



Battling for the New Man Fanon and French Counter-Revolutionaries

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Abstract: This article examines Frantz Fanon's conception of a "new man" in the context of the *psychological action* campaign initiated by French military strategists during the Algerian war. Using archival research, the article draws parallels between military psychologists and Fanon's search for a new man in a war of re-colonization for the former and decolonization for the latter. While the French military used sophisticated methods of brainwashing to bring about a new colonial subject, Fanon relied on anti-colonial political engagement, and an ambiguous relation to a rehabilitated European thought. The paper raises questions about Fanon's dismissal of the long-term significance of brainwashing for individual agency, and the absence of an elaborate psychiatric response to counter the military psychological action campaign.

There is a paradox at the heart of Fanon's vision of the future of newly independent societies: On the one hand, he had amply analyzed and documented the apparent "psycho-pathological" character of the colonized man (Black or Arab)—born of the ideational and material conditions imposed by European domination; on the other hand, he called for the emergence of a "new man" with a certain type of Europe as a model. How could the matrix, the nexus

of pathology built into the colonized person over the years be overcome in such a way as to lead to the "invention" of a new man that would prevent the duplication of a sick Europe in her former colonies? Did Fanon, the activist, allow his political ideals to take precedence over his knowledge as a psychiatrist? Is Fanon's conception of a "new man" mere wishful thinking, a last warning and admonition to colonized people at a time when he knew he was about to die?

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I would like to suggest that Fanon's last entreaty was not only the logical conclusion of his analysis of the role of violence/force in the process of decolonization, but also resonates with an important part of a secret French military strategy of precisely creating a "new man" in Algeria using methods of *psychological action*. In other words, both Fanon and the French civil/military authorities were aiming for the same ultimate goal, the creation of "new men" albeit with different methods. The military had a plan for achieving this goal. Fanon proposed a few pointers that fell short of a program of action. More importantly, although he knew of some of the psychological action techniques used by the military in brainwashing, he did not seem to have appreciated their long-lasting effects on perceptions of self, or on the positioning of the self in relation to the post-independence socio-political order.

In this paper I am concerned with understanding the *gap* between Fanon's knowledge of the psychopathology induced in the colonized person and his indeterminate conception of a "new man." I also seek to understand Fanon's apparent dismissal of the effects of military methods of psychological action, a program that combined propaganda, interrogation, and behavior modification. I do not wish to counterpose the French military and Fanon as an idle yet potentially misleading academic exercise. Rather, I wish to explore the significance of Fanon's conception of a "new man" in the context in which it was elaborated, namely the Algerian war, which informed the bulk of Fanon's work and ideas. In a way, anti-subversive war officers and revolutionary psychiatrist were engaged in a course of action that reflected to each a reverse mirror image of the other: military men used psychology for political gain; the psychiatrist used politics for psychological gain.

This paper is divided into three parts:

1. The overlap and points of divergence in assessments of the nature of the colonized person in the writings of military strategists as well as Fanon;
2. The strategies used by the military to bring about a new man;
3. Fanon's conception of the "new man."¹

I. CONSTRUCTING THE COLONIZED SELF

The Algerian war was defined by French military strategists as a "new war," or "revolutionary war" requiring unconventional methods with which to prosecute it (Lazreg 2007). As such, it was deployed on two main fronts: military and psychological. In fact there were two wars; one was fought with planes, tanks, and light mobile units, the other with psychological methods of propaganda and brainwashing in which torture figured prominently. This second and simultaneous war was appropriately called *guerre psychologique* (SHD 1957, 1959). While regular military propaganda targeted French conscripts whose commitment to the war was deemed weak, psychological warfare proper, which also included special propaganda techniques, but mostly torture, targeted the Algerian population only. In order to build an effective program of psychological action, military strategists constructed a psychological profile for use as a template by itinerant psychological experts, many of whom were intelligence officers.

