

Albert Memmi

The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon

Translation and Notes by
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THE NORTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE for liberation from French colonialism produced two universally significant formulations of the conflict between colonized and colonizer: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Albert Memmi and *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon. Both authors were personally involved in the liberation struggle and yet in a sense both were outsiders to the two contesting camps. They were outsiders within the Moslem majority in North Africa whose cause they made their own, since Memmi, though a native Tunisian, was a Jew and Fanon a West Indian of Christian background; and as colonials of a different "racial" origin they found themselves equally outsiders among the French with whom they shared a common cultural background through their education (Memmi, like Fanon, was educated in French schools and studied philosophy and psychology in France).

Starting from such similar experiences Memmi and Fanon developed widely divergent perspectives on the conflict between colonizer and colonized, between oppressor and oppressed. While Fanon sought to involve himself in the conflict by denying and transcending the identity imposed upon him by historical circumstances, Memmi tried to combine involvement in the struggle against oppression with the affirmation and exploration of the diverse elements that constitute his historical identity. Memmi is a writer who has moved back and forth between works of fiction (*The Pillar of Salt*, *Strangers*, *Le scorpion*) and socio-psychological treatises (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, *Portrait of a Jew*, *The Liberation of the Jew*, *Dominated Man*¹) in

FIRST NORTH AMERICAN SERIAL RIGHTS, *The Massachusetts Review*, 1973.

¹ All English translations of Memmi's works are published by Orion Press, N.Y. *Le scorpion* is published by Gallimard, Paris. Memmi has also edited two anthologies of North African writing in French: *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression française* (1965) and *Anthologie des écrivains français du Maghreb* (1969), both published by Présence Africaine, Paris, as well as *Bibliographie de la littérature nord-africaine d'expression française, 1945-1962*; Paris: Mouton, 1965. (Translators' note)

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an attempt to construct a typology of what he has come to call "Dominated Man." His novels take the form of autobiographical fiction while his theoretical works convert elements of his experience into more abstract, impersonal insights. All his books, however, give us fragments of an answer to the same recurring questions: In what manner does the phenomenon of oppression, or domination, shape the psychological and cultural personality of the oppressed? And what are the possible ways in which the oppressed, the colonized, persecuted, dominated individual can break out of the circle of oppression and give substance to the ideal of a universal humanism?

As Memmi indicates in this essay, he and Fanon knew each other in Tunis, where Memmi worked as psychologist and director of an institute of child psychology at the time when Fanon was editor of *El Moudjahid* and psychiatrist at a local hospital. Now, almost fifteen years later, Memmi has drawn on the many points of contact between himself and Fanon to give us an essay that is at one and the same time a personal testimony to Fanon and an evaluation of Fanon's career, viewed as one possible model for the dominated individual's revolt against the conditions of his oppression. This essay brings us one side of a dialogue; it is one of the sad consequences of Fanon's early death that we can never hope to read the essay on Memmi that Fanon might have written in reply.

—T. C.

IN HIS SHORT LIFE, Frantz Fanon experienced at least three serious failures. Born in a French department, he believed himself French and White. When he went to study in the capital he made the painful discovery that in the mother country he was West Indian and Black.

Infuriated, he decided that he would be neither French nor West Indian, but Algerian: were not the North Africans, like himself, the dupes and the victims of this same mother country? But the solidarity of the oppressed is another illusion: by what miracle, without changing his skin and losing all memory, was he going to transform himself into a white Arab, and Moslem to boot when he was Christian by birth?

Thereupon, he decided to construct a United Africa, where frontiers of skin and cultural prejudice would no longer count and where even a Black West Indian would belong. Unfortunately, those who were most directly concerned, that is to say, Africans, Black or White, Fetishist, Moslem or Christian, each one preoccupied with constructing his nation and his own universe, were as far as possible from such a communion.

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In order to complete this forward movement, in order to resolve his personal predicament, what was left for him if not to propose a totally unprecedented man, in a totally reconstructed world? Such was in fact the ultimate thesis of his last written work: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new beginning, develop new thought, try to create a new man."² Apocalypse and universal reconstruction are indeed the ultimate way out of such a total despair.

I

WHEN YOUNG FRANTZ LEFT his native island for the first time, his identification with France was still absolute. Much more so, assuredly, than was true of most of the colonized in the French Empire. This is what explains, in part at least, the violence of the inverse movement with Fanon. The wider the swing of the pendulum, the more painful is the break. For too long a time the West Indians believed they were behaving like authentic Frenchmen, especially in the middle and lower-middle classes to which Fanon belonged. And it is true that everything was done to make them believe it, thanks to the unbelievable juridical fiction that these West Indian islands, separated from the rest of France by several thousand kilometers, are French departments, like Brittany or Alsace. In any case, when General DeGaulle appealed to the West Indies to defend the Motherland it was quite natural for Fanon to enlist, together with his school friends, in the armed forces of Free France. Even today certain West Indians, especially in the older generation, still speak of *their* France.

What has not been so well understood, is that the identification continued until quite late in his life, until well after Fanon set foot on the cherished soil, where he discovered that the Motherland was quite willing to have Black children, upon

²Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968, p. 255. All subsequent references will be to the American translations of Fanon, published by Grove Press.

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condition that everyone, herself included, would pretend not to notice their color. It is true that he came to defend her and that in the heat of battle communion is closer and differences are scarcely thought about. More than ever, Fanon said *Us* at that time in speaking of France and the French.

It was only when peace returned and the French strove to forget all those who came from so far to deliver them, that Fanon discovered, or finally admitted, the importance of everyday racism. Then his memories and bitterness returned and took shape. But even then, it was as a Frenchman by right and affirmation that he viewed discrimination and the many petty aggressions which it brought him every day on the sidewalks of Paris or Lyon. He was a Black-skinned Frenchman, exposed to the delusions, the stupidities and the spitefulness of his fellow White-skinned citizens. I am neither inventing anything nor putting words in Fanon's mouth: all one has to do is not to read him merely in the light of his Algerian period. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, while discussing a study on discrimination that had appeared in the review *Présence Africaine*, Fanon gave a firm answer to those intellectuals who, more or less timidly and in good faith, alluded to possible differences between White metropolitan French and the Blacks. Fanon replied firmly: "What is this business of Black people, of Negro nationality? I am French. I am interested in French culture, French civilization, the French people" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 203).

