

FRANTZ FANON: OUR CONTEMPORARY ZEITGEIST

by

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'Africa shall be free. Yes, but it must get to work, it must not lose sight of its own unity... Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent... the Africans must remember that there is not an objective optimism that is more or less mechanically inevitable, but that optimism must be the sentiment that accompanies the revolutionary commitment and the combat'.

-Frantz Fanon in *Towards the African Revolution* .

The death of Frantz Fanon on December 6th, 1961, at the relatively young age of 36, which today here in Berlin gives us the occasion to commemorate its passage 25 years ago, was felt in many European, American and African intellectual and progressive circles to have been an event of great importance in African intellectual history. In a *Presence Africaine* issue of 1962, in a section devoted to homages concerning Fanon, Aime Cesaire, the great Martiniquan poet and Fanon's mentor, eulogised him as the theoretician of revolutionary action and of the process of decolonisation. Kwame Nkrumah, then the President of Ghana and the living embodiment of the Pan-Africanist philosophy, in the same review, characterised Fanon as the liberator and emancipator of Africa, whose ultimate aim was to bring about the unification of Africa. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French exponent of Existentialist philosophy, then in the process of attempting to forge a synthesis between Existentialism and Marxism in his colossal but digressive book, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* , published in 1960, in a preface to Cesaire's play of 1966 *Une saison au Congo* about the tragic Congo events of 1960, wrote that both Lumumba and Fanon were great men who died at the same age and in the same year; their different historical visions and political praxes represented that which was pre-eminently the best in human culture and civilization. In this essay on the political thought of Patrice Lumumba, which in fact is a great document of our century in which a great European philosophical mind grappled with the tragic flaws of an African political genius, Sartre stated that concerning Fanon still much needs to be said. As far as Lumumba, Sartre felt his tragedy lay in the fact that he was a revolutionary without a revolution, a Black Jacobin in the era of African nationalisms. For Fanon, the tragic failure of Lumumba in the Congo (today Zaire), was the failure of a politically disunited and inexperienced Africa.

The authoritativeness of the judgements of Aime Cesaire and Jean-Paul Sartre concerning Frantz Fanon taken on their particular significance when it is recalled that it was the former's *Discourse on Colonialism* and *Return to my Native Land* and the latter's *What is Literature* , *Anti-Semite and Jew* and *Orphee Noire* , that constituted the founding historical moment of Fanon's self-discovery as an intellectual within European culture. It was by forging through, past and beyond both Negritude and Existentialism, one a poetic movement and the other a philosophical system, that Fanon positioned and articulated himself as a revolutionary intellectual and guide of the African revolution. This surpassing, or in other words this transcendence of these two metaphysical systems was made possible and could only have been achievable within the context of the Algerian revolution (1954-1962), whose principal ideologue Fanon was to become. It was through his praxis in this revolution that Fanon was able to determine the objective coordinates that were essential for Africa's unity and progress in a culture of nations. Equally, it was in this inferno that Fanon felt the need to establish the rudimentary theoretical constructs and philosophical presuppositions of an African revolutionary philosophy. This crucible made it possible for him to move beyond Negritude and Existentialism towards positioning himself in relation to Marxism, that system of thought which Sartre in *Search For a Method* characterized in the following terms: `... the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond'. Indeed, in this phase of his short life Fanon was to become the voice of the Third World, as Sartre famously stated in his preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* . Nor is it astonishing that in this same preface Sartre wrote that Fanon was the first since Frederick Engels to make the mechanism of history understandable to a majority of the oppressed peoples. In one of the few instances in which Fanon self-interrogated himself as to his historical tasks in Africa, the unification of Africa as a historical necessity was primary among many. In a logbook of military operations and operational tasks, which he wrote in the Summer of 1960 on the occasion of establishing and opening a new military front for the Algerian National Liberation Front against French colonialism and imperialism, Fanon articulated his fundamental tasks in Africa. In this logbook, which now forms the concluding section of his book *Toward the African Revolution* , Fanon wrote the following: `To put Africa in motion, to cooperate in its organization, in its regrouping, behind revolutionary principles, to participate in the ordered movement of a continent -- this was really the work I had chosen'.(1) The need to put Africa behind revolutionary principles was governed by a particular fear on the part of Frantz Fanon. In this same text he writes further: `Colonialism and its derivatives do not, as a matter of fact, constitute the present enemies of Africa. In a short time this continent will be liberated. For my part, the deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles the surer I am that the great danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology. . . . With the triumph of socialism in Eastern Europe we witness a spectacular disappearance of the old rivalries, of the traditional territorial claims'.

(2) The kernel of the legacy that Fanon has left us is to be found in the interlocked relationships of his historical tasks: firstly, to put Africa behind revolutionary principles which will lead towards its unification; secondly, to establish an ideology which is comprehensive and all-encompassing, coherent and compatible with Africa's historical and cultural structures; and thirdly, to establish socialism as the only social and philosophical system in harmony with the interests of the African peoples. But in order to understand the full complexity of this legacy for us today, it is necessary to post a few semaphores on the historical landscape, whose complications and intricacies were part of the intellectual odyssey Fanon had to undertake.

