



New Faces, Old Masks

Borders and Confinements between the Desert and the Mediterranean Sea

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Abstract: This essay, which analyzes what is happening in “Fortress Europe” as a result of (post-colonial) migration, deals with the geography and politics of migration in the South of Italy, in Puglia and on Italy’s southernmost island, Lampedusa (“the Southern Gate to Fortress Europe,” Andrijasevic 2006) where people arriving on “despair boats” are confined in temporary holding centers, places reminiscent of Nazi concentration camps. Taking account of the fact that the primary regions of origin of these undocumented migrants have been identified by NGO (ARCI and Médecins sans Frontières) as the Middle East, Maghreb, Horn of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, the essay examines Fanon’s theory on the specular distortion, violence, and rejection arising from the racist encounters between colonizers and colonized, as expressed in *The Wretched of the Earth*, to see if and how his thought can be useful in reading contemporary violent relations between ex-colonizers and post-colonial peoples. Adopting Fanon’s scheme—humanism, justice, cosmopolitanism, the constructivity of race—as guidelines for a discussion of contemporary migration, the essay questions the transplanting of hierarchization and apartheid practices into European nation-states faced with the perspective of a *univers concentrationnaire*. Then it tries to find ways to dismantle this perspective and offer an epistemologico-political alternative with the help of Fanon’s view that “total liberation concerns every aspect of personality”—re-read through a displaced female Algerian intellectual, Assia Djebar, who writes of decolonization as a definite break with the legacy of violence and mourning that Fanon was nevertheless imbued with. The self-exiled Algerian writer goes as far as stripping down the Algerian national language as an act of decolonization, beyond postcoloniality, in order to redefine freedom. Issues also discussed are: citizenship and denizens (Arendt, Agamben), the right to citizenship as a human right, cohabitation versus militarization, droit de cité (Balibar, Derrida), right to write as @existence.

*THE REBEL: Me: surname: injured;
name: humiliated; civil status: revolu-
tionary; age: the stone age*

—Aimè Césaire, *Les armes miraculeuses*

I’ll start by posing some questions and one assumption.

First, the questions: if all relations between colonizers and colonized, racists and

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racialized, as Fanon demonstrates, are imbued with violence, is it the same with the relations between migrants and residents? Does the unconfessed attraction/repulsion between migrants and nationals determine the impulse to rape, to reject, to expel, to cast out, to repatriate? Is the area between the Sahara desert and the Western Mediterranean a pathological space? Why has Fanon's analysis of the specular distortion, violence, and rejection arising from racist/colonialist encounters been almost neglected by recent post-colonial studies?

Then, the assumption: the main points of Fanon's scheme—humanism, justice, cosmopolitanism, the constructivity of race—can all be adopted as guiding lines to discuss contemporary, in all its complexity, migrancy, the migrant/national relationship and a covered up return of hierarchization and reproletarianization in Western metropolises.

To conclude my preamble aimed at offering the guiding lines or first orientation into the epistemological frame assumed to analyze the "fortress mentality" and transplanting of apartheid practices in European nation-states faced with mass displacements, I will take two points suggested in the presentation of the forum, as a way into a discussion of what is happening in "fortress Europe" as a result of (postcolonial) migration—a phenomenon which is similar to and yet in some ways dissimilar to the ongoing American migrant flux. I will mainly deal with the geography and politics of migration in the South of Italy, with its landing shores on the coasts of Puglia, my own region, and in Lampedusa, Italy's southernmost island, which has been described as "the Southern Gate to Fortress Europe" (Andrijasevic 2006). This area, which is actually a site where the materialization of the power discourse takes shape, a Southern border to protect Western Europe, just like the Spanish coast facing Morocco, triangulates with the Maghreb coast and with Libya. In my land, when the me-

dia and politicians speak of migration, they perpetuate the myth of invasion. In my land, the justification given for the temporary holding centres (in Italian: Centri di Permanenza Temporanea, which I will hereafter refer to as CPT) for "irregular" migrants, is "crime prevention" which can also be seen as a "pre-emptive" seclusion-exclusion. This Southern gate is the landing ground for migrants whose primary regions of origin have been identified by non-governmental organizations (ARCI and Médecins Sans Frontières) as the Middle East (Iraq and Palestine), Maghrebi (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), the Horn of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (see Andrijasevic 2006). In my land, those who are still today the wretched of the earth land on despair boats without even the steersman, or die in the deep sea on boats of despair.

The first point I wish to consider is the assumption that Fanon, who was aware that "colonialism and racism do not stop at one's skin," devoted a significant part of his life to "understanding the nature of colonialism and racism and their effects on the indigenous cultures of the colonizers and the colonized, and their psyche" (from the conference program).