Then he left to take up his position at the Blida-Joinville hospital. But this did not mean that he considered himself an Algerian: Fanon still considered himself a Frenchman even in Algeria. After a brief interval he resigned (yet it took three years: he was appointed in 1953 and resigned in 1956). Critics have taken note of the important sentences in the letter he sent to the minister concerning the measures taken against the participants in the strike of July 5, 1956. What has not been sufficiently noted is that he made his protest in the name of humanism and the respect due humanity in general, represented here by the Algerian Arab. He still protested as an outsider,

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specifically as a French citizen: he explained that his “duty as a French citizen” obliged him to resign. This obligation “must take precedence over any desire not to launder French family linen in public. No pseudo-national mystification can find any validity in face of the exigencies of thought” (*Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 52–54). He concludes his letter by assuring “Monsieur le Ministre” of his high esteem. The least one can say is that his commitment to revolution and above all to Algeria was still incomplete.

The Algerian period of his life really began only at this point. It was to be decisive for Fanon’s work yet it lasted only five years, including his stay in Tunisia, his travels in Africa, to the USSR and to America; the letter of resignation dates from 1956, he died in 1961. At the most this period of his life lasted eight years, if one counts the three years of gestation as a French civil servant, when he seemed entirely taken up by his profession, even though he was passionately concerned with the population in his care and endeavored to reform the hospital system. Nor has there been much questioning about the profound significance of this extraordinary adventure, as if the political correctness of a line of conduct accounted for its motivations, as if it went without saying that a Black West Indian intellectual could some day become an Algerian patriot, with so absolute a self-sacrifice that he would die from it, refusing to spare his meager declining strength, in spite of the objurgations of his own comrades-in-arms.

Did Fanon at least have a particular interest in the Algerians, was he disposed to such a choice by previous affinities, by former friendships? On the contrary, nothing prepared him for Algeria. When he began his practice in Paris, he occasionally treated North African workers. This gave him the opportunity to publish a short study in the review *Esprit*. Certainly he defended the Algerians and suggested how lost and anguished they were in front of a doctor who was foreign to their civilization. But that is the point; he found himself in the position of a doctor who is foreign to his patients, while they appeared exotic to him. He even regards them with the nuance

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of disorientation and anxiety, which even a "progressive" European experiences upon contact with these strange people from a distant land.

"All these men who cause *us* fear, who break the jealous emerald of *our* dreams, who upset the fragile curve of *our* smiles, all these men facing *us*, who do not ask *us* anything, but of whom *we* ask strange questions. What are they?"

"What are they in truth, these creatures, who conceal themselves, who are concealed by social reality under the attributes of *bicots, bougnoules, arabes, sidi, mon z'ami*."³

I have purposely emphasized the *us* and *our* of the text. Fanon considered himself so unlike an Algerian or North African that he utilized the French collective pronoun. Not only did he not belong with North African workers, on contact with them he even experienced a certain apprehension welling up from his unconscious.

When later he thought of leaving France, where he no longer felt at ease, in order to work elsewhere, he first thought of Black Africa and not Algeria. He did not even choose Africa for political or sentimental reasons, neither was it out of curiosity for the land of his Black ancestors. An American author, Peter Geismar,⁴ who shows great enthusiasm and admiration for Fanon's works, has asked himself this question and investigated the subject. All these reasons perhaps unconsciously played a part, but it seems that Fanon primarily sought a more convenient field of research, in a better equipped psychiatric center, and perhaps also a position with better pay. We do not know why he ultimately did not go to Black Africa, nor why he decided on Algeria: probably because that was where he was offered a position.

Then why Algeria and the Algerians? Certainly Algeria was engaged in a war that Fanon deemed just; he thought that as a militant he had to help. But he went further and

³ Fanon, Frantz. *Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 3-4. *Bicots*, etc. are derogatory terms used by the French when speaking of the North African Arabs.

⁴ Geismar, Peter. *Fanon*. New York: The Dial Press, 1970. See especially pp. 59-60.

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made of Algeria the center of his existence, of his thought and of his work. Why did he believe it necessary to join so totally in the struggle that he thought himself transformed into an Algerian and consented to die for Algeria?

II

THE IDENTIFICATION of the former Black slave with the White nation which enslaved and then apparently adopted him, inevitably contains a subtle poison: the success of the operation—if one can speak of success—demands that the Black man renounce himself as Black. It must be admitted that for a long time the Black himself consented to the White man's monstrous demand. This is understandable: it is not up to the powerful to become more like the weak; assimilation takes place from the dominated to the dominant, from the dominated culture to the dominating culture, hardly ever in the inverse sense. Such is the price, in any case, for what appears to both partners as a rise in social status. Now as one of the results of this unnatural effort, the war waged by the White against the Black also brings about a war of the Black against himself, a war that is perhaps even more destructive, for it is unremittingly carried on from within. I shall not go further into the mechanism of self-rejection, which I described at length in connection with the colonized and the Jew.⁵ Fanon recounts that when as a child he happened to be particularly unbearable, his own mother told him not "to act like a nigger" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 191). And no doubt henceforth throughout his life, Fanon unconsciously or not tried not to play the "nigger," for the "Black is not a man" (*Ibid.*). He was not alone in this: the West Indians in general made fun of the Senegalese and other African savages because the West Indians did not consider themselves Black. This first and decisive split contains the germ of Fanon's tragedy.

That is why it came as such a thunderbolt (and scandal) for Martinique and the adolescent Fanon as well, when his teacher

⁵ In *The Colonizer and the Colonized and Dominated Man*.

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and long-time hero Aimé Césaire,⁶ already a recognized West Indian poet, proclaimed one day that “Black is beautiful.” This marked a proclamation of the end of the “White Illusion.” It gave the West Indian permission finally to take off his White mask, which he believed he had to wear in order to get ahead in the world. But what should replace this White mask? Did this mark a new era of self-affirmation? Should the West Indian decide to engage in battle together with his people, for their liberation and his own? It is at this moment that the specific destiny of Fanon emerges and that one can glimpse his ultimate political and intellectual personality. When a dominated man has understood the impossibility of assimilation to the dominator, he generally returns to himself, to his people, to his past, sometimes, as I have indicated, with excessive vigor, transfiguring this people and this past to the point of creating counter-myths. When Fanon finally discovered the fraud of assimilating West Indians into French citizens, he broke with France and the French with all the passion of which his fiery temperament was capable. He would henceforth have to combat this first love, to tear it out of him, with a violence all the more painful because he had believed in it and made it a part of himself. He would have to battle France in order to fight this aspect of his personality and ultimately become himself. Yet it was Fanon’s particular tragedy that, while henceforth he hated his former colonizer, he never again returned to Negritude and the West Indies.