Though at the time of writing his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, there were many counter-vailing influences on Frantz Fanon extending from Hegel's analysis of the Master-Slave relationship in *The Phenomenology of Mind* through Jacques Lacan's re-construction of Freudian psychoanalytical theory within linguistic parameters to Richard Wright's examination of the Black-white relationship in his novel *Native Son*, the most dominant and primary influences on him were those exercised by the Negritude philosophy embodied in the poetry of Aimé Césaire and those encapsulated in the Existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. It should perhaps be remembered that the primary task of Fanon in this book of 1952 was to deconstruct and reconstruct how the Black-Self perceived itself and attained its beingness in a world determined and dominated by the white-Other. In short, Fanon was attempting to understand how Black subjectivity projects its psychic and psychological experiences, attainments and uncertainties in a space of white subjectivity and objectivity. Fanon sought to unravel and heal the dismembered structure of the Black-ego. It should not be surprising that Fanon formulated the oppression of Black-Africa by white-Europe, especially within the colonial experience, in psychological and psychoanalytical coordinates and constructs, for Fanon was a trained psychiatrist. What was central to Fanon here was to lay bare the psychology of colonialism. In order to unravel the multifaceted nature of this historical phenomenon of colonialism, Fanon, then 27 years old, examined certain social relationships and sociological coordinates: in what forms and modes does the Black psychic structure reveal itself unconsciously in the novels of Black writers from different parts of the world; to what extent is language, especially European languages, an instrument of domination which was then perceived by Fanon as being responsible for the alienation of Black intellectuals, for Fanon language defines and demarcates the world of its possessor; what accounts for the traumatized psychosexual relationships between a Black man and an European woman, and between an European man and a Black woman; can Black consciousness attain a state of poise and peace in its state of Black beingness; what is the existential nature of Black beingness; by what means and in what form can freedom and choice be attainable for Black beingness within a sealed and hermetic white

world. These were some of the coordinates and constructs which Fanon considered in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In a letter of resignation to the French Resident Minister in Algeria in 1956, just before joining the Algerian Revolution, Fanon had come to the following conclusion, after having analysed the structure of the psychology of colonialism: 'Madness is one of the means man has of losing his freedom.... The social structure, existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.....non-viable society, a society to be replaced'.(3) This was a logical political conclusion from a lucid social and psychological analysis of colonialism.

The poetic intensity and conceptual pitch of *Black Skin, White Masks* was the result of Fanon's attempt to synthesize within its structure the poetics of Negritude and the metaphysics of Existentialism mediated through the categories of psychoanalysis: Aime Cesaire and Jean-Paul Sartre. The complex unity of Negritude lied in its attempt to wed content and form, logic and feeling in the form of a literary style, of a nexus of racial attitudes and in the affirmation of a Negro cultural essence.(4) It was the historical poetics of the Negritude of Cesaire rather than the romantic metaphysics of the Negritude of Leopold Sedar Senghor which was determinant of Fanon's intellectual formation. This distinction is crucial and fundamental. For Senghor Negritude is a philosophy of Humanism theorized from the biological constructs of Negro essence.(5) This could not be more in marked construct from the historical poeticism of Cesaire's Negritude. Cesaire himself has said in an interview: 'I do not in the slightest believe in biological permanence, but I believe in the culture. My negritude has a ground. It is a fact that there is a black culture: it is negritude from a literary point of view and as a personal ethic, but I am against an ideology founded on negritude....it seemed to me that Senghor made a kind of metaphysics out of negritude; there we parted company. He tended rather to construct negritude into an essentialism as though there were a black essence, a black soul,...but I never accepted this point of view'.(6) It was with the intent of criticising this attempted construction of the metaphysics and ideology of Negritude by Senghor that Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* wrote ironically that the European creates the Negro and the Negro in the state of oppression constructs the philosophy of Negritude. But even more paradoxical is that Sartre in *Orphee Noir*, in an introductory essay to Leopold Sedar Senghor's anthology of Negritude poetry had convincingly argued against the danger of constructing the philosophical essentialism of Negritude, the very undertaking the very same Senghor was to pursue with mis-guided vigour in the years subsequent to this anthology. In this essay Sartre situated Negritude as a moment in the development and progression of the dialectic within human civilization. Within this dialectic, whilst white supremacy (racism) was the thesis, Negritude was the anti-thesis, leading towards the synthesis of human civilization without races (the realm of proletarian culture, for Sartre). This was to be far beyond the capitalist culture. It was the

anti-thetical nature of Negritude poetry that for Sartre constituted its revolutionary nature, the only true revolutionary poetry of our century. Fanon was not totally assenting in Sartre's attempt to situate the poetics of Negritude within the progression of the dialectic. This was the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks*. But the Fanon of *The Wretched of the Earth* was in total agreement with this dialectical perspective of Sartre's. For what Sartre had achieved was to provide a much needed historical perspective. A truly fundamental achievement. In fact it could be argued that the fundamental construct that Sartre imparted to his young protege Fanon was this very concept of historical perspective.

