonial reproduction of either Europe or the Middle East devoid of its own histories.<sup>1</sup> Algeria, however, should be understood both as a site for the creation of European oriental taxonomies *and* the incubation site for revolutionary ideologies. Edmund Burke argues that studying North Africa is a means by which scholars can de-essentialise Europe.<sup>2</sup> I hope to reinforce this argument in two ways. Firstly by showing that North Africa was the geographical, cultural, and historical site against which the French republic defined itself. Secondly, I hope to demonstrate through a focus on Fanon that Algeria was a locus of revolutionary ideology. This was in part because the Algerian colonial project was a manifestation of the paradox of the French republic which on one hand rhetorically framed itself as the purveyor of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, and on the other hand instituted a brutalized colonial rule which maintained multiple levels of violence. In this way, I hope to show that the study of Algeria is a way by which to deconstruct the French (read: European) imagination of

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<sup>1</sup> See: Edmund Burke. “Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib.” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 20:2 (1998): 5–19. I address this further in chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

itself. Indeed this is precisely the work Fanon does: To deconstruct Europe through the disentangling of the colonial world.

Keeping the tensions of the Algerian context at the forefront of our minds, I advocate for reading into the humanism of Fanon while recognizing that the humanism he puts forward is a radical departure from the “universal humanism” of the European enlightenment. The disciplines of European enlightenment humanism, which Fanon pushed against, do the work of imagining the black colonial subject as the binary opposite of the white European rational self and therefore construct whiteness as a system of domination.<sup>3</sup> To demonstrate more clearly what I mean, I turn to two essential works which delineate how the construction of European scientific and artistic disciplines put forward a humanist doctrine which constructed and sustained whiteness. The first is V.Y. Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa*, which I address in conjunction with Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* in chapter one. The second work is Sander Gilman’s article “Black Bodies, White Bodies : Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature.” Gilman delineates the interlocking construction of scientific and artistic representations of Black women in the European academy and culture. He argues that the black figure in nineteenth century European arts was produced as a signifier of sexual deviance. This signification developed in tandem with scientific representations of women of African origin as sexually charged. Pseudo-scientific works by figures such as French anthropologist J.J. Virey and French naturalist Georges Cuvier used anatomical studies of black women to construct the black female body as the deviant other in relation to the normalized body of the white

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<sup>3</sup> In place of “whiteness” Fanon uses “Europe” to discuss the interlocking systems of dominations of white supremacist and imperial capitalist domination (see *The Wretched of the Earth*). My use of “whiteness” draws on the work more contemporary scholars particularly James Baldwin (*The Fire Next Time*, 1963) and Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1992)

European male.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the sexual organs of women of African origin became the site on which European scientists marked the difference between Africa and Europe. This constructed the white male body as the “universal” body which the the project of enlightenment humanism legitimated and upheld as “human” thereby casting other bodies as deviant. As Gilman writes, “The antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the greater chain of being, is the hottentot.”<sup>5</sup>

How, then, does Fanon reconcile the interconnected construction of the European scientific academy—and indeed all European epistemologies—and colonial ontologies with his own work as a scientist, theorist and physician? Ella Shohat frames this question succinctly, writing “Fanon’s ‘new humanism’ ultimately faces the dilemma of whether to ‘mend or end’ the Enlightenment’s humanists project.”<sup>6</sup> Her conclusion, with which I agree, is that Fanon deconstructs the “colorless universalism” of so called “master narratives,” among them Marxism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis, while retaining the parts of these frameworks which prove beneficial in dismantling colonial structures. As Shohat puts it, “What we see over and over is that Fanon takes a preexisting discourse and interrogates it, often transforming its terms by brining race and colonialism on board.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, D. Pal s. Ahluwali writes of Fanon’s relationship with Sartrean philosophy that,

Fanon’s nausea was manifested clearly in his recognition of the absurdity of the colonial world. However, this became enabling, forcing him to consider the

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<sup>4</sup> The interlocking development of biological sciences and colonial frameworks continued well into the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. I address these institutions in the context of colonial Algeria in chapter two.

<sup>5</sup> Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies : Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12:1, S. 204-242 (1985), 212.

<sup>6</sup> Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*. Next Wave. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 278.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.



possibilities of a new society in which both the colonizer and colonized are transformed through a new humanism, one that is by no means the humanism of the Enlightenment. It is this possibility of transformation that is pertinent to postcolonial societies.<sup>8</sup>

I hope to show that Fanon's use of existing epistemologies is nuanced: he builds on psychoanalytic tradition, yet rejects Freud's oedipal complex replacing the familial oedipal event with a colonial encounter; he recognizes Marxists revolutionary frameworks while demonstrating the limitations of a proletariat/bourgeoisie binary; he embraces Sartrean existentialism while arguing that it does not provide an existential framework for comprehending the lived experience of blackness. In this way, Fanon's work itself misleads us. For example, he famously insists in the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers...we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man."<sup>9</sup> It is parts of Fanon such as this one that read as a manifesto or even call to arms, but I argue that Fanon's conception of "newness" does not necessarily entail a complete overhaul of existing liberation ideologies. Rather, he calls for negotiations *within* them bringing in the colonial context. By theoretically unpacking some of Fanon's works and reading them alongside the colonial and de-colonial processes in Algeria, I demonstrate that Fanon consistently negotiated with *and* strategically manipulated the epistemological and medical institutions of the French state to forge a new social vision for the colonized world. In this way,

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<sup>8</sup> D. P. S Ahluwalia, *Out of Africa : Post-Structuralism's Colonial Roots*. Postcolonial Politics. (Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge, 2010), 54.

<sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, et al. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, (Grove Press, 2004), 239.

the “violence” which he seems to advocate for is more accurately an epistemic resistance against the European enlightenment humanism which produces the colonial condition.

Returning to Gilman, we should also keep in mind the particular role of the bodies of black *woman* as sites on which the European academy constructs hegemonic difference. This brings us to gender in the colonial context, an area for which Fanon’s work must be stretched. While Fanon writes readily about the constructions of whiteness and blackness, women, as a category, occupy an ambiguous space in his analysis which fails to address the interlocking systems of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. This is particularly troublesome in the colonial context. Anne McClintock argues that women and men do not experience colonization in the same way because the categories of gender and race are constituted *through* relationship with each other:

As the slaves, agricultural workers, house-servants, mothers, prostitutes and concubines of the far-flung colonies of Europe, colonized women had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women.<sup>10</sup>

These particular dynamics that constructed the colonial taxonomical state, while alluded to, are largely absent from Fanon’s work. Recognizing the theoretical “gaps” in Fanon’s body of work is part of a critical rereading and shows that the new humanism which Fanon puts forward is not exempt from upholding exclusionary structures. Some feminist writers have criticized Fanon for excluding women from his revolutionary theory and others accuse him of reproducing heteropatriarchy by putting forth a masculinized vision of revolution and building on male-centric psychoanalytic tradition. Rey Chow critiques Fanon’s theoretical formulation of a

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<sup>10</sup>Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. (Routledge, 1995), 6.

revolution arguing the Fanon does not admit women into his revolutionary community and, in fact, reproduces women of color as markers of sexual difference rather than revolutionary actors:

this construction, because it admits women as sexuality and nothing more, leaves no room for the woman of color to retain her membership among her own racial/ethnic community. In terms of the community formation that is based on race, the admittance that Fanon gives the woman of color is solely based on sex. Fanon's reading means that the woman of color is either a black traitor (when she chooses the white man) or a white woman (when she chooses a black man). Fanon's admittance of the sexual agency of the woman of color signifies her inevitable expulsion from her community. Between her conscious actions and her unconscious desires, between her wish for "lactification" and her fantasy of being raped "by a Negro," the woman of color is thus, literally, ex-communicated even as she is being acknowledged, attacked and assaulted even as she is being "admitted."<sup>11</sup>

Chow is among many theorists who have written against "The Woman of Color and the White Man," Fanon's chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* which frequently garners accusations of misogyny.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding these critiques, I contend that Fanon's writing beyond this particular essay actually deconstructs gender as fixed within the colonial context. By identifying and denaturalizing the export of the colonial family romance, which institutionalizes a double bind of patriarchy and colonization, Fanon unpacks the interlocking construction of race and gender. I attempt to nuance Fanon's treatment of gender by critically rereading "Algeria Unveiled" and "The Black Man and Psychopathology." However, I maintain that Fanon's writing of women, particularly of women of color, poses significant problems within his larger assessment of the colonial condition. Investigating Fanon's treatment of gender is an ongoing project whose resolution is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, gender in Fanon's work

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<sup>11</sup> Rey Chow, "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon." In *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, 2nd ed., 35–58. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 46.

<sup>12</sup> I address these critiques more extensively at the end of chapter one. See: "From the Antilles to Algeria: Imagining Women in Revolutionary Structures," 24.

demonstrates the importance of reading and rereading Fanon—assessing his works in a vacuum will give us a fragmentary understanding of the role gender plays in his work and in the colonial condition.

### **Contextualizing Fanon, Contextualizing Algeria**

This thesis is not a biography of Fanon nor is it a history of Algeria. Nonetheless, I find it important to touch on key biographical and historical contexts as I argue that this history in which Fanon worked must be read alongside his theory. Frantz Fanon was born on July 20, 1924 in Fort-de-France, Martinique. At the time, Martinique was still a French colony and being from an upper middle class family, Fanon received a French education at a lycée in Fort-de-France. Among his teachers was Aimée Césaire, the Martinician poet, politician and founder of the Négritude movement which Fanon would push against in his later work. In 1944, Fanon joined the Free French Army against the Nazis and later that year, received a Croix de Guerre for the injury he sustained. On May 8, 1945, just one day after Nazi Germany surrendered to Allied forces in Reims, France, French colonial authorities fired on demonstrators in Sétif, Algeria killing 30,000 Algerians in an event which came to be known as the Sétif Massacre. This was the way France signified that the end of WWII would not bring about the end of colonial rule. This was also the event that catalyzed Algerian armed resistance.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, after a brief return to Martinique, Fanon began University in Lyon, France and submitted his medical thesis in psychiatry in 1951. His original thesis, “The Disalienation of the Black Man,” was rejected by Fanon’s dissertation committee prompting him to submit a

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Hudis, "The Engaged Philosopher: The FLN and the Algerian Revolution." In *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades*, 69-91. (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 69

narrower work. However he published the original dissertation in 1952 with the title *Black Skin, White Masks*. It would become one of his most famous and referenced works. This same year Fanon married a French Jewish woman, Marie-Josèphe (“Josie”) Dublé. As Lewis Gordon—one of the only scholars who devotes more than a line to her existence aside from her race—notes, Josie was responsible for typing and editing almost all of Fanon’s published work as he dictated it to her. In this way, she was the primary audience to which Fanon wrote.<sup>14</sup> Her absence from most critical scholarship on Fanon is troublesome, to say the least.<sup>15</sup> Fanon completed a residency in France, but desired to work elsewhere. After initially expressing interest in practicing in Senegal, Fanon was appointed as a psychiatrist at the Blida-Joinville Hospital outside of Algiers, Algeria.<sup>16</sup>

When Fanon arrived, Algeria had been under French occupation for the last 123 years. French forces invaded Ottoman controlled Algiers in 1830. Four year later, under King Louis Philippe, France annexed all occupied land to French national territory through the *Ordinance 22 July 1834*. From the 1830’s onward, Algeria was considered part of France and in 1848 Algeria officially became an “extension of the republic” divided into three departments, Oran, Constantine, and Algiers.<sup>17</sup> From the outset, the French colonial project represented a series of contradictions. The most profound contradiction, with which the French state would grapple but

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<sup>14</sup>Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*, (NEW YORK: Fordham University Press, 2015), 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Josie Fanon is most often mentioned in the context of Fanon’s essay “The Woman of Color and the Black Man” to point out Fanon’s hypocrisy in marrying a white woman when he critiques Capécia for marrying a white man. I find it disturbing—if not ironic—that this woman, who was so instrumental in Fanon’s work, is relegated to the role of a rhetorical prop to critique his own unequal treatment of women. Unfortunately, there is such a lack of scholarship on her that I too have limited her presence to a single line.

<sup>16</sup> Ahluwalia, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization : The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. (Cornell University Press, 2006), 20.

mainly deny, was the contradiction between the incorporation of Algeria into France yet the exclusion of Algerians themselves from French citizenship. As the French colonial project advanced, France constructed taxonomies of indigenous Algerian through a series of legal directives which constructed the boundaries of French exclusionary citizenship. The 1865 decree allowed indigenous Algerians to become French citizens if they forfeited their rights to be judged through local and religious laws. The Crémieux Decree of 1870 extended French citizenship to Algerian Jews. In this way, French legal doctrine Algeria represents the inherent exclusion of European humanism as it applied separate laws to separate people. Shepard writes, “Officials continued to rely on the excuse of legal exigencies and the maintenance of “local civil statuses” to explain the ongoing juxtaposition of the theory of assimilation with a practice in which coexistence predominated.”<sup>18</sup> Through the maintenance of an exclusionary rule of law, the French republic constructed Frenchness in opposition to the existence of Algerian natives, most particularly, Algerian Muslims. My second chapter addresses the construction of exclusionary Frenchness in Algeria through French medical colonization. It was this aspect of colonization which Fanon’s writing and psychiatric practices in Algeria most pointedly dismantled.