In order to situate the unstable location I am speaking from, I will quote Patrizia Calefato's comments on post-coloniality and Spivak's *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*:

...today we are—historically and geo-politically—"after" post-coloniality, we are in a globalization process in which, nevertheless, new scenarios have arisen as a result of colonialism, of the post-colonial conflicts and the worldwide violence which leads to the exoduses of minorities. Postcolonial is today a theoretical and performative arena which reconsiders the mechanisms of knowledge and the cartographies of power going to and fro between history and narra-

tive and looks for the foundations of what Spivak calls the “epistemic violence” of colonialism and imperialism in the colonial past and in the transnational present alike; in cultural texts and in signs of the imagination alike...¹

I find in Calefato’s point of view reminiscences of Fanon’s studies on the effects of colonization. On the other hand, Spivak, just like Fanon, applies materialist categories to her analyses, and in reading her work we realize that she has personal experience of how colonialism and racism penetrate the deepest recesses of the psyche of the colonized as well as the psyche of the colonizer. Spivak, like Fanon—and like so many post-colonial subjects—finding themselves stared at and seen as “an other,” resist the process by articulating it, and both find that the colonizer defined himself in relation to those he was oppressing, both are faced with the entangled dynamic of racism and desire: the black man’s wearing of a white mask, and the white man’s desire for the black man; both challenge the colonizer’s stare—or in Spivak’s case, what remains of that stare and power in the post-colonial world—on multiple levels. Moreover, Fanon had already highlighted a problematic aspect of post-colonial studies: racism and colonialism operate also at the level of cultural imagination.

And yet Spivak does not mention Fanon in her bibliographical references—at least in the ones I consulted—preferring to quote Western Marxist studies:² Marx himself, Engels, Hegel and, among the contemporaries, Raymond Williams, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Fredrick Jameson, Deleuze-Guattari and, of course Derrida.³ The absence of the father of Post-colonial Studies is extremely curious, and is all the

¹ From Patrizia Calefato’s *Introduction* to the Italian translation of Spivak’s *Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, p. 9. All unacknowledged translations from non-English sources are mine.

stranger because Spivak’s concept of the native élite is closely akin to Fanon’s description of the ex-colonized nationalist who wears the white mask and becomes the guardian of imperialist interests. On the other hand, Fanon’s native revolutionary, the peasant or “fellaheen,” is in marked contrast with Spivak’s construction of the subaltern as deprived of subjectivization, voice and agency. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, focuses on those fringes of colonized who took part in anti-colonial resistance, whereas the colonial Text seemed to consider the colonized as non-representable, or, at best, metamorphosed the colonized into “the other,” as radical alterity, because, argues Fanon, the colonizer does not write the history of the country he robs, rapes and violates (p. 17), but he constantly writes as if he were in his own metropolis: he writes the history of his own nation. But, of course, there is a great cultural difference between Indian-Bengalese subalternity and North African subalternity, and both Fanon and Spivak (and the Subaltern Studies Group) want to write the history of the marginalized, the subaltern in their respective cultures.

Strangely, a rapid glance at contemporary studies on post-coloniality reveals that few scholars have looked into the need of the colonized for emancipation from the

² As for Fanon’s Marxist materialism, I think that he himself clarifies his attitude: “what above all breaks up the world is the fact of belonging or not belonging to a particular species, to a particular race. In a colony the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. Cause is consequence: people are rich because they are white, they are white because they are rich. Where the problem of colonialism is concerned, Marxist analysis therefore needs to be slightly broadened....In a colony...the colonist will always remain a foreigner. Crucially, the ruling class comes from outside and in no way resembles the indigenous inhabitants, “the others.” (Fanon 1961, p. 7). My quotations are from the Italian translation: *I dannati della terra*, Torino, Einaudi, 1967.

³ Actually, a quick look at the works cited in her books reveals that African writers and thinkers are almost absent.

culture of the colonizer, and its psychological and social effects, as Fanon did in *The Wretched of the Earth*. I can think of a few names: Benita Parry, Elleke Bohemer, Diana Fuss, Ania Loomba and Stuart Hall.⁴ Moreover, the initial considerations on nation and nationalism expressed by postcolonial theorists, which were first inspired by Fanon's conception of the decolonization process, as framed in the chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" (in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961), were replaced in the 1980s with more optimistic European Hegelian conceptions, although his work stands as an important influence on postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. And yet, it goes almost unsaid that the Fanonian work on popular textual resources, cultural aetiologies, and constructivity were all subsequently utilized by deconstructionists and poststructuralists and Fanon's constructive method for critical discussions of race was at the basis of Edward Said's influential *Orientalism*.