This is a solution to which only few among the oppressed have had recourse. By now we are well acquainted with the principal responses of the oppressed to his condition: the oppressed either rejects or accepts himself, accepts or rejects the colonial model. Most frequently, rejection and affirmation are intimately intertwined in variable proportions, according to the particular moment in the hero’s itinerary and the historical

⁶ Aimé Césaire: poet, playwright and political leader from Martinique who coined the expression *Negritude* in his famous poem, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939). He was Fanon’s teacher at the lycée in Fort de France. (*Translators’ note*)

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situation. It is quite possible, indeed, that there exists a third way and that Fanon's life illustrates it: one might suppose that identification with Algeria took the place of an unattainable identification with Martinique.

When Aimé Césaire proclaimed that "Black is beautiful" and then with Senghor launched the concept of Negritude, he did not merely reject what his long stay in Paris had made out of him: a French intellectual and one of the elite graduates of the French university system, an intimate of the surrealists and a member of the French communist party. He also re-affirmed himself as West Indian and Black. He returned to his country, took a teaching position in Fort de France and became the political representative of his country. For a brief time Fanon felt enthusiasm for the daring of his former teacher, but then he took the position that Negritude was not the solution and that in resisting the *white error*, we must not yield to the Black mirage. Thereupon we see him firing red-hot broadsides into Negritude, and condemning it in the most radical terms throughout his work. Nor has enough attention been paid to the fact that he scarcely ever set foot again in Martinique. It is even more striking that with the exception of two or three instances he never discussed the problems of his native island. His friends still recall today with what scornful irony he used to refer to his former fellow countrymen when he happened to speak of them.

"When I met him in Tunis in 1958, he greeted me coldly. Well are you still politicking in the West Indies and Guiana? One of these days, France will give you a kick in the ass that will force you to seize your independence. You will owe it to Algeria, our Algeria that will turn out to have been the whore of the French colonial empire."

"Several weeks later tragic disturbances took place in Fort de France.⁷ The C.R.S. killed several islanders. I went to see him. He was jubilant: Let them gather their dead, dis-

⁷ The reference is to a riot that actually took place in December 1959, not in 1958. C.R.S.: the *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*, a French constabulary force. (*Translators' note*)

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embowel them and take them on open trucks all over town . . . let them call out to the people: look at what the colonialists have done. They'll do nothing of the sort. They'll vote symbolic protest motions, and go on rotting in poverty. Actually this outburst of anger reassures the colonialists. It's simply a psychological release, a little like certain erotic dreams. You make love with a shadow. You soil your bed. But the next day all returns to normal. You no longer think about it. . . ."⁸

It is striking that he says, *you, your, they*; he is not one of them; neither his politics nor his independence are involved; he does not consider these victims who were murdered by the C.R.S. his people, nor does he feel part of the crowd which he scorns, even while he incites them to demonstrate.

So it appears that his rejection of the West Indies and the West Indians was now categorical and final. This rejection has a long history, to be sure: it is still the same denial of himself and his people which poisoned Frantz Fanon's soul in his youth, as it has poisoned the soul of every young colonized individual who has become conscious of his condition. But in fact we find ourselves at a subsequent stage where the colonizer's role is revealed for what it is and the colonized rejects the colonial relation. This is usually the moment when the return to self takes place, when the colonized individual decides to fight for and with his people. It is clear that for Fanon this change of orientation *did not occur*. Why? We might mention here the influence of Sartre who declared that Negritude is only the weak phase in the dialectic of Black liberation. Fanon was strongly impressed by Sartre, right to the end of his life, even when he was condemning French intellectuals as a group. And when, in *Black Orpheus*, Sartre attempted to reduce Negritude to its negativity (as he had tried to reduce Jewishness to a pure look), Fanon was consternated and had the feeling he had been deprived of his identity. Despite this reaction he accepted Sartre's conclusions: "In no way should I derive my basic purpose from the past of the peoples of color.

⁸ Juminer, Bertène. "Homage to Frantz Fanon." *Présence Africaine*, No. 40, 1962, p. 138.

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In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization . . . I have no wish to be the victim of the Fraud of the Black world. My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 226–229).

However even if we may perhaps agree with Sartre that Negritude—like Jewishness—marks a relatively negative up-beat in the dialectic, it is still necessary to live this phase before passing on to the next one; and the fact that it is lived gives it a very heavy weight of positiveness. Sartre's error as always is that he is not sufficiently aware that even negativity and misfortune, when they are lived, become in a way flesh and blood, that is positivity (just as he has not been aware enough of the importance of a people's affirmations, even when these are very humble or obfuscated by hallucinations and myths). In any case, every stage counts in the long march of a people towards its liberation and it is quite meaningless to disdain one or the other of these stages by calling it negative. Fanon, incidentally, foresaw this weakness in Sartre's thesis, even though he ended up by resigning himself to it because it met his need. Why did Fanon end by refusing to commit himself to his own people, who were irritated and resentful of his attitude, though in the end the younger generation rediscovered him by the round-about way of Africa and revolution? His propensity for repeating ceaselessly: "I am an Algerian . . . we Algerian patriots," which so irritated the West Indians, can be traced back to the fact that, whether he was aware of it or not, he had no expectation of finding the solution to his problem in his own people.

Fanon therefore broke with France, the French people and Europe; but he could not be content with a verbal rupture; he could not have settled down in Normandy, for example, in order to engage, with the aid of several other exiles, in a vague opposition on principle. He had to tear himself loose to the last fiber and eradicate what had constituted his life up to that point: the young man who had enlisted in the ranks of the Free French, the student at the medical school in Lyon, the

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doctor who practiced in French hospitals, the husband of a French woman (here again critics scarcely mention the significance of this marriage). "I say the hell with Europe. Its culture, its diplomas, the social conditions which it tolerates are just so many instruments of domination. We must junk it all and say to ourselves that we have nothing to lose. Otherwise, no liberation is possible."⁹

Would not the best solution for him have been to return home to the West Indies, to become one of the leaders of the revolt against Europe and France, and to identify his revolt with that of his people? That is what immediately comes to mind. Only his own people were not ready for revolt. In a certain manner of speaking it was the West Indies that betrayed Fanon, it was his country which revealed itself incapable of furnishing him with the psychological and historical remedy to his tragic situation. The failure of Martinique immediately to undertake its own liberation is also the sign of its powerlessness to aid Fanon, who remained alone with his revolt.