Fanon entered into Algerian history in 1953. Less than a year later, in November, 1954 the Army Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN), orchestrated a series of bombings across Algiers marking for them, and for Fanon, the ground zero event of the Algerian revolution.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, Fanon worked in Algeria at a moment when national liberation gained Algerian support and France countered with a regime of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 39. See also: Stein, Sarah Abrevaya. *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Hudis, 70. Hudis also unpacks the notion that this should be remembered at *the* beginning of an anti-colonial revolution pointing out that there were multiple previous movements for liberation and anti-colonial revolution.

systematic torture. Many scholars have argued that for Fanon, experiencing the particular colonial context of Algeria actuated a pivotal moment in his theoretical work. Edmund contends that “one could say that for [Fanon], Algeria was the place where the contradictions between the declaration of the rights of man on the one hand, and capitalism, on the other hand.”<sup>20</sup> We must pay close attention to Fanon’s psychiatric practice at the Blida-Joinville hospital as this period marks his enactment of a new psychiatric humanism within the confines of a Eurocentric institution. It was during this time that Fanon forged connections with the FLN, wrote against the doctrinal biodeterminism of French medicine in colonial Algeria, and instituted widespread psychiatric reforms. However, as the revolution progressed, Fanon was increasingly unable to reconcile his work with his belief in Algerian liberation. In 1956, when the Blida-Joinville hospital administration punished its Muslim employees after a general strike, Fanon wrote a letter of resignation.<sup>21</sup> In this truly stunning letter, which was published posthumously in *Towards the African Revolution*, Fanon writes, “although the objective conditions under which psychiatry is practiced in Algeria constituted a challenge to common sense, it appeared to me that an effort should be made to attenuate the viciousness of a system of which the doctrinal foundations are a daily defiance of an authentically human outlook.” And yet, “What good are intentions if their realization is made impossible by the indigence of the heart, the sterility of the mind, the hatred of the natives of this country?”<sup>22</sup> This letter demonstrates Fanon’s willingness to negotiate without abandoning his revolutionary consciousness. He would reform the doctrinal,

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<sup>20</sup> Edmund Burke, “Two Critics of French Rule in Algeria : Ismail Urbain and Frantz Fanon.” *Franco-Arab Encounters Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*. 1996, 343.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, and Maspero François. *Toward the African Revolution : Political Essays*. Translated by Haakon Chevalier. (New Evergreened. New York: Grove Press, 1988), 52-53.

inhuman basis of the psychiatric hospital he worked in, but only to a point. Ultimately, he was still the revolutionary who would not work within institutions which continue to reproduce the hegemony of French colonial state.

Fanon's membership in the FLN became increasingly recognized and he was expelled from Algeria in 1957. He continued working at the FLN headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia where he wrote for *El Moudjahid* and eventually co-founded the Neuropsychiatric Day Clinic in Tunis.<sup>23</sup> In 1959 he published *A Dying Colonialism* which was quickly banned by France. In 1960 after being appointed ambassador to Ghana, Fanon was diagnosed with leukemia. He died in Bethesda, Maryland on December 6, 1961. He had reluctantly gone to the United States to seek treatment and spent his final days alone in CIA custody. It is likely he was interrogated in his final hours.<sup>24</sup> On March 18, 1962 French president Charles de Gaulle declared the end of a cease-fire between French forces and the FLN.<sup>25</sup> On the same day, France and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (FLN government-in-exile) signed the Évian Accords formally ending the undeclared Algerian War of Independence. Fanon was buried in an FLN cemetery in Algeria with military honors.<sup>26</sup> Algerian history and Fanonian history are intertwined. By remembering Algeria in my rereading of Fanon, I hope to show that Fanon forged his revolutionary theory through a dismantling of the Algerian colonial dialectic.

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon, 92.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>25</sup> Shepard, 101.

<sup>26</sup> Ahluwalia, 59.



## CHAPTER ONE

### What We Can Take from Fanon: Reading and Situating Anti-Colonial Theory

*To talk about what Fanon said is also to battle with profound investments in misrepresenting what he said.*

*- Lewis Gordon, 2015*

*Should we postulate a typical human reality and describe its psychic modalities, taking into account only the imperfections, or should we not rather make a constant, solid endeavor to understand man in an ever-changing light?*

*- Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks*

#### **On Violence**

Frantz Fanon's writing is a product of the multidimensional roles he occupied in relation to the colonial world. He writes as a psychiatrist, a politician, and a revolutionary, yet all his subject positions are undercut by his lived experience as a black Martinician man practicing medicine in both the French metropole and at the forefront of colonial war. In this chapter, I attempt a critical re-reading of some of Fanon's most recognized and reproduced works keeping in mind that each theoretical text is situated within a historical, social, and biographical context. "On Violence," Fanon's frequently referenced first essay in *The Wretched of the Earth*, is one of his most contentious works whose meaning is consistently probed by scholars and critics. However, using Hannah Arendt's analysis as an example, I argue that meanings projected on to this work do not grapple with Fanon's nuanced treatment of European epistemologies nor his political situating within the Algerian struggle for independence. Fanon writes that "the colonial world is a compartmentalized world," maintained through the consistent construction and

maintenance of a binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized.<sup>27</sup> Fanon's insistence on binary opposition as both a result of colonial violence and a self-actualizing condition is central to his thesis of "On Violence." He argues that the colonial world is produced and sustained by the physical, cultural, and epistemological violence of the colonizer. This violence is consistently reproduced by the sustained rule of the colonizer then appropriated by the colonized subject. In this way violence always characterizes both the colonial and de-colonializing processes.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, Fanon does not call for violence in this essay; doing so would, in fact, be redundant as the violence that he names already exists. Rather, "On Violence," is a studied analysis of the compartmentalization that is constitutive of the colonial condition. Through his careful unpacking of the colonial reality, Fanon challenges western ethno-centric paradigms of what violence is. Specifically, Fanon describes violence as always political and historic. He insists that through the appropriation of colonial violence, the colonized take history into their own hands. However, this thesis, which is so central to Fanon's theorization of the colonial condition is frequently read as a manifesto for violent anti-colonial praxis. In her provocatively titled response, "Reflections on Violence," Hannah Arendt demonstrates an incomplete understanding of "On Violence" as an apolitical embrace of carnal force. Arendt's reading, I argue, does not account for Fanon's move away from an ethno-centric reading of Marx, nor the historical and biographical situating of this work (both are critical). Unpacking Arendt's critique of Fanon is thus essential for deconstructing ethno-centric interpretations of his work that forget the colonial context that situate in and in turn is transformed by it.

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<sup>27</sup> Frantz Fanon, et al. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2004, 2.

Fanon wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* in a ten-week period in 1961 shortly after he received a terminal leukemia diagnosis. He was 36 and up to this point had fought with the Free French Forces in World War II, trained as a psychiatrist in Lyon, worked in Algeria for four years during the War of Independence, edited the revolutionary publication *El Moudjahid*, and served as the Ambassador to Ghana for the Provisional Algerian Government. He occupied a multifaceted role in the Algerian liberation movement yet, crucially, his involvement stemmed directly from his psychiatric practice. In “On Violence” Fanon employs a revolutionary, authoritative voice which identifies certain universal truths about the colonial world. “Colonialism,” Fanon writes, “is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence.”<sup>28</sup> It is precisely these sweeping claims which shock theorists like Arendt who work and write within a European framework assumeing a universal history. As Lewis Gordon puts it,

Fanon was thus not only addressing the colonized, the agent who previously stood frozen in fear and anguish before colonial gods. he was also addressing the critics of revolutionary violence, including those such as Friedrich Engels, who seems to support armed struggle...Fanon’s objection to [Engels] view is that is addresses the problem from the *outside* in a neat rationalization of the matter. For Fanon, as we have seen the human world is sloppy, full of contingencies, and even the meaning of human actions and relationships require a rich conception of social understanding, and, in other words, sociogenic interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

It is this *social understanding* gained through consistent dialogue with the colonial world and the lived experience of blackness which differentiates Fanon’s analyses from Arendt’s.

In her assertion that violence is an apolitical act, Arendt writes, “violence does not promote causes, it promotes neither History nor Revolution, but it can indeed serve to dramatize

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<sup>28</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, 116.

grievances and to bring them to public attention.”<sup>30</sup> Arendt analyzes “On Violence” in the context of Eurocentric Marxist theory and therefore naturally comes to the conclusion that Fanon advocates for violence praxis which, in her mind, therefore demonstrates his misunderstanding of Marxist revolutionary politics. Arendt’s critique centers on the idea that violence fills a void where intellectual and political action should otherwise exist. However, this critique is premised on the notion that Fanon attempts and fails to formulate a Marxist revolutionary manifesto. This is a misreading of “On Violence” which is neither manifesto nor Marxist. Rather, “On Violence,” particularly when read alongside the multiple other essays in *The Wretched of the Earth*, is not a call for violent revolution but a critical examination of the how the violence of the colonial produces violent resistance:

The violence which governed the ordering of the colonial world, which tirelessly punctuated the destruction of the indigenous social fabric, and demolished unchecked the systems of reference of the country’s economy, lifestyles, and modes of dress, this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities.<sup>31</sup>

Fanon skillfully calculates that the destruction of the indigenous world by the colonizer is violent in its destruction of lifestyle, culture, and heritage which exists simultaneously and in parallel to the physical violence of colonization. This is why violence, which is a means by which to physically decolonize the land, is how the colonized “take history into their own hands.” Therefore, contrary to Arendt’s assessment, violence is of course political because it is the physical and social eradication of colonial oppression. Of course, this theory does not fit neatly into a Marxist framework because Fanon is not witnessing a Marxist revolution. In fact, he goes

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<sup>30</sup>Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Violence.” *Journal of International Affairs*, 23:1 (1969), pp. 1–35, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

as far as to write that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue.”<sup>32</sup> Fanon’s hesitation to align himself strictly with a Marxist framework is primarily attributed to the fact that the colonial condition cannot be explained through Marxist analysis nor alleviated through an urban, proletariat revolution.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a closer examination of Marx’s revolutionary praxis reminds us of its ethnocentric grounding which render it incompatible with the de-colonial revolution that Fanon imagines. In his work *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, Shlomo Avineri addresses the limitations in Marxist theory when extended to processes of decolonization. Avineri argues that spreading capitalism to “oriental” lands is fundamental to Marx’s theory as a necessary condition to spark a proletariat revolution:

Since Marx postulates that ultimate victory of socialism on the prior universalization of capitalism, he necessarily arrives at the position of having to endorse European colonial expansion as a brutal but necessary step towards the visit of socialism...so the horrors of colonialism are dialectically necessary for the world revolution of proletariat since without them the countries of Asia (and presumably also Africa) will not be able to emancipate themselves from their stagnant backwardness.<sup>34</sup>

This analysis positions Marx’s theory in opposition to the processes of decolonization and points out that fundamental to Marxism is the “necessary evil” of colonization as paradoxically necessary for a global proletariat revolution. In his own words, Marx explains the process of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>33</sup> See “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity” in which Fanon notes the relatively privileged position of the proletariat worker in the colonial context compared to the rural peasantry: “The workers, now ‘independent’ are getting nowhere. The unions realize in the aftermath of independence that is their social demands were to be expressed they would scandalize the rest of the nation. The workers are in fact pampered by the regime. They represent the most well to do faction of the people. Any unrest aimed at winning improved living standards for the laborers and dock workers would not only be unpopular but might very well stir up to hostility of the disheartened rural population. The unions, banned from union activities, make no headway.” Ibid., 75-6.

<sup>34</sup> Shlomo Avineri, “Introduction,” from *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, (Doubleday, 1968), 12.

colonization as enacted by the bourgeoisie stating that the bourgeoisie “draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization.”<sup>35</sup> This statement, uses the civilizing language of the colonizer, In conceptualizing colonization as a progressive enterprise and reveals the limitation of Marx’s theory in promoting an anti-colonial revolution.

Yet in her critique of violence, Arendt measures the validity of violent praxis against a strict reading of Marx, writing that scholars such as Fanon “have remained unaware of their decisive disagreement with the teachings of Karl Marx, or, to put it another way, why they cling with such stubborn tenacity to concepts and doctrines which stand not only refuted by factual developments but are clearly inconsistent with their own politics.”<sup>36</sup> Clear in this quotation is both Arendt’s heavy reliance on Marx and her assumption that Fanon’s politics should align strictly with a marxist framework, an assumption which he refutes. Arendt’s patronizing tone suggests that Fanon is intellectually incapable of grasping the importance of Marxism. She is so locked in her assumption that Marx puts forward a universal humanism that she forgets that Fanon lives and writes in the colonial world which represents Europe’s exception to any kind of human universality. Europe posits the colonial world as the antithesis of itself, constructed and exploited to affirm the white, rational European self. Any enlightenment humanism does not apply to colonial subjects as it is the literal creation of the colonial condition. It is thus necessary to unpack Arendt’s critique of Fanon because her analysis demonstrates the limitations of reading Fanon without first locating his theory within the project of French colonization. Arendt

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Arendt, “Reflections on Violence,” 8.

struggles to place Fanon within euro-centric leftist theory because she fails to consider the colonial paradigm he works within and which she consequently reproduces in her critique.