Of the scholars interested in intercultural confrontation in the postcolonial context, Homi Bhabha is the one who most extensively discusses Fanon's thought: in *The Location of Culture* (1984) in particular, Fanon is one of the subtexts of many Bhabhian concepts⁵—it would not be going too far to say that Fanon is nowadays mostly

⁴ Although, as far as race studies are concerned, as Lewis Gordon pointed out, "From the late 1970s to the present, critical race theory has, thus, been marked by two major influences: Du Bois and Fanon. [...] The Fanonian legacy varies because it has two offshoots. On the one hand, there are those who simply follow Fanon's insights on constructivity. ...Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, and Victor Anderson, for instance, share Fanon's approach of analyzing failures, and his appeals to constructivity, but they reject his thesis that *liberalism* and *scientism* are examples of those failures. David Goldberg, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Cornel West, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and many others have taken the lead on the *racist culture* position. We should bear in mind that none of these thinkers, on either the Du Boisian end or the Fanonian end, represent a complete unity" (Gordon 1999).

encountered through Bhabha's dialogue with his thought. And if Stuart Hall asks "Why Fanon?" (1996), it is Bhabha, in the same year, who puts the question, "Why invoke Frantz Fanon today, quite out of historical context? Why invoke Fanon when the ardor of emancipatory discourse has seemingly yielded to fervent, ferocious pleas for 'the end of history', the end of struggle?" (1996, p.188). In a way, we can answer both scholars with Gates' suggestion that: "Fanon's current fascination for us has something to do with the convergence of the problematic of colonialism with that of subject-formation" (1991, p. 485).

Paul Gilroy, in *After Empire* (2004), makes use of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) by Fanon and of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by DuBois as discussants of his thesis on race and the rights to be human. Gilroy remarks that Fanon's concept of "sociogenesis"—the black/white opposition is a catastrophe brought about by intercultural relations determined by colonial order as a consequence of the colonizer/colonized, colonizer/native dichotomies—although highly meaningful, is at present strangely unspoken, almost covered up (cfr. Gilroy 2004, p. 71).⁶

The second point I mean to address in this article is what in the program of the

⁵ See the chapters titled "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Pre-rogative" and "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of Modern Nation." Pnina Werbner says that Bhabha makes a big mistake: he conflates his "third space of multicultural multiplicity with the Fanonian, pre-revolutionary, perverted and fear-driven spaces of colonial specularities" (Werbner 1994, pp. 234-5).

⁶ I discuss the American scenario of post-colonial studies because in Europe, and Italy particularly, our experience of the impact of racism has been recent. In truth, for decades in Italy there has been a conviction that colonization has nothing to do with us. Today's Eastern European and extra-European migrants have brought back memories of both the Italian colonial adventure in Africa and Italian emigration to America and to other European countries in the 19th and 20th centuries.

conference has been described as Fanon's prescription to undertake action "involving psychological and socio-political education and activism through writing and participation in liberatory movements ... —approaches that ... still inspire scholars and activists alike to simultaneously combine inner and global inquiries into the nature of oppression and liberation."

I will do this through the work of an Algerian writer, Assia Djébar, a woman who has chosen to leave Algeria because she thinks that notwithstanding the struggle for independence, the Algerian psyche is still wounded by the effects of colonialism and the colonizers' legacy: torture and assassination. Violence, seared into the tortured fathers' psyche, passed onto the next generation and, more worryingly, into the politics of postcolonialism—as is evident in the fifth chapter of *The Wretched*, entitled "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." It is here, where he examines torture, imprisonment, and the effects of armed resistance, that Fanon's thinking becomes relevant to today's realities: as a psychiatrist working with patients in the Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algeria, he was troubled by the incorporation of colonialist tactics into the battle against colonialism, and yet he thought that violence was unavoidable for a revolutionary reform of colonized nations. It is on this issue that Fanon's work reveals its lasting relevance to what is happening today and his gendered, schizophrenic positioning: in celebrating the Algerian peasant fighter or "fellaheen" as the real man, Fanon supported masculine strategies of opposition to colonial forces, and while as a psychiatrist he condemned torture and tried to help traumatised people, as a combatant he espoused violence as counter-revolutionary: all colonizations, in being repressive, inflict wounds on identity and central human self-esteem, which will then determine that decolonisation will always be a violent phenomenon (Fanon 1961, part 1, "On violence"). So, the male schizo-

phrenic structure of thinking survives in Fanon: if, as an African, he realizes and shows that a racist culture is an impediment to psychological health in the black man, and rightly accuses white colonizers of inducing pathology in Africans, as a male he realizes that violence brings about trauma, but in attributing the source of violence to European colonizers, he does not foresee the effects of the legacy of violence on post-colonial citizens.

Faced with the effects of this legacy of violence—perpetration of torture, murder, funerals (see *Blanc d'Algerie*, 1996)—Assia Djébar long ago chose to live in exile, and, from wherever she happens to find herself, responds through acts of writing which combine inquiries into the nature of oppression and violence in both colonialism and nationalism in Algeria with investigation of the nature of global oppression—it is over and over again a story of power and possession, i.e., as Fanon knew, violence was and is the shared evil that forces together the oppressor and the oppressed. But neither Fanon nor more contemporary thinkers have yet devised a means of disentangling this web.