Algerians were defined as sub-human ("*sous-hommes*"), primitive—a concept that was frequently used by hard line generals such as Massu and Salan—emotional beings, detached from reality, fanatics, but

¹ In this article, I will use my own translation of the books by Franz Fanon as well as Constance Farrington's translation of the *Wretched of the Earth*.

valuing pride, dignity and justice. Although intelligent, Algerians were deemed lacking in the capacity for critical inquiry, which, allegedly, was a consequence of their attachment to Islam and their resulting tendency to fanaticism (CAOM). The root-cause of the thirst for justice and dignity which the psychological action experts noted among the native population was not explained, and thus the colonial system of rule was left unexamined and untouched. For, explaining it would have meant discussing the socio-economic inequities that led to the war to begin with. By contrast, Fanon's analysis of the Algerian situation naturally focused on the colonial context that produced aspirations for justice and dignity. Fanon had also observed that the colonial construction of the native's character had no effect on the native's inner self during the process of decolonization, although it had been at the core of the native's decision to free himself of the colonial system: "The colonized man knows all about this [his definition as an animal], and has a good laugh" (2002:46). Some officers too had doubts that their construction of the character of the natives was accurate: A report issued by the 31st Light Infantry Group, in the Oran (Wahran) region, notes that "The indigenous people, genetically distrustful, observe us, appear indifferent, and adopt a wait-and-see attitude" (SHD 1956:2).

An examination of the role of *force* in the anti-colonial war reveals additional overlap between Fanon and the military strategists' conceptions of the necessity of violence in an anti-colonial war. Fanon had argued that colonial rule was based on violence, symbolic as well as physical. The being of the colonized is kneaded with raw, "unmediated"—a rather problematic conception—violence (2002:48). Consequently, decolonization must by necessity proceed along a violent path. In this, the colonized person turns the violence inflicted upon her/him against the colonist. Force meets

with force, violence itself is its own special medium ("la médiation royale"); violence is "praxis" (2002:83). Anti-subversive war strategists had argued that the native only understood the language of "force," and thus had to be dealt with only with force. Imputed force calls for more (concrete) force. Force has no other medium but itself.

Finally, Fanon's choice of words in discussing the transformation of the colonized intellectual into a politically aware intellectual at the vanguard of the decolonization struggle is similar to that of the Psychological Action strategist: Both use the concept of "contact." For Fanon, "contact" with the people helps the intellectual to discover a different reality, "honesty," "good faith." More importantly, "contact" reveals to the colonized intellectual, the "falsehood" of the humanistic, universalizing theories that the colonizer furnished his mind with (2002:47-49). For military officers, making "contact" with the population was a code word for "pacifying" the population after "liberating" it from the FLN. Just like Fanon had outlined the risks (including "populism" and the "cult of the detail") for the intellectual of failing to understand the people during contact with them, when he is "ensconced" (in French, "enfouï") in them, submerged by their "tide," military officers on the ground too had trouble with the notion of "contact" with native Algerians. As officer Pouget (1981:143) put it, "search for contact, contact intelligence, line of contact etc. This line of contact on the ground, the Joint Chiefs of Staff represented it on the map in a double underline: red for the enemy, blue for the friend. ... Where on earth is this devilish contact located, elusive like the enemy in an unnamable war?" The war was waged in and against the population deemed friend and enemy. More importantly, the most efficient method of "making contact" with the "population-enemy" in order to turn it into a "population-friend" was torture.