As it will be re-called, the other intellectual imprint on *Black Skin, White Masks* was Existentialism. The Existentialism of Sartre which is atheistic should be distinguished from the Christian existentialism of Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel among others. Sartre has defined his brand of existentialism in the following terms: `... that existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point'.(7) Further on Sartre, in his book or lecture on Existentialism, adds: `Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.... condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does'.(8) It could be said that from Sartre's existentialism Fanon derived the concepts of subjectivity and freedom. It is therefore not accidental that one of the undertakings of *Black Skin, White Masks*, as already indicated, was to establish the unique subjectivity or the beingness of the Black historical experience. Equally, Fanon sought to free this Black subjectivity from the constrictions of white oppression and domination. Hence also the importance also of Sartre's formulation of the concept of freedom. Another work of Sartre's, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, was to assist Fanon in formulating the structures of Black subjectivity. It was within this context that Fanon was to write in *Black Skin, White Masks* that an anti-Semitic was invariably anti-Black. Hence the idissoluble unity and solidarity that Fanon believed should exist between Blacks and Jews. It should be added that at this juncture of Fanon's intellectual development, it was indeed Sartre who was the master and Fanon the pupil, but as Fanon was moving towards the shores of *The Wretched of the Earth* propelled by the Algerian Revolution, it was Fanon who was the master and Jean-Paul Sartre the pupil. What else is Sartre's preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* if not a great pupil's tribute to his great master. The relationships between Sartre and Fanon, which still awaits examination in its full complexity and passionate strains, represents intellectually the best that has existed between Europe and Africa. Sartre represents the best in European culture and what Fanon demanded of European intellectuals in his essay on French intellectuals: `One of the first duties of intellectuals and democratic elements in colonialist countries is unreservedly to support the national aspirations of colonized peoples'.(9) This humanism of Sartre is in

marked contrast to the profoundly deplorable intellectual chauvinism and Eurocentrism of Jürgen Habermas, for whom there is nothing of importance in the Third World from which he can learn and to which he can contribute his unquestioned genius.(10) But to move on to matters at hand.

As Fanon moved further and beyond *Black Skin, White Masks* towards *A Dying Colonialism*, his philosophical and historical vision shifted from the synchronicism of subjectivity to the diachronism of objectivity. In other words, whereas Fanon earlier had sought to establish the subjectivity of the Black experience, now he examined the objective coordinates and determinants of African social structures. The move was from subject to structure, without necessarily postulating the interrelationships between them. This shift at the analytical level was accompanied by a transcendence at the philosophical level from the poetics of Negritude to the politics of Pan-Africanism. This in many ways was inevitable since there could never be such a thing as the politics of Negritude. It should also be emphasised that Sartre also independently was moving in parallel fashion from the biographism of Saint Genet and Baudelaire to the historicism of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In this latter book Sartre was seeking to establish the nature of the dialectical unity between subject and structure. As Perry Anderson has indicated in his brilliant book, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, the failure of Sartre's enterprise has had the effect that French intellectual culture is dominated today by the post-structuralism of Derrida and the post modernism of Lyotard, which are both hostile to the Enlightenment project of modernity and rationality in history.

The move of emphasis by Fanon from subject to structure in analysis was determined by the developing Algerian Revolution, even though he had already written earlier in *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'The neurotic structure of an individual is simply the elaboration, the formation, the eruption within the ego of conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which the individual reacts to these influences'.(11) Here then, the structure is the determinant of the subject. One of the first consequences of Fanon's transcendence of the poetics of Negritude onto the politics of Pan-Africanism was a series of two essays, 'West Indians and Africans' and 'The North African Syndrome'. The first of these essays examined the changing nature of the West Indians political and cultural identification with Africa after World War II, whereas previously they had identified with Europe. The important factor was the intervention of the Negritude of Aime Cesaire. This had the effect of transforming the political and social consciousness of West Indians as Blacks. Henceforth Pan-Africanism in the Caribbean was to shift from merely cultural identification with Africa to political activity in order to assist in the liberation of the African continent from European colonialism and imperialism. In the context of this essay Fanon writes: 'A Negro worker will be on the side of the mulatto

worker against the middle-class Negro. Here we have proof that questions of race are but a superstructure, a mantle, an obscure ideological emanation concealing an economic reality'.(12) Fanon was equally aware that an uncritical identification of West Indians with Africa could have negative consequences: 'It thus seems that the West Indian, after the great white error, is now living in the great black mirage'.(13) The other essay of this period is on the way North Africans are handled by the French medical profession; the way in which French science denies the humanity of the Arabs. Whereas in the other essay Fanon was seeking to establish the political links between Africa and the Caribbean, the other sought to understand the depth of Arabic culture from the Black African scientific-cultural perspective. Both are important in that Fanon in them was establishing the elementary sign-posts of the sociological landscape within which the politics of Pan-Africanism could find expression and fruition.

