

**“It is too soon... or too late:”
Frantz Fanon’s Legacy in the French Caribbean**

ANDREW M. DAILY
University of Memphis

The Martinican psychiatrist and theorist Frantz Fanon’s work is foundational to studies of imperialism, decolonization, and postcolonial studies, with new articles, books, and conferences dedicated to his thought appearing year after year. Yet, despite his outsized influence and impact in the academy, observers have suggested that in his native Antilles Fanon was largely forgotten. Close attention to the archival record casts doubt on this reading of his legacy in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane. Rather than disappearing into obscurity following his premature death in 1961, Fanon’s work and his life shaped French Caribbean students, activists, intellectuals, and writers. His sharp critique of the Antillean situation and the Antillean psyche, as well as his committed revolutionary example, proved a fecund resource for Antillean student activists, whether Marxist or Catholic, for poets and writers such as Maryse Condé, Sonny Rupaire, Bertène Juminer, and Daniel Boukman, and for critics and social scientists like Edouard Glissant, Roland Suvélor, Michel Giraud, and others. Fanon’s work was not forgotten, but remained explosive and provocative, the subject of intense political and intellectual organization and debate.

“O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge!”
Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*

What is Frantz Fanon’s legacy in his native Antilles? To ask the question denotes the ambivalence and ambiguity of Fanon’s ties to and impact in his native land. Beginning with his earliest interlocutors and critics, it was sug-

gested that his fellow Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Guyanese forgot him, and that if he was remembered at all, it was as a traitor or a shameful secret. One of his first biographers, Pierre Geismar, wrote that in 1970 the public library in Martinique only had Fanon's first book, and that he was "forced to move" from his hotel when the subject of his research became known (Geismar, 9). Edouard Glissant, perhaps Fanon's most important intellectual heir, stated that "years go by without his name (not to mention his work) being mentioned by the media," and that "It is difficult for a French Caribbean to be the brother" of Fanon (Glissant 1981, 36; Glissant 1989, 25). Even Fanon's close friend Marcel Manville, who did so much to keep his legacy alive, suggested that "Fanon était banni dans sa patrie," and that the 1982 Fort-de-France conference he helped organize in Fanon's memory was necessary to, "accompagner... à ce rendez-vous inaugural avec le peuple de la Martinique" (Manville 1984, 23, 21). And David Macey suggested in his definitive 2000 biography that, "his memory remains rather marginal to Martinique as a whole" (Macey 2000, 12). It would seem that Fanon had, and perhaps has, no legacy in his native Antilles.

And yet this tells only part of the story. While Fanon is cast as a "figure of amnesia," close attention to the archives reveals the mark he left on his contemporaries. From his first publications in the 1950s to his death in 1961 and on through revivals in 1982 and again after 2000, Fanon was read and debated in Antillean intellectual and political circles. When the American activist James Forman traveled to Martinique in 1969 to research a Fanon biography, he reported many willing and interested in discussing Fanon's life and work (Forman). In classes prepared for American students visiting Martinique in the 1970s, Glissant devoted an entire session to Fanon's thought (Clark). And figures as diverse as Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, Bertène Juminer, Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Roland Suvélor, René Ménéil, Aimé Césaire, and André Lucrèce found it necessary to return to Fanon and his work, whether to draw inspiration from his example or to quarrel with his caustic vision of Antillean life (Condé; Maximin; Juminer; Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant; Suvélor; Césaire; Lucrèce).

What is doubly ironic in the narrative of a forgotten Fanon is that the richness and complexity of Antillean intellectual and political history are erased as well. Neglecting Fanon's impact in the Antilles is expedient because it facilitates the dehistoricization and decontextualization of his work, enabling its domestication and smooth incorporation into contemporary pieties. For postcolonial criticism, severing Fanon from the Antilles allows his work to travel effortlessly, glossing over his work's close attention to cultural and political context, to the specific histories that made him as an activist and critic. For French universalist and republican discourse, a Fanon conjoined to Algeria and not the Antillean overseas departments fits a national consensus that reads decolonization as a resolved process, the inevitable outcome of history, rather than the subject of ongoing political and intellectual dispute.¹ Returning Fanon to the Antilles reveals a complex and messy experience of decolonization – assimilation, citizenship, hope, disappointment, racism, violence, social upheaval – and a rich intellectual and cultural response to this turmoil that undermines easy binaries. Recovering Fanon's legacy in the French Caribbean enriches our understanding of Fanon as a thinker, and also resurrects an entire body of Antillean Francophone thought that not only narrates the Antillean experience, but poses an immanent critique of both decontextualized postcolonial criticism and French fictions of republican universalism.

Most concretely, this essay shows that his work influenced the generation of Antillean intellectuals and political activists that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Fanon's critique of colonialism and his analysis of the Antillean situation formed an important ideological resource for radical political groups such as the *Groupe d'organisation nationale de la Guadeloupe* (GONG), the *Groupe Revolution Socialiste* (GRS), and the *Mouvement de l'Indépendance de la Martinique* (MIM).² While space prevents tracing a

¹ For decolonization as historical destiny, see: Shepard 2005, 55–100.