II. MILITARY STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A NEW ALGERIAN MAN²

Psychological action techniques were initially used by the military to secure intelligence by making captured combatants talk, but they soon became crucial to a plan of socio-political engineering devised by General Raoul Salan to “create a new man.” The notion of a “new man” in which Fanon and anti-subversive war officers shared is intriguing. It was already part of France’s intellectual and public discourse. Furthermore, between the two World Wars, a Center for the Study of Social Problems had been established under the leadership of an engineer, Jean Coutrot, who had been studying the impact of an accelerated pace of industrialization on “Man,” especially the working class man. Around this Society were people with various agendas, such as Alex Carrel, a eugenicist, who wanted to develop a program for creating “biological elites” (Clarke 2001:63-86). Although they adopted the notion of a “new man” from a non-colonial milieu, the anti-subversive war officers integrated it in a program of psychological action inspired by theories of crowd behavior (as formulated by Gustave le Bon) and mass manipulation. They found in the work of Sergei (Stepanovich) Chakotin (1940), a student and assistant of the famed physiologist, Pavlov, and former member of the Center for the Study of Social problems, justifications and techniques for a program of behavior modification in which torture played a significant role.

In his book, *The Rape of the Masses*, Chakotin revealed that political behavior, like all other categories of human behavior, is based on four classes of instincts or “innate reactions.” Extrapolating from Pavlov’s experiments with cats and dogs, he argued

that the instincts of struggle (or defense), nutrition, sexuality, and “maternity” form the foundation of “applied psychology” (18-20). Accordingly, the manipulation of the right instincts yields the appropriate behavior through reflex conditioning. For example, the instinct of struggle is related to passive states such as fear and depression, as well as active states, which include the search for power and domination, whereas the nutrition instinct is related to material wants and rewards (xv, 19). Chakotin believed that methods used by “counter-revolutionary” fascist movements that literally raped the masses could be adopted to bring about behavior reflecting peace, freedom, and equality among people (19). He revealed the techniques that overcome resistance in individuals, and produce fear and obedience through expert use of symbols, speech, sounds (including music), and *pain*. For instance, resistance (also called *inhibition*) can be neutralized in an individual by shocking (“overexciting”) his nervous system and causing a “deep emotion.” Induced fatigue may also render the individual sleepy, a condition that weakens his resistance, and makes him receptive to suggestion as happens in hypnosis (13).

Chakotin’s work—taught at the *Centre d’Instruction Pacification Contre-Guérilla* in Arzew, Western Algeria—inspired strategists to mount a “physical” and “moral” offensive to conquer the population (Souyris 1957:102). They saw the appropriateness of using “violent” methods of psychological action, including placing recalcitrants or “notorious rebels” (Souyris, 102-109) in special moral rehabilitation camps (*camps de désendoctrinement*). Chakotin sensitized psychological action experts in search of the proper methods of behavior modification to the use of combinations of sound stimulants, images, as well as anticipation of pain. Furthermore, modulations of pain in the torture chambers were combined with reflex conditioning techniques between torture sessions, calculated to induce detainees to talk.

² This section is based on chapters 3 of my forthcoming book, *Torture and Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad*, Princeton University Press.

Salan's New Men

How were these ideas put to use by the anti-subversive war generals? Salan devised a “shock method which would lead to pacification,” based on the erasure of “the ideological hold that rebels have on the population; the creation in the population of a new mindset favorable to our cause; and the establishment of the right infrastructure” (SHD 1957). This was an elaborate psychological scheme requiring the utilization of *special* psychological methods (SHD 1957). Salan cast doubt on the prevailing methods of psychological action which emphasized making “contacts” with the population. He wished to do a cleansing mental operation, followed by a refurbishing of the mind with new concepts. Echoing Pavlov and Chakotin, he strongly felt that “pacification” could not be “superimposed” on a mental domain that had not been emptied out of its contents.

