

CHAPTER II

Biography

In Training: First stage psychodynamics of racism

Frantz Fanon was born in Martinique on July 20, 1925, into the class he would later term the 'native bourgeoisie'. His father was a customs official and his mother, a shopkeeper. Historically Martinique was a sugar plantation, a French colonial outpost sustained by slave labour. By Fanon's day it was a colonial backwater peopled by mutually hostile castes. The black bourgeoisie was strongly assimilationist and the Fanon family itself was quite patriotic. Five of the eight Fanon children went on the study at French universities (Zahar 1974: vii).

Martinique was a labyrinth of class and status. Whiteness was a social marker: it meant wealthy and cultured - not poor and not black. Later David Lowenthal described it as follows:

The 2300 *bekes*, or resident whites -- less than 1 percent of Martinique's population...Some of the 500 petit blanc peasantry work for the elite whites...Grand blancs shun them less for their poverty than for being culturally non-white: *petit blanc* patois speech, dress, and, above all, deportment brand them as akin to blacks...Distinctions further divide Martinique's upper and middle-class whites...a dozen families constitute the true elite...In the second rank are families of less distinguished or more recent Caribbean vintage...Still lower come folk designated '*pas tout-à-fait blanc*', who though considered tainted by remotely coloured ancestry are none the less formally treated as white. All three groups avoid marriage not only with coloured Antilleans, but also with poor whites, and even with mainland French, lest marriage to any outsider erode *beke* family control over the sugar industry (Robinson 1987: 31-2).

Fanon belonged to the second politically developed generation of the strata that had produced Aimé Césaire, the poet who had pioneered the *Négritude* movement. He attended a secular *lycée*, which only four percent of Black Martinicans could afford (Bulhan 1985: 16). At school, as on the island more generally, there was no acknowledged culture but French culture, no identity but French identity. As Fanon (1967a: 147) commented later, the Antillean schoolboy in his lessons was 'forever talking about "our ancestors, the Gauls".' They were told they must speak 'the French of France, the Frenchman's French, French French' (Fanon 1967a: 20). One never spoke Creole *patois* except to servants. The class links to language were clear. Poorer islanders spoke *patois*, while the assimilated bourgeoisie used French unless speaking to servants. Blacks were only considered human as they became more fluent in 'standard' French. In the 1970s Geismar (1971: 6) noted when disembarking at Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital, that a person with good French or English was whisked through customs while Creole-speaking blacks were searched for contraband.

Martinique had no industry, even its largest crop, sugar, was refined in France and shipped back to the island. Fifty-percent unemployment, especially outside the harvest season was common. The other half worked seven days a week for low pay despite the formal abolition of slavery. Malnutrition was widespread; many people survived on small pieces of sugar cane lying in the countryside (Geismar 1971: 16).

The ruling Antilleans saw themselves as Europeans, despite being descended from slaves (as Fanon was). They avoided any connotation that they were associated with Africa, which represented the savage and the cannibal. For whites the racial divide was clear but West Indians needed to be more careful to avoid the taint of blackness. Even in his late twenties Fanon could still write 'I am a Frenchman. I am interested in French culture, French Civilisation, the French people...what have I to do with a black empire?' (Fanon 1967a: 25)

Whilst the Martinicans thought of themselves as European, this was not always reciprocated. When Frantz was 15, thousands of French troops occupied Martinique, their crude racism and indiscriminate harassment made it clear that they did not recognise the 'whiteness' of the colonials. The huge influx of sailors expropriated Fort-de-France bars, beaches and brothels. Segregation was introduced into cafes: black waiters and white customers. In shops the latter expected to be served first. Any young black woman on the island was regarded as a prostitute; rape was widespread with little redress in the courts. This insight into the 'civilised' French hardly increased the colonials' respect for them, though many assumed that these Frenchmen were not representative. In 1955 Fanon would describe this as the West Indians first 'metaphysical experience' (1967b: 27). By this he meant that their Martinican identity as 'white' was not problematic until contact with Europeans who did not recognise them as 'white' caused a sort of collective identity crisis.

At the age of 17, Fanon decided to leave the island to fight for the 'motherland' against the Nazis. He announced his imminent departure on his brother's wedding day. This decision bewildered the family. His younger brother even reminding him of the words of a professor at the *lycée*, to the effect that the whole business of the European war was whites killing whites and that this was a blessing for the Negro. The idealistic Fanon rejected this retorting 'each time that liberty is at stake, we are all affected, be we whites, blacks, yellows or khakis. Your professor is a fool and I swear to you today that no matter where it may be, each time that Freedom is threatened, I'll be there' (Bulhan 1985: 22).

The volunteers' treatment on their way to fight for France compounded the observations of 'French' troops on the island. The troops were subject to racial slurs. Geismar (1971: 31) describes the miserable conditions of the voyage for everyone but the white officers: minimal rations, cold and wet. When the officers attempted to requisition the 'services' of black female volunteers on board, there was almost a race riot. It was not so much the sexual activities, as the racism. It was clear that the regular French army was not so different from the one that occupied Martinique as Martinicans had assumed.