² The GONG was a Third World Marxist group that organized in Guadeloupe in the 1960s; they were suppressed following deadly riots in 1967. The GRS was a Trotskyist organization active throughout the 60s and 70s, attracting disaffected Communists. The MIM was the most long-lasting of the groups, beginning as a radical independentist grouping; its separatist ambitions have softened somewhat, and it now controls the Martinican Regional Council.

complete genealogy of Fanon's influence on Caribbean activists and thinkers, in this essay I focus on two key sites of Antillean political and intellectual life in the decades following his premature death: the 1960s student movement, based in both the metropole and the Caribbean, and the Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes, founded by the novelist and critic Edouard Glissant and his colleagues in 1967. Fanon found a ready audience among these students and writers, who took his work as a starting point to elaborate new and novel anticolonial and psychosocial critiques of the Antillean situation. For the students, migrants, workers, and writers that had only known *l'Assimilation*, and had grown disillusioned with its failures, Fanon's critical analysis of Antillean life, and his committed anticolonial militancy, offered a model of a politically engaged life that transcended the narrow bonds of French Antillean identity.

Fanon, an Antillean

A cursory survey of the popular imagination and even critical literature on Frantz Fanon underlines the extent to which, when situating him as a theorist and critic, his Caribbean origins have been downplayed and even completely forgotten.³ A major contribution of David Macey's biography was to return Fanon and his thought to Martinique. While origins do not determine destiny, Macey carefully and painstakingly argued that Martinique and its specific colonial context shaped Fanon's development as a thinker and as a revolutionary (Macey 2000, 31-71; Alessandrini). Born in 1925 in *la vieille colonie* Martinique, Fanon came from the same social and cultural milieu that produced Aimé Césaire, René Ménéil, and Edouard Glissant. Middle-class Martinicans, the social strata from which Fanon came, were largely "assimilated;" they spoke French, observed French customs, possessed French citizenship, and by and large thought of themselves as French men and

³ A Google search turns up descriptions of him as French, Algerian, North African, African, even Egyptian.

women. While France still governed Martinique as a colony, few Caribbeans saw themselves as a colonized people.⁴

Fanon's life and work in the 1950s reflected what Edward Said termed the "voyage in." Said noted that nationalist and anticolonial movements and critiques "paradoxically work better in the heart of empire than in its far-flung domains," that these "subjugated knowledges" transform European cultures and undergird the "modernism of decolonization" (Said, 242-3). The "voyage in," Said suggested, spurred new institutional and associative networks that were central to the critique of colonialism and the elaboration of anticolonial discourse. But the "voyage in" was more than that. As Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* so eloquently narrated, the "voyage in" was central to the emergence of anticolonial consciousness. Displacement itself was vital, for the movement from one colonial space to another – from the Antilles to the metropole – meant movement from one set of social rules and hierarchies to another. Whereas in the Antilles assimilated, middle-class *évolués* were secure in their identities as both black and French, metropolitan realities challenged the link between blackness and Frenchness. The movement itself from colony to metropole alienated and subsequently radicalized Antillean students, intellectuals, and immigrant workers (James; Putnam).

The importance of movement from the Caribbean to Paris was already evident in the writings of the *négritude* generation. Anticipating Fanon's alienation narrative in *Peau noire*, Aimé Césaire, René Ménéil, Léon Damas, and Léonard Sainville filled the pages of *Légitime Défense* and *L'Étudiant Noir* with attacks on France's disinterested treatment of its colonial peoples, particularly the casual, quotidian racism that marked Antilleans as colonized subjects (Boittin). Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* can be read as the poetic account of a returning student, irrevocably changed by his trip to the metropole, sketching a demystified portrait of Martinique to counter the pieties of colonial humanism and the black and métis colonial bourgeois' naïve self-understanding (Wilder).

The centrality Fanon accorded the "voyage in" no doubt reflected his own experience moving from colony to metropole. With friends Pierre

⁴ See Constant and Daniel for a discussion of *l'Assimilation* and its legacies.

Mosole and Marcel Manville, Fanon joined a Free French battalion in 1944, fighting from southern France into Alsace-Lorraine. While treated better than other imperial troops, the army provided an education in the hard realities behind French republican idealism. Fanon wrote to his brother Joby that he had “been deceived” and that he was fighting to “defend an obsolete ideal” (Macey 2000, 103). Remembering that black colonial troops were “whitened” out of victory celebrations, Manville bitterly observed, “Nous réalisons que nous qui avons fait la guerre pour l'égalité des races et la fraternité humaine, nous vivions dans la solitude et le mépris” (Manville 1992, 48). Despite their experiences, Manville and Mosole settled in the metropole to complete their educations. Fanon returned to Martinique, worked on Césaire's parliamentary and mayoral campaign, and moved to France in 1946 to complete his studies (Macey 2000, 108-119).