Salan's method was to set up an organization modeled after the FLN, with a political commissar, and a commando operating underground. The instruments of this “pacification” program were to be the psychological action officers, including Mobile Officers that traveled to military camps throughout the country to advise local intelligence officers, Intelligence Officers, and a trained corps of “political commissars.” The latter were to be selected by Mobile Officers in close cooperation with local authorities from the targeted military zone. They were to be skillfully “kidnapped” (“*enlevés*”) and trained in secret “Special Centers” (SHD 1957). After completion of their training, the “political commissars” would be “discretely reintroduced into their *douars* [hamlets], protected and controlled with extreme care.” They in turn “will secretly recruit members for the new structure, organized in cells after the rebel model, and will form the kernels of future bands which we will later arm” (SHD 1957). They would be introduced after the

“cleansing” of the OPA, and the establishment of a new infrastructure. They would bring about the ideological “conquest” of the population before being officially incorporated into the administration of their zone. At this phase too, a “mobile self-defense” network would be created out of the bands that operated clandestinely. This “pacification” method was perceived as solid—it was based on a professional team of psychologically reconverted natives—as well as economical; its psychological reliability would help to reduce the number of troops. It is unclear how many people were picked up for no other reason than they were deemed suitable for the task of being “re-educated” into the “new men” whom civil and military leaders often mentioned in their communications. This was a policy, initiated at the highest levels of the military hierarchy and carried out in secret that targeted unsuspecting individuals for psychological engineering.

In treating some of the men who had been brainwashed Fanon distinguished, as French intelligence officers did, between the brainwashing of intellectuals and that of common combatants. However, he felt that intellectuals were subjected to more sophisticated methods than common combatants. Fanon was convinced that the treatment of “intellectuals,” required therapy to rid the victims of the “guilt” of betrayal, whereas he deemed the common combatants' symptoms “not serious” since their brainwashing was carried out primarily with torture (1963:285-289). He failed to see that “intellectuals,” of whom he only treated a very small number, too could have been tortured prior to undergoing brainwashing. Fanon may not have been aware of the multiple theoretical sources used by anti-subversive war psychological strategists in devising their brainwashing program, nor was he aware of the full scale of this program.

III. FANON'S CONCEPTION OF THE NEW MAN IN THE THIRD WORLD

In the last two pages and a half of the *Wretched of the Earth*—I use the French edition, *Les damnés de la terre*—Fanon calls on the Third World to blaze a new path, “make a fresh start,” or in French “faire peau neuve” (literally get a new skin), to develop a new way of thinking, “to try and create a new man” (2002: 305). To achieve this goal, Fanon suggests that the Third World man tear himself away from Europe for a number of reasons.

First, Europe is now in a “state of stasis” between “physical and spiritual fragmentation,” having exhausted itself in its narcissism. It has little to offer the people it colonized since it brought them destruction, death, and enslavement under the banner of humanism. As he put it “Let’s leave this Europe that does not cease to talk about man, but murders him whether it finds him, at every street corner, in every part of the world” (305).

Second, Europe has lost control and cannot redress its course. It is a rudderless ship that must be abandoned.

Three, a corollary of the preceding point, in Europe “cerebral work,” (“le travail cérébral”) has become painful as it is disconnected from, alienated from, reality.

These oft repeated reasons over less than three pages are meant to demonstrate to the Third World man that the object of his dreams is not worth it: “We must leave our dreams, we must abandon our old beliefs [in the goodness of Europe], our friendships for they belong to a time when were not alive.” It is time to wake up from the “night in which we were plunged” (301). The awakened Third world man cannot afford to play “catch up” with or “ape Europe.” The “European game is definitely up!” (302).

But is the European game really up for Fanon himself? After identifying all the rea-