Djébar's books are counter-narratives written by someone who situates herself beyond the concept of national sovereignty and creates figurations of resistance to colonization, namely inner oppressive politics aimed at oppressing even one's own fellow citizens through subtle colonizing acts which serve to discriminate against people of different sex, race and religion who are asking for nothing more than human emancipation.

I will start with Fanon's description of the condition of the colonized during colonization and I will show what links his analysis with the contemporary migrant's condition. In the colonial Manichean world (a "world of statues"—says Fanon, p. 17; a "world divided into compartments," p. 5), the native is a being enclosed in a compound—apartheid is a tool of the colonist

who subdivides the colonized city into separated segments, where the border-checkpoint is the military barracks and police stations (p. 5). The first thing the colonized learns is to stay in his own place—in the medina, in the black quarter: no trespassing of spatial, cultural, power borders is permitted (p. 7); he therefore dreams of jumping or trespassing; at a muscular level he is tensed and very twitchy, “like a beast,” as the colonial ideology depicts him; he is constantly anxious, always likely to be found guilty of some transgression (pp. 17-19); he is, Fanon confesses, envious of the colonizer: he wants to take his place.⁷

Well, this apartheid is recreated in the CPTs, which are temporary prefab buildings surrounded with barbed wire, usually located in distant suburbs, to separate migrants from residents, from the other half of the city.⁸ The migrants shut up in these shameful internment camps are perceived by the State and by many “legitimate” inhabitants as half-human, as mongrels, potential trespassers who might rape or rob, who are a threat to property:⁹ as in colonial times, we are witnessing a splitting of the world, which involves a splitting of the souls—of the entrapped migrant’s souls and of those few Italian citizens who feel powerless in the face of this oppression, this violence perpetrated upon their brothers from the opposite shore of the Mediter-

⁷ Rey Chow considers this element in Fanon’s analysis as an expression of an Oedipal reading of the colonizer/native relationship: “Like Freud’s construction of woman ... Fanon’s construction of the native is Oedipal ... Fanon asks ‘What does the black man want?’ The native (the black man) is thus imagined to be an angry son who wants to displace the white man, the father” (Chow 1993, p. 31).

⁸ The racial implications of this segregation are glaringly obvious if we “re-memory” (to use a Morrisonian word-figuration) bell hook’s description of her concept of margin as deriving from the railway which in her native town divided the white people’s city from the black city she belonged to (cf. hook 2000).

anean sea. Perhaps because the postcolonial migrant, like the native in colonial times, knows naked oppression, he is the contemporary figure who foreshadows the ghost of revolution. That’s why the French *banlieus* are a cause of such concern to the establishment: the postcolonial migrants have knocked down the fence of discontent, grievance and delinquency and progressed to the raising of barricades—from here it is but a short step to revolution: that is why governments prefer to deal with kamikaze attacks than to acknowledge that the Left Bank belongs to the Palestinians: thus all Palestinians can be depicted as a threat, as kamikazes and the issue of the ownership of the land, as it was in colonial times, is put to one side.

For the colonized experiencing blatant oppression, enslavement, there was no hole in the fence to walk through, to escape through, no way of finding relief from the muscular tension, says Fanon. For the management and control of migrants, police are accorded the same rights as they were granted in colonial times (“In the colony the recognised, institutionalised interlocutor for the colonised, the mouthpiece of the colonizer and oppressive regime, is the policeman or soldier,” Fanon, p. 5). It is the police who deal with the new arrivals, check their IDs (usually migrants do not have documents), put them in the CPTs, and generally, with some exceptions of course, behave extremely badly. On TV, however, the images shown are of policemen helping sick people off boats, giving them water, food and medicines. What we never see or find out about is what happens

⁹ As Fanon acknowledged, as far as colonization procedures were concerned, the colonizer is not content to physically limit, with the help of the police, the physical space of the colonized: the colonizer makes of the colonized a quintessence of evil, an enemy of (Western) values—in fact, the colonized’s indigenous values are actually perceived as evidence of devaluation.

to those people while they are being held in the barricaded CPTs: the insulting, the humiliation, the objectification, and the consequent birth of feelings of shame, rage and fear which lead to the disintegration of their personalities. Is this not very similar to what the colonized endured? It hardly needs pointing out that Italy and those other European countries which act in defiance of international laws are the same that seventy or more years ago stole these people's goods, exploited their land and their fathers' labour. Today we are again doing them wrong, depriving them of the right to come here, even though they come, not as we went there, to occupy, but simply to survive poverty or water scarcity or different forms of exploitation—to have hope, to have a future, i.e., agency.