Peau noire, masques blancs, which Fanon began writing in Lyon in the late 1940s, drew on his own experiences, and the experiences of friends and peers, to paint a critical portrait of postwar Antillean migrants. Highlighting their ideals, hopes, and blindspots, as well as their disappointments, frustrations, and neuroses, *Peau noire* recounted the collision between Antilleans' idealized image of France and the colonial and racist reality. France, Fanon argued, and the journey to it, possessed mythic overtones in Martinican popular imagination: “the metropole is the holy of holies,” which “casts a kind of spell from afar” (Fanon 2008, 7). The Antillean who has been to the metropole “is a demigod” and “returns home radically transformed” (Fanon 2008, 3). Movement from island to metropole was more than a transatlantic crossing: it signified movement from one form of life to another. It represented accession to full humanity.

When Antillean hopes collided with French racism, the results were affecting and for many immigrants would prove profoundly alienating. Postwar Antillean newspapers and journals published accounts of racism, prejudice, dismissal, and even racial violence. Students were regularly denied lodging and service because of their race, and Antilleans out in public with white partners, particularly white women, were scrutinized and harassed. Fanon, for example, was arrested and accused of being a pimp while out

walking with his future wife, Josie (House, 50). Many Antilleans reacted to racial discrimination by withdrawing from French society and into what Fanon called the Antillean “*umwelt*,” a defensive response that student activist Maddy Lastel also described (Lastel, 21; Fanon 2008, 20). Others recommitted to their belief in French identity and ideals. One student, repeatedly denied lodgings due to his race, responded with neither anger nor frustration, but by querying whether France still, “[possessed] authentic French” (Assouvie, 8–9).

As Fanon illustrated so eloquently in his famous anecdote of the little girl on the train – “Look a Negro!” – Antilleans arrived in France demanding recognition as French, or in other words, as white, but were repeatedly denied this recognition. Instead they were marked as black and as colonial, a marking that Fanon argued was tantamount to reducing them to “nonbeing.” “Running the risk of angering my black brothers,” he wrote, “I shall say that a Black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge” (Fanon 2008, xii). Under colonialism whiteness was equated with humanity and this elision constructed a particularly insidious trap for Antilleans. To fulfill their desire for full humanity, Antilleans had to prove themselves twice over: to the French and to themselves. This “double narcissism,” as Fanon termed it, produced a neurotic personality that required white recognition yet remained suspicious that full acceptance would ever be offered. Antilleans parodied the French – linguistic overcompensation, sexual desire for the white man and the white woman, disdain for Africans, dismissive contempt for their own home islands – thus building up neurotic structures that would, ironically, further block assimilation.

Antillean neuroses had their roots in the Antillean situation. Engaging with both Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and Alfred Adler’s theorization of an inferiority complex, Fanon suggested that Antilleans’ freedom and equality were illusory, and that the subjectivity produced from this “freedom” was incomplete and alienated. In 1848, neither slave revolt nor revolution had swept aside slavery, but rather French legislation, a “gift” of liberation that

forever marked Antilleans.⁵ Channeling Kojève, Fanon's conception of psychological formation owed an extensive theoretical debt to the Hegelian "struggle unto death" between the master and the slave for recognition and supremacy.⁶ Such struggle was necessary, Fanon argued, because only struggle creates opposition, and it is only through "encountering opposition from the other, [that] self-consciousness experiences desire, the first stage that leads to the dignity of the mind" (Fanon 2008, 192). Subjectivity emerged only from a freedom wrested from the master; without struggle, the slave's subjectivity was attenuated, incomplete. "Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions" (Fanon 2008, 191).

In the Antilles, the epochal conflict Hegel predicted never occurred. In the 1848 emancipation, "the white master recognized *without a struggle* the black slave," a process that short-circuited the necessary confrontation between master and slave (Fanon 2008, 191).⁷ Black slaves did not liberate themselves but were granted freedom by their former masters. The "black man" had not acted, but had been "acted upon." The Antillean ceased to be a slave, but he never defeated the old master which, according to both Hegel and Fanon, was a vital step toward mastery and being-for-self. The black Frenchman, though free physically and politically, remained bound psychologically and subjectively, for while Antilleans "went from one way of life to another," they did not move "from one life to another" (Fanon 2008, 195). Never reborn as masters, as consciousness-in-itself-for-itself, Antilleans remained slaves despite the master's abdication of mastery. In Fanon's estima-

⁵ The incompleteness of Antillean freedom vis-à-vis Haiti is a common trope in Martinican and Guadeloupean writing. Fanon may not have been aware of the actual history: that Martinicans and Guadeloupeans revolted against slavery before formal word of emancipation arrived from the metropole. See: Schloss 2009 and Bongie 1997.

⁶ Ethan Kleinberg has an excellent account of Hegel's influence and Kojève's seminar in his study of Heidegger's reception in France. Kleinberg 2007, 49–83; on the "French Hegel" more generally: Baugh 2003.

⁷ Emphasis in the original.

tion, postwar political and cultural assimilation only confirmed that Antilleans were a reactive, not active, people: slaves without masters.