Black Skin, White Masks contains a curious attempt to explain the psychological disturbance of the colonized personality: he is said to be stricken with "abandonitis." Frantz Fanon borrowed this theory from a little known psychological work by Germaine Guex, that makes no mention of the colonized but seems to have impressed Fanon a great deal. One borrows only what one needs: Fanon had enough personal experience with this feeling of abandonment to make it the pivot of the colonized's conduct. Once he discovered the frightful betrayal by the White mother country, he felt himself forsaken. Worse yet, he realized that he had always been forsaken, that he had never been a true child of his country. Like every colonized individual he would gladly have turned to his native land with all his demands, to the only homeland of which he could henceforth be sure. Provided, of course, that it could be both father and motherland, so to speak, provided that it might

⁹ Fanon's words as reported by Bertène Juminer in *Présence Africaine*, No. 40, 1962, p. 139.

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remedy the abandonment in which he found himself. That is just what Martinique could not do. "The tragedy," wrote Césaire, "is that doubtless this West Indian would not have found West Indians of his stature, and would have been isolated among his people."¹⁰

When the colonized finally recovers his identity, he needs to find the psychological and material resources to succeed in his combat against the oppressor. Beyond this he needs to reconstruct his identity, to acknowledge his past and to have a more or less clear vision of his future. For the time being, at least, Martinique could help Fanon in neither of these endeavors, neither in the negative nor positive effort to free himself. As a department of France, Martinique still believed too much in its integration into the French community to view it as an outsider. Martinique did not even dare imagine separation from France. Revolt and armed struggle seemed scandalously matricidal, even though the mother was suspected of not being a very good mother. Was Fanon then going to fight alone?

On the other hand, what precisely was the cultural, even mythical past of Martinique, what original patrimony and language could the inhabitants claim as their own and draw strength from to face the whole world and especially the oppressor? Creole lacks the range of expression that can support a country's entire spiritual and intellectual life. And worst of all it is so intermingled with French that the colonizer would in any case be present in the thought and soul of the colonized. Here we meet an extraordinary difficulty that is present as well in certain other situations where the dominated individual has been subjected so completely and for such a long time, that he does not even have an autonomous cultural personality and is unsure of the content of his liberty even while he fights for it. It is no accident that Fanon has been best understood and taken up most by Black Americans who suffer from domination of this sort. In short, Fanon needed another way, a third

¹⁰ Césaire, Aimé. "Homage to Frantz Fanon." *Présence Africaine*, No. 40, 1962, p. 133.

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solution which was neither France nor Martinique. At this point he discovered Algeria.

III

THE EXTRAORDINARY ALGERIAN PHASE of Frantz Fanon's life has been accepted as a matter of course. Yet it is scarcely believable. A man who has never set foot in a country decides within a rather brief span of time that this people will be his people, this country his country until death, even though he knows neither its language nor its civilization and has no particular ties to it. He eventually dies for this cause and is buried in Algerian soil.

Nor has it been pointed out sufficiently how far Fanon went in this feeling for Algeria. Critics have done justice to his total political commitment, of course, and have marvelled at it. What seems unusual and disturbing to me, and of deeper significance, is that he now identified himself with Algeria as he formerly did with France and never could with Martinique.

Towards the end of 1956 or the beginning of 1957, he settled in Tunis with the staff of *El Moudjahid*, the Algerian nationalist newspaper. In September, 1957, for the first time to my knowledge, he wrote *We* in speaking of the Algerians (Cf. *Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 57-63). This was less than one year after he first took on expressly political responsibilities. In the same text he spoke of "National Territory" as if it were the territory of his own nation. In February, 1958, he took another step towards this identification and made it more specific and exclusive. He addressed the Tunisians in the following words: "*We* say to the Tunisian people that we are together for better and for worse, that the blood of the Maghreb is sufficiently generous . . . etc." (*Toward the African Revolution*, p. 95). In a word he now considered himself Algerian and set himself apart from the other peoples of the Maghreb. He was now closer to the Algerians than a Tunisian or a Moroccan who shares the same language, the same culture,

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the same civilization with an Algerian. We should not be surprised by this: henceforth he was an Algerian. This was neither an off-hand remark nor a war-time slogan; a few months later, in "The Farce That Changes Sides" (*Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 96-98), he wrote again: "We Algerians, between Tunisia and Morocco." On the 16th of April he spoke of "our diplomacy" and rejected the accusations made against "our sharp-edged diplomacy." In May he wrote a "Letter to the Youth of Africa" in which he attacked a leading African politician, Houphouet-Boigny,¹¹ whom he accused of "having compromised the development of our country for many years to come." Let us note that he was at this time no more of an African than he was a Tunisian or a Moroccan. He was an Algerian speaking to the youth of relatively foreign countries. It was as an outsider that he exhorted the people of the Ivory Coast, and yet they were Black, as he was, while the Algerians were white. In October of the same year, he just as violently attacked the African gradualists because they were opposed to violence and did not want to support the Algerian war effort (*El Moudjahid*, Oct. 30, 1958. Cf. *Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 135-143).

The most astonishing expression of this development can be found in "Adresse aux Antilles."¹² Here he assured the people to whom he belonged by birth of the fraternal sympathy of the Algerian people (among whom he counted himself) and asked the West Indians to exert themselves more. His principal objective was to persuade them to help the Algerians. Any benefit to the West Indians was incidental. Whether he addressed the Ivoreans or the West Indians, his attitude, his language were the same: he spoke as an Algerian patriot. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, his last work, published

¹¹ *Toward the African Revolution*, p. 117. Houphouet-Boigny has been President of the Ivory Coast since 1960. (*Translators' note*)

¹² We have not been able to verify this reference. Memmi may be referring to Fanon's article "Aux Antilles, naissance d'une nation?" *El Moudjahid*, No. 16, Jan. 1958. (*Translators' note*)

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after his death, he went so far as to write "Our Fathers"! His identification was by then so complete that it extended even into the past, into myth. What was the sense of revolting, as we all did, against "Our Fathers the Gauls" if in the end he came up with different fictitious ancestors!¹³

One could give other examples, but there is no need. In March, 1960, he was appointed ambassador to Accra. It is true he went there to study the possibilities of transporting supplies by the southern route. He contacted the political leaders in Mali, and at his suggestion a base was set up in the Sahara for the arms route to be followed towards Wilayas I and IV.¹⁴ But even though he undertook this trip as the envoy of Algeria, he experienced a decisive change of perspective: he discovered Africa. We will come to this in a moment. Fanon came to this new phase out of a total and absolute identification with the Algerians in their struggle for independence. Clearly Algeria gave him what he had lacked for so long, a cultural patrimony and the conditions for battle. He was bound to Algeria by the ties of comradeship in battle, by the commitment of a doctor to his patients and by the profound allegiance of an intellectual to a just political cause. But all these factors must be seen in a larger context: it does not seem too rash to say that Algeria took the place of Martinique.