sons for which Europe must be abandoned and avoided, he asserts that “it is true however that we need a model.” He asks that the Third World man look elsewhere for inspiration. Yet, and after portraying Europe as hypocritical, lying, unjust, and genocidal Fanon finds himself compelled to outline her achievements: First, at home, on her turf, Europe has been successful at everything she endeavored to do. Second, European thought contains answers to all the problems encountered by “humanity” (303). Third, Europe would be better at leading Africa “should we wish to transform Africa into a new Europe” (303-5). In other words, Fanon was convinced of the universalistic and humanistic core of European thought, but felt that it had been perverted by European men who lacked the will necessary to fulfill Europe’s humanistic promise and worldview. Instead, these men allowed European technology, the search for productivity and efficiency, fast-paced existence (in French, “rythmes”) to take precedence over “total” man. This echoes Coutrot’s and his associates’ conception of French industrialization as having stunted the growth of man, and transformed him into a machine of production. Fanon conflated a political critique of Europe’s imperial domination with a critique of the impact of technologies of production on Man, with a capital M, when in reality, as he well knew, colonized Africa, North and Sub-Saharan, had escaped the process of industrialization that alienated Man from his work as mechanization in (all of) French colonial Africa was far less developed than it was in Europe.

Fanon entrusts the Third world man with the task of finding inspiration in a purified Europe, a Europe cleansed of its “crimes.” Of these he lists in a first place the “pathological tearing apart of his [Man’s] functions and the crumbling away of his unity” (1963: 315). Thus, the Third World man must revolutionize Europe by re-exploring its “prodigious” theses, finding so-

lutions to the problems that Europe could not tackle. This echoes some of the French officers' desire to finish the revolution started in Algeria and take it back to France and bring about a new order. For example, Captain Jean Racinet (1970:93), who "pacified" the southern town of Géryville thought that "France ought to achieve the Algerian revolution at the home of the FLN, in its place, and against it." "We wanted the Algerian population to do its revolution. We made the revolution ours" (89).

As I already mentioned, the hard line "pacifiers" had a plan for how to literally construct a new man. The question is how did Fanon think that a new man could be created in the formerly colonized societies when he had amply analyzed the "pathological" psychic condition of the colonized man? How could a new man emerge out of the psychic mutilation he underwent? How could he free Europe of its own distortions when he is kneaded with them, molded by them? This is a double burden that the Third world man must shoulder: free himself of Europe, while freeing Europe of its anti-humanistic self.

If colonialism is a system, and Fanon along with Sartre felt that it was, an anti-colonial response must also be systemic. Replacing the system requires addressing its material, political, cultural and psychological aspects. It is not clear whether Fanon thought that this new man would emerge out of this multiple task of creating a new system or was he the precondition for the creation of a new system, regardless of his sundered psyche.

Clearly, the "new man" can only emerge out of a consciousness that has been able to demystify the colonial ideology of obfuscation that hides before "eternal essences." This is the consciousness of the intellectual who through *contact* with the people, "burns all his [European] idols, namely selfishness, recriminations born out of conceit, and the infantile silliness of al-

ways wanting to have the last word" (2002:49). However, the transformation that takes place in such an intellectual is a function of the degree to which he is part of a colony that has been sufficiently "shaken up by a movement of national liberation." Fanon notes that where there has been no real struggle for liberation, as was the case with the Antilles, or Senegal, "we find [among intellectuals] intact, behaviors and ways of thinking picked up in the course of their contacts with the colonial bourgeoisie." In them, 'a vigilant sentinel [still] stands guard in defense of the Greco-Latin fortification" (50, 49). In *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs (Black Skin, White Masks)*, Fanon had applied the Hegelian metaphor to better understand the "psychopathology" of the Antillean who is born Black but thinks of himself as White (especially vis-à-vis other Black people), uses "whites" as a frame of reference, and constantly seeks recognition for his superiority from his fellow Antilleans. He remarks that having had freedom bestowed upon them, Antilleans do not know the price of freedom. Unlike Black people in the United States, Fanon argues, "The negro is a slave who has been permitted to adopt the attitude of the master" (1952:198).