On arriving in metropolitan France the Antillean practiced a form of active reactivity, constantly searching out signs of contempt and misrecognition, a process Fanon compared to Adler's inferiority complex.⁸ "Unsure whether the white man considers him as consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, and contestation" (Fanon 2008, 196–7). This search rendered the Antillean "a *comparaison*," which Fanon defined as a person (and a society) defined not by consciousness-in-itself-for-itself, but by a constant identification by and through the Other.⁹ The Antillean "does not possess a personal value of his own and is always dependent on the presence of the Other... Every act... is dependent on 'the Other' – not because 'the Other' remains his final goal for the purpose of communing with him as described by Adler, but simply because it is 'the Other' who asserts him in his need to enhance his status" (Fanon 2008, 186–7). The incessant demand for recognition and fear of misrecognition – as West Africans, for example – formed the dialectic through which the neurotic Antillean self was constituted.¹⁰ Fanon's insight was that the centrality of *comparaison* to Antillean identity formation was insidious not only because it produced a neurotic subject ill at ease in both France and the Antilles, but because *comparaison's* repetitive demand for the Other's recognition circumscribed Antillean political imagination. In short, a subjectivity seeking the Frenchman's recognition would generate a politics forever trapped in assimilation's inherent contradictions.¹¹

⁸ Fanon's use of Adler's theories remains an understudied aspect of his work. For a brief consideration: Bulhan 2004, 77–80.

⁹ *Comparaison* is a Creolism that describes the dynamics of comparison and social pressure that Fanon suggested was a mania among Antilleans. *Comparaison* denoted a simultaneous comparison and leveling – through language, joking, and mockery – that occurred when Antilleans met, socialized and circulated.

¹⁰ Fanon also referred to this as 'lactification.' But the fundamental move of lactification is *comparaison*. See also: "West Indians and Africans," in Fanon 1994, 19–21; Fanon 2008, 24–31.

¹¹ Glen Sean Coulthard brilliantly applies Fanon's critique of the politics of recognition in his own recent study of indigenous struggles in contemporary Canada. See: Coulthard 2014.

The 1960s Generation

Fanon's grim description of Antillean mental and cultural life in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, and his argument that the republican assimilating project would end in failure, infuriated many Martinicans and Guadeloupeans. The novelist Maryse Condé remembered how, as a young student invested in assimilating to an idealized Frenchness, she and three Antillean classmates wrote a letter to the journal *Esprit* to criticize its positive review of Fanon's book (Condé, 166). Even Confiant, skeptical of Frenchness, suggested that Fanon essentially got it wrong, arguing that his portrait of alienation was too totalizing. Despite criticisms, however, Fanon's diagnosis of the Antillean condition and his withering critique of both postwar assimilation and Césaire's *négritude* were foundational for the Antillean students, workers, and intellectuals that developed their political consciousness in Assimilation's wake.

When Fanon died in Bethesda, Maryland, in December 1961, obituaries appeared in the major Martinican and Guadeloupean papers noting Fanon's life and the loss to the Antilles.¹² But Fanon's heterodox political commitments left him without a natural constituency among the Antilles' quarrelsome political factions; neither Césaire and the PPM's "autonomy" nor the PCM's Marxism were predisposed to Fanon's heterodox criticisms of both colonialism and postcolonial governments. Pages in *Les damnés de la terre*, particularly the chapters on national culture, can be read as an implicit critique of *négritude*, and Fanon was always suspicious of the expansive claims of Marxist anticolonialism, which he saw as detached from the realities of the peasants that formed the colonized masses (Fanon 2011, 541-586; Fanon 2004, 145-169). Framed in psychological language and grounded in his firsthand experience of anticolonial revolution, his particular critique left little trace in mainstream Martinican political life, and commentators have thus suggested that Fanon had no discernible legacy in the French Caribbean.

And yet. Looking past party politics offers a more nuanced story, one in which Fanon's thought remained living and consequential to the generation that became intellectually and politically active in an era of decolonization,

¹² For example: "Frantz Fanon est mort." *Justice* 14 December 1961.

revolution, and social and cultural upheaval. The Antilleans that came of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s were more skeptical of Assimilation than the wartime generation. Raised with the promise of assimilation's benefits, they would prove the most disillusioned with its failures. The 1946 departmentalization law pledged that the Antilles would seamlessly integrate into the French republic and Antilleans into French citizenship. But administrative and social differences persisted: Paris continued to rule the islands with a heavy hand and promised socioeconomic improvements developed slowly. Further, the thousands of students and young workers that traveled to the metropole for work were subjected to racialized abuse and even violence. While some Antilleans argued that assimilation was incomplete and had to be seen patiently through to its end, others suggested that it was an impossible project and, inspired by anticolonial struggles in the Maghreb and Southeast Asia, as well as Third World revolutionary movements in Africa and Latin America, advocated more radical positions (Jalabert; Germain).