“On Violence” centers violence conceptually within the anti-colonial revolution. Despite this essay’s popularity, it does not reflect the manifold ways in which Fanon theorizes violence. Fanon’s subsequent essays published in *The Wretched of the Earth* “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity,” and “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” ground violence in the historic event of decolonization while “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” demonstrates that violence is not the romantic act of revolutionary comradeship that the colony necessarily imagines it to be.<sup>37</sup> In fact, this final chapter of the book in which Fanon outlines cases of trauma he treated at a mental hospital in Algeria during the revolution, purposefully problematizes any reading which determines “On Violence” to be a call for violent struggle. “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” in particular represents Fanon as the enemy of violence as he recounts his treatment of patients suffering the medical consequences of the violent Algerian War of Independence. Arendt’s ahistorical critique which misses these crucial points is valuable because it demonstrates how gaps in understanding Fanon’s work emerge and proliferate once the Algerian context is forgotten. Recognizing the colonial context in which Fanon is situated in, the violence he discusses is better understood as a metaphor the dismantling of the colonial condition through an epistemic struggle. This is not to say that violent struggle does not occur, but rather that it is a *symptom* of the larger project of a theoretical reconfiguration of the world.

### ***Black Skin, White Masks and Reframing Blackness***

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<sup>37</sup> See Ch. 2

In an effort to situate Fanon, both historically and biographically, we must return to his first and most foundational work: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's first book, which was rejected by his dissertation committee in Lyon, France and subsequently published in 1952, is a study of how the colonial condition is created through the construction of multiple binaries: colonizer/colonized, culture/nature, colony/metropole, all of which stem from the original binary opposition: white/black. The title of the book itself is indicative of this argument. As a continuation of this analysis, *The Wretched of the Earth* demonstrates the historically created consequence of these binaries that is, that their construction constitutes the condition for the colonial project. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon argues that blackness and whiteness are constructions of white supremacy that affirm the white, European self. He asserts that "white civilization and European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black man," which, among other things, necessitates the construction of a "black soul."<sup>38</sup> But how does the binary create the condition for violence? Fanon, by invoking the roles of science and objectivity in racial construction theorizes the racial binary as the rational *reason* for the colonial project.

Fanon writes readily about the physiological transformation that the black subject undergoes when they come in contact with the white world. In describing an Antillean who has left their colony and gone to the metropole, Fanon writes, "The black man who has lived in France for a certain time returns home radically transformed. Genetically speaking, his phenotype under-goes an absolute, definitive mutation," yet he immediately clarifies what he means in the footnote, writing: "By this we mean that the black man who returns home gives the impression of having completed a cycle, of having added something that was missing. He returns

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<sup>38</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1st ed., New ed. (New York : [Berkeley, Calif.]: Grove Press; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), xviii.



home literally full of himself.”<sup>39</sup> Like Freud’s use of August Weismann’s work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principal*, Fanon uses a biological analogy only to immediately clarify that he is not actually speaking of the biology of the body at all. Through the euphemism of biology and science, Freud concludes that the goals of human life are constructed as idealized, yet by using biological analogy Freud also obscures his argument. Rather than delving into construction of meaning as a socio-cultural phenomenon, Freud writes of the “history of the earth” and “its relation to the sun” implying environmental and geological factors for evolutionary change. While this Darwinist approach suffices to explain physiological change in a living organism, Freud is not talking about the physical body. In fact, he makes this very clear when he uses the work of biologist August Weismann as an analogy for his own argument that there exists in the unconscious both death and life instincts. He writes that while Weismann’s work concerns the living substance morphologically—specifically the soma and the germ-plasm—his work examines what lies beneath. He writes, “we, on the other hand, dealing not with the living substance but with the forces operating in it, have been led to distinguish two kinds of instincts: those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting to and achieving a renewal of life.” There is a contradiction here between Freud’s attempt to prove the life’s meaning is constructed and his inability to explain why outside of biological analogy. We can conclude that meaning is constructed, but Freud does not provide a subject for this construction beyond the history of the earth and sun. However, Freud’s use of biology is a departure from his previous work—particularly *Interpretation of Dreams*—which relies heavily on literary and cultural reference and strays from scientific basis. In this

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 3, fn 3.

way, the extensive biological reference in Freud's work grounds it in the hard sciences which psycho-analysis strives to be included in. It also represents a weakness in Freud's work: where he could have delved into processes of socialization, Freud instead turns to shallow scientific euphemism, thereby ironically constituting the legitimacy of the same sciences he attempts to go beyond.<sup>40</sup>

Fanon, however, does not say that the black subject was previously incomplete, in fact, he deconstructs the entire notion of completeness stating that "for all these finding and all this research have a single aim: to get man to admit he is nothing, absolutely nothing—and get him to eradicate this narcissism whereby he thinks he is different than other animals."<sup>41</sup> If man is fundamentally nothing, then completeness is out of the question anyways. Rather, this analogy suggests that genetics—that is, the biological root of who we are—is not fixed at birth but subject to change through a course of interactions. Fanon does not mean this literally, but by using an analogy of genetics, he disrupts conventions of race as biologically fixed. Rather, whiteness can be learned, and responded to and this is what completes the black subject. In other words through interactions with the white world the black subject internalizes his perceived inferiority and therefore reactively changes his identity and physiological mannerisms and *this* is what creates race. Fanon's use of genetic biology is subversive in that it is deeply ironic. Obviously, the genetic phenotype doesn't change, but it is also not important. Against convention, Fanon is arguing race is not constructed through the genetic phenotype, it is learned. Later, Fanon addresses this issue more directly. He writes, "Scientists reluctantly admitted that

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<sup>40</sup> Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (Standarded. New York: Norton, 1989), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 6.

the Negro was identical to the white man: same morphology, same histology. Reason was assured of victory on every level. I reintegrated the brotherhood of man. But I was soon disillusioned.”<sup>42</sup> Disillusioned, perhaps, because any scientific “discovery” of sameness between black and white people serves to legitimize the same system—biological science—which created hegemonic racial binaries. As a case in point Fanon writes, “They inscribed on my chromosomes certain genes of various thickness representing cannibalism. Next to the *sex linked*, they discovered the *racial linked*. Science should be ashamed of itself!”<sup>43</sup> This passage reminds us that science does not take place without human actors who carry their own biases. It is this key critique of biological determinism that Fanon returns to again and again in his work on Algeria.

In order to dismantle the epistemological reliance on biological determinism, Fanon deconstructs existing theories that constitute its reproduction. One of the theoretical movements that Fanon unpacks is Negritude.<sup>44</sup> He writes,

Fact: some Whites consider themselves superior to Blacks.  
Another fact: some Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth of the black man’s intellect and equal intelligence.<sup>45</sup>

While deconstructing white superiority is undoubtedly essential to Fanon’s work, the crux of *Black Skin, White Masks* lies in analyzing the second “fact” he identifies. Fanon determines that any attempt by Blacks to prove the wealth of black intellect exists in an already fraught

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>44</sup> Negritude is a literary theory developed by writers and politicians of the African Diaspora in the mid twentieth century against the backdrop of French colonization. It is focused on the affirmation of “the black world” centering the intrinsic value of blackness. Two of the founding theorists of Negritude, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor were acquaintances of Fanon Césaire, a fellow Martinican, was Fanon’s teacher for a period of time. Fanon’s critique of Negritude stems from his effort to conceive of blackness as a construction rather than an essential quality.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., xiv.

framework which conceives of black intellect as intrinsically separate from white intellect and thereby re-enforces the creation of the black and white binary in which is, of course, inherently hierarchical and thus prejudicial. In this way, it is an unnecessary detour for Fanon to spend time proving the merit of black intellect. Not only would it be redundant, but an attempt to measure the worth of “black intellect” against “white intellect” is from the outset, a failed mission without first the detailed unpacking of the Eurocentric epistemological constructions of intellect.<sup>46</sup> This is why Fanon endeavors to break the cycle of these two modes of thinking. Instead of deconstructing white supremacy by proving the value of black intellect, Fanon maintains that man is nothing. With this assertion, Fanon centers the constructed nature of racial binary in his act of deconstruction. Put differently, if man is fundamentally nothing, then the binary opposition of black and white—and therefore the hierarchical, binary separation between black and white intellect—is a cultural production through which to maintain social hegemony. Man is fundamentally nothing and therefore identity, race, and intellect are not inherent but are all created and maintained through social, political, and economic systems of domination.<sup>47</sup> The connection between binary opposition and colonial violence is fleshed out convincingly in V. Y. Mudimbe’s work, *The Invention of Africa*. He argues that actors and institutional processes in Europe created the idea of Africa through movements in the arts and social sciences. Mudimbe argues that hierarchy is born of classification and therefore, through the classification, categorization, and dissection of African artifacts, traditions, and peoples, the European social

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 12: “For if equality among men is proclaimed in the name of intelligence and philosophy, it is also true that these concepts have been used to justify the extermination of man.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., xv: “The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority.”

sciences constructed a hierarchical binary opposition between Europe and the “other.” Through these scientific constructions, African culture was evaluated and understood through a strictly European framework. The organized study and disciplinization of Africa in the European academy thereby created the idea of Africa as less historically evolved within a progressive notion of history thus creating the foundation for a colonial dialectic in which Africa is understood as the binary opposite to Europe:

a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed” traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies. In Africa a great deal of attention is generally given to the evolution implied and promised by the passage from the former paradigms to the latter.<sup>48</sup>

With this analysis Mudimbe identifies how the creation of the African/ European binary created the potential for colonization as a force which propels history forward.

If we understand colonization as the active constitution of *and* result of binary oppositions, Fanon’s move to identify decolonization as the eradication of binaries and therefore the creation of a new self take on significant meanings. Within his work lies a profound project of self-creation. Fanon insists “every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every instance of my reticence, every instance of my cowardice, manifests the man.”<sup>49</sup> Following his thesis that man is fundamentally nothing, Fanon claims that his existence is not predetermined but actively created. Any movement made, word spoken, or sentence written is constitutive of his existence which has no inherent objective meaning. Thus, in outlining the creation of his self, Fanon rejects a

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<sup>48</sup> V. Y Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa : Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. African Systems of Thought. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 69.

flattened, predetermined, binary identity imposed and codified by imperialist white supremacy.

We see an important contribution of this thesis in “On Violence.” Fanon describes the violence of decolonization an act of self creation. In taking “history into their own hands” the colonized create themselves as men. Fanon writes:

[decolonization] infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: the ‘thing’ colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation.<sup>50</sup>

In Fanon’s assessment, then, de-colonial revolution, which constitutes national consciousness, creates man in place of the colonially imagined “thing.” This is a hopeful assessment which allows for a humanistic reimagining of the world. Fanon welcomes a new and universal humanity through the obliteration of colonial ontologies via revolutionary practice. Therefore, Fanon imagines revolution as carving out the opportunity for new roles for black people, women, and the working class alike.

### **Writing the Peasantry**

Fanon calculates that the colonial condition cannot be challenged without also dismantling the European structures of power which sustain it. The rural peasantry, for him, occupies an important role in the anti-colonial struggle because without its engagement the colony remains trapped by the interests of the national bourgeoisie which serves to reproduce the interest of the colonial metropole. As Fanon puts it, “this is not the traditional opposition between town and country. It is the opposition between the colonized excluded from the benefits of colonialism and their counterparts who manage to turn the colonial system to their

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<sup>50</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2.

advantage.”<sup>51</sup> However, Fanon’s treatment of the peasantry is not so clear cut. While he recognizes its strategic importance in disrupting both colonial and class hegemonies, Fanon still writes the peasantry as a monolithic, uncultured mass which offers the rural bodily as supplement to the urban mind. Jacques Derrida’s theory of the violence of naming is helpful for assessing the limitations of Fanon’s analysis/ writing of the rural. In his chapter “The Violence of the Letter,” Derrida deconstructs the work of Claude Levi-Strauss by demonstrating that despite Levi-Strauss’ attempt to move away from ethno-centrism via his anthropological study he is nonetheless employing the same Rousseauian nature/culture binary which assigns hegemonic values. Levi-Strauss aims to find the natural human, the purely natural society which can thereby prove that the corrupt culture of Europe does, in fact, have roots in natural humanity.<sup>52</sup> Levi-Strauss’ analysis of the Nambikwara people in his chapter “A Writing Lesson” from his book *Tristes Tropiques* posits their traditions of naming and writing against those of Europe. He thereby confines them to the category of nature rather than recognizing these techniques as manifestations of culture that take a different form than the euro-centric imaginings of what constitutes culture. Derrida argues that the interaction between Levi-Strauss and the Nambikwara people carries with it the inherent violence of the anthropological framework it exists within. Specifically, the act of writing, that is, the attempt at achieving a presence which necessarily differentiates the author from the *subject*—that is, the signified—lays out the potential for violence. Derrida writes, “For writing, obliteration of the proper, classed in the play of difference, is the originary violence itself: pure impossibility of the ‘vocative mark,’ impossible

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Of Grammatology*. Corrected ed. Baltimore, Md.: (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 110.