We should add that the Algerians spoke French and many of them had lived in France. Their intellectuals, Fanon's colleagues, had French diplomas and were steeped in the same French culture as he. As if by a miracle Fanon discovered men with whom he shared at least in part a common memory, who were revolting against the same previously well-loved enemy. Does anyone still remember today that Algeria, in distinction from Tunisia and Morocco, was considered an integral part of the Mother Country and split up into departments,

¹³ "Our Fathers the Gauls" refers to the standard history texts used in all French schools. Like all French-speaking children, irrespective of cultural background, Memmi and Fanon began their study of history in elementary school by learning about their "Gallic ancestors." (*Translators' note*)

¹⁴ Wilaya: fighting unit of the Algerian army of liberation. (*Translators' note*)

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just like Martinique? What an extraordinary encounter in a part of the world uniquely suited to Fanon's neurosis: a land where French was spoken but where one could hate France. Algeria was precisely the right substitute, in the negative and the positive sense, for Martinique which had let him down; or rather Algeria was the embellished substitute of his lost homeland. A country where the people were tortured by the French, but in retaliation could kill them. Yet, when tested against reality, any substitute, whatever it may be, sooner or later reveals both its inadequacy and fragility.

When Fanon came to Tunisia, he was not content with helping edit *El Moudjahid*, the newspaper of the Algerian rebels; he continued to practice his profession; he was granted his request to care for the patients in the psychiatric hospital of la Manouba, a suburb of Tunis. The Tunisian doctor who headed the hospital was well known to me. He was an extremely jovial and pleasant man. His training in psychiatry was limited to what he had been taught by the former French director and he had had to wait many years for his promotion. He was not too pleased at the arrival of this young colleague who was more up to date on new techniques and who had the required degrees. Moreover, this young man was extremely enterprising and intent on upsetting the established routine. It was quite normal that the head of the hospital would not be too happy, but he could think of no better way to injure his new colleague from another French colony than to call him "the nigger," although the Tunisian himself was formerly colonized and was now a free citizen of a recently liberated country. It is true that he called him "the nigger" behind his back, but nothing can be kept secret in such a small country, and certainly there were many people who took pleasure in letting Fanon know. Fanon realized that this was no different from what had happened to him with his French colleagues in Algeria, which was still a French colony. An American critic (Geismar, pp. 129-134) maintains that the head of the Manouba hospital did not merely make sarcastic remarks about Fanon's skin color, but also denounced the "Black Doctor" to

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the authorities as a possible spy and ally of the Jews.¹⁵ I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this statement.

This man was a moderate with socialist sympathies. It is not surprising that a man of right wing sympathies who still plays quite an important role in Algerian cultural affairs, Malek Bennabi, could write about Fanon: "We wrong Fanon when we make him the theoretician of the Algerian revolution, as some have tried to do. In order to speak the language of a people, one must share its convictions: yet Fanon was an Atheist."¹⁶

The Algerian and the Tunisian were in agreement with the European doctors. I am ready to admit that such opinions did not affect the intellectuals who were Fanon's close friends and comrades in the struggle. But this was not the situation among the rank-and-file militants and even less so among the common people who formed the mass of the country. Simone de Beauvoir states in her well-known *Memoirs* that this made him suffer, and she was certainly right. The Blacks were formerly as much the slaves of the Arabs as of the Europeans, and the differences between Arabs and Blacks are far from being settled. Much of the political distrust current between peoples North and South of the Sahara originates in these differences. Fanon tried to play a political role in the North where everyone is white, but he was Black and everyday reality would not let him forget it.

I have never seen the fact mentioned that Fanon was of Christian background. It is true that he himself never spoke of it and that all the exegetes of his work are revolutionaries or sympathetic to revolution; consequently they consider religion of no importance. Socialists tend to have a serious misconception of religion: they consider it on the whole a mass of superstitions exploited by the ruling class. They behave as if "the people," "the masses," took no heed of religion and con-

¹⁵ I.e., Israel. (*Translators' note*)

¹⁶ Bennabi, Malek. *Perspectives algériennes*, p. 64, quoted by A. Nadir, *Le mouvement réformiste algérien*, p. 216.

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sequently they do not make any allowance for religion in the projected reconstruction of the society of the future.

During the process of building socialism there is inevitably a moment of discovery, however, when it becomes clear that the relations between mankind and religion are far more subtle and tenacious. At this point socialists lose patience with the people and blame them instead of their own myopia. The Algerians were and still are Moslems; the Algerian state today calls itself Arab and Moslem. Fanon, it will be argued, was neither one nor the other, and he surely considered religious differences of no importance. But did the Algerians consider them of no importance? In any case, the course of history has shown Fanon to have been wrong: the new post-independence Algeria is a Moslem state where religion is inscribed in the constitution. What would have been Fanon's situation? Some Christians were naturalized and escaped notice. But Fanon was Fanon. Uncompromising and impassioned as he was, how would he have felt in this new State? Would he have had recourse to that overly simplistic explanation that religion was being exploited by people in power? And how would the people have reacted to a Black of Christian origin who challenged the religion of an almost totally Moslem country? Or would he have kept quiet? Could he have protested against so many evils in so loud a voice and then kept silent on such an important point? In truth I cannot really see a satisfactory solution for Fanon, had he lived. This brings to mind another destiny: that of Jean Amrouche,¹⁷ whom I also knew well, since he was my professor of literature in my last year at the lycée in Tunis. He too was of Christian origin and a French intellectual, to the tip of his fingers, who loved the great French poets. He put all this aside for the duration of the war. After so many years of struggle, Algerian independence was going to confront him with an impossible choice. Like Fanon, he died on the eve of independence.