In North Africa, where Fanon trained as an officer, the white settlers were openly hostile. Antilleans wore a distinguishing beret so they would not be mistaken for Africans. As Bulhan (1985: 27) put it: 'Without their berets they were treated as wild savages and, with them, as domesticated servants.' Fanon and his friends, Mosole and Manville, witnessed the racial divisions in Morocco, sorting out five cliques in the town. The colour line was obvious but it was complex. The first clique was between Metropolitan French and those who had settled in North Africa. Both groups of Frenchmen looked down on Muslims in the army, who in turn did not care for blacks. Fanon's company of Martinican soldiers held aloof from the Africans, especially the Senegalese, whom Fanon had known as 'savages' since childhood (1967a: 162). Rations varied, Africans received vegetable crops harvested in West Africa but Martinicans received European rations.

In mid-1944 there was a call to fight in Europe. Fanon, Mosole and Manville were the only three to volunteer. As they marched across Algeria, the Germans in retreat from North Africa had stripped

the countryside. Scores of children died as famine and disease visited the land. In Oran Fanon witnessed French soldiers tossing bread to Muslim children who fought each other for the crusts (Geismar 1971: 36). He would refer to this incident years later in *Wretched of the Earth*. In Europe it was the Africans, especially the Senegalese, who did most of the fighting. Martinicans were regarded as Europeans. Later the battalion was 'bleached' as it was thought to be too cold for Africans (but not for the tropical Martinicans). Manville commented later the criterion was really assimilation - those who speak French better could resist the cold (Geismar 1971: 38). The population for whom they had come to risk their lives was overtly racist. Residents insulted them in the street. Even in the victory celebrations black troops were ignored, European women preferring to dance with Italian POWs. Fanon was injured fighting near the Swiss border. He and his two friends all received the *Croix de Guerre* and were promoted to corporal.¹ As with many colonials in this generation they all felt that after two years of war they had earned the right to be French and wanted French rights and citizenship. Fanon returned to Martinique in 1945 to finish school. He supported his former French teacher, Aimé Césaire, for election as a communist deputy to the French parliament. Years later, Fanon would remember Césaire's campaign slogan: 'When I turn on my radio, when I hear that Negroes have been lynched in America, I say that we have been lied to; *Hitler is not dead...*' (1967a: 90, emphasis added).² This was Fanon's first experience of working with the island's farmers learning the difficulty of reaching such a group while one remained an outsider (Geismar 1971: 41).

Aimé Césaire was an important influence on Fanon. A quotation of his opens Fanon's first book. Césaire was a founder of the *Négritude* movement, which asserted both the African heritage and the inescapable essence of one's blackness: 'paint the trunk white as you will, the roots will remain black' (Fanon 1967b: 31). The shock that these early 'black pride' statements generated is evident in Fanon's comment:

What indeed could be more grotesque than an educated man, a man with a diploma, having in consequence understood a good many things, among others that is was 'unfortunate to be a Negro,' proclaiming that his skin was beautiful and the '*big black hole*' was a source of truth. Neither the mulattoes nor the Negroes understood this delirium. The mulattoes because they had escaped from the night, the Negroes because they aspired to get away from it. Two centuries of white truth proved this man to be wrong. He must be mad, for it was unthinkable that he could be right (Fanon 1967b: 31).

The only career path in Martinique was education for the colonial apparatus. Fanon returned to school and thought of a career in drama. In 1946 he obtained a scholarship for war veterans. He went to Paris to study dentistry with his two friends. After three weeks of dentistry Fanon packed his bags for Lyons declaring to Manville that "there are just too many niggers in Paris". While Manville was inclined to agree he wanted a better explanation to which Fanon replied that he had never met so many idiots in his life as at dentistry school. He would rather endure his miserable wartime experiences again. Asking why Lyons, Manville found his friend determined to study chemistry and biology as a preparation for medicine (Geismar 1971: 44).

¹ Ironically the general who signed the bravery award, Raoul Salan, would later lead the French forces in Algeria against the Algerian resistance for whom Fanon was fighting. Salan was part of the proto-fascist group that seized power and threatened a coup in Paris.

² Remembering that this slogan was being used in the immediate post-war period so its resonance was very strong.

The year Fanon arrived in France, 1947, was also the year that the *Negritude* movement began publishing its journal, *Présence Africaine*. The *Negritude* movement did hold some fascination for Fanon as it gathered strength. The ‘white trunk and black roots’ analogy of Césaire held some appeal. This influence is evident in his first book, but so also is Sartre’s critique. Sartre, who was on the editorial board of *Présence Africaine*, wrote the preface for Senghor’s classic *Negritude* text, but he also labelled it ‘anti-racist racism’ and a ‘minor term’ in a dialectical process (Bulhan 1985: 31). Fanon could see the logic of Sartre’s critique, even if the expression of it was Eurocentric. It was clear to Fanon that the *Negritude* polemic was not enough. It was based on an essentialist notion of identity not on the social system that creates it. Fanon would increasingly move towards political solutions rather than the more cultural orientation of the *Negritude* movement. He remained close to their project, close enough that the West Indian intellectual Alioune Diop, one of the original editors of *Présence Africaine*, was with Fanon in the last weeks of his life (Gendzier 1973: 44).³

Fanon moved to Lyons, a city of fine food and silk weavers with a history of hard radicalism. He arrived amidst the widespread post-war unrest replete with strikes and student protests. In the midst of radical politics and racial tension, Fanon took up the study of medicine and specialised in psychiatry. He divided his time between medicine and reading Freud, Adler and Jung. He attended Merleau-Ponty’s lectures as well as reading Hegel, Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Husserl and Sartre. He wrote a number of plays and edited a student newspaper for Francophone students from overseas.