purity of the mark of vocation.”<sup>53</sup> What Derrida intends here is that writing, which carries the ultimate goal of creating presence by representing through phonic symbols the voice, necessitates categorization through the so called “play of difference” because it assigns a vocative mark to each *thing* it names and therefore places it within a phonetic and symbolic category. Categorization, furthermore, necessitates a hierarchy of values because it creates a framework of difference, largely rooted in the fundamental binary of Nature/Culture which conceives of one category (culture) being the progression of the other (nature). Put more clearly, Derrida writes, “there was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names, that is, will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originally violence of language with consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute.”<sup>54</sup> Naturally, this is the violence which Levi-Strauss engages in when naming the Nambikwara as the pinnacle of nature. His work instrumentalizes the *other* to complete the European man which has lost his humanity under western capitalism and thereby constitutes a hierarchy of peoples from original to progressive.<sup>55</sup>

Derrida’s assessment synchronizes well with Fanon’s critique of the black/white binary. However Derrida also offers a framework for deconstructing the binaries which Fanon himself sets up in his work. Chapter two of *The Wretched of the Earth* “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity,” demonstrates the hierarchical binary through which Fanon theorized the peasantry. Fanon explains that a divide between the masses and the national bourgeoisie exists due to their

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 115: “Non-European people were not only studies as the index to a hidden good Nature, as a native soil recovered, of a ‘zero degree’ with reference to which one could outline the structure, the growth, and above all the degradation of our society and our culture.”



differing relation to the colonial ruling class.<sup>56</sup> The creation of nationalist parties, for examples, is a consequence of the birth of an intellectual and economic elite during the period of colonization. The elite is able to appropriate the colonial system for their political and economic gain in contrast to the rural masses who are positionally unable to take any advantage of the colonial system.<sup>57</sup> Fanon's characterization of this divide is key to understanding how colonizing powers create and maintain binaries, but he nonetheless essentialises the rural masses as a source of spontaneous violent upheaval. He describes the rural masses as "the least politically conscious, the least organized, as well as the most anarchistic elements. They are characterized by a series of features--individualism, lack of discipline, the love of money, fits of rage, and a deep depression--defining an objectively reactionary behavior."<sup>58</sup> In this way, to Fanon, the peasantry represents the unconscious desires of the otherwise conscious national struggle. The peasantry is almost libidinal to Fanon who sees it as the heady, freedom-oriented force in the face of the conforming bourgeoisie. Unlike the "progressive head" of the national elite, the peasantry exists as the "huge body" which remains "retarded, rebellious and recalcitrant."<sup>59</sup> And yet, despite his essentialised dehumanization of the rural masses, Fanon fetishizes the peasantry as the essential trigger for the anti-colonial revolution because it cannot occur without the participation of the entire colonized people. Yet paradoxically,

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<sup>56</sup> "In any union or political organization there is a traditional gap between the masses who demand an immediate, unconditional improvement of their situation, and the cadres who, gauging the difficulties likely to be created by employers, put a restraint on their demands." Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Violence alone, perpetrated by the people, violence organized and guided by the leadership, provides the key for the masses to decipher social reality. Without this struggle...all that is left is a slight re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag, and down at the bottom a shapeless, writing mass, still mired in the Dark Ages.<sup>60</sup>

To Fanon, the peasantry is both the origin of violent struggle and the means by which the colonized rural masses become integrated into the “social reality” of the national bourgeoisie. In this way, Fanon does not simply name the binary created between rural and urban masses through the colonizing project, he essentialises and constitutes the binary between urban and rural, peasants and city workers. In doing so, in a fashion similar to that of Levi-Strauss, Fanon seems to employ the same hierarchical framework which he sets out to evade. By conceptualizing the peasantry as lacking consciousness, rationality, or progress and constituting the writhing body of the rational, national bourgeoisie, Fanon creates a hierarchy between the peasant body and the “head” of the nation, created and deployed by the colonizing power. Returning to Derrida’s deconstruction of Levi-Strauss, a similar critique is applicable here, for Fanon too builds from the binary framework of nature/culture. He envisions the national bourgeoisie as the rational progressive in counterpoint to the regression of the masses. In this way, Fanon engages in a violence of reflection by creating the non-identity of the native, that is, of the rural peasant. That is to say, in categorizing the peasant as opposed to the national bourgeoisie, Fanon presents the peasantry as contrary to the proper identity of the national

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 96.

bourgeoisie and thereby relies on the same ethnocentric hegemony of the colonizer. In Derrida's analysis, this classification creates the potential for physical violence.<sup>61</sup>

However, Fanon did not write the binary between the peasantry and the urban bourgeoisie into existence. While he theorizes each of these groups as monolithic, hierarchical entities, Fanon names the peasantry in order to demonstrate both its existence—which is often forgotten—and its centrality to an anti-colonial revolution. His treatment of the peasantry as the libidinal body poses challenges to this reading. However, in framing the peasantry as a source of untamed libidinal energy, Fanon also suggests that it is the “Id” of colonized society which exists before the imposition of colonial binaries.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Gordon argues that Fanon's treatment of the peasantry is an intentional disruption of the bourgeoisie/proletariat dialectic from which a western, Marxist revolution is born. Gordon builds on Antonio Gramsci's theory of the cultural *hegemony* of the ruling class.<sup>63</sup> Gramsci theorizes that through the control of capital and monopoly on state power, the ruling class gains social and political hegemony over the working class. In this “non-homogeneity” of the social classes, the bourgeoisie naturally works within their own class interests letting the interests of the people fall away.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, employing this framework within the colonial context, Fanon demonstrates that the peasantry is actually

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<sup>61</sup>“Violence of reflection, which denudes the native non-identity, classification as denaturation of the proper, and identity as the abstract moment of the concept. It is on this tertiary level, that of the empirical consciousness, that the common concept of violence (the system of the moral law and of transgression) whose possibility remains yet unthought, should no doubt be situated.” Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 112.

<sup>62</sup> See: Sigmund Freud and James Strachey. *The Ego and the Id*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. (New York: Norton, 1989), 10: “Moreover, the ego seems to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id. For the ego, perception plays the part which in the id falls to instinct. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions.”

<sup>63</sup> Gordon's italics, 125.

<sup>64</sup>Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International, 1999), 213.

essential in disrupting both the colonial power and the power of the colonially denoted ruling class. Or, put differently, he reproduces this colonially imposed binary only to point out the within this binary formulation there is the potential for revolution. Gordon explains: “In the course of his critique of neocolonial values and how they create the postcolony, Fanon advances both a geopolitical and a class critique. The geopolitical critique challenged the necessity of the capital city as the site of political residence and the organization of social life.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, Fanon transfers political power from the city to the rural masses and therefore disrupts the metropole’s exported hegemony of the politically powerful city over the empty rural land.

We should be reminded here of France’s treatment of the Algerian Tell versus the Algerian Sahara during the colonial period. The former was considered an extension of the metropole and the site of French political control while the latter was theorized, administered, and conquered as a separate entity. Geographer R.I Lawless writes that “the European settler saw the coastal zone as particularly favorable for agriculture and sedentary life, and the steppe and desert as a hostile environment, permitting mainly pastoralism linked with a nomadic way of life.” However, “As rural colonization proceeded in the costal area, and even encroached upon parts of the pre-Saharan zone, the authorities were forced to restrict the northern migration of tribes who lost many of their summer pastures....considerable areas of private land became in effect private property.”<sup>66</sup> To France, the Sahara represented an empty expanse with few people and ample resources despite the historical existence of multiple communities who called the Sahara home for centuries. This rhetorical dichotomy between the Sahara and Tell was

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<sup>65</sup> Gordon, 125.

<sup>66</sup> R. I Lawless, "The Concept of Tell and Sahara in the Maghreb: A Reappraisal." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 57 (1972), 126, 133.

particularly clear during the decolonization period when the Sahara continued to be a site of military control and nuclear testing for France despite its faltering control over the Tell.<sup>67</sup> It is exactly this compartmentalization between the urban and rural populations of a colonial territory which Fanon writes against for it is the political and cultural hegemony of the urban, nationalist bourgeoisie over the rural peasantry which creates the condition of neocolonialism.

### **Fanon and the New Man: Constitutions and Disruptions of the Colonial Family Romance**

Fanon's work is about the creation of new *men*. Newness, in his assessment, is masculinized and the violence that creates new men is constitutive of a masculine/feminine hegemonic binary. Newness born from a revolution is itself a fraught historical concept. Fanon imagines the decolonizing revolution as necessarily producing new men, a new culture, and a break with history. Yet this central concept strongly echoes to the rhetoric of the French Revolution, ironically the same historical process which created the potential for the French colonial world and whose dogma of universal rights was unequally deployed to maintain the hegemonic power of the French state. As Lynn Hunt writes in *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, "The French harkened to what I will call a "mythic present," the instant of creation of the new community, the sacred moment of the new consensus."<sup>68</sup> The "mythic present" that Hunt theorizes reminds us of how Fanon imagines the colonized "taking history

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<sup>67</sup> See Todd Shepard, "Making Algeriens" in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 139-168 and Panchasi, Roxanne. "'No Hiroshima in Africa:' The Algerian War and the Question of French Nuclear Tests in the Sahara." *History of the Present* 9:1 (2019): 84-112.

<sup>68</sup> Lynn Avery Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 27.

into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities.”<sup>69</sup> Both imagine the instantaneous creation of a new revolutionary community instantaneously, outside of temporal confines. Fanon conceptualizes newness as a total event. In his assessment the de-colonial process leaves no remnants of the previous colonial work. To Fanon, “[decolonization] infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Hunt writes of the French Revolution that “because revolutionary rhetoric insisted on a complete break with the past, it called into question all customs, traditions and ways of life. National regeneration required nothing less than a new man and new habits; the people had to be reformed in the republican mold.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, Fanon’s “new man” is a reproduction of the same trope of total, sudden newness which was central to the imagination of the French Revolution.<sup>72</sup>

But what is at stake here? In replicating the language of the French Revolution, Fanon employs a curious tension between insisting that revolution fundamentally alters the world and conceiving of it through the framework of the western republic and western notions of political transformation. A significant aspect of this tension is that it calls into question the role of women, for if new humanity is born from a framework which theorized citizenship in terms of a binary opposition, is this really newness? The central paradox of the French revolution was the tension between universal human rights and the construction of exclusionary citizenship. Joan Scott

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<sup>69</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Hunt, 56.

<sup>72</sup> Significantly, Fanon’s second book published during his time in Algeria is titled *L’An V de la Révolution Algérienne* conjuring reference to “year one” of the French Revolutionary calendar marking the overthrow of the Monarchy.

contends that the creation of the new, French, male citizen was contingent on the racialized and sexualized exclusion of women and people of color. In her writing on Olympe de Gouges, Scott shows that the Jacobin revolutionaries rigidly maintained gender roles through the exclusion of figures such as de Gouges who imagined a feminist revolution. De Gouges countered the construction of the archetypal white, male citizen by resisting the confines of femininity thereby threatening the fragile self-identity of the French Republic:

If, by the exercise of creative imagination, women could convincingly enact men's characteristics, social roles, or both, then how was one to distinguish between the real or natural and its imitation, how justify the restriction of citizenship to men? The only way was to establish some authority endowed with the ability to recognize and enforce the distinction that were said to constitute sexual difference.<sup>73</sup>

In its creation of new men, the imagined French Revolution also represents the imagination of a new French brotherhood of citizens with the French state as mother. This “family romance” as scholar Francois Verges calls it, was central to the construction of a French Republic, but was also the precursor to the invention of the colonial family romance, that is the denial of sexual procreation in the colonies and the construction of France as the father of his colonial children. As Verges points out, the irony of this family romance, born from the French Revolution, is that while the cry for Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité of the French Revolution offered the political and historic grounds for the colonized to challenge French colonial power, it equally created a dynamic of debt which introduced a new phenomenon in that “the transformation of revolutionary ideals into maternal *dons* sought to deprive individuals of their agency.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>74</sup> Françoise Verges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries : Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*. (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

However, while Fanon employs the tropes of the French Revolution, his interrogation of the colonial family romance problematizes this gendered dialectic. In “The Black Man and Psychopathology” Fanon argues that in a European context the familial structure is a reproduction of the national structure. As a result, the oedipal family drama is only universal within the prescribed European national structure. However, for the black man, the oedipal event occurs with the first contact with the white world. In this way, for the black world “morbidity” is not located in the family unit but in the colonial structure.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, while Fanon recognizes the export of the colonial family romance of which Verges writes, he works to disrupt the notion of the French colonial family rather than naturalize it. Fanon frames the French colonial family as an abnormal state which causes violent disruption and neurosis. Contingent to the family romance, Fanon theorizes the black man as produced through the sexual imagination of the white man who displaces his fear of sexual inadequacy and desire for sexual “licentiousness” onto the black other. Simply “projecting his desires onto the black man, the white man behaves as if the black man actually had them...The black man is fixated at the genital level, or rather he has been fixated there.”<sup>76</sup> In this way, it is the particular masculinity and desire for sexual violence that constitutes the white man in opposition to both women and black men. This assessment is a condemnation of the colonial family romance which necessarily reproduces white masculinity. Put differently, the sexual difference that Fanon fixates on is not that between men and women but the imagined differences between the white and black man through which racialization occurs. Attention to these arguments should also draw attention to the interlocking construction

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<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.



of racial and sexual binaries which Fanon interrogates. In this way, he disrupts notions of gender as sized and rather suggest that both gender and race are socially constructed through the imagination of the black “other.”