¹⁷ Jean Amrouche (1906–1962): poet and essayist from the Kabyle region of Algeria. He is best known for his translations of Berber poetry, *Chants berbères de Kabylie* (1939). (*Translators' note*)

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In reality Fanon remained an outsider in his country of adoption, or rather in the country he had adopted. He did not even speak the language. That too is hardly ever mentioned, as though it was an unimportant detail. Yet, at least professionally, this is of crucial importance to a psychiatrist. During my various internships I witnessed many three-sided consultations, where the European psychiatrist, with the best of intentions was desperately trying to interpret what the interpreter had understood as he questioned an already confused patient. "Ask him whether—", "What exactly did he say to you?", "No, repeat my question: did you. . . ?" It is true that Fanon began to learn Arabic. But I have said it often before: language is never simply a language, a tool, it is a reservoir of a people's soul. Fanon was often mistaken in his view of Algeria. He openly admitted this on several occasions: when he discovered, for example, that the hospital reforms could not be applied without taking into account the particular human environment of Algeria. Likewise he was too ready to believe that the Algerian woman was once and for all liberated from the masculine yoke. Yet, it could hardly be otherwise: one cannot learn to understand a people so quickly. Perhaps, in time, he would have become an Algerian, but at what price? It would have taken him a long time to adjust to a people with whom, out of personal need, he wanted to identify.

In short, one cannot shed his identity so easily. A Black man does not get rid of his Negritude by calling it a mirage: nor can anyone exchange his cultural, historical and social singularity for another, by a simple act of will—not even in the service of a revolutionary ethic.

IV

THUS IT WAS FORESEEABLE that in this long, painful quest for identity, the Algerian stage would not be the last.

What can an individual do on discovering that he cannot

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step outside of his singularity, nor erase it in the minds of others to the point of being adopted by them? The next step is to deny to the utmost all singularities, all those accursed differences which stand in the way of communion between men and prevent one from being simply human among other humans. All individuals are then blended into the universal and the universal is declared to be the only reality, the only ethic. How well I know this attitude! It is so common among the oppressed and so tempting for many of them. I wrote at length about it in connection with the Jews. As I write these lines, I have just learned that the Gypsies also claim to be the world's most universal people. We scarcely need to recall that Marx believed in the universalist messianism of the proletariat. In any case, there is no doubt that during the last stage of his life Fanon decided on the universalist solution.

This development did not take place immediately, however. To pass from the particularist Algerian commitment to a universalist vision, the vision of a New Man in a reconciled world, would have been too great a leap. He needed a mediator. This was the role of Africa.

In March, 1960, he was appointed ambassador to Accra. Two plausible explanations have been suggested for this move: it was either at his request or perhaps the Algerians wanted to remove him from the immediate political scene. Fanon had certainly been very upset and troubled by the assassination of one of the military leaders of the FLN, which was carried out by Algerians who were most probably working with the political leadership. But, on the other hand, he seems to have been the one who had the idea of creating military supply bases at the edge of the Sahara. In any case, he became immediately fascinated by the vastness of Africa and its unexpected potential.

To be sure, his enthusiasm was due in great measure to his foreseeing an extraordinary widening of the Algerian struggle that could bring relief to his adopted brothers in arms. But such enthusiasm is aroused only by the discovery of what one already expected to find. He experienced a veritable upheaval in his outlook: he became an African.

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It was several months earlier, in January 1960,¹⁸ that he first used a new expression which would soon acquire much greater importance: "We Africans. . ." But at that time he probably meant it only as a more inclusive term. Algeria was a part of Africa and Frantz Fanon a part of Algeria, therefore also of Africa. Later he gave the expression its full, precise meaning: it stood for the creation of the political and economic unity of the continent. It did not refer merely to mythical Africa, the primordial mother of all the Blacks in the world, with which Black Americans or Césaire, the West Indian poet, identify themselves. Fanon saw it as a physical, social and historical identification, as a task to be understood and completed; he, in any case, henceforth took it upon himself. "What I chose to do was to stir Africa out of its immobility and to collaborate in its refashioning according to revolutionary principles. In a word I decided to take part in the coordinated movement of a continent" (*Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 177-178).

Did this cause him to forget Algeria? Not exactly, since appealing to African solidarity would certainly enable him to obtain the aid of the Malians, the Senegalese, the Guineans. Undoubtedly, he was now carried along by a new impetus inspired by the dimensions of the new world revealed to his dazzled eyes. He discovered Africa, the physical and geographical reality of Africa, as a living whole, and he made it his own with every tired bone in his body on this exhausting trip which may well have contributed to his physical breakdown. "I wish for great trunklines, great ship canals across the desert. I would like to deaden the desert, to deny it, to bring Africa together, to create the continent" (*Ibid.*, pp. 180-181).

He did not abandon Algeria, but he did abandon the Algerian nationalist point of view. In *The Wretched of the Earth* he still writes that it is necessary "to protect *our* militants detained by the enemy" and speaks in the name of "our people." But a notable widening of his horizon has already taken place. For

¹⁸ *El Moudjahid*, No. 58. Cf. *Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 167-169.

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the first time he states unequivocally: "African unity as a principle gives us the starting point from which we propose to create the United States of Africa, without passing through the nationalist, chauvinist, bourgeois phase, with its cortege of wars and ruins" (*Ibid.*, p. 187).

He wrote "We propose." Whom does *we* refer to? Certainly not to his comrades-in-arms, the Algerians and Tunisians, who never maintained that the nationalist phase should even provisionally be bypassed.¹⁹ A little later in *The Wretched of the Earth* he severely criticized the "national parties." I would suspect that this aroused much mistrust against him. The leaders of these parties had worked too hard to forge such a collective tool for mass action and combat. Fanon seldom confided in anyone and except during his flights of lyricism, which became increasingly rare as his writings were politicized, he scarcely ever revealed the nature of his daily relations with his comrades, nor told us who were his friends and especially his enemies. Yet being in such a state of permanent tension, it was inevitable that he made enemies in spite of the bonds created by the struggle. His thesis was so important, and he expressed it so uncompromisingly, that he must have had determined opponents, as determined as he himself, when he stated: "Africa [and therefore Algeria and his comrades-in-arms] must understand that it can no longer progress one region at a time. Like a large body that refuses to let itself be mutilated, it must progress as a whole" (*Ibid.*, p. 192).