(NON) CITIZENS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As a starting point for an examination of contemporary migration into Europe via Lampedusa or the shores of Puglia, let us consider the status of refugee, as defined by Hannah Arendt who, in "We Refugees" (1943), said that the condition of the refugee is the paradigm of a new historical consciousness (see Agamben 1999, p. 1). On the subject of the first camps in Europe built to house refugees, Arendt reminds us that the *lager* was conceived in the colonies. Giorgio Agamben—inspired by Arendt, who wrote that, as a result of the experience of colonization, Europeans introduced into Europe the practices experimented in the colonies, most significantly the suppression of the constitutional state—adds that the refugee is a disquieting figure because he undermines the identification of man with citizen, birth with nationality. As history recounts, before sending the Jews to the *lagers*, the Nazis deprived them of citizenship. The standard deprivation progression was: internment camp, concentration

camp, extermination camp.

To the Italians living near the CPTs, the *fil rouge* linking contemporary refugee camps to concentration camps to colonial oppression and violence should be strikingly clear. If the Jews were refugees criminalized by Nazi-fascism, contemporary migrants evoke both the ghost of the Shoah and the ghost of colonialism and its tools: deprivation of rights, of justice, of humanity, and the institutionalization of terror, violence, persecution and detention. To what extent, at a phantasmatical level, does this influence Israeli politics and the Israelisation of American politics in recent years? To what extent does colonialism and a colonialist regime survive in Israeli settlements on the Gaza Strip, where the settlers have the power to threaten and destabilize both the Palestinians (the colonized) and their own government?¹⁰ To what extent, notwithstanding the Palestinians' struggle to retain their own territories, are the colonial policies of Israeli still imbricated in the production of refugees on the borders of that no man's land which has not even a name?

The refugee, says Agamben, is a "border concept" which calls into question the categories of state and nation and requires a redefinition of those categories. Western nation-states are faced today with a "permanently resident mass of non-citizens" who often cannot or do not want to be naturalized, yet neither do they want to be repatriated (p. 3). If the borders were really porous, as post-modern theories affirm, then there would be no need for "citizenship" (actually, says Agamben, "the concept of citizen is no longer adequate to describe the sociopolitical reality of modern states," p. 4): wor(l)ds would be open to

¹⁰ Fanon, on the link between nationalist policy and colonizers' militarism, wrote: "The colonizers, the farmers above all, isolated in their farms, are the first to panic [because of the pre-conflict atmosphere of violence] and ask for firm measures" (1961, p. 34).

trespassings, and for extraterritorial innovative discourses, the reversal of apartheid-type binarisms, would contribute to enhancing human emancipation—one of Fanon's utopianistic formations.

To simplify, I will consider three post-colonial unstable conditions: the refugee, to whom very often Europe denies access; the European resident who will not accept a model of citizenship which excludes the migrant, the wanderer, the refugee;¹¹ the Algerian post-colonial woman who rejects her own country, a country where oppression, imprisonment and torture have survived colonialism, where white colonial violence has got beneath white and coloured post-colonial skins/psyches. Notwithstanding the war for liberation, it seems that the nation state is a "gift" of the colonizer to the political imagination of the colonized, and in the name of the nation state postcolonial and ex-colonial countries deport, export, expel and kill, because, as Agamben suggests, there is no place for man as a human being, as "bare life" or humanity—the forgotten, invisible "humanity" Fanon spoke of in his works.

For the law, the status of man in the sense of "a human being as such"¹² is inconceivable: just as the resident becomes a citizen, or "belongs" to a country, from the moment s/he is born, so the migrant or refugee, in order to be accepted, must become a naturalized citizen, or else be repatriated (Agamben 1999, p. 3). Here again, the link to the colonial system is clear: in the same way that the (post)colonized had to wear

¹¹ The dissident citizen is becoming ever more aware that behind the expulsion procedures there is, on the part of governments, a desire to discipline the "foreigners within" and to abolish any form of dissent or reform inside the borders of the nation-state. According to S. Benhabib, immigration policies are closely intertwined with the politics of conformism and the control of inside opposition (Benhabib 2004, p. 139).

¹² Cf. H. Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" chapter 5 of *Imperialism*.

the white mask and interiorize white capitalist values¹³ in order to be part of the indigenous bourgeoisie, so the migrant, in order to become part of the new country, has to declare the values of the new place to be his own. Moreover, in what, as far as migration processes are concerned, increasingly resembles a police state, where rights are increasingly neglected, it is possible to detect strong parallels between the practices of containment of migration and the practices used in the colonies to repress the struggle for independence: the compilation of dossiers, the detention of presumed suspects, tolerance towards the creation of paramilitary civilian troops in Northern Italy (cf. Fanon, footnote 2, pp. 49-51). The key-words in the control of migration are the same as those used by colonisers with regard to the natives: "to discipline, to tame, and today to pacify" (Fanon, p. 235).