### **From the Antilles to Algeria: Imagining Women in Revolutionary Structures**

It is within “The Woman of Color and The White Man,” however, where we see Fanon’s most blatant construct of sexual difference. In this inflammatory chapter Fanon attempts to argue that sexuality takes place within a prior racialization. Fanon’s treatment of gender in this chapter is indeed highly compartmentalized, applying contrary analyses to the behaviors of women of color and men of color vis à vis their sexual and romantic relationships with the white world. In fact, in structuring a separate essay for his analysis of men of color and white women, “The Man of Color and the White Woman,” Fanon theorizes men and women as categorically different in their sexual and romantic behavior, yet fails to unpack the socially constructed patriarchal hegemony which creates the binary he then reproduces. We can attribute Fanon’s reproduction of a sexual binary to his reproduction of the French revolution because it is the French revolutionary framework affirm the revolutionary citizen as masculine and his counterpart as feminine. In his analysis of Mayotte Capecia’s *Je Suis Martiniquaise* Fanon writes that in the novel “the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random” thereby condemning it not only as bad writing, but as an anti-intellectual, anti-theoretical feminized work.<sup>77</sup> In the words of Myriam Chancy who argues for a critical (re)reading of Capecia,

[Fanon’s] incapacity to recognize the contributions of women of color intellectuals and writers has contributed to the accepted, unspoken belief, by

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 25.

omission, that women of color do not philosophize, leading to an internalization of Fanon's pithy phrase, that we "know nothing of her."<sup>78</sup>

Fanon has little sympathy for what he calls Mayotte's attempt to "whiten [the world] in her body and mind," commenting that "Mayotte Capecia did not reckon with her unconscious. As soon as the novelist allows her characters a little freedom, they use it to belittle the black man. . . . we can safely say that Mayotte Capecia has turned her back on her island."<sup>79</sup> Chancy would call this a misreading of Capecia who is working within socio-economic dynamics of the racialized Caribbean to insure the best social outcome for herself. Her decisions are shaped through the triple bind of her gender, racial, and economic conditions and strongly influenced through her familial relationships, particularly those with her father.<sup>80</sup> This nuanced understanding of Capecia's dynamic narrative and the layered social roles of marriage in a Caribbean context is lacking in Fanon's analysis. It is essential to examine Fanon's treatment of women in this essay to show that through his analysis of Capecia, Fanon constructs sexual difference between the male revolutionary and the woman of color. In this analysis, women write memoir while men engage in theory. Fanon affords the *man* of color who is overtaken by romantic love for a white woman the assumption that *he* reckons with his conscious explaining "we understand now why the black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him there is only one way out, and it leads to the white world." This is clearly contrary to the analysis he extends to Capecia's writing on a woman of color.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Myriam J. A. Chancy, "Subjectivity in Motion: Caribbean Womens (Dis)Articulations of Being from Fanon/ Capécia to the Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands." *Hypatia* 30: 2 (2015): 434–49. 436.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 35, fn 12.

<sup>80</sup> Chancy, 441.

<sup>81</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 33.

Fanon's treatment of Capécia is problematic, yet it is equally important to recognize his work as a reaction to systemized anti-blackness in the French Caribbean compounded by his own experiences as a black man in post-war France. While Chancy persuasively argues that Fanon projects patriarchal understanding onto *Je Suis Martiniquaise*, Denean Sharpley-Whiting suggests that many scholars approach "The Woman of Color and the White Man" without proper consideration of the anti-blackness at play in Mayotte Capécia's work which is the clear subject of Fanon's fixation: "While Euro-American lit-crit feminists' gendered criticisms of Fanon are undercut by their lack of antiracist, anticapitalist, and anti-female-sexist analyses, Fanon's analyses of Capécia fixate on anti-black racism, alienation, and economic disease. One is left with gaping holes, 'blind spots,' if you will, in both critical analyses."<sup>82</sup> I do not argue that Sharpley-Whiting's analysis necessarily undercuts Chancy's. Rather she demonstrates that attempting to synthesize "The Woman of Color and the White Man" as a single argument proves challenging because the chapter itself, while doing some important work, contains within it blind spots and contradictions.

Notably, Fanon presents a more disruptive look at the gender binary in "Algeria Unveiled," the opening essay of *A Dying Colonialism* (or *L'An V de la Revolution Algerienne*). In "Algeria Unveiled" Fanon identifies that within the colonizers-shared conceptual understanding of Algeria, the Algerian woman becomes a monolithic symbol whose literal unveiling opens the door for the colonial penetration of Algerian society. Fanon underscores the interlocking construction of Algerian woman as a raced and sexed subject through western representations of Algeria in the Academy, sciences, and media:

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<sup>82</sup> Denean T. Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon and Capécia." In *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, 2nd ed., 59–77. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 73.

The officials of the French administration in Algeria committed to destroying the people's originality, and under instruction to bring about the disintegration, at whatever cost, of form of existence likely to evoke a national reality direct or indirectly, were to concentrate their efforts on the wearing of the veil, which was looked upon at the juncture as a symbol of the status of the Algerian woman. Such a position is not the consequence of a chance intuition. It is on the basis of the analyses of sociologist and ethnologists that the specialists in so-called native affairs and the heads of the Arab Bureaus coordinated their work. At an initial stage, there was a pure and simple adoption of the well-known formula, "let's win over the women and the rest will follow." This definition of policy merely gave a scientific corporation to the "discoveries" of the sociologists.<sup>83</sup>

In this way, Algerian women become the semiotic frontier of Algerian society and the veil the barrier which must be penetrated to enter into it. The veil also becomes the signifier of the home. The colonizer feels that in order to access the private realm of Algerian society—and the protection and autonomy from the French state that exists within it—the women must be conquered, unveiled, and violated. "Thus the rape of the Algerian woman in the dream of a European is always preceded by a rending of the veil."<sup>84</sup>

However, it is exactly the confines of the colonizers' imagination which allow the Algerian woman to take the revolutionary struggle into their own hands. Fanon contends that the limitation of the French consciousness is that it imagines the Algerian woman caught in a constant pull between the liberated, secular, western world and the oppressive Islamic one. It is therefore France's duty to free the Algerian woman from her tyrannical oppressor who is naturally the Arab, Algerian man. This liberation rhetoric, with the ultimate goal of dividing the Algerian family, comes up time and time again in the French colonial discourse and is then strategically appropriated by Fanon. Yet by imagining the Algerian woman as either the victim of

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<sup>83</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*. 1st Evergreened. An Evergreen Book. (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 37.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Islamic patriarchy or as a secular, modern French woman, the French state disregards any potential for her as a revolutionary figure. In this way, the Algerian woman, gaining an acute understanding of the colonizer's gaze, uses it to a revolutionary end:

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols.<sup>85</sup>

There are two things at play here. Firstly, this passage points out that even the woman who appeals to the French colonial gaze and presents herself in a modernized, sexually-liberated fashion is not registered as a revolutionary figure in the colonizer's mind. In this way she demonstrates the central paradox of liberation rhetoric: the woman who presents herself as socially "liberated" thanks to the French occupation is the woman who has best conformed to the ideals of an archetypal, submissive, French citizen. Secondly, Fanon posits that revolutionary action can be born from a double bind of patriarchy and colonization. In this way, it is precisely the colonial condition which creates potential for the revolutionary Algerian woman. The forging of a revolutionary role occurs within a colonial encounter because "the violence of the occupier, his ferocity, his delirious attachment to the national territory, induces the leaders no longer to exclude certain forms of combat."<sup>86</sup>

Contrary to his more flattened assessment of women in "The Woman of Color and the White Man," Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled" does not exclude women from an imagined revolutionary community. In fact, it is exactly the colonizer's assumption that women would be

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 48.

excluded from the revolutionary struggle which allows them to pursue it so fervently. Fanon nuances the double bind of constructed racial and sexual categories and demonstrates that the obliteration of these colonial stratifications is the creation of a revolutionary newness. Hence Algerian revolutionary women “liquidate the old mystifications once and for all.”<sup>87</sup> How, then, can we make sense of the discrepancies between these works? Verges argues that to Fanon, Algeria offered a masculine revolutionary virility in contrast to the perceived passivity of his colonial homeland. She writes, “with the Algerian national fighter, Fanon found a man whose masculinity has been wounded but who had, in contrast to the black man of the Antilles, the courage to attack the castrating master, the Frenchman, and to castrate him in return.”<sup>88</sup> Along similar lines, Ann McClintock writes of “Algeria Unveiled” that “Fanon masculinizes the female militant, turning her into a phallic substitute, detached from the male body but remaining, still, the man’s ‘woman-arsenal’”<sup>89</sup> I argue that is the exported masculine paradigm of the colonizer which creates the condition for the female militant. She exists within a previous masculine assessment of Algerian women who are imagined within rigid colonial categories. To Verges’s point, I propose that rather than setting up a theoretical dichotomy between Fanon’s assessment of Algeria and the Caribbean, we must note the situational context in which both of these assessments were made. Fanon wrote “Algeria Unveiled” after practicing medicine in the midst of a colonial war and after significant interaction with Freedom fighters. The same cannot be said for his work on “The Woman of Color and the White Man” which was published in his first book. Fanon wrote these essays within two separate biographical and historical periods and

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>88</sup> Verges, 210.

<sup>89</sup> McClintock, 367.

therefore fixation on one gives us an incomplete picture of Fanon's treatment of gender with colonial and revolutionary structures. This is why we must consider the gaps and opportunities offered by both analyses in tandem. These essays also remind us that patriarchy, racism, and colonization are interconnected systems which reproduce one another.

Ella Shohat provides one of the most helpful analyses of these two essays. She reminds us that Fanon's response to Capécia was situated not only in his Martinician experience, but was also written in reaction to his experience of fighting alongside the allies in World War II and experiencing the disorienting realization that he fought not just against the brutality of the Vichy Regime but *for* the equally racist free France. This context makes Capécia's right wing leanings even more stinging. Shohat writes, "Fanon's rejection of Capécia must therefore be read as a response not only to her symbolic rejection of the black man and of her worshipful mimicry of the French bourgeoisie, but also to her embrace of the Vichy regime."<sup>90</sup> This is an important reminder that biographically situating Fanon's work allows us to produce richer meaning for his work. In both essays, Fanon demonstrates how colonial constructions of race serve also to construct roles for women within the Antilles and Algeria alike. Re-examining Fanon's treatment of women throughout multiple works demonstrates that his *reproduction* of patriarchal tropes and *deconstruction* of interlocking systems of racial and sexual domination exist in relation to the historical and biographical moments they are produced in. With this in mind, my following chapter is focused on locating the development of Fanon's theory within the Algerian colonial context.

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<sup>90</sup> Shohat, 273.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Decolonizing Medicine: Locating Fanon's Theory in the Project of French Medical Colonization

*On this, both Marx and Tocqueville were agreed: the French role in Algeria was to bring civilization and progress. From this angle, Algerian resistance could be painted as futile and indeed anti-progressive, and atrocities (like the massacre of 500-1000 at Oulad Riah in 1845) as as deplorable but necessary mistakes.*

*- Edmund Burke, "Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghreb"*

*The insult to man which is in ourselves must be identified, demystified and hunted down at all times and in all places. We must not expect the nation to produce new men. We must not expect men to change imperceptibly as the revolution constantly innovates. it is true both processes are important, but it is the consciousness that needs help.*

*- Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth*

#### **Situating Algeria as a Locus of French Imperial Violence and Strategic Resistance**

Frantz Fanon spoke at the First World Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, 1956 one year before he was expelled from Algeria by the French authorities. At this point, Fanon had worked in Algeria for three years. Violent conflict between the Front de la Liberation National and France had begun in November, 1954 with the FLN bombings across Algiers and since then, Fanon had established close personal and professional ties with the FLN through his work at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital. To Fanon, Algeria represented the beginning of a global de-colonial revolution, and he was surprised to hear no mention of it at the conference.<sup>91</sup> His speech, "Racism and Culture" which was published in *Toward the African Revolution* in 1964 was nonetheless centered on the cultural racism he observed in Algeria. In it, he argued that rather than an individual phenomenon, racism was part of the national culture of any imperial

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<sup>91</sup> Hudis, 76.



nation. This cultural racism, Fanon argued, was a systemization of more individualistic scientific racism stating, “this racism that aspires to be rational, individual, genotypical and phenotypically determined, becomes transformed into cultural racism. The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing.”<sup>92</sup> Fanon went on to invoke Algeria as a case study of cultural racism arguing that France engaged in a “pseudo-respect” for Algerian culture in which French authorities attempted to infiltrate native systems of governance in order to bolster French influence. He used the example of French appointed Kabyle *djemaas* (tribal leaders) as an attempt to use indigenous cultural systems to gain the alliance of “reliable men.”<sup>93</sup> Fanon’s appeals to the transformation of biological racism and the particular context of colonial Algeria exemplify an essential intervention into the discourse on colonization. This speech represents both the centrality of Algeria to Fanon’s anti-racist, anti-colonial theories *and* the importance of unpacking the scientism at the root of cultural racism. In this chapter, I argue for situating Fanon’s theory of cultural racism within the project of French medical colonization of Algeria. I argue that French cultural racism in Algeria was bolstered by an obsession with scientism in the colonial project which ultimately incubated Fanon’s analysis of the colonial context.