In the early 1960s a number of students followed in Fanon's footsteps, traveling to Africa and especially Algeria to participate in the anticolonial revolutions that were shaking the French empire. The novelist Raphaël Confiant and the historian Oruno Lara both cited Fanon's example and traveled to Algeria to organize, teach, and write, while the novelist Maryse Condé, who lived in Guinée, credited Fanon with furnishing her with the language she needed to criticize Sekou Touré's regime (Taylor, 276-280; Lara; Condé, 164-9). For this generation, Fanon represented a model of the committed life that refused compromise with both assimilation and the stale slogans of orthodox Marxism, and put Third World and anticolonial politics at the center of activism and scholarship.

The Martinican poet Daniel Blérald, for example, was active in the Antillean student movement, becoming an officer of the General Association of Martinican Students (AGEM) and writing frequently for their journal, *Trait d'Union*. Though not a member of the Communist Party, he was sympathetic to Marxism and traveled to Moscow and China as a Martinican student delegate (Blérald 1959a, 62-71; Blérald 1959b, 82-5). While

teaching in Morocco he was called up for army service; instead, Blérald contacted the Algerian ALN and deserted from the French army (Corzani, 106-110). Blérald, who would change his name to Boukman to honor the legendary *houngan* that initiated the Haitian Revolution, settled in Algeria where he taught French for nearly two decades and wrote “dramatic poems” in both French and Creole on revolutionary and Third World themes (Pallister).

In *Chants pour hâter la mort du temps des Orphée*, Boukman dedicated a poem to Frantz Fanon and the collection as a whole was steeped in Fanonian themes: the psychological effects of white racism, the question of violence, skepticism regarding national culture, and militant hostility to assimilation and imperialism (Boukman). In *Orphée nègre*, Boukman used the allegorical figures of Death and Négritude to deliver a scathing critique of the négritude poets (one imagines Césaire and Senghor in particular). In a framing indebted to Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre*, Boukman suggested that the “Black Orpheus,” in singing of Africa, no longer represented the real lives of the people. In a 2011 interview, Boukman listed Fanon among his primary influences, “above all *Les Damnés de la terre*, in particular the final pages of a man writing on his deathbed, this final song where he warns us against slavishly imitating Europe and its so-called ‘modernity’” (Spear).

Others pursued similar paths. The Guadeloupean Sonny Rupaïre, who published poems in the Antillean radical press and Parisian journals, also defected to Algeria rather than report to the French army. Living first in Algeria and then in Cuba before returning to Guadeloupe in 1971 under amnesty, Rupaïre's poems criticized Antillean politics and celebrated Third World revolution (Corzani, 136-149). Like Boukman, Rupaïre shared Fanon's skepticism of négritude and the “autonomist” politics of both Césaire and the Communists, and his poetry frequently sought to place the Antillean experience in regional and global histories of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, a gesture intended to embed Antillean consciousness within the larger Third World.

Rupaïre's 1971 collection, *Cette igname brisée qu'est ma terre natale*, both anticipated and celebrated violent revolution against colonialism (Rupaïre).

His 1967 poem, “Ultra-marine,” inscribed his identity within a broader Caribbean frame, writing, “Je suis outre-mer/de Saint-Domingue à Trinidad/parenthèse verte d’îles américaines/si riches de leur dénuement/et si pauvres dans leur richesse.” And in his poem “97-1/5/6/1967,” he stated, “Je suis d’une tête de tropique en colère/et mes frères/de Haine sont ailleurs/Asie Afrique et Amérique/à Djibouti/en Algérie/en Martinique/en Indochine” (Rupaire, 61, 47). Rupaire’s poetry looked beyond assimilation’s Francophilia and négritude’s Afrocentrism to remind Antilleans that they, too, must be numbered among the wretched of the earth.

Both Boukman and Rupaire emerged from a student movement that embraced Fanon’s critique of assimilation, nationalism, and négritude. While Césaire’s aesthetic innovations remained influential among the 60s generation, his politics were roundly rejected and condemned on the student left.¹³ Fanon’s analysis of the psychic impact of “epidermilization” in *Peau noire*, and his strident attack on both colonialism and postcolonial states in *Les Damnés de la terre*, reverberated with Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guyanese students in Paris, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and other university centers. In 1962, student activists from all three Caribbean departments founded a new journal, *Matouba*, to unite together Caribbean students. It was shortly followed by the formation of the Organisation de Jeunesse Anticolonialiste Martiniquais (OJAM), a revolutionary anticolonial group committed to linking together students and workers in the islands with those living in the “third island:” the metropole.¹⁴

Matouba, which only ran for three issues before French censors shut it down, combined anticolonial politics with working-class activism, drawing on the lessons of the Algerian War to rethink Antillean politics. An editorial asked, “After Algeria, the Antilles?,” and the journal printed detailed *enquêtes* with Antillean migrant workers alongside analyses of anticolonial and revolutionary movements (Capitaine; Zebus). Fanon’s influence was evident in *Matouba*’s analytical linkage between Algeria and the Antilles, as well as its

¹³ See for example the dossier in *Trait d’Union* debating Césaire’s 1956 resignation from the Communist Party. *Trait d’Union* (June 1957).