It seems as though borders are built between neighbouring lands precisely in order to keep "bare life" out. The border, *cum-finis* in Latin, which is that line drawn on a map to define a nation-state, has a meaning and a materiality akin to confinement, in as much as both border and confinement contain the meaning of barrage, fortification, (*hudud* in Arabic): I refer to the electrified wire between Mexico and USA; I refer to the wall erected in the no man's land between Israel and Palestine; I refer to the barricades built around temporary holding centers everywhere. Those Iraqi villages and towns which have been transformed into *de facto* camps, fenced off with razor-wire, with roadblocks and curfews, provide further examples of confinement, jailing and denationalization. To confine and exclude is the goal of the military ships patrolling international waters between Sicily and Libya. The sea, an international area, becomes the territory where the powerful can confine the desperate, the stateless, the

¹³ This figure is closely akin to what Spivak, in *The Death of a Discipline*, calls the native élite.

landless before they can reach a land.

As Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, today we are witness to the *empire of camps*, which “reinstates the privilege of a third of the world over the remaining two thirds, thus reinforcing the prerogatives of the Western nation-states through the de-nationalization of the nation-states of the rest of the world.”¹⁴ We should ask ourselves both if this is not a strategy as violent and shameless as colonization and if the empire of camps is not, after all, a new form of political and economical oppression devised by the West to control the Rest after the end of the cold war, after the end of the oppressive confinement of the Rest of the world both in the Western and in the Eastern hemispheres.

Let us pause to reconsider the semantic fields of “border” and “confinement”: being denied *admittance*, the migrant very often attempts *to trespass*, and if he succeeds in *landing*, sometimes he asks for *asylum*. Asylum is a synonym of *shelter*, *protection*, *hospitality*. The *border*, a concept introduced into the colonies with nationhood, on the other hand, has been thought up by political-economical powers as a *barrier to check* the circulation of goods and labour, that is to check bodies—as it was in colonial times. The circulation of migrants seeking for work and freedom threatens just that *barrier* designed to check the *traffic of self-exiled, delocalized* bodies that are feared as bringers of *turbulence*, which is semantically conveyed through the *flood* and *invasion* myths; it is often forgotten that this invasion or flood is, after all, a response, a counter-wave to the invasion of the migrants’ space by European colonialists who *occupied* those spaces as if they were the masters and treated the natives as slaves. This very feeling of turbulence brings about reactions aimed at exclusion: *confine-*

ment, expulsion, repatriation, or new forms of *apartheid*, which is the result of the act of drawing the line of exclusion, which is very often synonymous with the “wrong colour” line. What, after all, are temporary holding centers if not ghettos, enclaves where apartheid practices, racial segregation, exclusion from civilised society—all colonial practices—are condoned? And those of us who live near the CPTs? Do we pretend not to see, as the Polish did not see the trains and the concentration camps? As the French (in France) pretended not to see the violence of colonization, not to hear the cries of the wronged, the wretched, the tortured? Many European countries were responsible for the wrongs of colonization, which can be seen as one of the schools in which North America learned how to “do” imperialism.

Attention needs also to be focused on a new development: the *externalisation of asylum*, an implementation of the detention and return schemes which extends Italian and European borders across the sea, as far as the Libyan desert. This extremely serious form of persecution does not simply relocate the asylum procedures outside the EU’s external borders, but actually deprives asylum seekers of the opportunity of access to asylum procedures and “illegalizes” the movement of migrants between Libya and Italy and between Libya and the neighbouring African states. The establishment of processing centers, i.e., the construction of Italian-funded detention centers on Libyan territory, transforms the border into a confining barrier. Can we call it “delocalization of the entrant” who, through the act of departure, had already delocalized himself from his own land—that entrant who is very often the child of a colonized subject who, notwithstanding postcoloniality, has not succeeded in decolonizing his land and his children?

That is not all: Europeans cannot pretend not to see or know about the policies of removal and detention of undocu-

¹⁴ Mirzoeff 2004, p. 181. My translation from the Italian translation into English. The Italian version of the book was published before (2004) the Routledge edition, 2005.

mented migrants, which recall the Nazi policy of building the concentration camps outside Germany's borders, or the Russian procedures of establishing the gulags in the most far-flung regions of its empire. The Italian temporary holding centers, be they in Lampedusa or Libya, give the impression of being descended both from the penal colonies in colonial and fascist regimes and from the eugenic schemes used for sick, "imperfect" migrants arriving in the United States in the early 20th century.

As Mirzoeff writes, "The camp is the panopticon of our times, being simultaneously the place where new visual technologies are experimented, a model institution for global culture and a powerful symbol of how the nation-states reserve global freedom of movement for capital and deny it to people" (2004, p. 168).

In her essay "The Southern Gate to Fortress Europe," Rutvica Andrijasevic wonders whether the proposal to externalize asylum and the joint patrolling by Italian and Libyan police of the Mediterranean coastline are not "all instances that de-localize the EU's external borders from South Italy into Libyan territory" (2006, p. 40).

I also wonder whether these are not new forms of colonialism, perpetuated by both the ex-colonial state and the post-colonial country; this time, however, the oppression does not imply the imperium of one nation over another territory, but complicity between two nations which place a supranational economical social imperium on subaltern (mostly dark-skinned) classes, depriving migrants and refugees of rights both in the country of origin and in the place of arrival. The brutal face of the free market hegemonic supremacist white and whitened power disrupts old patterns of logic and old antipathies between colonizer and colonized and reaffirms the global free market logic: the oppositions nowadays are hegemonic/subaltern, rich/poor, integrated/delocalized, ex-colonized's children/colonizers' children.