Another Black man, an American, was to have a similar idea; Malcolm X also concluded that any solution would have to be African and even Afro-Asian. It has never been quite clear who was responsible for his assassination. This state of affairs certainly suited the Whites, but it is not out of the question that he may have antagonized many Blacks as well. Patrice Lumumba met the same fate, perhaps for the same complex rea-

¹⁹ Since then, the Algerian leaders have again taken up the idea of African unity. But for them this does not imply the destruction of the African nation states. In all probability their position is essentially tactical and thus far from Fanon's visionary sincerity.

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sons. I suspect that Fanon's sudden and intransigent Africanism roused new hostility against him. He might have shared the fate of those Jewish intellectuals who declare themselves universalists and are suspected of cosmopolitanism and even treason; they are not considered sufficiently legitimate members of the community to be permitted such aloofness. For an Algerian so late in the making it was imprudent, to say the least, to put so recent a bond to the test.

The wheel had come full circle. Fanon was now back at his point of departure. He had refused his West Indian identity in the name of a universalist humanism which was then embodied in France. The failure of this effort caused him to choose another role and he became an Algerian patriot. Now he had come to still another universalism, this time embodied in Africa. But this too was not the final stage. When he attacked Europe in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he did so not merely in the name of Africa, but in the name of "the sweat and cadavers of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and Orientals." Soon thereafter he found himself both attacking Europe and wanting to save it; now he wanted to save all of humanity. It was no longer a matter of Algeria or even of Africa, but of Man and the entire world. To quote again the concluding lines of his final work: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new beginning, develop new thought, try to create a new man."

V

IT MIGHT BE ASKED whether it is of more than historical interest to interpret the work and conduct of Fanon in terms of the fundamental drama of his existence. One could argue that his private motives are of little importance as long as their outward manifestations can be held up as an example before the admiring eyes of countless individuals. What matters is the result, the end point of the journey, and not its stages or the reason for setting out in the first place. Take Freud or Marx; is it really useful today to know in detail

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Marx the man, to know that he was of Jewish background and probably had a special relationship with Judaism and the Jewish community? Is there after all any common denominator between such a narrow base and the extraordinary range and influence of the work?

I think there is. Not that genetic exegesis in any way deals exhaustively with all the dimensions of a finished work, or even illuminates them in their entirety. It is obvious, moreover, that whatever the genius of an author, the success of a work depends even more on the integration of the work into human reality and on its potential to modify that reality. But every work also represents the individual's response to the problems raised for him by that world and by his inner life. The work must therefore bear at every moment the mark—hidden or overt—of this man, of the passion that drives him and confers on his work both its strength and its vulnerability. I am convinced in the case of Marx that one of the most fascinating and questionable facets of his work, his messianism, is merely the transposition into secular and revolutionary language of the persistent and ever unfulfilled great hope of the Jewish ethic, the ethic of his family and of his childhood.

True, *in the end* Fanon's response to his own predicament was political: after a long period in which he tried to respond to it on the psychological and existential level, he gradually identified his own destiny with Algeria, then with the Third World, and ultimately with all of humanity. That is what gives his image, his life's journey, and his work their final significance, since that is how they were completed and immobilized by death. Yet I am convinced that Fanon's relations with himself, his initial orientation toward psychology and his profession of specialist in the human psyche, played a role until the end in everything he undertook, including politics, and inevitably remained a coefficient of his vision of the future of mankind.

This osmosis probably explains, at least in part, the extraordinary passion and the latent despair that permeate Fanon's work. He had suffered too much from his Negritude not to

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be exasperated by it. *Black Skin, White Masks* should be re-read from this perspective. In this work he speaks at times directly about himself and then again describes the behavior of his fellow citizens, but it is always his own suffering that propels and gives a lyrical quality to his sentences which break up into short poems of bitterness or rage. He could have concluded by identifying with his misfortune and trying to confront it directly in order to transform it. Or he could have evaded it, an alternative reaction common to many oppressed; and in the end that is what he chose to do.

This choice had decisive consequences for his subsequent work. The first of these was his totally negative and very questionable conception of Negritude. After all, Negritude implies more than the mere consciousness of misfortune and of belonging to a vanquished group. It is also recognition and affirmation of self; it is protest, reconstruction of a culture, at least of its potential, positive adherence to a group, and the decision to contribute to a collective future. The disdainful abandonment of Blackness (or Jewishness, or Arabness) in the name of universalism and universal man rests on a misconception. This is not the place to go into a thorough critique. It should however be pointed out that such an outlook of false universalism and abstract humanism is based on neglecting all specific identity and all intervening social particularities, though it is hard to see why these are necessarily contemptible, nor how they could be dispensed with. Universal man and universal culture are after all made up of particular men and particular cultures.

The best proof of this can be found in Fanon himself: he rejected his Negritude in the name of universalism, and then defended a cause that was national and concerned a particular country. It is true that the Algerian patriots called their movement the Algerian revolution. This could deceive wholehearted sympathizers who were far from the scene where the destiny of Algeria was being decided. Fanon, however, lived in daily contact with the leaders of the struggle: how could he seriously have believed that this was not primarily a national movement?

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In fact he did not quite believe it. It only needs a close reading of *The Wretched of the Earth* with its very detailed critique of all national movements. He must have been alluding to the Algerians and the Tunisians. In any case, even if he did believe that Algeria was building socialism, he knew that it was Algerian, not international socialism. Why not socialism in Martinique? Why not struggle for West Indian socialism, even if it was more problematical than Algerian socialism, since he was West Indian and not Algerian? For what other reason except that he needed to shed his former self and his Negritude as much as he needed to come to the aid of Algeria. Hence this paradoxical condemnation of Negritude, as being narrow and particularist, at the very time when he was desperately trying to be a part of another particularism.

The same can be said of his theory of violence. This theory is probably only the expression of the intimate conflict and the exposed situation in which he lived, a situation to which he condemned himself, once he decided to move to a far-away country and fight a battle that was neither his own nor that of his native island. He went beyond the Marxist thesis that violence is inevitable and necessary. For him violence was a purifying force. Here he clearly parts company with Marx, in spite of the latter's ambiguous remarks on the "blessed violence" of the proletariat. In fact, as we now know, Fanon was distraught by the torture in both camps, and by the necessity of countering the fear which torture aroused in the minds of the militants. How can one react to fear other than through an act of violence which frees the militant from his fear-inspired paralysis? A hand raised against the colonizer strips this all-powerful personage of his sacred character. That is why the goal of violence is not solely to affect the colonizer. Violence must also transform the colonized. No doubt these statements are true in the context of a particular situation, but it is doubtful that a theoretical generalization of this affirmation can be acceptable. Can violence never be avoided, through negotiation for example or through a change in the relative strength of the two camps? Can one so resolutely affirm that any people that does not liberate itself through violence will botch its revolution?