¹⁴ The three issues of *Matouba* can be found at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam: IISG ZK 36160.

efforts to focus on the experiences of colonized workers. The second issue ran Fanon's obituary from *El Moudjahid* as well as an analysis of his 'oeuvre,' in which Raymond Relouzat named Fanon, "the apostle of decolonization and the prophet of a future that would not be solely European," and proposed that "his books teach us by offering a human experience of astounding richness" (Relouzat, 27).

Organized at the same time as *Matouba*, OJAM was, as former member Gesner Mencé put it, formed in response to Fanon's insistence that the violence of colonialism could only be defeated with the "legitimate violence" of the colonized (Mencé). While OJAM did not openly advocate armed insurrection against French colonialism, its organizers studied the Algerian FLN and Castro's 26 July Movement as potential models. Composed primarily of members of the Jeunesse Communiste and AGEM, OJAM also recruited from the Parti Socialiste Unifié's youth wing, the Parti Progressiste's youth organization, and even the Catholic youth activists of FAGEC. Citing the "Originality, the Authenticity, and the Unity of the Martinican People," OJAM activists argued that from the "historical, geographical, cultural, and psychological point of view," French colonialism "stifled, bullied, dismantled" the "Antillean nation," and that the Antilles would "only truly bloom with the complete removal of the colonial yoke" ("Entretien avec les Etudiants"). OJAM's project soon attracted the scrutiny of the security services and in 1963 the French state dissolved the organization and put its leading activists on trial for subversion and for threatening the integrity of the French Republic.¹⁵

Not only radical left-wing students took up Fanon's writings and tried to put them into practice. Antillean Catholic students, associated with the Antillean-Guyanese Federation of Catholic Students (FAGEC), read Fanon as an incisive critic of colonialism's dehumanizing force; unlike their leftist counterparts they struggled with his advocacy of violence. Much like their secular colleagues, metropolitan racism and decolonization's ongoing violence radicalized Antillean Catholics. Sympathetic to demands for self-de-

¹⁵ Archives Nationales – Centre des Archives Contemporaine, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, "Atteinte à la Surêté de l'Etat."

termination and cognizant of the persistence of colonial structures and practices in Martinique and Guadeloupe, Fanon's work and his existentialist humanism attracted many Antillean Catholic activists (Bernasconi). At the Federation's second national congress in Noisy-sur-Oise in 1962, activists criticized the violent inhumanity of colonialism. Drawing on both Fanon and Catholic social thought, they argued that, "Decolonization would be incomplete if it were realized at a strictly economic level." Complete decolonization had to overcome the "domination exercised by the civilization of the colonizer over that of the colonized," in order to enable the "collective advancement... the accession of all the people to a material, cultural, moral and spiritual well-being" ("Dimension sociale"). While intrigued by revolutionary movements in Algeria, Cuba, China, Ghana, and the Third World more generally, FAGEC activists perceived violence to be inherently dehumanizing and thus recoiled at the counter-violence of revolutionary anti-colonial movements ("Dimension économique").

In a consideration written in the midst of the 1968 student protests, FAGEC secretary Christian Berchel returned to the question of violence in movements for social change. In a conceptualization drawn directly from Fanon, Berchel defined two forms of violence: "the violence of social injustice," or violence that worked for the "established order (which is in fact the 'established disorder');" and the counter-violence of the oppressed which contested the violence of the social order (Berchel). Berchel argued that merely lamenting "the situation of the 'wretched of the earth'" was a form of resignation and that "for those who wish to be realistic, to opt for a radical change in society, it appears *it is necessary to take on the means*" (Berchel, 13). Like the Church, revolutions were a "carrier of hope for men" because the "Revolution awakens unsuspected energies, reveals to men their selves, and gives 'birth to their own history'" (Berchel, 17). While rejecting Fanon's argument that violence was central to revolutionary renewal, Berchel concluded, placing Fanon alongside Césaire, Guevara, King, and the Gospel of Matthew, by asking, "if the revolution is not for changing men, then what is it for?" (Berchel, 28). He rejected the necessity of violence but maintained Fanon's belief that the colonized would only recover their humanity through struggle.

Whether in the Caribbean or among metropolitan migrants, the inescapable presence of Fanonian themes in 1960s and 1970s radical and activist writings indicates that Fanon and his work remained living in the decades after his death. While there was no “Fanonist Party” in Martinique or Guadeloupe, *Peau noire* and *Les Damnés* marked an entire generation of Antillean students and intellectuals that would play important roles in Antillean culture and politics. His diagnosis of the Antillean situation, and the questions he asked about colonialism, culture, and mental life, set the framework for subsequent Antillean critics and thinkers.