In order to examine the sociological landscape that supported the politics of Pan-Africanism, Fanon was compelled to analyse the cultural texture which formed and enriched the landscape in various complications. This cultural texture, in the many African national contexts, was subordinated to, and dominated by, the metropolitan (colonial-imperial) cultural systems. It was with the intent of unravelling the dominating cultural patterns of the European imperial countries in many of the Third World countries, that Fanon in 1956 wrote his well-known essay, 'Racism and Culture', which in fact was his address to the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris. From this point onwards, for Fanon the revolutionary principles of social transformation were indissolubly tied to the political principles of cultural liberation and emancipation. Though colonial domination is first and foremost a process of economic exploitation with the concomitants of political oppression and repression, for Fanon it is equally a process of destruction of indigeneous cultural values and patterns of life. Racism is a central component in what Fanon calls the mummification of culture which subsequently leads to the mummification of individual life. Fanon elaborates: 'The setting up of the colonial system does not of itself bring about the death of the native culture. Historic observation reveals, on the contrary, that the aim sought is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture.'(14) The revolutionary principles should re-activate and re-establish the patterns and ensembles of the newly emancipated culture. It is also these revolutionary principles, that all forms of domination from colonialism to neo-colonialism should be expelled from the national territories of Third World countries, that armed struggle is an integral component of the national liberation struggle, and that the working class and the peasantry should form a class alliance against all regimes of oppression, which should inform the politics of Pan-Africanism, that Africa ought to form a unity of economic interests and political aspirations, that a single central government ought to form the United States of Africa, and that this government should seek to represent the interests of

Black people in the African diaspora. It was towards these tasks and aspirations that Fanon spent the last years of his life, represented by his last two books, *A Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth* .

From the moment of his resignation as the Appointed-Head of the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria in 1956, Fanon devoted his intellectual powers and political praxis within the Algerian Revolution to the task of putting Africa behind revolutionary principles. Towards realizing this aim, he worked on the editorial board of the *El Moudjahid* , the National Liberation Front's newspaper based in Tunis. It was in a series of essays written for this newspaper that Fanon argued that the whole of Africa should and must support the Algerian Revolution against french colonialism and imperialism. It was Africa's historical responsibility. Equally, in these essays, Fanon formulated the outlines of pan-continentalism, that is, the possible forms of Africa's unification and the supportive systems that could be constructed to support the various national liberation movements that were struggling against European colonial systems. It was also in *El Moudjahid* that Fanon theorized the ideological aims of the Algerian Revolution. As a National Liberation Front's delegate to many Pan-African conferences in Africa, as the Algerian revolution's delegate in black Africa, and as the Provisional Government's ambassador to Ghana, Fanon worked tirelessly to link the Algerian Revolution to the upcoming African revolution, and to forge political and solidarity links between Arab Africa and Black Africa. The nature of Fanon's dedication to the Algerian struggle can be judged from the inscription on his friend's copy of *A Dying Colonialism* : `This book is the illustration of a principle: action is incoherent agitation if it does not serve to reconstruct the consciousness of an individual. The Algerian people, in the great struggle that they lead against colonial oppression, bring to light their own national consciousness so that an Algerian nation, based on mass participation, can no longer be deferred. Have confidence in your people and devote yourself to helping them re-establish their dignity and spiritual awareness. For us, there can be no other choice.....!.(15) Confidence in the people is what exemplifies the aforementioned series of essays. In one of them, `A Letter to the Youth of Africa', Fanon explains the aims of the Algerian Revolution, which is, to re-discover the national history of the Algerian people through the expulsion of French colonialism, to revive the cultural patterns and structures which has been dis-located by French cultural penetration, and to forge links with other revolutions then taking place in Africa, stretching from Mozambique through Angola to Guinea-Bissau.(16) In another essay, `The Algerian War and Man's Liberation', Fanon argues for the strengthening dialectically of the links and channels between the national liberation struggles in the Third World countries and the emancipatory struggle of the working classes in the metropolitan (imperialist countries. Simultaneously, Fanon analyses the ideological and political obstacles that tend to hinder this inter-connection. The analysis is

eminently historical. In this same essay Fanon explains why the Algerian revolution then was in the vanguard of the African revolution, and then he adds characteristically: 'The Algerian people is conscious of the importance of the combat in which it is engaged. Since 1954 it has maintained the slogan of the national liberation of Algeria and the liberation of the African continent'.(17) It was in the context of these essays that Fanon wrote *A Dying Colonialism* to explain to African intellectuals and world public opinion the structural changes effected by the then on-going revolution in Algeria.

