

## 50 years Later: Fanon's Legacy and the Caribbean

### Introduction

That Frantz Fanon is today one of the most influential Caribbean born theorists and activists is without dispute. Indeed Fanon's revolutionary impact is evidenced in anti-colonial, anti-racist, and liberation struggles as far and wide as Iran, South Africa, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean and the United States over the past five decades. However, Fanon's personal experiences of everyday life under colonialism in the French Caribbean colony of Martinique is the bedrock of philosophical and theoretical contributions and the source of his own militancy and activism. Any meaningful reflection on Fanon—both the man and the work—will, of necessity, come face-to-face with the Caribbean foundation of his thought and action. One of the primary objectives of this issue is to trace the legacies of Fanon's philosophical, theoretical, and revolutionary engagement in and on the wider Caribbean region.

The title of the present collection—*50 years Later: Fanon's Legacy and the Caribbean*—captures the impulse to commemorate and reflect embedded in the tradition of marking milestone anniversaries. In fact, the one day symposium during which much of the work collected here was first presented was explicit in its intent to reflect back on the impact of Fanon's life and work. The inaugural Critical Caribbean Symposium launched the series as both an act of homage to an intellectual giant of the Caribbean but also to fill the void and speak to the rather lack-luster regional efforts to celebrate the rich and complex legacies of theorizing, and revolutionary activism of the Caribbean. The central focus of the symposium was to interrogate the impact on and in the Caribbean of Frantz Fanon's life, his texts and his active participation in the Algerian liberation struggle.

Part of the work of commemoration requires a direct confrontation with the question of relevance i.e. the intersection of the historical and the contemporary. More precisely, do the conditions of our contemporary moment

compel us to revisit Fanon's revolutionary example and now classic texts? Nigel Gibson's opening essay "The Rationality of Revolt and Fanon's Relevance, 50 Years Later" sets the tone for the project foregrounding the fact that "to speak about relevance ... is to speak about historical context." Indeed, just as the historical context of the decolonization period reverberated in the collective memory and objective reality informing, at once, practice and transformative action, the same is true in our contemporary global moment of capitalist accumulation fueled by ever intensifying processes of neoliberalization. As Gibson astutely observes "the question is not whether Fanon is relevant, but why is Fanon relevant now?" From Tahrir Square, to the urban revolts in England, student mobilization in Chile, and the anti-police protests rocking the United States, Gibson shows how Fanonian practices can help to articulate bottom up dialogues which have the potential to shift the foundations of knowledge and action.

Moving from the larger question of relevance, Andrew Daily's "It is too soon ... or too late: Fanon's legacy in the French Caribbean" challenges the notion that Fanon is largely forgotten in his native Antilles and the wider Caribbean. Daily's essay returns Fanon to the French Antilles revealing that his critique of colonialism influenced the generation of Antillean intellectuals and political activists emerging in the late 1950s and 1960s. The student movements of the 1960s and Edouard Glissant's Institut Martiniquais took Fanon as a point of departure "to elaborate new and novel anticolonial and psychosocial critiques of the Antillean situation." Neil Roberts' "Fanon's Rebel Fifty Years Later" shifts the terrain of the emergence of an anticolonial consciousness—identified by Daily—from the French Antilles to Jamaica which gained independence from Britain in 1962. Using the contemporary political debates surrounding Jamaica's intent to abandon Queen Elizabeth as the state figurehead and transition to a parliamentary Republic, Roberts shows how freedom has been short-circuited within the "colonial forms of constitutionalism and systems of governance" which undergird the Jamaican state. Focusing on the Aimé Césaire inspired figure of the Rebel—the embodiment of anticolonial consciousness—Roberts convincingly argues that true independence resides in the actualization of the collective force of

human freedom i.e. the materialization of the Rebel as a politically engaged group over and above the strictures of the Jamaican state.

In “A permanent State of Carnival: Frantz Fanon on Language, Subjectivity and Violence” Mirey Gorgis teases out the points of convergence between Fanon and Michel Foucault, particularly their philosophical and theoretical understanding of subjectivation. Gorgis contends that Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power fails to consider the underlying mechanisms of colonialism buttressed by the simultaneously hyper-visibility (the spectacular) of the subject and the subtle forms of violence which reduce the colonized body to the corporeal reality of skin—what Gorgis calls a “permanent state of carnival” i.e. black skin and its white mask. In Fanon, as Gorgis demonstrates, the carnivalesque is hard to pin down and rendered flexible where “words, masks, carnivals appear to constitute the cause and the consequence of the black problem, they also represent the cure.” E. Anthony Hurley continues the Fanonian theme of the psychological and psychic violence, anchoring his essay in the contemporary context of Barbados. “Visual Skin, Virtual Masks: Frantz Fanon’s Legacy and the Caribbean” points to the largely unconscious degree to which “many of the social structures, attitudes and values of the former colonial overlord are still firmly entrenched and embraced” by Barbadians. Drawing on Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* Hurley calls for a therapeutic process of personal decolonization for “all human products of colonialism.” This form of therapeutic decolonization is all the more urgent “in the context of a globalized, virtual environment that, while diminishing the significance of the visual in relation to the skin color of individuals, tends to mask the persistence of new permutations of neo-colonial, racialized ideologies.”

Luis Galanes Valldejuli shifts our attention to the significance of the literary dimension at the core of Fanon’s theoretical development. Fanon, as Galanes Valldejuli shows, often turns to literature as a resource, particularly his now famous reading of Mayotte Capécia’s autobiographical novel *Je suis Martiniquaise* as the “empirical ground upon which to build his assertions about Martiniquais women.” In fact, Fanon’s conclusions about the inherent malinchismo of Martiniquais women have been soundly criticized for his

blatant misogyny by feminist critics and activists. Reading Fanon within the Caribbean literary tradition of romantic novels, Galanes Valdejuli makes a compelling case for the need to re-evaluate Fanon's misogynist gender politics and more importantly the pitfalls of the feminist critique responsible for establishing it.

Finally, in order to undertake an evaluation of the impact of Fanon's life and work we also have to come to grips with the processes of translation and reception across multiple linguistic, cultural and national spheres. In "Fanon's Nordic Adventure: A Brief Study of Translation and Reception" Christina Kullberg maps Fanon's presence in Sweden "in order to understand why Fanon has been a prevailing reference for academics, intellectuals and artists." In spite of the official ban against the publication of *Les Damnés de la Terre* in France, two foreign language translations—one is Swedish and the other in Italian—were published 1962. In her brief historical sketch, Kullberg makes clear that successive translations and reception of Fanon in the Swedish context carry the traces of the circumstances in which the translation came about. Indeed, as Kullberg writes, "it would be interesting to see to what extent Fanon has influenced intellectuals and artists that are today engaged particularly in the struggle against the extreme right in Sweden." What is clear is Fanon's continuing influence on thinkers, artists and activists facilitated by the translation and reception of his classic texts.

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Guest Editors