Central to the French colonial project in Algeria was the institution of medicine. By creating medical institutions in tandem with legal and governance systems, the French state reproduced its colonial rule through the presence of European doctors in colonial communities. I contend that French medical practices in Algeria should draw our attention firstly, to the role French doctors in Algeria played in creating European conceptions of the “orient” and secondly,

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<sup>92</sup> Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

to the centrality of Fanon's work in Algeria to dismantling this creation. Indeed, Patricia Lorcin calls Algeria the "vanguard" of European medical imperialism in the subaltern world.<sup>94</sup> Algeria was the site on which French colonial medicine was refined and experimented with, thus allowing its application to the larger colonized world. While the role of colonial medicine in Algeria has been the subject of ample scholarship, rarely is Fanon's work *located* within this scientific medical project.<sup>95</sup> By studying the role of medicine in the colonization of Algeria, we re-center Fanon's medical practice in the development of his revolutionary praxis. In this way, the practice of decolonizing medicine (specifically Fanon's technique of medical decolonization enacted within the context of Algeria) was central to the formation of a revolutionary consciousness. Through this lens I argue for situating Fanon's work in a larger project aimed at deconstructing the French invention of the "Orient."

French Algeria played an emblematic role building European conceptions of the "Orient" and the resulting Algerian War of Independence became a site of revolutionary struggle which took on a global dimension in time of worldwide decolonization.<sup>96</sup> The study of North Africa, however, tends to be peripheralized within the western academy. Edmund Burke argues that North African studies are marginal to both Middle East and African studies and historically,

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<sup>94</sup> Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities : Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*. Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 120.

<sup>95</sup> Lorcin, Gallois, Clark, Macey, Osborne

<sup>96</sup> The global and semiotic dimensions of Algeria are represented in the relationship between the Front de la Liberation Nationale and the Palestinian Liberation Organization where the latter derived its model of independence from the former. See: Frisch, Hillel. *Countdown to Statehood : Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*. SUNY Series in Israeli Studies. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Furthermore, Burke argues "The Algerian war for independence is one of the places in the Third World where these nationalist histories cohered for a time into a self-conscious project: the decolonization of history. This self-consciously nationalist project sought to devise a basis for factoring the colonial presence out of the Algerian past." Burke, "Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghreb," 10.

many western writings on the region, particularly French, tend to reproduce colonial hierarchies. A notable example of this marginality is the conspicuous absence of any discussion of Algeria colonization or decolonization in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. As Burke pointedly remarks,

It is interesting to note that in [orientalism] said makes no reference to Algerian decolonization, arguable the most bitterly contested and radical anti-colonial struggle in the Middle Eastern region as a whole in the 1950s and 1960s, (or indeed to Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, two of its leading opponents).<sup>97</sup>

Burke's reference to Fanon in this passage is key. I argue that the colonial and decolonizing periods in Algerian history merit scholarship not simply because they were key temporal sites for the reproduction of imperial violence and epistemologies of race but equally because born from these periods was the articulation of a new and global revolutionary consciousness which I have chosen to highlight through the work of Frantz Fanon. While Fanon has been left out of some of the more famous accounts of the Algerian War of independence, I argue that his work was paramount for the creation of an Algerian revolutionary consciousness which addressed the legacy of colonial, scientifically codified taxonomies.<sup>98</sup> In analyzing the mechanisms of French colonial governance—in this case through the analysis of Medical Colonization—I hope to demonstrate that centering the Algerian colonial and decolonization periods within scholarly horizons necessarily leads to a recognition of Algeria as an incubator of liberation ideology.

The initial French occupation of Algeria began in 1830 with the First French Algerian War (1830-1848) against various armed Algerian oppositions groups resulting in French control over the Tell. While the initial military plans to occupy Algeria lacked coherent goals, Brower argues that the 1830 military invasion was in part a result of Charles X's rise to power in 1824

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<sup>97</sup> Burke, "Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghreb," 17, fn 9.

<sup>98</sup> See Alistar Horne, *A Savage War for Peace* and Benjamin Brower *A Desert Named Peace*

and his desire to assert French nationalism through conquest.<sup>99</sup> From its outset, the ideologically muddy French occupation was characterized by strategic rhetorical framing which sought to “liberate” Algeria from its Ottoman provincial status. In 1830 head General de Bourmont insisted that

Our presence among you is not to fight you; our goal is only to make war on your Pacha... You are not ignorant of the excesses of hit tyranny, the deprivation of his bad character... The proof [of these] is that the most beautiful estates, lands, horses, arms, clothing, jewelry, etc., are all for him alone....to deliver you from the worries and the misery that oppress you.<sup>100</sup>

Under the Convention of 5 July 1830 France negotiated the surrender of Hussein Dey, the Ottoman provincial governor to Algeria and promised that the exercise of Islam would remain free and there would be no assault on Algerian claims to property.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, the months that followed saw a wave of looting by both French officials and local criminals. The French military seized homes, mosques, and destroyed neighborhoods. They were accompanied by military engineers who destroyed 90 building in Algiers in 1830 and 355 in 1831. The Decree of 7 December 1830 claimed properties held by mosques and Islamic pious foundations for France. There was an estimated outflow of 30,000-40,000 refugees from Algiers between 1830-1834.<sup>102</sup> The ousting of the Ottoman Dey was followed by the forced explosion of Ottoman-Anatolian populations in Algiers. 1830 also saw the French Sack of Bilda in November which Brower describes as “six hours of indiscriminate killing.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace : The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902*. (Columbia University Press, 2009), 8, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 16.

These are by no means complete accounts of the violence which took place across over 130 years of colonization. I mention these instances of colonial violence not to provide a comprehensive colonial timeline but rather to demonstrate that from the very outset of military occupation French colonization of Algeria was a violent event. Moreover, I hope these examples illustrate the fundamental contradiction between French rhetoric of *une mission civilisatrice* and the brutal outcomes of colonial conquest. Furthermore, within a chapter on colonial medicine, these examples offer a pushback against conceptions of medicine as a humanitarian project by reminding us that any benevolence we associate with medicine is not only offset by the violent colonial framework that medical colonization existed within, but also that compatibility between western medicine and western colonial structures should lead us to question the objective altruism of medicine itself. When Fanon arrived in Algeria in 1953, previous to the organized presence of the Front de Liberation National, he arrived in a colonial society in which every event took place against the backdrop of a violent occupation. What followed was a negotiation between the French medical institutions he worked within and the revolutionary theory he derived from them.

### **From Cairo to Algiers: Tracing the Epistemes of Scientific Colonization**

In his article “Science and the French Empire” Michael Osborne writes that “the purported rational, secular, and disinterested nature of science—often juxtaposed against the perceived fanatics of Islam in France’s African holdings and French Catholicism at home and abroad—was seen as a means to retain and develop the French colonies.”<sup>104</sup> Indeed French colonial holdings offered a wealth of reproducible discoveries that allowed for the publishing of

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<sup>104</sup> Michael A. Osborne, “Science and the French Empire.” *Isis* 96:1 (2005): 80-87, 86.

encyclopedias and the establishment of institutions deemed necessary for the reproduction of knowledge. Perhaps the most notable historic “moment” in this practice of knowledge production through the pillaging of the non-European world was Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1798 campaign in Cairo. Like the eventual 130 years of colonial occupation in Algeria, Napoleon’s 1798-1801 occupation of Egypt privileged scientific studies alongside military conquest; these constituted categorical representations of North African Arabs that then provided empirical justification for the hegemonic colonial mission. Napoleon strategically framed his campaign in Egypt as a mission to free Egyptians from Mamluk tyranny and demonstrate alliance to the Ottoman Sultan and reverence of Islam. Al-Jabarti’s chronicle of French occupation provides a valuable perspective on Napoleon’s mission which was simultaneously socio-political and militant.<sup>105</sup> Al-Jabarti’s account challenges Napoleon’s liberation rhetoric even as it chronicles the injustices of Mamluk rule. Said’s analysis of Napoleon’s invasion demonstrates a strong lineage between the academic corps which accompanied Napoleon and the medical corps which accompanied General de Bourmont in 1830 in Algeria. Said argues that Napoleon’s project drew on the work of Comte de Voleny, the French traveler who wrote *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie* in 1787 which, in Said’s words, produced a “canonical hostility” towards Islam.<sup>106</sup> In practice, Napoleon took a different approach in which he consciously used the language of Islam and translated his proclamations into Arabic thereby appropriating Egyptian Islamic culture to construct a false benevolence towards the Egyptian Muslim landscapes he occupied. Notably through personal invitations, distributions of military honors, and external admiration of Islam,

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<sup>105</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jabartī and Shmuel Moreh. 2004. *Napoleon in Egypt: Al-Jabarti's chronicle of the French occupation, 1798*. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers)

<sup>106</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. Vol. First Vintage books edition. (New York: Vintage, 1979)

Napoleon forged connections with Egyptian imams, qadis (judges), muftis (jurisconsults), and ulema (religious scholars) in an attempt to influence scholarly interpretations of the Qu'ran in favor of his military occupation.<sup>107</sup>

However, more most notable than these efforts the shape the rhetoric of invasion through strategic connections with the local elite was Napoleon's attempt to develop Egypt into a department of French learning through the establishment of L'Institut d'Egypte and the publication of the 23 volumes of *Description de L'Egypte* with input from scientists, historians, and archeologists. Said argues that the legacy of Napoleon's conquest was "to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition with full recognition of its place memory, its importance to imperial strategy, and its 'natural' role as an appendage to Europe."<sup>108</sup> Said conceives of Napoleon's invasion as a significant turning point in Orientalism from a style of representation to a means of creation. I argue that the project that Napoleon began in Egypt was crystalized in Algeria and, in fact, fortified by the privileging of biological science. French medical colonization, through both medical practice and scholarly publication, was both a continuation and essential complication of Napoleon's conception that conquest would transform North Africa from its "present barbarism" to "former classical greatness."<sup>109</sup> While Said writes that Napoleon's invasion produced many orientalist "textual children," he does not mention Algerian medical writings—paramount documents in French creations of the orient.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid: There is an interesting connection here between Napoleon's calculated relationship with Muslim scholars and French use of local qadi to enforce hygiene protocol in Algeria which I will discuss later.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## Colonial Medicine in Algeria

As David Macey writes in his biography of Fanon, “France conquered Algeria with a gun in one hand and quinine in the other.”<sup>110</sup> Colonial medicine, rather than a secondary result of France’s colonial process, was central to the creation of colonial Algeria and factored heavily into the feasibility and justification of colonial conquest. 167 surgeons accompanied French military forces on their initial conquest of Algeria in 1830. As towns subsequently fell to French forces, military doctors set up hospitals, thus literally tying French military conquest to the institutionalization of medicine.<sup>111</sup> There are two crucial dimensions to this medical conquest of Algeria. The first was the way in which European doctors and medical institutions literally profited off of the violent colonial condition through occupying land, colluding with legal institutions, and engaging in dishonest medical practice. The second is the role that European doctors played as informants for anthropologists. Algeria was a crucial site for European developments of scientific racism through the intersection of medical science and anthropology. These two distinct yet interlocking projects were essential for the longevity of French colonization of Algeria which lasted for 133 years (1830-1963).

The *Service Medical de Colonisation* was a medical corps established by the French state in 1853. It permitted the establishment of private medical practices which receive stipends from the French state. These doctors were tasked with inspecting school children, sex workers, and food and water.<sup>112</sup> In the following decades a series of legal measures fine-tuned the role of

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<sup>110</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon : A Biography*. (Picador USA, 2001), 218.

<sup>111</sup> Lorcin, 120.

<sup>112</sup> Hannah-Louise Clark, “Expressing Entitlement in Colonial Algeria: Villagers, Medical Doctors, and the State in the Early 20th Century.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48:3 (2016): 445–72, 447.



doctors in the colonial context.<sup>113</sup> *Le loi du 15 février 1902 relative à la protection de la santé publique* dictated that French doctors were responsible for producing registries of 13 infectious diseases and required each mayor to produce sanitary regulations for his constituency.<sup>114</sup> The law took effect in Algeria in 1909 and entailed the distribution of sanitary regulation pamphlets and new requirements for Algerian owned businesses to declare illness among clients. Notably this responsibility was not extended to European owned institutions.<sup>115</sup> This law demonstrates the way in which medicine was deployed through legal frameworks in order to define and control Algerian populations. Similarly, France deployed local quids (chieftains) in rural areas to report on disease and mortality within their communities and paid them bonuses for good sanitary policing thereby deploying Algerian governance structures for the colonial project.<sup>116</sup> In this way, medical and hygienic interventions were a means by which the French state could control who was “in” or “out” of their national community. This is only further underscored by the lineage between medical science and anthropology. Lorcin writes,

Military doctors were invaluable to the development in France of interest in racial questions. Many were members of scholarly societies, especially the anthropological societies. Their research provided the first-hand information necessary to confirm or refute racial hypotheses, and was therefore discussed and often published.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>*Le loi du 15 juillet 1893 sur l'assistance médicale gratuite* promised free home visits and hospitalizations for poor French citizens and made licensed medical professionals responsible for “medical policing” and public declaration of infectious disease. The Imperial Decree of 12 July 1851 applied French medical licensing laws to Algeria but excluded native Muslims or Jews who practiced medicine. Decrees in 1896, 1927, and 1935 restricted medicine to licensed doctors. *Ibid.*, 449, 454.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Lorcin, 125.