The medical faculty, influenced by the ‘Algiers school’ of psychiatry, offered courses that were very neurological. The professor’s only real interest was in neurosurgery. Psychoanalysis and social psychology were almost unknown (Macey 1996: 491). The ‘Algiers school’ was part of the colonial apparatus’ attempts to ‘understand’ France’s colonial subjects. It began as part of broad nineteenth century debates about the links between insanity and civilisation. In particular they were concerned that there was a lack of mental illnesses among ‘primitive’ peoples relative to ‘civilised’ Europeans. This was interpreted as a sign of primitive people’s inferiority. The Algiers school considered Arabs suffered from ‘suggestibility, credulousness, hysteria and pithiatism, perseverance, mental childishness and relative mental deficiency’. Later ‘criminal impulsiveness’ was added to the list. This cross-cultural psychiatry used climatic theories of epidemiology, social Darwinism and Lévy-Bruhl’s thesis of a ‘primitive mentality’ to explain the Arab’s mysterious symptoms. Usually these were located in the neuropsychological limits of the brain due to ‘premature ossification of the skull hampering the development of the Algerian’s brain’ (Bégué 1996: 539-40). Psychiatric symptoms typical of North Africans like suggestibility and ‘magical thinking’ were still being discussed as late as the 1970s (Macey 1996: 492).

In 1952, Fanon would write ‘The North African Syndrome’ based on his clinical experiences with North African emigrants in Lyons (1967b: 13). These emigrants, who stayed on after fighting for France in the war, worked in the chemical and textile industries. Against the background of scientific racism this article seeks to demonstrate that complaints by Arabs were a response to social conditions. The lack of recognition of the social context by doctors was part of the cultural prejudice and institutionalised racism that refused recognition to the Other and was the basis for misdiagnosis and mistrust.

³ The political breach with Césaire came later in 1958 when Césaire called for a ‘yes’ vote in De Gaulle’s referendum to integrate Martinique with France, rather than seeking independence.

His first book dramatises Fanon's difficulties in living in a white world. This book was influenced by existentialism shaped by Karl Jaspers General Psychopathology. Jaspers argued that solidarity among humans makes each member responsible for every wrong and injustice. For Jaspers 'man becomes conscious of himself only in border situations' for instance, nervous breakdowns or depression, after such 'border situations' humans regenerate themselves (Geismar 1971: 50). Fanon experienced many such 'border situations'. On the day of his final examination, for which questions were drawn at random from a basket by the student, the examiner upon discovering that Fanon was Martinican asked: 'what would you like me to ask you about, *boy?*' Fanon angrily drew out a question and answered it (Bulhan 1985: 32). The medical school was no refuge from racism.

In 1952, at the age of 26, Fanon published Peau Noir, Masque Blancs (translated into English as Black Skin White Masks in 1967). Originally begun as a clinical study of the relevance of classical psychoanalysis (Zolberg 1971: 121), it became instead a clinical study of alienated Black consciousness in the white colonial system. Originally entitled 'Essay for the Disalienation of the Black', its mixture of psychology, psychiatry and philosophy laid the basis for his later thought. The book is a testament to the ferment and the anguish of these years, grappling with medicine, politics and racism, it draws critically on a range of sources.

The model used is Césaire's writing style - calm, resigned and aesthetic:

The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon ... or too late
I do not come with timeless truths.
My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances.
Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said.
These things I am going to say, not shout. For it is a long time since shouting has gone out of my life.
So very long... (Fanon 1967a: 7)

As Geismar (1971: 18) put it - this is the serious writing of a young man but not his own - 'he has many things to shout about'. Perhaps knowing the way that 'native' writers had to prove themselves in the Metropole, Césaire's acknowledged mastery of French made him an obvious model. Fanon, in his writing as in his life more generally, was frenetic and driven. His comment in the same introduction that 'I do not trust fervour' (1967a: 9) sounds ironic to anyone who is familiar with his writing. When Francis Jeanson, one of Fanon's first editors, asked him to clarify a phrase in the book, Fanon replied:

I cannot explain that phrase more fully. I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader...That's to say irrationally, almost sensually (Geismar 1971: 18).

Other sources of inspiration included: Sartre's Anti-Semite and Jew, Freud, Jung, and the psycho-analytic sociology of race-relations manifested in sources like the Haitian novelist Richard Wright's book Native Son.

Fanon looks at the role of language and culture as positioning the Negro in an inferiority complex. Popular biographies and novels illustrate his ideas on the effect of racism on gender relations. There is a critique of Octave Mannoni, the colonial psychiatrist, who wrote Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of Colonisation. Fanon's critique is a concrete analysis of this new type of colonial psychiatry. He draws on various psychoanalysts and Hegel as he explores the psychological dynamics of Blackness as imposed inferiority but he is always critical, drawing out their implicit Eurocentrism. He often deploys the rhetorical strategy of making positive statements about a line of thought and then demonstrating its limitations.