In the same book, Fanon defines the "psychopathology" of the Antillean as residing in the hiatus or lack of connection between the family and the larger society. One is Black; the other is dominated culturally and politically by White Frenchmen. Entering society's mainstream means for the Black Antillean entering and internalizing a state of "anomaly." Fanon provides a beginning of a concrete program that would restore the Antillean to himself: Use of comic books especially designed for Black children in order to create new, more positive "myths," songs adapted to Black children, and 'at the extreme'—and one wonders why?—new history books "at least until 7th grade"(141). In other words, changing school curricula to re-socialize

the Antillean child is the first therapeutic step toward a restructuring of the self. Fanon also evokes in passing that Sartre had thought that adoption of Marxism, presumably as a method of social analysis, and thus social demystification, helped those who took on the colonial system.

In the *Wretched of the Earth*, however, Fanon focuses on a mechanism other than targeted education through which the opacity of the consciousness of self, and of mimicry of the colonial other, is transcended or sublated. *Violence*, the physical confrontation with the colonist, determines the extent to which consciousness is demystified. And it is so because in the colonies, unlike in the colonizing countries, the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is raw, unscreened by “désorienteurs” or agents of the colonial system that help to gloss over its inequities, and make them palatable by inducing false consciousness. This is evidently not accurate, but Fanon may have had in mind the colonized person that had not been worked through ideologically by colonial schools. The colonized man frees himself of the “indigène” forced into him by the colonial psychosocial order, and regains his humanity. Such a man remains unspecified in Fanon’s entreaty. He could be Ali-la-Pointe, the down and out unemployed young man who redeemed his life by embracing the Algerian revolution, or the assimilated intellectual who manages to wake up from his European dreams. From Fanon’s perspective, Violence as “praxis” is self-transformative. Violence eradicates the colonial “superstructure” (2002:49). By erasing the superstructural encasing of the self, violence creates a cathartic effect productive of a new inner experience of the self. It also produces what Fanon called a self that is “actionnel,” action-oriented, that exercises its agency against the colonist. If this analysis remains at the psychic level, nationalism inevitably appears as a pathological response to a pathological situation; it stems

from a pathological condition. And the much criticized comment made by Sartre in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, that specifically brought out the significance of pathology in Fanon’s analysis was not off the mark: Fanon, the psychiatrist, gave a psychological explanation to a political phenomenon.

Nevertheless, Fanon clearly described the structural preconditions of the emergence of decolonized man. These were: “liberation of the national territory; an incessant struggle against all new forms of colonialism; a staunch resistance to complacency in the higher circles [of politics]” (2002:223). However, Fanon also provides a searing critique of post-colonial governing groups, pointing out their spent nationalism, their dictatorial inclinations, their incapacity to elaborate a “minimal humanistic catechism,” their [African] racism, their aloofness from the people, their pillaging of national resources (158). Amidst the nausea, and the stench of death and rot that he feels and describes in vivid terms with words such as “cadavers” and “sarcophagi” (213, 221), Fanon evinces a sort of nostalgia for Europe: “The western bourgeoisie, although fundamentally racist, manages most often to mask its racism by multiplying nuances, thus allowing itself to preserve intact its proclamation of the eminence of human dignity.” Or, “A bourgeoisie, such as developed in Europe, could, while reinforcing its own power, elaborate an ideology. This dynamic, educated, secular bourgeoisie has successfully accumulated capital thereby giving the nation at least some prosperity” (158,168). By comparison, the Third World bourgeoisie is greedy, lacking in dynamism, lazy and mimetic (157). One might argue that it was only expected that men whose psyche had been thoroughly mutilated would not evolve forms of government that would revolutionize their societies. At any rate, by 1961, one year before the independence of Algeria, Fanon is disillusioned with the

new nations of Africa, and finds that Europe had not left its colonies; it is still in control. Europe's persistent power "turned independence from apotheosis to curse." In frustration, going one step further, Fanon turns his critique of the Third World into an argument for historical accountability: Europe is obligated to give the Third World aid because the Third World "literally created Europe" (95,98).