Notable figures in this movement include Dr. L. Baudens, and Dr. Eugene Bodichon. The work of both of these two French doctors offers unique insight into the interplay of medicine and the categorization of indigenous Algerians during French colonization. Specifically, Baudens and Bodichon helped constitute an anthropological-medical movement which provided a scientifically codified—and therefore objective—theoretical basis for the the French colonial regime’s privileging of Amazigh (specifically Kayble) over Arab Algerians. Baudens’ *Relation de L’Expedition de Constantine* (1836), identifies five distinct Muslim “castes” in which produced negative characterizations of Arabs and more positive representations of Kabyles. Bodichon’s *Considérations sur l’Algérie* (1845), focuses on physiognomic differences between Arabs and Kabyles. He also produced literature on “acclimatization” in which he argues that the climates that races of people are found in determine their moral character. In *De l’Humanité* (1866) Bodichon argues that disease itself is biologically determined.<sup>118</sup> The work of these doctors which Lorcin writes about extensively, should not be taken as a comprehensive representation of medicine in Algeria; however they are crucial to understanding Algeria as the site—and Algerians as the people—on which France created taxonomies of the orient. This begs the question of why Algeria and North Africa more broadly have been peripheralized in critical theory surrounding the Middle East.

In addition to actual medical practices and the mutual construction of medical and anthropological ontologies of the indigenous population in Algeria, medical and hygiene initiatives also played an important rhetorical role in justifying the colonial enterprise and ameliorating blame for French inflicted physical violence. In her extensive work on the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 125, 126.

institutionalization of commodified hygiene practices in post-WWII France, Kirstin Ross lays out the language of “cleansing” which France used to bolster a *mission civilisatrice* in Algeria. From the moment the Algerian War was conceived of as a war, it was known as the *sale de guerre* or “dirty war.” Accordingly, military operations were conceived of as “cleansing” missions such as “cleansing the casbah” and “floor polishing” patrols along the border of Tunisia and Algeria.<sup>119</sup> Ross lays out one particularly haunting testimony from a French soldier who remarks,

It’s maybe not the cleanest job but when you think about it, all those guys are criminals really, and if you let them live they’d only go on killing old men and women and children You can’t let them carry on like that. So really we’re cleaning up the country [*on nettoie le pays*], ridding it of all the scum [*racaille*].<sup>120</sup>

While the connection between medical colonization and cleansing rhetoric might seem tenuous, these examples nonetheless represent the dissonance between a French declaration of human rights and the brutality of colonization as converging on the grounds of a sanitizing mission— be it the humanitarian sanitation of medicine or the civilizing sanitation of war. We see this convergence in Alexis de Tocqueville’s “Essay on Algeria,” published in October 1841 when he was a member of the Chamber of Deputies for Manche. Significantly, Tocqueville represents center-of-left French political thought. While, unlike some French pundits, he did not believe that the “uncivilized” condition of Algeria was irreversible, he does argue that in order to be incorporated into France, Algerian land and disease must be managed and cultivated:

When Europeans began to cultivate the hills and valleys of the Algerian Massif to the east of the coast of Couba, Hussein Dey...they were taken by fevers, which led

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<sup>119</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies : Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 114.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

us to believe that the country was unhealthy, even if the cause was invisible. After several years, when the land has been cultivated and the population had grown, people no longer fell sick.<sup>121</sup>

Albeit subtly, this passage ties the colonization and cultivation of land to the decline of disease. To Tocqueville, disease is an obstacle of the colonial experience which can and will be overcome with the persistence of the settler population. Through the eradication of disease, Tocqueville argues, Algeria can be transformed into a civilized French society. In this way, the parallel is drawn between disease, death, regression, and pre-colonial Algeria while French Algeria is a site of cultivation, health, and progression. In her chapter, “What Race is Your Disease? Africanizing ‘Dirt’” Cassie Trentaz argues that the categorical implementations of biological science, medicine, and hygiene constituted an enlightenment secular humanism which intertwined notions of civility with a mastery over nature, dirt, and disease. In this way, the vague image of “fever” on the African continent—which Tocqueville reproduces— represents a binary between “sick” Africa and “healing” Europe. Indeed,

The image of the feverish heart of Africa also spurred an interest in a Christian healing mission that in some senses challenged the denigration of the body because of its concern for providing medical care for people in need even while it walked hand in hand with colonial imperialism in the restructuring of life on the African continent.<sup>122</sup>

I argue that Fanon’s anti-colonial writing participates in this dialectic by identifying and subsequently deconstructing the rhetorical paradigm which creates parallel binaries of colony/metropole, disease/health, and death/life binaries.

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<sup>121</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville and Jennifer Pitts. *Writings on Empire and Slavery*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>122</sup> Cassie R. E. H. Trentaz, “Theology in the Age of Global Aids & Hiv : Complicity and Possibility.” In *What Race Is Your Disease? Africanizing “Dirt,”* 67–80. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan US : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 73.

## **Fanon and Psychiatry: The Making of a Revolutionary**

Fanon did not enter Algeria as a revolutionary. While he had already published *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952, he nonetheless arrived to the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital without a liberation agenda. Previous to Algeria, Fanon worked in a hospital in Protonson, France where his actions demonstrated an attempt to alter psychiatric practices while working within the parameters of the hospital as an institution.<sup>123</sup> When Fanon arrived in Algeria, however, he was frustrated with the “doctrinal-basis” of the Algiers School of Psychology—the school of psychological thought derived from the racial system of French medical colonization.<sup>124</sup> Fanon was the first doctors to practice social therapy in North Africa and his widespread reforms in psychiatric practice included the introduction of social events to treatment programs such as patient film discussions, construction of a café and institution of Friday prayer for Algerian patients in an attempt to practice culturally informed therapy, and reformation of the Thematic Apperception test to fit the Algerian cultural context.<sup>125</sup> Ultimately the work that this did was to place Eurocentric psychoanalytic tradition within a socio-political context or as Fanon puts it in *Black Skin, White Mask’s* diagnose a “situational neurosis” which evaluates the systematic depersonalization of the colonial context. It was through Fanon’s psychiatric practice that he was contacted by the FLN seeking psychological care for its freedom fighters. By February 1955, FLN representatives were meeting with Fanon and arranging for militants to be housed in his hospital. He developed a close relationship with FLN commander

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<sup>123</sup> Macey, 210.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>125</sup> Macey, 228, 229, 233, 234.

Silmane Dehilés who represented the Marxist wing of the movement.<sup>126</sup> Gordon also reveals that Fanon used his hospital and medical training as a site on which to train FLN militants:

Fanon's response was to use Blida-Joinville's grounds to train FLN members to become nurses and medics. He instructed them how to resist divulging secrets when under interrogation, which invariably mean when under torture, and how to utilize ordinary materials as implements of war.<sup>127</sup>

In this way, Fanon transformed the hospital, which was previously the site where French hegemonic military power was reproduced, into a space of revolutionary action against the French state. He continued to treat members of the FLN alongside French soldiers until his explosion from Algeria in 1957.<sup>128</sup> This four year period represents a break between Fanon and the French Left and the articulation of his anti-colonial theory.

Perhaps the most insightful look into Fanon's medical practice occurs in his own essay, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" published in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this essay Fanon presents multiple case studies of patients experiencing psychiatric fallout from the Algerian War of Independence. Notably, the cases Fanon chooses to highlight involve both French and Algerian patients, posited on opposite sides of the conflict and nonetheless experiencing similar psychiatric harm from the omnipresent trauma of colonial war. Case number 4 in series A highlights a European Police Officer experiencing depression after being involved in a number of torture scenarios. The following case, no. 5, involves another European police officer who after conducting multiple torture sessions of FLN freedom fighters, began torturing his own wife and children at home. Fanon notes,

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<sup>126</sup> Hudis, 73.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon, 83.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

This man knew perfectly well that all his problems stemmed directly from the type of work conducted in the interrogation rooms, though he tried to blame everything on “the troubles.” As he has no intention of giving up his job as a torturer (this would make no sense since he would then have to resign) he asked me in plain language to help him torture Algerian patriots without having a guilty conscience, without any behavioral problems, and with a total peace of mind.<sup>129</sup>

These accounts not only demonstrate the cognitive dissonance taking place within the French psyche, which conceives of the multiyear Algerian war as “the troubles,” but also frame the violence and neurosis of these patients as a consequence of the colonial condition rather than as emanating from a natural state. In his own words, Fanon writes “this case revealed the existence of a coherent system that leaves nothing intact.”<sup>130</sup> Fanon’s inclusion of colonial figures in his analysis is brilliant in its denaturalization of the state of colonial occupation and war in Algeria. Returning to his previous thesis that “man is nothing” these case studies demonstrate that violence exhibited by anyone living within the colonial system is a product of that system rather than reflective of a natural state.<sup>131</sup> Put differently, the colonial context is an unhealthy and neurotic state which produces violence. It is important to note the tension here between Fanon’s diagnosis of a “situational neurosis” and his reproduction of Eurocentric psychiatric medicine that historically relied on the assumption of a universal (read: European) consciousness. As Shohat writes

Fanon and Azoulay came to realize that they has been the unconscious “carriers” of the French assimilationist model within the mental institution itself. But within this asymmetrical situation, Fanon at least tried to unravel the fictitious

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<sup>129</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 198.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 199, fn 25.

<sup>131</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 6.

universalism of psychoanalysis and psychiatry by placing theory and practice in dialogue.<sup>132</sup>

However, we must remember to place Fanon's movement across these tensions within a larger colonial war which necessitated medical care. Considering the Algerian context allows us to remember that Fanon's practice was revolutionary in that it pushed back against the French ethnocentric, alienating gaze upon its colonial subjects. As Fanon's intern, Jacques Azoulay testifies: "There were no chains in Blida. The originality of Fanon does not need that myth. Fanon freed something in the patients, something beyond their illness. He succeeded in liberating his patients from an ethnocentric gaze. That is his innovation."<sup>133</sup>

Fanon dedicates the majority of "Colonial War and Mental Disorder," however, to the conditions of the colonized and tortured. Fanon chronicles a number of physical, mental, and psychosomatic consequences of colonial war including anorexia, depression, delusions, criminality, and sexual impotence. In establishing a connection between these disorders and the colonial condition, Fanon counters the biological determinism of the Algiers School of Psychiatry which he works within. Referencing the 1918 work, *Annales Médico-Psychologiques* by A. Porot, Fanon writes,

We must recall the semiology elaborated by the school of Algiers. The "native," it says, presents the following characteristic:

- complete or almost complete lack of emotivity
- highly credulous and suggestible
- doggedly stubborn
- childlike mentality minus the curiosity of the European child
- prone to accidents and pithiatic reactions.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Shohat, 258.

<sup>133</sup> Nedjari Al, John Wilson, Gary Brown, Mark Nash, Isaac Julien, Colin Salmon, Al Nedjari, et al. 1996. *Frantz Fanon: black skin, white mask*. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel.

<sup>134</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 224.



At this point, it should be clear that the Algiers school and the psychiatric treatment derived from it functioned to concretize the hierarchy of the colonial vulgate through the biological essentializing of its colonial subjects. Fanon's detailed accounts of his patients in Blida, engaged in criminality or suffering from mental disorders, *due* to the conditions of French colonial rule works to dismantle the logic of the colonial vulgate through psychiatric practice.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, Fanon's detailed and often gruesome accounts of mental disorders and torture through this essay add an important dimension to his work in "On Violence." For anyone still unconvinced that this essay is not a call to arms, Fanon's nuanced understanding of the tangible consequences of violent struggle should convince us that while Fanon does not call for violence—and may even detest it—he is acutely aware that violent struggle is the natural consequence of the un-natural event of colonization.

### ***Against Une Mission Civilisatrice: Identifying the Violence of Western Medical Frameworks***

Gallois underscores the forefront of Medicine in French colonization in his work on Algerian doctors working in colonial Algeria between 1870 and 1900. He asserts that the accounts of these doctors represent the contradiction between medicine as a justification for colonial conquest and medicine as a site of Algerian opposition to French imperialism.