Fanon hastily dictated *Peau Noir, Masque Blancs* to the white woman who would, in October 1954, become his wife and intended to submit it as his dissertation. The professor rejected it out of hand. Forced to compromise in November 1951 he submitted a doctoral thesis on 'A Case of Friedrich's Disease with Delusions of Possession', a neuropsychological disorder as suggested by the professor (Macey 1996: 491). Despite the title Fanon uses the term 'drama' to discuss the physiological process as part of the reaction 'of a self ruptured from inter-social relations'. He prefaced it with a quotation from Nietzsche: 'I dedicate myself to living beings not to introspective mental processes' (Bulhan 1985: 32).

After his return to Martinique and work with Césaire it was clear that there was little scope for radical politics at home. Rum was served cheaply in bars and cafes and even though Fanon treated patients for medical problems it was clear that their problems were broader than that (Geismar 1971: 22). As he notes at the end of *Black Skin White Masks*:

I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, Martinique, there is only one solution: to fight (Fanon 1967a: 224).

Fanon returned to France to obtain his certificate to go into private practice, taking up a residency at the Saint Alban clinic. This clinic was known as a centre of wartime resistance and was one of the most progressive psychiatric institutions in France. At a time when most hospitals were carceral, there were no walls at Saint Alban. Working with François Tosquelles, a Catalan refugee from Franco's Spain, Fanon learned about listening to patients and group work. Treatment in a therapeutic community included elements of psychoanalysis and phenomenology as well as drug and shock therapy (Macey 1996: 493). Tosquelles pioneered *thérapeutique institutionnelle* [milieu therapy] based on the idea that:

Psychiatry cannot be reduced to a vision of man as just another variety of living organism. Psychiatry is a medical activity which must be based on a 'total' or 'anthropological' view of man including, at the same time, that which we would call the biological, the psychological, historic, and sociologic perspectives (Geismar 1971: 54).

At a 1953 medical conference Tosquelles explained that the cure of the patients involved all the hospital staff:

Psychiatry forced by society to be isolated with its patients behind the walls of asylums, cannot remain blind to the relationships between mental illnesses. The personality, the place, and the actual events lived through. Psychiatry must define itself by its efforts at integrating medical and organic knowledge with the concrete psychology of the patients (Geismar 1971: 54).

By July 1953 Fanon had completed the gruelling series of exams required to specialise in hospital psychiatry. He asked Leopold Senghor, pioneering *Négritude* poet and later the first president of an independent Senegal, to find him a job in Africa. Having received no reply he accepted an offer of work in Algeria. He was appointed as a medical director at the psychiatric hospital at Blida, the largest such hospital in Algeria (and which now bears his name).

Hospital Militant: November 1953 - January 1957

The French colonised Algeria in 1830 in the face of a declining Ottoman Empire. By 1962, the population was about 10 million, 90 per cent of who were 'natives' that is, Muslim Arabs and Berbers; the rest were *colon*, white settlers. Arab Islamic medicine had its own tradition of treating

the insane, seeing them as 'possessed' and according them a certain respect. The French administration gradually imposed a system of racialised Western medicine, based on ethnographic studies, with the aim of understanding the 'native mentality' (Bégué 1996). Fanon rightly saw that French doctors were an integral part of the colonial repressive apparatus, for example, assisting with torture. This experience found its way into Fanon's writing on 'Medicine and Colonialism' later published in A Dying Colonialism.

By 1953 when Fanon arrived in the Arab quarter of Algiers, known as the Casbah, it was isolated by barbed wire and police checkpoints. He quickly became familiar with the paranoia of the colonial situation. All Arabs, and any Europeans friendly with them, were assumed to be guilty of unspecified crimes (Geismar 1971: 80). Fanon occupied an awkward position seen as 'West Indian' by whites and thus above the Arabs, while his Muslim patients saw him as an inferior Sudanese (Zolberg 1971: 124). He took over a ward with 165 European women and 220 Muslim men. Appalled at some of the conditions including 69 patients who were confined and attended by one nurse. Fanon ordered their release, to the shock of the staff (Onjuanibe 1983: ix). 'Natives' and Europeans were segregated, he overturned this, basing classification on the patient's aggressiveness. The aim was for nurses to graduate patients from closed to open wards and finally out of the hospital. The hospital administrator, who opposed these changes, was too confused to be angry. Apart from one colleague, Lacaton, who had felt the necessity for reform and was given a push by Fanon's example, the remaining European doctors became increasingly hostile. Nurses and interns in other sections made changes, when doctors were not around, emulating Fanon's example as much as they could. He even complained about the Air Force whose planes disturbed the patients to the Chief of Staff and the Resident Minister and the flight paths were changed. After 1955 he stopped police from carrying arms into the hospital.

The staff were under suspicion. Many male nurses were arrested for suspected nationalist sympathies. Lacaton was also taken into custody and tortured. When it was decided that he was not involved with the nationalists he was taken to a farm in the countryside and thrown, half conscious, into one of the settler's pigsties. Fortunately, he was not too injured to escape the pigs alive and after recovering his health fled the hospital. Fanon faced the prospect of similar treatment but never stinted in his revolutionary activities (Geismar 1971: 65-77)

Geronimi, one of Fanon's collaborators, said later 'Fanon wanted a freedom, total freedom, to free man from his chains, all his chains' (Vergés 1996b: 49). Fanon, trying to learn Arabic as he went; and a number of colleagues, serving as interns denied a medical education by colonialism, instituted a new regime. This new regime emphasised patient participation in group work aiming to return them to their community. Fanon and his colleagues examined the effects of Eurocentric diagnosis on Arabs and wrote a number of original clinical pieces on topics like 'Sociotherapy and Muslim Men' and ethno-psychiatry. They also developed an interest in indigenous healing practices (Bulhan 1985: 33).