In sum, the conditions under which the "new man" Fanon called for did not avail. They did not exist in Martinique, they did not exist in Sub-Saharan Africa, but gleams of them shone in Algeria during the war. I will refrain from examining the contemporary Algerian situation as my interest is not to prove Fanon wrong, but to explore what he meant. How is it possible to explain that Fanon, the psychiatrist, neglected to delve into a latent and deep-seated form of colonial "psychopathology" (qua- alienation) that would re-emerge after the colonial struggle was over? Fanon's focus was on political engagement, which he endowed with a curative capacity. The point is not that political engagement is not necessary; it is. But it is not sufficient. In this sense, the anti-subversive war officers were daring in their arrogance: They proposed to deal with the pathology they had created over years of colonial rule by the forced induction into the colonized of more pathology. The brainwashed combatant was "turned" into a military auxiliary: he became the torturer of his former comrades in arms. *A la guerre, comme à la guerre!* Pathology begets more alienating pathology, and what Fanon called the "restructuring of perception" (2002:231) of the colonized man may not be undone with political action alone or one supplemented by a rejuvenated culture. Rather, intense and focused techniques that undo the alienation of the psyche over generations would seem to be more appropriate.

Could Fanon have developed a program of re-conditioning of the people to

counter that of the French psychological action? I cannot answer this question at this time.³ However, judging by the description he gave of the French military techniques of brainwashing, he was not aware of their multiple sources. Nor did he seriously gauge the long term effects of brainwashing. There is a sense in which Fanon could not have developed such a program. As a militant, busily engaged in political anti-colonial action on the side of the FLN, he had little time to devote to it. However, he alone among the FLN circles had the psychiatric training necessary to understand the significance of the methods used by the anti-subversive war military psychologists, and provide a response to them, or at the very least consider them in his conception of the new man. Fanon's failure to do so and the resulting floating indeterminacy that mars his conception of the new man may be partially attributed to methodological difficulties stemming from the tension that existed in him between the professional scientist and the political activist. Fanon had trouble (as many of us sociologists have) with relating the individual and social levels of analysis, and teasing out the specific from the generic. The fact that he was a psychiatrist complicated matters for him as he had to show *specificity*—pathological specificity induced by a warped socio-political milieu—while indicating that it was part of identifiable general patterns that cut across various colonial situations.

Fanon's analysis of the socially induced psychological problems experienced by the individual is accurate. It is so because he understood the nature of colonial rule from within. However, where colonial rule is varied, its variations impact the individual psyche differently. Algerians had a different relation to the French than the Antilleans did. The colonial divide was not be-

³ I am doing research on this issue to be published as a book.

tween Black and White, but between Christian-French vs. Muslim-Algerian, which concealed from the victims, militants and activists among them, the raw facts of race, if not color. This did not mean that race did not play a role in the dynamics of the war. It did, but it was experienced differently at the individual as well as the collective levels. The Algerian war helped Fanon to shift emphasis from color as the medium and hotbed of alienation as he did in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to political domination.

On the one hand, in discussing the Algerian war, Fanon de-emphasized the social-psychological pathology he had observed in the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital among the clinically mentally ill as well as the sane; on the other hand, somewhat leery of conventional psychoanalysis, he emphasized action, as a more effective therapy for politically induced individual problems. Aware of the complexity of colonial experiences, Fanon had already stressed the need to account for context. He had noted the differences in attitudes towards blackness between Black Antilleans and their American counterparts pointing out that “negritude thus found its first limitation in phenomena that account for the *historicity* of men” (emphasis added). And he had concluded that culture, which he had described as the second medium (after liberation of the national territory) through which decolonization is effectuated, is first and foremost national, therefore situational. Consequently, the problems encountered by various Black leaders living in different countries are necessarily different (2002:206). By implication, there cannot be a modal “new man” in the Third world, nor is there one single path that leads to this new man.

In passing, I would like to observe that all along his discussion of the new man, Fanon retains a medical language: The imagery he uses when discussing the need to evolve a new man is strikingly medical.