A Dying Colonialism was written by Fanon on the fifth year of the Algerian Revolution, two years before its final triumph. But certainty of victory was already apparent that he already spoke of the independence of Algeria and its sovereignty. The principal aim of this book of 1959 is evident in the following statement in the Preface: 'The Algerian nation is no longer in a future heaven. It is no longer the product of hazy and fantasy-ridden imaginations. It is at the very centre of the new Algerian man. There is a new kind of Algerian man, a new dimension to his existence'.(18) The book is composed of five essays on the transformation effected in the political and historical consciousness of the Algerian people by the revolution. In the first essay Fanon explains how the revolution and the liberation struggle have destroyed the subservience of the Algerian women symbolised by the veil. Colonialism has reinforced the traditional structures which held the women under oppression. In fact, Fanon argues, the unwillingness of the Algerian women to unveil themselves in the colonial context was a form of protest against colonialism. With the outbreak of the revolution, the women unveiled themselves in order to participate in it fully. The optimism of Fanon on this issue has not been confirmed by events after the revolution. The second essay concerns the changing consciousness of the Algerian people towards radio as a component of communication systems. The emergence of Radio Free Algeria as the voice of the revolution, changed the old listening habits of the people. This radio station also transformed newspaper reading habits and patterns. In the third essay Fanon traces the transformation of family relationships and patterns. With the participation of Algerian women in the liberation struggle, the patriarchal structures in the family were challenged by them. The women had attained a certain level of consciousness and of self-certainty. The fourth essay is concerned with the acceptance of medical practices by Algerian people within the context of the Algerian revolution, these very same medical practices which had been rejected by the people when practised by French doctors within the colonial context. *A Dying Colonialism* concludes with an essay on the divisions among the approximately one million Europeans then in Algeria. Fanon also examines the different forms of discrimination practised by this community.

It is because of these transformations effected by the national liberation struggle

and revolution that Fanon believed that a profound new mutation was taking place in Algeria. He concluded the book with the following words: 'The Revolution in depth, the true one, precisely because it changes man and renews society, has reached an advanced stage. This oxygen which creates and shapes a new humanity -- this, too, is the Algerian Revolution'.(19) It was the lesson taught by the Algerian Revolution, that colonialism and imperialism should if necessary be confronted with armed struggle, which inspired Fanon to write his last and greatest work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, directed to intellectuals in other parts of Africa and in the Third World.

It is in the attempted synthesis of the politics of Pan-Africanism and a Marxist methodology in *The Wretched of the Earth* that Fanon sought to articulate an ideology that would guide the construction of socialism in the Third World, particularly in Africa. In as much as the Cuban Revolution and the Algerian Revolution were the social processes informing the political philosophy of the book, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was the analytical instrument mediating the thematic structure of this Third World classic. Though the book expresses a commitment to socialism and the socialist revolution, its central paradox which has aroused violent polemics for the past twenty years ranging from the Vietnamese Communist philosopher Nguyen Nghe(20) to the great Belgian Marxist economist Ernest Mandel(21), is that though it employs a Marxist analysis of class structure, it rejects Marxist philosophy in toto by refusing to recognise the working class (the proletariat) as the revolutionary and leading class in Third World countries. This is no small matter if one agrees with Sartre that: 'Soist eine Philosophie zunächst ursprünglich einmaleine bestimmte Art, in der die "aufsteigende" Klasse Selbstbewusstsein erlangt.... Wenn aber dieser Spiegel wirklich philosophisch sein soll, dann muß er sich als die Totalisierung des zeitgenössischen Wissens erweisen....'.(22) For Marxist philosophy the proletariat is the material force which effects change, transformation and mutation in relations of production and in the social formation from the capitalist mode of production to the socialist mode of production. But the political and philosophical texture of *The Wretched of the Earth* is much more complicated and richer than this would seem to imply.

That *The Wretched of the Earth* is one of those books that define a whole historical epoch, whatever the internal antinomies that have riven its conceptual structure and categorial argumentation, is evident not only from the fact that as Sartre said - 'The Third World discovers itself and speaks to itself through his voice.', but also the way in which this book has been interpreted in different parts of the world. To Black American intellectuals and revolutionaries of the 1960's, especially within the Black Panther Party, it was Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence which held the utmost importance for them. Fanon believed that through revolutionary violence the colonized or oppressed overcame their inferiority

complexes and dependency. By this revolutionary act, the wretched of the earth established and created a new Self and a New Man. Anyway for Fanon it was through revolutionary violence that colonialism, capitalism and imperialism could be expelled from Third World countries. According to Fanon revolutionary violence had the effect of psychological therapy on the oppressed. This view of Fanon was contested, within the same American intellectual culture, by liberal thinkers like Hannah Arendt, who in her book *On Violence* argued vehemently against Fanon's theory of revolutionary violence. In contrast to this, for Latin American intellectuals and artists, for example the Cuban Roberto Fernandez Retamar and the Argentinian Octavio Getino, the importance of *The Wretched of the Earth* was in its implacable hostility to all forms of neo-colonialism and imperialism, and in its support for the Cuban revolution. Also Fanon's theory of the Third World exercised their minds. In Europe on the other hand, Fanon's book was situated within an intellectual context which also included Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and Regis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution ?*. To the Students Movement of the 1960's, for whom these books were sacred political texts, the central issue was not only to oppose America's intervention in Vietnam, but also to establish concrete pathways and patterns of internationalism. *The Wretched of the Earth* exemplifies this form of political commitment and solidarity at its eminently best. In the African context itself, it was Fanon's critique of the then emerging national bourgeoisie that had the most profound impact. In a chapter on "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness", Fanon castigates the sycophancy and imitative undertakings of this class, its lack of a true sense of history, its contempt of a nation's culture, its betrayal of a peoples' trust, its repressive measures against the peasantry, and of it being the agent of neo-colonialism and imperialism. It was the historical importance of this critique which inspired patriots in many Third World countries to attempt to overthrow this comprador bourgeois class. This task still remains on the agenda.