Perhaps Fanon's most important heir was the critic and novelist Edouard Glissant. In his novels, his criticism, and his political and intellectual activism, Glissant preserved and elaborated a Fanonian tradition not only in Antillean writing and critical thought, but in French literature and philosophy. It was through Glissant that Fanon's thought became part of the dialogue, between the Antilles and the wider Americas, the Antilles and the “becoming global” of the world, and the Antilles and French poststructuralist philosophy.¹⁶

Fanon, Glissant, and Caribbean Critique

For Glissant, Fanon's life and work formed a central theoretical and practical touchstone, and his study of the colonized condition, his uncompromising politics, and his commitment to the FLN shaped Glissant's own work. As Nick Nesbitt reminds us, “Glissant considers Fanon's becoming Algerian the only true event in Antillean history” (Nesbitt 2013, 148). Fanon's trace is found particularly in Glissant's 1960s work, in the essays on Antillean history and psychology that he composed for the journal *ACOMA* and which were later published in *Le Discours antillais* (1981).

Despite exile, Fanon remained connected to black intellectual and activist circles in Paris through Marcel Manville. Manville was an activist in

¹⁶ Contemporary thinkers that have engaged Glissant include: Derrida 1998; Nesbitt 2003; Burns 2014; Drabinski 2013; Gallagher 2008.

the Communist Party and in the Mouvement contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et pour la paix (MRAP), and as a lawyer was active, alongside the Réunionnais Jacques Vergès and the Corsican Leo Matarasso, in defense work with FLN militants and anticolonial activists (Manville 1992). His work took him to North Africa and he visited Fanon regularly until Fanon went underground. "Frantz éprouvait un réel plaisir à me parler de notre Martinique, de sa famille, de son frère Joby, mon condisciple et ami. Il me faisait écouter les vieux disques 78 tours de Stellio, père de la Biguine marseillaise. Il imposait à Josie, son épouse, de nous préparer des marinades de morue, pas toujours réussies, mais savourés un peu comme le madeleine de Proust" (Manville 1992, 243).¹⁷

Manville insisted that Fanon was interested in Martinique up to the end of his life, and while Fanon admitted to Manville his skepticism that Antilleans would ever rebel against French domination, he remained hopeful that the explosion, pondered on the first pages of *Peau noire*, would eventually arrive. Macey reports that in the last months of his life Fanon spoke extensively of Martinique to Sartre and de Beauvoir, and with Glissant (Macey 2000, 424-6, 459-62). Coupled with Fanon's late essay for *El Moudjahid* denouncing the December 1959 riots in Fort-de-France, this suggests that with the Algerian War winding down, Fanon contemplated a return to France and possibly even Martinique (Fanon 2011, 849-51; Fanon 1994, 167-9).

At the Second Negro Writer's Congress in 1959, Glissant and his close friend Albert Béville (who wrote under the pen name Paul Niger) met with Fanon and Césaire to discuss the formation of an organization that would unite Martinican, Guadeloupean, and Guyanese to advocate for political autonomy for the French Caribbean (Roget, 60-2). While Fanon had to remain in Rome and eventually Tunis, Glissant and Niger returned to Paris and recruited other Antilleans to the organization first sketched out in Rome. Manville soon joined, as did Gilbert Gratiant, the Guyanese deputy Justin Catayée, Alain Plénel, Joby Fanon, and dozens of other Antillean activists. More than 300 people met in Paris in April 1961 to found the *Front An-*

¹⁷ Alexandre Stellio was a Martinican band leader who popularized the beguine in France in the 1930s. *Morades de morue* – pickled cod – was a paradigmatically Antillean dish, which made many appearances, alongside *ti-punch*, in the literature of *doudouisme*.

tillo-Guyanais pour l'autonomie (Germain, 27-31).¹⁸ Its founding document reflected Fanonian concerns, detailing the economic, psychological, social, and political impoverishment of Antillean life and culture, and the Antilles' complete subordination to France (*Les Antilles et la Guyane à l'heure*).

The Front's demand for "autonomy" immediately attracted scrutiny and the French government, mired in the bloodiest phase of the Algerian War, moved swiftly. The Front was dissolved by special presidential decree and Glissant, Niger, Manville, and the rest of its leadership were barred from the Antilles (Roget, 62-3). Before its dissolution, and Niger's and Catayée's deaths in the crash of Air France Flight 117 over La Soufrière, the Front's leading members published a special dossier in *Esprit*, "Les Antilles avant qu'il soit trop tard," which collected essays by Niger, Glissant, and Manville, as well as poems by Rupaire, Henri Corbin, and Gabriel Jos ("Les Antilles avant trop tard"). While both Niger's and Glissant's essays dissected the political failures of assimilation, with Niger denouncing assimilation as merely the latest transformation in a resilient French colonialism, it was Glissant's essay on the "mental disequilibrium" of Martinicans that most fully wrestled with the implications of Fanon's theories (Glissant 1962, 588-595).

Like Fanon, Glissant found himself exiled, and in those years he traveled widely in the Third World, including North Africa and Cuba, before returning to Martinique in 1965. Two years later he formed the Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes (IME) to gather young scholars and writers from both Martinique and the broader Americas to consider the "Antillean situation," and to craft a "science of ourselves" that eschewed received categories inherited from French republicanism, *négritude*, and Marxism in favor of a situated knowledge of Antillean life ("Untitled Introduction"). The Institut published a journal, *ACOMA*, which featured critical literary and sociological explorations of Antillean culture, literature, economics, society, and history.¹⁹

In *ACOMA*, Glissant and several collaborators – Michel Giraud, Marlène Hospice, and Hector Elisabeth – continued Fanon's research, elaborating on

¹⁸ CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 287, "Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais."