These oppositions reflect the geography of hunger, where "man's relations with matter, with the world, with history are ... relations with food. For the colonized, ... to live is not to die. To exist means to hold onto life" (Fanon, p. 238). These persisting oppositions are a reminder of European crimes, i.e., that "Europe is, literally, the creation of the Third World. The wealth which chokes her is what she stole from underdeveloped populations" (p. 60).

New faces, old masks.

Placing clandestine immigrants in the holding centres allows the border patrol to call them illegal and, as such, deportable. As Rutvica Andrijasevic says, the new Italia-Libya partnership (2004) indicates

A new reorientation of Libyan politics from a pro-African to a pro-European stance, with profound implications for Sub-Saharan migrants. Libya's consequential tightening of its borders with Sub-Saharan neighbors is likely to clash with the long-established principle of free-movement of people that has been a cornerstone of regional cooperation and integration in the Sahel-Saharan region. This shift could destabilize current political relations between Libya and neighboring states and may further 'illegalize' movements of large groups of Sub-Saharan nationals. (Andrijasevic 2006, pp. 41-2)

This seems to mean the end of the revolutionary days when many African post-colonial countries dreamt of a pan-African radical political axis. It is the reversal of Fanon's foreshadowing of a different Africa:

For the Third World it is a question of beginning again from scratch, of taking account both of the often prodigious ideas which come out

of Europe and of Europe's crimes... The bloody class-fuelled tensions,... the racial hatred, slavery, exploitation and above all the bloodless genocide constituted by the segregation of a billion and a half of human beings ...

So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by taking her as an inspiration for our States, institutions and societies.

If we wish to transform Africa [...] we need to invent and discover. [...] For Europe, for ourselves and for all humanity, comrades, we need to renew ourselves, develop new ways of thinking, try to create a new kind of human being." (1961, pp. 243-4)

The Italian policy of deporting asylum seekers from Lampedusa and other Italian CPT to Libya, Andrijasevic observes, is in contravention of article II-19-2 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, according to which "No one may be removed, expelled or extradited to a State where there is a serious risk that they may be subjected to the death penalty, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment," and Libya is considered by many Eurocentric and African states as a country which does not provide the necessary guarantees (Andrijasevic 2006b, note 53, p. 41). Ironically and yet tragically, Libya is a key member of the Group of Sahel-Saharan States and of the African Union, whose main objectives were "to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid; to promote unity and solidarity among African States; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development ..." (*ivi*, note 68, pp. 41-2)—words which seem inspired by Fanon's dream of pan-Africanist communal politics. It is clear that these objectives are wholly incompatible

with Libya's attitude towards migration.

What is happening here? With what residue of the tensions for freedom from colonialism, and freedom from psychological, cultural and political diseases were post-colonial subjects left in the post-liberation era? The brand of the violence of social and racist oppression remains and hinders any effort towards human emancipation of the subaltern, who is still as subaltern today in his own land and abroad, as he was in the colonial age. Those in power have internalized the white mask and made the subaltern brother/sister conscious of his/her (actually or symbolically) black skin.

A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE: GRAPHING DESTITUTION AS DECOLONIZATION

Many intellectual activists in/from post-colonial spaces offer us visions and actions in their books which, in being powerfully evocative and constructive of figurations which help to bring about human emancipation from exclusion, silence, slavery, racial apartheid and deportation, respond to Fanon's plea not only to develop imaginative sociological analysis, but also to present innovative discourses concurring to the construction of a dis-alienated, inner self-representation and of a global healing from the effects of human injustice everywhere:

In a colonial regime like that which existed in Algeria, colonialist ideas influenced not only the European minority but also the Algerians themselves. Total liberation concerns every aspect of personality. ... Independence is not a magic word, but an indispensable precondition for the existence of truly liberated men and women; "truly liberated" in the sense that they are in control of all those material means which will enable the radi-

cal transformation of society.
(Fanon 1961, p. 239)

I will now consider a few theoretical utopianist elements in the literature of Assia Djebar, the displaced post-colonial intellectual whose thinking is strongly marked by a political, ethical and gender consciousness which influences the way she envisages books which trace new modes of existence and resistance. Djebar is a post-colonial subject who was close friends with Fanon's wife (see *Le blanc d'Algerie*) and she is conscious of woman's condition in a fundamentally male culture, such as nationalist Algerian society.¹⁵ This awareness has led her to be critical of post-colonial governments and their methods of violence, and to choose to live in exile. She identifies different forms of colonialism: the European occupation of non-European territories, and the inner Algerian colonialism—Arab culture and language versus Berber culture and language; man's world versus woman's world, etc. She describes herself and the people who "do not belong" to any place, as "in-between"

...between North and South, between two Mediterranean shores, between two lands, between two languages; and between two memories ... writing necessarily between this constant pitching, in this toing and froing, I am landing here ... between two shores where all of a sudden I see the rock of no-return.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the other hand, it was Fanon who in *The Wretched of the Earth* prophetically saw that the class in power after independence was not interested in developing a different national economy, but aimed at becoming an intermediary between Western economies and the people it was governing: the nationalists were, or were going to become, agents of the ex-colonial powers.