As Razanajao et al (1996: 522-3) sums up:

In the last analysis, the twin aspects of his activity cannot be separated: promoting the revolution and promoting real psychiatry are constant features of the same commitment.

His psychiatric work has the stamp of a pioneer, both at a theoretical and practical level. Fanon was motivated by a desire to pursue research based on fundamental principles arising from his time at Saint Alban with Tosquelles; he sought to apply the foundations of a style of social psychiatry, as a part of life, adapted to the patients milieu and, consequently, to his

culture. This aspect of his thinking was related to the trend towards transcultural psychiatry; but one should refrain from applying fixed labels to Fanon, bearing in mind that for him there was no such thing as a Black psychopathology as such, it being solely the consequence of colonial alienation...For him the social dimension of the pathogenesis of disorders was primary; he dreamt of a radical psychiatry directly related to the political sphere. He does not deny the existence of madness to which he ascribes no revolutionary value when looked at logically and pragmatically.

At the theoretical level he was part of the institutional psychotherapy movement; in Algeria he was alone during that period in putting it into practice, implying a denunciation of the neuropsychiatric theories of the Algiers school with their 'innate' assumptions. Instead he turned resolutely towards a psychiatry where colonised people could regain their health once the factors producing their alienation had been destroyed...In Algeria, however, this community psychiatry could not be established without one essential precondition: decolonisation. He had the courage to remain consistently true to himself by joining those who worked for liberation.

In September 1956 Fanon made a speech to the Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris. The theme of the conference was the effect of French colonisation on African culture. Paris was not the ideal setting for such a conference. As the centre of the empire, black participants from Africa had to phrase what they said carefully. Fanon cloaked his points in literary allusions. There was general agreement to ban open political discussion, which meant that 'culture' was the focus, but since political repression was on everyone's mind this was often the real topic. As James Baldwin, writing about the conference in *Nobody Knows My Name*, put it 'the "cultural" debate was in perpetual danger of drowning in the sea of the unstated' (Geismar 1971: 153).

The conference represented a variety of views. Richard Wright, the black American novelist, argued that Europeans had liberated Africa from irrationalism. Divisions between French, British and American blacks came into the open, Fanon maintaining that 'he is a Frenchman' as representative of the most universal of all cultures (Caute 1970: 28). In attendance were members of the older generation of Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor (who later became President of Senegal), Richard Wright and Alioune Diop, the editor of *Présence Africaine*. Diop gave a lecture on the theme of 'assimilation' and the harm it had done to indigenous African cultures. Fanon picked up this theme. In the crowded Sorbonne lecture hall, thick with cigarette smoke and hot, Fanon (1967b: 41) began:

The unilaterally agreed normative value of certain cultures deserves our careful attention. One of the paradoxes immediately encountered is the rebound, egocentric, sociocentric definitions.

As Geismar (1971:149) pointed out his first performance in such company meant that his ideas were overworked and propped up with jargon. His ideas were good though, representing a summation of what he had learned up to this point. Racism was an expression of, and was justified by, Western scholarship which created a hierarchy of cultures. Gradually the artificial, academic language led to a more vivid prose:

Having judged, condemned, abandoned his cultural forms, his language, his food habits his sexual behaviour, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed *flings himself* upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man (Fanon 1967b: 49).

Flowing on, Fanon talked of Black power and the resurrection of an African style. This issue would eventually split black militants in the United States those who wanted to confront system and those

wanting to reconstruct separate black societies. Fanon's warning of the dangers of 'nativism' was quite prophetic. It came two years before the United States Supreme Court ruled on the necessity of school desegregation in the USA and Martin Luther King was just beginning his campaign against southern racism. The black Muslims influence was mainly in the prisons. While Fanon was locating racism in the context of a global capitalism, Malcolm X was still a staunch follower of Elijah Muhammad preaching about the horror of 'Christian white men's crimes' (Geismar 1971: 150-1).

In his speech, later published as 'Racism and Culture' in *Présence Africaine*, he proclaimed the necessity of a war of liberation. Racism, he said, is part of a characteristic whole in which one group exploits another. Violence precedes it and makes it possible. It is not a 'psychological flaw' but part of the culture. It is here that Fanon first makes explicit his theory of cultural stages (upon which this thesis will draw repeatedly). He argues that the process of cultural change can be seen as a series of stages: assimilation, retreat and fighting. Later chapters shall examine this in detail as well as applying the stages model in various contexts.

Increasing political tensions and repression made psychiatric work futile. At the height of the 'Battle of Algiers' in 1956 Fanon wrote his letter of resignation to Robert Lacoste (published as 'Letter to the Resident Minister'). He makes clear his frustration and political commitment but also his approach to mental illness:

Madness is one of the means man has of losing his freedom...if psychiatry is a medical technique to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation (Fanon 1967b: 63).