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Fanon attacked the national bourgeoisie and not without cause. It is enough to make one angry to see how so many sacrifices are followed by such a rush for selfish enjoyment, by so much waste and childish vanity. But he was carried away by his feelings and could not foresee that in all probability the bourgeoisie or the military groups would seize power, since in new nations they were the only relatively organized structures. Ultimately he mistook the actual situation in these new countries.

The same is true of Fanon's vision of Africa. He underestimated the short-run importance of the national bourgeoisie and the long-run importance of the urban proletariat, while on the other hand he overestimated the role of the peasantry, at least for the immediate future. His perception of African unity was in great part illusory or at least premature. He made only vague constructive proposals: he wanted neither the socialist model nor, to be sure, the western capitalist model. Fanon scarcely thought about the manner in which the initial accumulation of wealth would take place, yet this is indispensable for a take-off of the economy. He was against nearly all the political leaders and one-party systems that he encountered. He probably would have wished to replace them with a rather utopian alliance between the uncorrupted intellectuals and the peasantry. Just as in Algeria he had difficulty discerning the mentality and the way of life of his patients, so too in Africa he made little distinction between the social realities of the various peoples, states, and nations that make up this immense continent. Thus he grew impatient, he showed his scorn of regional particularism, of the tenacity of tradition and custom, of cultural and national aspirations, as well as of the play of frequently contradictory interests. It is probable that this brought him as much mistrust and resentment as it did sympathy and respect.

Much could be said about the new man that Fanon hoped and wished for. He thought he saw him emerging out of the Third World. What were the characteristics of this totally new man in this totally new world? Are we still in politics or in a

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dream? We find that the Third World must not only discover the solution to its own social and political misery but also offer itself as a model to the world. This is part of Fanon's tendency to engage in messianic prophesying. His idea of the new man is inspiring, that is true, but there is no indication that such a man is emerging nor that the Third World is inventing an original social structure. The key to the idea can probably be found in Fanon's desire to reject Europe once and for all. Consequently he believed that his adopted country, his chosen brothers, must break once and for all with the men who humiliated him in his childhood. It is true that Europe did not live up to our expectations—I am referring both to its ruling classes and to its proletariat. The European working classes also profited to some extent from colonialism and therefore did not always understand, or perhaps were unwilling to admit, that there must be an end to domination over colonial or formerly colonial countries. Our disappointment went very deep. Does this mean that we should cut ourselves off from the intellectual methods and the tools perfected by the Europeans? After all, socialism too is a European invention. It is difficult to see what sort of third economic and social way the Third World could have adopted, nor can we discern the make-up of this new man, until we have defined the economic, social and political conditions under which he might emerge.

If Fanon had lived, he would have defined his thought more clearly, would have given substance to its outline and have overcome its contradictions. Death did not leave him time. Perhaps on the other hand he would always have maintained his distance from individuals and social reality even while he was fighting on their behalf. This is not to say that such distance cannot be an advantage: it may offer the only opportunity for clear vision. This distance is also the high price one pays for an impossible situation and for non-coincidence with others and oneself. The rejection of self, as I have said elsewhere, is rarely a satisfactory solution and, in any case, is no guarantee of happiness or growth. Many Algerians made the same discovery: they almost believed themselves French, but

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when they finally understood that they had never been French, they decided to be what they had never ceased being: Algerians. Fanon never accepted this return to self. His true problem, in actuality, was neither how to be French, nor how to be Algerian, but how to be West Indian. He refused to attempt a solution to this problem, or rather he discussed it once in *Black Skins, White Masks* and then did not concern himself with it anymore.

One cannot refrain from thinking of Fanon's first hero, Aimé Césaire, whom he first followed in the enthusiasm of his adolescence, then categorically rejected. Césaire has never wavered from his original purpose: the return to his people. It is true that the people did not immediately respond to his revolutionary appeal; they have scarcely begun to be conscious of their identity and are still unsure of their destiny. Martinique has not yet decided whether to continue, at least for the time being, in a not too profitable alliance with France, or to break off and rush into the adventure of independence. In any case, there is no point in trying to drive a people farther than they are willing to go. Anyone who wishes to lead his people on the path of progress must stay more or less in step with them. Who was right, Fanon or Césaire? The one who preferred to leave and find another people who could better effect his wishes, or the one who remained in the midst of his own people, with the compromises and even necessary ruses that this entailed? This question goes beyond the subject of this article. We can hope that perhaps some day it will become academic: on the day when any man will be at home anywhere, and will be allowed to live and work elsewhere as well as in his own country. I fear that this day is very far off. Today conventional wisdom prescribes a more pragmatic conduct attuned to the immediate and specific reality of each nation.

And yet, in spite of all this, Fanon's paroxysmic politics, his impatience with immediate reality, his scorn for tactics and gradualism, are fueled by such an inextinguishable inner fire that the reader is carried along with the author, is raised beyond himself, in an impetus that cannot reach its goal, to be

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sure, but does overcome doubts and hesitations and opens up the vision of a totally regenerate humanity.

I have spoken of Fanon's three failures; a fourth must be added, the last among them: death. At 36, he died of cancer at Bethesda hospital, in the America he hated. It was the kind of death typical of self-destruction; it was the end of an impossible life. Ultimately he received the approbation of neither the Marxists nor the nationalists, neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie in the developing countries. And the peasants have not yet spoken their piece.

This death froze him in the attitude of a prophet of the Third World, a romantic hero of decolonization, a fate which Guevara was to share under different circumstances. It is this aspect of Fanon which today fascinates so many young men and so many revolutionary movements. It is not accidental that he has become a patron saint of the Black Panthers: the fundamental problem for them too is probably one of a troubled identity. They too experience difficulty in reconstructing a past and a culture which they can recognize as their own. When social despair is too great, men succumb to the temptation of messianism. They are gripped by a lyrical fever, by a manichaeism that constantly confuses ethical demand and reality. Paradoxically, they also fall into revolutionary romanticism, with an unshakeable belief in radical and final change. Frantz Fanon's success is probably due more to this uncompromisingly prophetic attitude, than to his particular theses or the correctness of his analyses. So that here, as in the rest of his life, it is his failure itself that has become the source of his far-reaching influence.