To us today in Africa leaving in the last quarter of the twentieth century, *The Wretched of the Earth* poses different historical questions and different political tasks: Are the works of Frantz Fanon the founding moment of African Marxism, a Marxism of a different strain and quality from Classical Marxism and from Western Marxism? What is or should be the forms of socialism within the African context? What ought to be the democratic forms of this socialism? If these questions today cannot be avoided, it is because they are necessitated by a great event in recent African history: the chain of revolutions in the last decade which has extended from Mozambique, through Angola and Ethiopia to Cape Verde. Related to this, is the looming revolution in South Africa. Though these questions would require a full-length study in order just to begin to answer them in their full depth, the following concluding remarks to this tribute to Frantz Fanon are merely intended to convey the urgency of their being answered.

The great debate between E.P. Thompson and Perry Anderson involving among other things, the structure of British national history, the texture of English Marxism in contrast to the tonic form of continental Marxism, the relationship between Marxist historiography and Marxist philosophy, the distinction between empiricism and the empirical mode of expression, the political history of Marxism in the twentieth century, has served to remind us of the difficulties involved in delimiting Marxism within a geographical zone, and/or cultural space, and/or conceptual field of categories.(23) For Thompson Marxism cannot be a science because the very nature of historical knowledge is incomplete and approximate.(24) Hence for him Marxism is better understood as a tradition. It would seem that Thompson is working under a gross mis-apprehension, for it is the consistency, coherence and systematicity of concepts of a particular field in relation to empirical reality that makes that field a science or not rather its incompleteness in relation to other knowledge areas. Perry Anderson has shown this to be the case in his magisterial book, *Arguments Within English Marxism*. Though Marxism ought to strive for universality in its movement and totalization, it is perhaps unavoidable that it will always be sectorial in its expression and articulation, its complexion is largely determined by politics and class struggles situated within, and emanating from, regional and national contexts. This seems to have been the case in the recent recession of Latin Marxism (Italy, France, and Spain), as Anderson has argued so convincingly in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*. In the African context too, it is particular political determinants which have structured the objective coordinates of African Marxism. The ideology which Fanon thought would put Africa behind revolutionary principles is the ideology of African Marxism. For historical purposes, it should be stated that the founding moment of African Marxism is the combined work of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral. But our concern today is Fanon.

Though one would have to agree with David Caute that Fanon was 'not a Marxist in any traditional sense' (25), it is totally mistaken to believe that Fanon only sympathised with the dialectical methodology of Marxism as Caute believes.(26) Equally unacceptable is Caute's comparison of Fanon with Milovan Djilas political critiques of '... a new ruling class'.(27) This is historically untenable and unfounded. It could only be a product of an impressionistic analysis. Nor would it do to argue as Caute does that Fanon thought and believed that '... the Western proletariat as neither revolutionary nor sympathetic to the colonial peoples'.(28) This is incorrect as it can be dis-proven by an article of Fanon's, "The Algerian War and Man's Liberation", in which he indicates the historical imperatives of the necessary organic links between the particular (the national liberation struggle) and the whole (the emancipation of the working class): 'Thus, to take an example, the dialectical strengthening that occurs between the movement of liberation of the colonized peoples and the emancipatory struggle of the exploited

working classes of the imperialist countries is sometimes neglected, and indeed forgotten'.(29) Within the colonial context, Fanon was aware that the colonialist worker tended to be hostile, even sometimes displaying hatred, towards the colonized worker and peasant.(30) Rather than just lamenting such phenomenon, Fanon was more interested in unhinging and unravelling such historical blockages. For as Fanon had learned from Marx, this quotation was at the head of one chapter of *Black Skin White Masks* : 'The social revolution ... cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all superstitions concerning the past'. This could not be otherwise for Fanon also subscribed to the Marxist ontology that social being determines consciousness.

Though the year 1960 was a decisive moment in which Fanon made a determinant identification with Marxism and socialism as various scholars have argued (31), it would be improper and incorrect to see this political shift in apocalyptic religious categories reminiscent of Goergy Lukacs's spectacular conversion into Marxism in matter of days in December of 1918. Rather, Fanon's historical alignment was gradual and accumulative, informed by historical analysis and theoretical enquiry. The political determinants of Fanon's rendezvous with historical materialism were, among many others, the following: Fanon's intellectual engagement with Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* on its publication in 1960; his journey to the Soviet Union seeking medication for his growing cancer. Although Fanon was extremely critical of Soviet psychiatric practices as Simone de Beauvoir has notated in her memoirs, the trip on the whole re-inforced his convictions as to the superiority of socialism over capitalism. The catastrophic events in Congo which led to the death of Patrice Lumumba also convinced Fanon of the need for socialism in Africa. Fanon held Western imperialism responsible for this disaster, one of the most traumatic and shameful in African history. And lastly, his observation of the moral, intellectual, cultural and economic bankruptcy of the then emerging national bourgeoisie in many of the independent African countries re-inforced his hatred of capitalism. it was the conjunction of these events and processes that enabled Fanon to make a definitive break with Existentialism and Negritude. Simultaneously, this philosophical and political epistemological break, was accompanied by a passage on the part of Fanon from Pan-Africanism to Third Worldism. It is within this field force of political complications and historical complexities that *The Wretched of the Earth* finds its unsurpassed originality in African political history.