He went on:

The function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man's needs. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced...the decision I have reached is that I cannot continue to bear a responsibility at no matter what cost, on the false pretext that there is nothing else to be done (Fanon 1967b: 63-4).

This letter was the culmination of his increasing commitment to the cause of the Algerian revolution which had broken into armed struggle in 1954. He found his clinical work increasingly problematic as he treated both victims and perpetrators of the torture that was part of France's 'pacification' policy. He hid resistance members, trained nurses, offered secret meeting rooms, ran guns and gathered intelligence. He helped train guerilla units to lay booby traps, control their reflexes and to resist torture (Zahar 1974: xi). Fanon's militancy evidenced in the above speech and his letter of resignation led, in January 1957, to his expulsion from Algeria.

In the Heat of Battle:

After the expulsion he went to Tunis where the *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne* (GPRA) was based. His wife Josie, and their son Olivier, joined him later. Here he again encountered resistance to his ideas within the hospital system. While the hospital was fairly progressive, its staff in the newly independent Tunisia resented the presence of Algerians. Fanon's ideas made the director's job more difficult at a time when many administrative staff were content to reap the benefits of independence. Fanon did not seek approval for his modifications. On being told that there were no funds, he immediately went to the Minister of Health to ask for more

funding. The hospital director was incensed, and the sympathetic hearing that Fanon received made it worse. Fanon turned to the numerous patients termed 'chronically ill', families had hospitalised them to get rid of them. He found that as many as two hundred might be able to go home thereby releasing funds for other work. Again the administrator vetoed the plan.

In a 1959 article 'Day-Care Psychiatry - its Value and Limits', Fanon outlined his introduction of day care for patients that was rare at the time. The idea, which now seems a logical extension of the idea of a therapeutic community, was that patients would maintain contact with their families and culture more broadly and be treated like patients in a clinic rather than incarcerated. For Fanon the key issue of any therapy was that 'the doctor-patient relationship is at all times freely entered into in both sides' (Razanajao et al 1996: 516). In this way the patient can exercise his freedom, rather than escaping into fantasy to indulge it. Not cut off from everyday life and free from the confines of an institution allows for a more individual analysis and exploration of pathological experiences. The patient is not sheltered from the world but is cushioned as the neurosis is confronted. Fanon sums up the therapies:

The guiding principle of our psychiatric methods is to attack the conscious mind as little as possible. We do not believe that it has any curative value. Treatment is directed instead towards awareness, verbalisation and strengthening the patients self-image (Razanajao et al 1996: 517)

At his second meeting with the health minister Fanon explained the plan, including the new outpatients clinic to keep in touch with the patients he wanted discharged. The minister was impressed. The hospital administrator, however, was not and began plotting Fanon's removal. Fanon was accused of being a spy for Israel and thus a threat to Tunisian internal security. The basis of these claims was his sympathy with Jews expressed in Black Skin White Masks, as well as regular meetings with the Jewish doctors on staff (they were the only ones who attended staff meetings). The Minister laughed off these claims.

Arab prejudice against his colour and African discomfort in the presence of his white wife constantly dogged his work. He helped to raise funds and re-organise the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) press. He lectured at the university on the 'Social Psychology of the Black World' based on the work of Chester Himes If He Hollers Let Him Go (Gendzier 1973: 99) and on 'Categories of Modern Humanism.' In a course at Tunis University entitled 'The Meeting of Society and Psychiatry' he outlined his theory of madness and recovery in line with 'milieu therapy' stating 'the insane is an "alien" to society and society decides to exclude the anarchic element'. Fanon questioned the definition of normality adding: 'To be socialised is to answer to the social milieu, to accept that the social milieu influences me.' After considering the workplace and its production of mental disorders, Fanon then addressed the problem of colonial racism. He argued it produced guilt and a desire for whitening, overcompensation and self-destruction. 'Blacks often have only one resource; to kill.' The pathologising of the native, Fanon argued, was a projection of the coloniser's pathology. 'Is the colonial lazy?' Fanon asked, answering that 'the laziness of the colonised is a form of protection; mainly a measure of self-defence on a physiological level'. His conclusion was 'the colonised person who resists is right' (Vergés 1996b: 58).

In addition he worked long hours in FLN health clinics and sat on the editorial board of the newspaper *El Moudjahid*.⁴ His work for the paper covered a wide range of areas but focused on

⁴ Articles from September 1957 to November 1960 were published later as Chapter 4 of Towards the African Revolution. The title means 'fighter' from the Arabic word, *jihad*, meaning struggle.

exposing the violence of colonialism. He also polemicised with the French Left and began to explore some of the dynamics of the revolutionary process.

In December 1958 Fanon spoke for the first time at Pan-Africa congress in Accra. Here he met Kwame Nkrumah, president of the newly independent Ghana; Patrice Lumumba of the Congolese Nationalist Movement; Robert Holden who later became the leader of the *União das Populações de Angola* (UPA) and Amílcar Cabral, leader of the struggle in Guinea-Bissau. He campaigned for unity between northern and southern Africa. At the end of March 1959 he addressed the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists as a member of the West Indian delegation (his statement was reprinted later as part of Wretched of the Earth).

It was while working in the Charles Nicolle Hospital in Tunis that he asked his assistant, Charles Geromini:

“Could you take over the services here?”

“For how long?”