¹⁶ A. Djebar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, 1999, pp. 191-2. My translation into English.

Maybe because she is self-exiled, Djebar opts to inhabit the supranational territory of literature and language. And, just like Fanon, she knows in her flesh and in her spirit that

to be a writer, to be born to literature (that is to exercise in the *igthiad* one's wish to understand, to interpret, to delve into one's involvement and thought processes), to be a writer ... means eventually... to be doomed to expatriation ... the Southern writer will not be a mouthpiece inside his own community, but the live or dead remorse of a world floating on the ocean of darkness. (pp. 200-201)

With these words she tells how and why she, a post-colonial woman writer, has chosen exile as her locality: her country has not cut all the ties with violence, has not offered human emancipation to all its subjects. An almost mortal wound has been inflicted on disinherited daughters: in socialist Algeria, a family law (1984) legalizes women's exclusion from riches and rights, and from this condition, the woman writer is left with the "graphing of destitution" (p. 243), says Djebar. Nevertheless, she adds, the female writer should express herself neither through silence nor through crying nor rage. No, she says, it is not enough to transcribe mourning, deploration, seclusion and severance. Ethically, utopianistically the writer-interpreter declares:

My writing does not feed on rupture, it fills up any breach; neither does it feed on exile, but denies it. Above all, my words abhor desolation and consolation. Although I have not inherited the deep chant, it pours out, for free, as a beginning ... Destitute writing which, nevertheless still sings of the sun. (pp.243-6)

In a passage highly relevant to the topic under discussion, Djébar explains how in what she calls “third-world literature,” anchored in the pitching between word and writing, the writer “quenches her thirst at the subterranean river of the very often forgotten memory of the so-called ‘illiterates’” (p. 87). Djébar’s illiterate is not exactly Spivak’s subaltern, but rather closer to Fanon’s native¹⁷: her illiterate woman takes the writer back to oral-aural narratives, to popular knowledge which the writer absorbs in her writing, recalling the way Fanon elected the peasant the radical revolutionary.¹⁸ In the sentence which follows, she goes on to stress a difference, between Islamic and Western cultures, reminding us that it is never possible to generalize on questions such as oppression, migration, colonization, and sexual discrimination. In this passage, Djébar describes Algerian women as eloquent in the harem, but without the power of the written word. Then she adds the image of “bodies turned in upon themselves” because of some “pseudo-Islamic law: for any Islamic woman, writing involves re-confronting a double prohibition—of the gaze and of knowledge” (p. 87).

The ban from writing, from portraying herself in representation, derives, for the Algerian woman, from the barring of the eye: if any story, to be narrated, requires an

exchange of glances, women’s narration can only take place in the harem, where the storyteller can look into the other women’s eyes. First of all, says Djébar, there is the taboo of the eye, and then—she adds—the taboo of the visible body, the strangling of the voice (p. 41). This has led her to choose francophony, a path she herself would have to build, to invent, but also an exercise in the decolonization of all the languages inhabiting her voice: Arab, Berber, French. And in her case, because of her history and culture, there is no surrendering to liberal multiculturalism and polylinguism, because she is herself, at the same time, the emerging voice of emerging Algerian (formerly illiterate) women and the transnational subject who dares to betray both her origins (Arab) and adopted culture (French): the cultural origin is de-territorialized, decolonized, detranscendentalized in the literary work, which becomes a manufacture which subtracts itself from claims of authenticity and nationalism.

Further investigation of this—the language as a transnational space to share and invent with other migrants arriving in Western metropolis from different cultures—is necessary in order to understand if and how the destitution of national languages can be an act of decolonization which goes beyond postcoloniality while at the same time enhancing the renovation of literary, societal and political discourses in order to redefine freedom.

¹⁷ However, she adds, in her reading of the illiterate woman, a political, gendered perspective, absent from Fanon’s analysis.

¹⁸ Fanon mostly speaks of the colonized subject as essentially a male subject, and the resistance fighter is also male, although the history of the Algerian War of Independence saw women contribute significantly and, at that stage of history, the battle for emancipation was secular and seemed to encompass sex equality. Did Fanon have no time, owing to his premature departure, to analyse gender colonization inside Colonization, or was he too, steeped in patriarchal fundamentalist values? On sexuality, race, miscegenation and gender in Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks*, cf. the interesting and complexified essay “The Politics of Admittance” by Rey Chow (1995).

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