The word brain or cerebral is used five times in a little over two pages. For example, he asks that we “gear up our muscles and our brains in a new direction;” he speaks of “cerebral work,” “cerebral reality,” “cerebral mass of humanity,” “rhythms imposed on the brain.” In French, the alliteration effect is more striking as the word for brain, “cerveau,” derived from the same Latin root as “cerebral,” helps to repeat the sound “s.” This resonates with what was being done at the time to the brains of Algerian combatants in General Salan’s secret incubators of “new men.”

The issue at stake for Fanon, as for many of us, was and still is consciousness. How can it be changed, how can it be transformed? Does confronting a system of domination necessarily mean a displacement of the oppressor as an object of desire for the colonized? Or, does it mean a rejection of his political and economic rule without a necessary questioning of the desire for him, for what he represents that is enviable, or not easily obtainable? Does the question “why aren’t you like me, why aren’t you me?”—a transposition of the Lacanian metaphor of the thief who says: “your money or your life”—continue to plague the colonized after money and life have been had? In raising this question I am not agreeing with the post-colonial literary artists (Parry 1981), but merely identifying an area of inquiry that needs to be addressed. In other words, is the colonial situation, a “total” situation—total in the sociological sense given the expression by both Goffman (1962) and Mauss (1967)—amenable to transcendence once the colonizer is physically removed without a vast, systemic and systematic program of action, not only political but also psychological? Was the Algerian experience of a fierce anti-colonial struggle generalizable, and if so why did Fanon fail to tackle a psychological, counter-counter-subversive war? Why did Fanon believe that political consciousness-raising (as well as some education)

would undo what he had called a “trauma” in *Black Skin, White Masks*? By comparison, the anti-subversive officers felt that they could “shock” the psyche of the colonized into embracing and defending the colonial system against their own best interests. They did so systematically, doggedly, and with some success even though they lost the war. But what does it mean to lose a war, if some of the principles for which the anti-subversive officer fought continue to be defended by their victims of yesteryear?

Fanon’s thought was innovative and insightful, but it was also conventional in so far as it partook in a number of accepted verities of the time. One of these is the universalizing notion (albeit based on the European experience) that the historical agent of development is the bourgeoisie, and where this class cannot fulfill that role it will have to be replaced with the peasantry. Yet, the peasantry—often identified with the “people” or with the “masses”—is also portrayed by Fanon as needing to be brought up to “adulthood” by men organized into a democratically structured party endowed with an ideology (of liberation). Political action through the party would “invent souls,” the souls of the people. Ironically, Fanon’s thought converges here with that of Foucault who argued that modern techniques of discipline aim to educate the “soul” (1995:29). Thus, Fanon did not shy away from a patronizing recommendation that the peasantry be disciplined while at the same time hailing it as the crucible of revolutionary action.

It is important to realize that Fanon, as Sartre understood, was writing for a specific audience: Those of us who experienced (or continue to experience) colonial domination and are fully aware of it, as well as those of us who have yet to become conscious of its implications for who and what they are. In the end, at the end of his life, Fanon wished to remind us that there are multiple ways in which colonial cultural and political hegemony establishes it-

self in the hearts and minds of generations of colonized and “ex-colonized” peoples. He wished to warn us and to admonish us to strive to reconstitute ourselves as new men and women with the fragments of our alienated or dispersed selves, to be whole again, free, sound in mind, independent at last, full agents of our own actions. He did not provide a program for the emergence of such a man/woman. Perhaps Fanon was the very model for the new man he called for, he who, in Blida, put the specialized knowledge of psychiatry to work for the people it was turned against, who cured his Antillean self by joining in with colonized Algerians to fight a common oppressive power. And as he put it: “On the battlefield, bounded by scores of Black men hung by their testicles at all four corners, a monument is erected that promises to be grand. And at the top of this monument I already make out a White man and a Black man holding hands” (1952:200).

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