“Three weeks or so?”

“Sure. But could you tell me why?”

“I have to write a book” (Geismar 1971: 125)

Geromini did not quite believe him but within a month Fanon had written *L’An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne*.⁵ Originally entitled The Reality of a Nation Fanon gave a copy of the book to a friend with the dedication:

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... (Geismar 1971: 125-26)

The book was published in 1959. It was translated into English as A Dying Colonialism in 1965. In it Fanon examines how values change as part of revolutionary praxis. The book is in effect a study of the third cultural response to racism. It develops more empirically the development of a fighting stage, charting phenomenologically the birth of the new society. He looks at the veil, the radio, patriarchal family relations, colonial medicine and the attitudes of the European minority in Algeria and shows how they might be changed by a revolutionary struggle.

Six months after its publication, *L’An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne* was banned in France and further printing prohibited (Bulhan 1985: 33). This and Black Skin White Masks had roused interest, both pro and anti, in him as an intellectual. His psychiatric innovations and articles attracted interest as well as foreign interns keen to work with him. Through both his clinical and political work he became one of the French security forces ‘most wanted’ men. He was the target of assassination or kidnap plots by right wing settlers and French security forces. In the middle of 1959 he was seriously injured when his jeep hit a mine while he was visiting refugee camps on the Algerian border. With twelve fractured vertebrae in his spine, he was flown to Rome for treatment where right-wing terrorists made two attempts on his life.

⁵ Geromini gives his own testimony in an appendix to Fanon’s essay ‘Algeria’s European Minority’ which is contained in the new book at Fanon (1965a: 163f).

The next year, 1960, was an important one for the decolonisation process. Many colonies obtained their independence, and their support for each other as well as other national liberation struggles crystallised the notion of an 'African Socialism'. Fanon saw independence granted – as opposed to fought for - as rewarding compliant nationalists by allowing them to become clients. It was clear to Fanon that most leader's version of nationalism did not go far enough. In January, Fanon took part in the second congress of the African peoples and called for the formation of brigades to fight French colonialism (Zahar 1974: xiv). Peter Worsley said of Fanon's speech:

I found myself electrified by a contribution that was remarkable not only for its analytical power, but delivered, too, with a passion and brilliance that is all too rare (Geismar 1971: 146).

The next month Fanon appeared in Cairo, the seat of the GPRC's foreign affairs section, as the GPRC's permanent representative based in Accra, Ghana. Ghana was the centre of an extensive network with African revolutionaries and progressives.

Here he enjoyed a particular prestige as a:

committed revolutionary incarnate, the French intellectual who had broken with the motherland to fight in the front line of the anti-imperialist struggle; here was the black man, the descendant of slaves deported from the continent, who had returned as a militant and as the theoretician of African independence (Zahar 1974: xiv).

He served as Algerian representative at a series of international conferences. He won great applause in Accra by opposing Nkrumah's policy of non-violence with a speech on the need for armed struggle (De Beauvoir 1965: 597). He proclaimed the Algerian struggle as the vanguard of the African Revolution and the need for African unity. He began to work on a book to be called Algiers - The Cape that was to discuss the integration of the Algerian revolution into schemes for Pan African unity and the building of an African Legion to fight in Algeria as a first step in continental self-defence (Geismar 1971: 172). Fanon focused on three problems: opening a southern front in Algeria on the Malian border, the armed struggle in Angola and the events in the Congo (Zahar 1974: xv). The GPRC approved his project to import arms from Mali and to mobilise the population of the Sahara.⁶

In Angola, Fanon saw the possibility of a 'second Algeria' urging the Angolans 'only to begin, the rest will follow.' The *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo-Verde* (PAIGC) dissented arguing for more time. Nevertheless, the *Algerian Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN) and Fanon, in particular, threw their weight behind Holden, who was prepared to act sooner. He liaised with other African leaders on Holden's behalf, and organised training of *União das Populações de Angola* (UPA) guerillas by the ALN. Fanon is said to have explained at the time 'I know Holden is inferior to the MPLA men. But Holden is ready to begin and they are not. And I am convinced that what is necessary is to begin, and that an Angolan revolutionary movement will be forged in the ensuing struggle.' Fanon here is inspired by the Guevarist '*foco*' strategy. It would prove to be a terrible mistake (Davidson 1972: 186). In January 1960, Fanon brokered a 'declaration of compromise' to get all the revolutionary forces working together: Holden signed for UPA, Cabral for the PAIGC and three others signed for the MPLA (Davidson 1972: 201).

⁶ His notes from this period were later published as 'This Africa to Come' in Towards the African Revolution (Fanon 1967b: 187f).

In June 1960, Congo obtained its independence but the Belgians moved in troops as did the United Nations, against the newly elected president, Patrice Lumumba, who was an old comrade of Fanon. Though the pair did not collaborate directly they were close in political outlook. In August, at the Pan African Congress, they met for the last time. Lumumba was arrested illegally, the United Nations maintained its 'neutrality' and in January 1961 he was murdered. Fanon used this as a warning to other African countries in an article 'Lumumba's Death: Could We Do Otherwise?' (Fanon 1967b: 201).

By 1961 his gravest fear was that the result of the Algerian struggle would be the replacement of the Europeans by a Muslim bourgeoisie. He increasingly turned to the army as supervisors of the growth of Third World socialism, which he thought would remain immune from the materialistic corruption of the new bourgeoisie (Geismar 1971: 179).