The dimensions of this originality are various and historically founded. At a time when the Western Marxism of Ernst Bloch, Karl Korsch, Lucio Colletti and others was pre-occupied with national peculiarities and national particularisms, as Perry Anderson has convincingly indicated in his magisterial work,

Considerations on Western Marxism, the African Marxism which was emerging from *The Wretched of the Earth* and from the works of Amilcar Cabral was modelled on internationalism. Though informed of differential national consciousness governing the complex political landscape of the African continent, this Marxism militated against all forms of nationalism. Secondly, even earlier than the English Marxism of Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*, of Perry Anderson in *Lineages of the Absolutist State and Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, and of E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, African Marxism, especially its Fanonian variant, had imbricated and interpenetrated into each other the superstructural and infrastructural levels of historical materialism. Frantz Fanon had written in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem." (32) The historical untenability of this epistemological construct of both African Marxism and English Marxism has been made analytically clear by G. A. Cohen in *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (33). This imbrication into one another of the base and the superstructure is one of the theoretical fault lines which dislocates the epistemological and historical structure of *The Wretched of the Earth*. From the base of this theoretical fault line, it was only logical that Fanon would mistakenly articulate the view that in the colonial context or in the Third World, for Fanon occasionally these different historical contexts were interchangeable, the peasantry is the revolutionary and progressive class in contrast to the working class, which he felt was privileged. Amilcar Cabral has provided a historical corrective to Fanon which is consistent with the internal conceptual dynamics of the then emerging African Marxism. The direct and oblique duells and correctives between Fanon and Cabral in their construction of African Marxism ought to be the primary concern of the much needed study of the conceptual and historical structure of African Marxism. Its absence should not delay us going on with the matters at hand, that is, this twenty-fifth commemoration anniversary of Fanon's death.

The third originality of the African Marxism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and this is more apparent in the works of Amilcar Cabral, is that in opposition to the tradition of Western Marxism as is principally evident in the German Marxism of Theodor Adorno where the political principles of Marxism are extracted and separated from the cultural fabric which should be their informing point of departure, hence the hypertrophy of the aesthetic in the final days of Western Marxism as Perry Anderson has argued, in contrast to this, the political principles of African Marxism are interwoven into the cultural texture of the different African national cultures; they form a dialectical unity. From this flows the difference that whereas for Western Marxism culture seems to be the theoretical

and artistic creation of intellectuals, for African Marxism culture is the living experience informing the daily activity of the common people. Hence it is not accidental that whereas African Marxism postulates a simultaneous transformation of the social formation and its accompanying cultural fabric (texture), Western Marxism on the whole, argues for a cultural lag between these structural processes. Here the point is not to argue for the correctness of one, and the incorrectness of the other. As the works of Antonio Gramsci, particularly *The Prison Notebooks*, have taught us, the complexion of African Marxism as opposed to the complexion of Western Marxism, and vice versa, is determined by the differential historical planes on which each has had to fight in order to bring about its particular efflorescence. Nonetheless, the African Marxism of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral finds a point of similarity with the Latin American Marxism of Jose Carlos Mariategui(34).

But beyond the situating of *The Wretched of the Earth* within an international Marxist culture, its richness and originality is even more apparent when one examines some of its political propositions. Fanon had hoped that African Marxism would establish a particular form of socialism. About the particularity of this socialism, Fanon was adamant and unwavering: "The Third World ought not to be content to define itself in the terms of values which have preceded it. On the contrary, the under-developed countries ought to do their utmost to find their particular values and methods and a style which shall be peculiar to them. The concrete problem we find ourselves up against is not that of a choice, cost what it may, between socialism and capitalism as they have been defined by men of other continents and of other ages. Of course we know that the capitalist regime, in so far as it is a way of life, cannot leave us free to perform our work at home, nor our duty in the world.... On the other hand the choice of a socialist regime, a regime which is completely oriented towards the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions will allow us to go forward more quickly and more harmoniously,"(35) This long quotation is very critical and absolutely crucial for various fundamental reasons: firstly, the Introduction to the recent Polish translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*, it is the line in which Fanon says that the choice of socialism should not be in accordance with principles formulated by other men of other countries and epochs, which is seen as constituting the greatness and originality of Fanon in our time.(36) This observation, given the present Polish crisis stretching from the founding of Solidarnosc in 1980, which is first and foremost a crisis of political legitimacy, requires serious reflection and examination; secondly, the recent retirement of Julius Nyerere as President of Tanzania was truly a closing of the first chapter in African political history, for without question Nyerere is the greatest Head of State produced by Africa in our century, so far. Julius Nyerere formulated in a series of book, lectures and speeches, what could be termed the first original theoretical and historical principles of African Socialism in terms