Accordingly, the personal testimonies and resistances of Algerian doctors in the late nineteenth century should be understood as the foundation on which Fanon articulated and institutionalized

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 233: "The criminality of the Algerian, his impulsiveness, the savagery of his murders are not, therefore the consequence of how his nervous system is organized or specific character traits, but the direct result of the colonial situation."

medical opposition to France.<sup>136</sup> Here we can turn to Fanon's work as constitutive of this central irony. Fanon worked within a French psychiatric hospital in Algeria, yet his position working in this medical capacity for the French state allowed him to identify medical interactions as sites of resistance. In "Medicine and Colonialism," an essay in Fanon's collection *A Dying Colonialism* he describes the interactions between the colonized patient and the colonial doctor as the site on which the fundamental violence of colonization is enacted *and* relatedly, the site which represents the fundamental dichotomy(ies) between the colonial and colonized populations. We see in this essay, published in 1960, the way in which medical colonization shaped Fanon's revolutionary praxis. Put differently, Fanon, the revolutionary, acted within and through French institutions of medicine to formulate and apply revolutionary psychiatric practice alongside revolutionary organizations such as la Front de la Liberation Nationale.

Careful attention to Fanon's footnotes reveal his assessment of medicine in Algeria as a capital enterprise in which European doctors profited off exploitation of Algerian subjects. Fanon claims that Algerians and "sub-saharan infantrymen" were subject to psychological experimentation to determine the "threshold of each race." Equally striking is his assertion that frequently French doctors would scam and mistreat patients for profit:

Medical practice in the colonies very often assumes an aspect of systemized piracy. Injections of twice-distilled water, billed as penicillin or vitamin B-12, chest X-rays, radiotherapy sessions 'to stabilize a cancer,' given by a doctor who has no radiological equipment, are examples. In the latter case the doctor need only place the patient behind a sheet and after 15 or 20 minutes announce that the session is over.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> William Gallois, "Local Responses to French Medical Imperialism in Late Nineteenth-Century Algeria." *Social History of Medicine* 20:2 (2007): 315–31, 318.

<sup>137</sup> Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 124, fn 1, 133, fn 4.

In a further testament to the brutality of French medicine, Fanon demonstrates the role of doctors in practices of torture. European doctors were frequently called on to testify on behalf of the French state in cases involving Algerians who were held in police custody, their assessments always concluded that no torture had occurred. Algerian doctors were prohibited from being appointed as experts.<sup>138</sup> Fanon describes French doctors' use of a psychoactive chemical substance which he called the "truth serum" (Pentothal) during torture sessions and writes "Everything—heart stimulants, massive doses of vitamins—is used before, during, and after the sessions to keep the Algerian hovering between life and death."<sup>139</sup> Equally disturbing is the manipulation of trust and strategic framing of medicine as benevolent event when it exists to enhance torture:

The scene goes as follows: First of all, the psychiatrist states "I am a doctor, not a policeman. I'm here to help you." Thus the prisoner's trust is won after a few days, Then: "I'm going to give you a dew shots to clear your head." For several days all kinds of vitamins, heart stimulants and other placebos are administered. On the fourth or fifthly the Pentothal is injected intravenously. The interrogation begins.<sup>140</sup>

These examples are poignant and naturally complicate the French rhetoric of a civilizing and humanitarian colonial mission, but Fanon's most crucial point on the relationship between medicine and capital is his connection between doctors and land ownership. The predictable yet crucial reality that European doctors in Algeria enjoyed a higher standard of living than their colleagues in the metropole and "almost always" owner agriculture-producing land should in our minds—like it did for Fanon—center medicine as an active component to the colonial project

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 137, 138.

<sup>140</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 212.

rather than an appendage and therefore mark it as an essential site for revolutionary action. The colonial doctor *is* the colonial project, his land is his profit upheld by the flimsy facade of medical aid.<sup>141</sup> In Fanon's own words the doctor is the "spokesman for the occupying power" he is central to it and the face of it.<sup>142</sup> We should pay special attention to the importance of land here as the re-acquisition of land is a prominent theme in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Not only does Fanon valorize rural, land-working populations, in his assessment land is everything: "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity."<sup>143</sup> Fanon identifies that the colonization of land and colonial medicine are mutually constitutive practices which both must be obliterated on the path to liberation.

However, this is not the only argument of "Medicine and Colonization." Rather, Fanon seeks to demonstrate that the colonizer is operating within an entirely different paradigm of life, death, and health from the colonized. For the problem is not simply that France mobilized medicine as a weapon against colonized populations, but rather that in the dichotomous situation of a colonial encounter, medicine epitomizes hegemonic European conceptions of progress over that of the colonized. The deep-seated irony is that the life that colonial medicine seeks to extend is naturally shortened by the violent Eurocentric paradigms imposed by a colonial regime. Fanon writes:

There is, first of all, the fact that the colonized person, who in this respect is like the mean in underdeveloped countries or the disinherited in all parts of the world,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 134: "The colonialists arrogance, the contempt for the client, the hateful brutality toward the indigent are more or less contained in the formula, 'I don't have to sit around waiting for clients to make a living.'"

<sup>142</sup> Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 131.

<sup>143</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 9.

perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. This ever-menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future.<sup>144</sup>

Where European history conceives of death as a fundamental obstacle in human progress, Fanon takes a different approach. He contends that for the colonized, death is part of life, an “omnipresent force” rather than an enemy of existence. This is not to say that Fanon essentialises the colonized relationship with death. Rather, he argues that within the European colonial dialectic, colonization is figured as synonymous with the dominance of nature, that is, the control over life. In this binary conception of life/death as parallel with civilization/nature (or perhaps more accurately, colonial/native), the indigenous person is necessarily the site of disease and death which the colonizer has come to liberate with European enlightenment rationality.<sup>145</sup> In fact, Fanon claims that this dynamic is essentially what colonization is: “A hostile, ungovernable, and fundamentally rebellious Nature is in fact synonymous in the colonies with the bush, the mosquitoes, the natives, and disease. Colonization has succeeded once this untamed Nature has been brought under control.”<sup>146</sup> In the context in which he is writing, however, the nature that colonization attempts to control is the natural state of disease. European medical intervention exists within a specific life/death binary framework which is ultimately exported to the colony.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 128.

<sup>145</sup> This should bring us back to the work of Trentaz.

<sup>146</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 182.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid: “All this gnawing at the existence of the colonized tends to make of life something resembling an incomplete death. Acts of refusal or rejection of medical treatment are not a refusal of life, but a greater passivity before that close and contagious death.” Put differently, Fanon later speaks of the psychological toll which colonization places upon the colonized’s will to live. In a system of consistent exploitation, bodily violence, and material raid, the colonized subject experiences something akin to ego death in which erodes the life drive: “This object man, without means of existing, with a *raison d’être*, is broken in the very depth of his substance. The desire to live, to continue, becomes more and more indecisive, more and more phantom-like.” Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, 35.

In this way, Fanon argues that the body of the colonized medical patient becomes the battleground on which the opposing forces of colonial medicine and traditional treatments fight not just for a medical cure, but for ontological hegemony.<sup>148</sup> As a result, the colonized patient always will interpret colonial medical intervention as an aggression and humiliation against not only herself, but her larger native community.<sup>149</sup> However, it is equally important to keep in mind that French colonial medicine, despite constituting itself as a life-prolonging mission was regularly used to the opposite end as a tool of torture and medical fraud.

I have argued that medical colonization in Algeria was central to the production of scientifically codified orientalist literature of North Africa and served to rigidly bifurcate European and Algerian populations. While Said writes of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt as a key historic moment in the European invention of North Africa and the Middle East, the medical colonization of Algeria which took place 30 years later was a continuation of this project. The work of Fanon, through a denaturing of European medical practice, represents a moment of resistance through the negotiation between colonial institutional models and revolutionary paradigms. Fanon's anti-colonial theory which exists within colonial institutions yet offers a radical deconstruction of colonial practice, is consistently ripe with tension yet embodies a revolutionary dismantling of the European colonial dialectic.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 126.

## CONCLUSION

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

- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

In his masterpiece, *What Fanon Said*, Gordon names five historical stages in the development of “Fanon studies:” reaction; biography; social and political science; colonial and postcolonial critique; and pragmatic use for continued development of thought.<sup>150</sup> I contend that two of the most telling pieces in the development of Fanon studies are Issac Julien and Göran Olsson respective films: *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1998) and *Concerning Violence* (2014). Julien’s film combines documentary and live action to engage in a detailed, theoretical unpacking of Fanon’s works. It features interviews with many of Fanon’s family members as well as scholars including Francois Vèrges, Stuart Hall, and Alice Cherki. In the film, Fanon, played by Colin Salmon, is stoic and calm. His character does not read like a revolutionary. Rather, he is most often a silent observer. He frequently sits mute at the edge of the frame playing the attentive but wordless psychiatrist as other characters take the center to offer testimony of their experience with torture and colonial war. It seems like in Julien’s assessment, Fanon is not a violent revolutionary. Rather, he is a doctor who is profoundly moved by the colonial condition in Algeria and responds accordingly. Julien offers a nuanced portrait of Fanon accompanied by some highly critical commentary. Vèrges repeats (or more likely states for the first time) her opinion that to Fanon, the Algerian revolutionary male was the antidote to the feminized castrated Martinique who succumbed to colonization. Mohammad Harbi, a former member of the FLN accuses Fanon of being an outsider to Arab society who was only interested

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<sup>150</sup> Gordon, 3.

in associating with the intelligentsia. Hall similarly comments that Fanon did not understand the “deeply religious” nature of Algerian society. We are left with an understanding of Fanon as a mysterious and slightly impenetrable character. He embodies both perceptivity of the colonial condition and an unconscious desire for a masculine revolutionary experience.

Olsson’s *Concerning Violence* takes some what of an opposite approach. It is not about Fanon at all. Rather the film presents multiple scenes of footage from anti-colonial guerrilla movements across Africa in the 1960s and 70s. The narrator (Ms. Lauryn Hill) somberly reads dissonant phrases from *The Wretched of the Earth* (on which the film claims to be based) focusing almost exclusively on “On Violence” and the conclusion. Algeria is entirely absent from the film and aside from a two minute introduction from Gayatri Spivak, so is Fanon. Olsson compiles shocking and important footage of colonial projects in Africa which demonstrate that colonial violence exists in the cultural and economic domination of the colonizer as much as their physical force. However, his thesis is bland: colonialism is violent and Fanon argues that the colonized must respond with violence. I hope, if nothing else, this thesis has shown why such a simplified interpretation of *The Wretched of the Earth* does not do Fanon justice.

I am concerned with these films because they represents two of the rhetorical “traps” we get stuck in when remembering Fanon. The first, which we see in Julien’s work, is the trap centering the study of Fanon on what others have said about him. Julien does not do this exclusively; Fanon is present through his image and character. However, as opposed to . That is, what he said and what ideas he grappled with. Olsson on the other hand falls into the trap of reading Fanon’s work completely out of context. He reproduces only the surface level of what Fanon says, and despite his effort to frame it as justified, Olsson still falls into the trap of



presenting Fanon's work as a call to violence. In this thesis, I attempt to move away from these two approaches which are each reductive in their own ways. What interests me is a close analysis of Fanon's texts— that is, as Gordon put it, *What Fanon Said*. Through a critical rereading of Fanon we see that the genius of his work lies in its epistemic negotiations. Fanon identifies that the colonial world ruptures the paradox of enlightenment humanism by exhibiting that this humanism is built on the *negation* of the other. In this way, Fanon pushes against the limitations of colorblind humanism and appropriates Eurocentric frameworks of thought against the colonial structures they uphold. Understanding this nuance requires both a close reading of Fanon's texts themselves and an understanding of the epistemologies they build from. Rereading Fanon also requires rereading the Algerian colonial project because it was within this historical context that Fanon enacted his revolutionary praxis. Fanon deconstructed the contradictions of French Algeria through a calculated manipulation of its medical institutions. His interventions at the psychiatric hospital transformed it from a site where the native Algerian became locked in their racial alienation to a training ground for liberation from the colonial structure and colonial gaze. Just as France constructed colonial Algeria through medical colonization, Fanon dismantled through medical practice.

Studying Fanon should leave us with questions. I still have many. One of the most pressing being, how do we place women in Fanon's dialectic? If Fanon's writing strives to reframe existing epistemes to include ontologies of blackness, can we do the same with his work and gender? In other words, can we apply the work Fanon does to deconstruct binaries in the colonial context to the question of gender rather than dismiss his work? And what about Josie? How does her intricate and forgotten role in Frantz Fanon's life play into these questions? Josie

Fanon died in 1989 by suicide, but she dedicated her life after Fanon's death to working and writing for liberation in Algeria. I hope that further study of Fanon—my own included—will explore her role as Frantz's partner and intellectual companion more deeply. I also question how Fanon's work can inform our understanding of Algeria today. To better unpack the lasting political unrest including the Algerian civil war from 1991 to 2002 and the ousting of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019 we might return to "Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity" and "The Trials and Tribulations of National Conciseness" in which Fanon argues that when the colonial metropole transfers power to the nationalist bourgeoisie, there is no real emancipation from the colonial system. How studying Fanon can shape scholarly, political, and revolutionary approaches to present day Algeria—and the Middle East more broadly—is an ongoing question which I feel has not yet been adequately addressed in the growing field of Fanon studies but offers incredible potential for finding new frameworks to understand existing socio-political unrest. I am particularly interested in further integrating Fanon's work into scholarly approaches to the Middle East. What Fanon gives us is a framework to begin to unpack the interlocking construction of colonial histories, political hegemony, and epistemic violence. To determine how, why, and to what end we continue to use Fanon we must continue to read, reread, and question.

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