Denouement:

Shortly after his second visit to Mali his failing health forced his return to Tunis. Though aware of it before, Fanon was diagnosed with leukaemia in December 1960, with at most a few years, possibly months, to live. He went to the Soviet Union for treatment, they advised him to go to the USA or at least to take it easy in hospital.

Instead he returned to Algeria and requested a place as ambassador to Cuba. In the next few months he continued his work on the border giving political training to ALN cadre. By April 1961, his health was visibly deteriorating with bleeding from the gums, horrible bruises and weight loss. In ten weeks he wrote the bulk of his last work that had presumably served as the basis of his cadre training lectures. He included his speech from the second Negro Writers Congress to produce *Les Damnés de la Terre*, the title taken from the Internationale (and translated as Wretched of the Earth in 1965). He commented 'I am under the impression that I have been very, or even too vehement, in my descriptions. The reason is that I feel the whole project is at stake' (Zahar 1974: xviii).

Fanon admitted to his friend Berténe Juminer:

I know that I don't have more than three or four years left to live. I feel the necessity to hurry and to say and to do the most possible...But my Algerian brothers ask me to "spare" myself. Do the colonialists spare them?...You see, keeping up the pressure, I have finished *Wretched of the Earth*. I would have liked to write more... (Geismar 1971: 181).

In August he met Sartre in Rome and asked him to write a preface for the book. When Sartre broke off talking at 2 AM pleading tiredness, Fanon, now only weeks from his death, was outraged at his lack of generosity. Although the two had much in common, Fanon always saw Sartre as a 'French' intellectual never wholly committed to action even though Sartre's journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, had already published the first chapter of the new book entitled 'On Violence'.

Speaking of violence, in a 1959 letter Fanon criticised the irrational violence on both sides:

We do not legitimise the reflex actions of our comrades. We understand them; but we neither excuse them nor deny their existence. Because we are building a new democratic Algeria, because we don't believe that we can elevate and liberate in one area and repress in another, we condemn with bitter hearts those brothers entering revolutionary action with almost psychotic brutality which was brought into being and sustained by long [French] repression (Geismar 1971: 191).

The Algerian war involved a French army of 500 000. During the war 10 000 French troops and 250 000 Algerians died, while two million peasants were 'relocated.' In this milieu peaceful solutions were not an option. The challenge of Third World parties was to channel the violence toward constructive political goals.

Seeing the effects of French torture and the French unwilling to give up their prized possession, Fanon saw violence as the only answer: 'Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leader, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truth and gives the key to them' (1965b: 117). He also noted that the violence of the oppressed is often directed against one another. The solution was to challenge the violence of the oppressor by violence. Whilst many are critical of his ideas, no alternative solutions are offered, such an approach makes violence legitimate only in the hands of the oppressor.

Soon after, he temporarily lost his vision. Thirty pounds underweight he collapsed into bed, unable to go over the proofs for the book, which described his disdain for the United States:

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which all the taints, the sicknesses and the inhumanity of Europe grew to appalling dimensions (Fanon 1965b: 313)

Nevertheless they were his last resort. His treatment in Russia had brought him the time to write Wretched of the Earth. Now he could die quietly in Tunis or swallow his hatred to buy time to be more active, to go back to work on opening the third front. The struggle had reached a crucial stage. The French had initiated cease-fire talks that they were stalling; the third front might tip the balance. Desperate for more time he applied to travel to Washington for treatment, knowing that the CIA was keen to 'interview' him. The CIA negotiated the transport of Fanon to the USA, where they kept him confined in a hotel for eight days, while interrogating him.

He received visitors, such as the Guinean ambassador, Robert Holden in Washington raising funds, and Alioune Diop as well as numerous African UN representatives - with whom he discussed future plans. He received a copy of *Les Damnés de la Terre* from the publisher at the end of November 1961. He made plans for another book. Three topics suggested themselves. One was a history of the ALN and the possibility of reinvigorating the revolution. Another was a description of the organisation of the FLN within France or thirdly a psychological analysis of dying entitled *Le Leucémique et Son Double* (Geismar 1971: 186).

Fanon died on 6 December 1961, aged 36. When the news reached Paris his new book was seized as seditious. In accord with his wishes he was flown back to Tunis and transported to the Algerian border to be buried with his fallen comrades. Four weeks before his death he wrote to a friend in North Africa:

If I'd left Tunis any later, I'd surely have been dead. No doctor can hide that from me. Where am I now? In the trying period after the large haemorrhages when the leucocytes increase their offensive; where, during a night and day surveillance, they inject me with components of blood for which I have a terrible need, and where they give me huge transfusions to keep me in shape - that's to say, alive.

What I want to say is that death is always close by, and what's important is not to know if you can avoid it, but to know that you have done the most possible to realise your ideas. What shocks me here in this bed, as I grow weaker, is not that I'm dying, but that I'm dying in Washington of leukemia considering that I could have died in battle with the enemy three

months ago when I knew I had this disease. We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all, slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty. I want you to know that even at this moment, when the doctors have given up hope, I still think of the Algerian people, of the people of the Third World. And if I've held on this long, it's because of them (Geismar 1971: 185).