particular and peculiar to our African cultural values. More, Nyerere implemented these principles as State policy. The spectacular collapse of Ujamaa socialism in Tanzania was no national matter, but the concern of at least the whole African continent, if not the Third World. The question posed by this collapse is: did the African Socialism of Nyerere collapse of its own internal inconsistencies, incoherences and illogicalities or collapse because of external pressures imposed on Tanzania by Western imperialism in the form of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Or was it the combination of both processes. The historical verdict is still in solemn session. Mwalimu Nyerere has recently said in an interview: "We set out, in the Arusha Declaration (1967), to build a socialist and self-reliant country. Is Tanzania now socialist and self-reliant? And the answer is "no", it is not socialist; it is not self-reliant. What is it now? This is 1985. I never expected that in 18 years a backward country, which started its independence, as I said, almost totally illiterate, was going to be socialist and self-reliant."(37); thirdly, the emergence of regimes of Marxist persuasion in Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique in the mid-1970's raises a series of interlocked questions. Posing the Fanonian questions to these progressive political States, one could ask: To what extent are these governments constructing social systems in accordance with their particular values, styles, and methods, and not according to methodologies developed for other countries and other times? To what extent are they oriented towards the aspirations of their own particular peoples? These are questions beyond our immediate competence. Nevertheless, these questions reveal the relevance of *The Wretched of the Earth* to our present political experience by posing questions to important African political events and processes post-dating its publication.

Though there are other important thematic structures which run through *The Wretched of the Earth* that have been the object of scholarly investigation and presentation, it is the relationship between socialism and democracy which commands our attention today. The progress and well-being of Africa depends on our being able to find a true dialectic between these two historical constructs. The importance of the writings of Frantz Fanon is that they have enabled us to construct the rudimentary, but real and fundamental, elements of this dialectic.

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2. *ibid.*, p. 196.
3. *ibid.*, p. 63
4. David Caute, *Fanon* , Fontana/Collins, London, 1970, p. 22-23.
5. Leopold Sedar Senghor, *Negritude and Humanism* , Eugen Diederichs

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6. Aime Cesaire cited in A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude* , Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 37, p. 44.

7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism* , Philosophical Library, New York, 1947, p. 15.

8. *ibid.*, p. 18, p. 27.

9. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* , *op. cit.*, p. 86.

10. Jürgen Habermas, "An Interview: A Philosophico-Political Profile", in *New Left Review* , no. 151, May-June 1985, p. 104.

11. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* , Grove Press, New York, 1967, p. 81.

12. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* , *op. cit.*, p. 28.

13. *ibid.*, p. 37.

14. *ibid.*, p. 44.

15. Cited in Peter Geismar, *Fanon* , The Dial Press, New York, 1971, p. 125-126.

16. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* , *op. cit.*, p. 124-129.

17. *ibid.*, p. 158.

18. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* , Penguin Books, London, 1970, p. 18, emphasis in the original.

19. *ibid.*, p. 160.

20. Nguyen Nghe, "Frantz Fanon et les problemes de l'indépendance", *La Pensee* , 107, February 1963.

21. Ernest Mandel, *The Economic Thought of Karl Marx* , New Left Books, London, 1970.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Marxismus and Existentialismus: Versuch einer Methodik* , Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Hamburg, 1964, s. 7-8.

23. Perry Anderson: "Origins of the Present Crisis", in *New Left Review* , no. 23, March-April 1964; "Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism", in *New Left Review* , no. 35, January-February 1966; *Arguments Within English Marxism* , New Left Books, London, 1980. E.P. Thompson: "The Peculiarities of the English", in *The Socialist Register 1965* , ed., Ralph Miliband and John Saville; "An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski", in *The Socialist Register 1973* - both now in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* , Merlin Press, London, 1978.

24. E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* , *ibid.*, p. 229-242.

25. David Caute, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

26. *ibid.*, p. 52.

27. *ibid.*, p. 93.

28. *ibid.*, p. 70.

29. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* , *op. cit.*, p. 154, *my italics*.

There is a tendency among Fanon scholars and commentators to commingle and intertwine different political structures and processes just because they are both situated within a capitalist system: a colonialist worker is not a worker in the imperialist countries. Fanon was always clear about such historical distinctions.

30. *ibid.*, p. 155.
31. David Caute, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Peter Geismar, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
32. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* , Penguin Books, London, 1967, p. 31.
33. G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* , Oxford University Press, London, 1978, p. 248.
34. Jose Carlos Mariategui, the great Peruvian Marxist, was a great enigma: his compassion and humanism for the American Indians is in total contrast to his unmitigated hatred of black people and African cultures. See, his book, *The Seven Interpretations of Peruvian Reality* .
35. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* , *op. cit.*, p. 78.
36. Elzbieta Reklajtis, "Przedmowa do Wydania Polskiegr", w Frantz Fanon, *Wyklety Lud Ziemi* , Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Waszawa, 1985, s. 13.
37. President Julius Nyerere, In conversation with Darcus Howe and Tarig Ali , Race Today Publications, London, March 1986, p. 7. doc.b.FFanon