¹⁹ What Christina Kullberg has described as the "poetics of ethnography" among Antillean writers clearly shaped Glissant's work with the IME and his Fanonian essays for *ACOMA*. See: Kullberg 2013a; Kullberg 2013b.

his initial insights into the psychology of French Antilleans and situating his theories in a thicker historical and social context. Fanon had read Antilleans' fraught and alienated relationship to the metropole as pathological, symptomatic of their attachment to a France that continued to deny their humanity. Glissant and his collaborators contextualized Fanon's psychological inquiries in the longer social and cultural history of the Antilles. Linking his analyses of language, sex, violence, culture, and the self to Antillean society's origins in the "colonial act" – conquest, slavery, and colonization – they deepened Fanon's argument, suggesting that the behavior described in *Peau noire* was not isolated to one historical moment, but reflected Antillean history's fundamental traumatic structure. If Fanon had remained cautiously optimistic that Antilleans could liberate themselves if they so desired, the participants in the *ACOMA* project adopted a more pessimistic position, suggesting that the very social, cultural, psychic, and linguistic reality they lived was and remained colonized and thus militated against the emergence of any such desire (Glissant 1973a, 16-20). Glissant offered that the Antilles might represent the sole example of a "successful colonization" (Glissant 1973b, 50).

Fanon stated that language was "essential" for "understanding the black man's dimension of being-for-others," an optic that *ACOMA* writers applied both theoretically and empirically, postulating that quotidian Antillean speech revealed the traumatic structures of Antillean social and mental life (Fanon 2008, 1). In their daily speech, Antilleans had lost conscious control over their own language – similar to Freud's "parapraxes" – and were prisoners of what the *ACOMA* analysts labeled "habitual verbal delirium."²⁰ Sorting different speech-acts into different "forms" and "modalities" of delirium, they argued that verbal delirium, a ubiquitous feature of Antillean daily life, expressed the repressed dissatisfaction Antilleans felt towards their society. While madness would constitute a "total refusal of the situation," verbal delirium merely "let off" pressure" (Glissant 1973b, 65-6). Delirium, in the form of clichés, stock phrases, repetition, malapropisms, and other linguistic ticks, enabled Antilleans to circumvent the trauma at the heart of the Antil-

²⁰ On parapraxes, see: Freud 1990.

lean situation. Delirium, Glissant suggested was, “almost uniformly lived as de-proprietation,” a disinvestment from and denial of lived reality (Glissant 1973b, 66).²¹ Just as the Antillean student on the dock at Le Havre lost control of his diction, so too had Antillean society lost control of its speech. Unable to master and inhabit a language, Antillean subjectivity remained a Being-for-others, lacking the capacity to make sense of, possess, and act in the world (Glissant 1971, 31-43).²²

Here *ACOMA* writers went beyond Fanon's initial prescriptions. Whereas Fanon called for a new humanism and a new world, they counseled “*enracinement*” in the Caribbean and in the “Other America.”²³ Picking up on Fanon's “song” in the last pages of *Peau noire*, Glissant argued that only when Antilleans recognized and overcame their “unconscious refusal of structures” would they move beyond the “dead letter” and “empty catharsis” of social and cultural disorder. To “tear” themselves from their trauma, to launch the “initial and initiating act” of a “politics and poetics of liberation” that would finally “enroot” them in their proper world, Antilleans had to become conscious of their historical becoming as a people, both traumatic and heroic, and embrace their actual lived experience (Glissant 1971, 39). Liberation from empire meant more than the transfer of power or new symbols of state; it required a complete revolution that undid all the structures – political, economic, social, and above all, cultural and psychological – of colonization. Glissant's subsequent work, most explicitly in *Le Discours antillais* and more elliptically in *Poétique de la Relation*, carried forward Fanon's project for the total overthrow of colonization.²⁴

²¹ Ibid. “De-proprietation” is also the French word used to translate the Heideggerean coinage “enteignis,” which Heidegger theorizes is a necessary de-appropriation that accompanies (and even makes possible) the appropriation of Being described as *ereignis*. See: Dastur 2013, 61.

²² Glissant's work in this period shows the strong influence of phenomenology and Heidegger, particularly the idea of ‘worlding’ or world-making, though Glissant prefers the term “counterpoetics.” See: Sumalee 2008; Corio 2014.

²³ “Other America” was Glissant's description of the non-hegemonic Americas, the subaltern peoples and traditions that resisted the monolingualism and monoculturalism of the colonial order of power and knowledge. He coined the phrase in dialogue with the work of the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier. See: Glissant 1956; Dash 1998.

²⁴ I read Glissant's later work as, in part, a struggle against colonization at the level of histor-

Conclusion

Fanon has commanded much greater attention in Anglo-American activist and academic circles than in France. *Les Damnés de la Terre's* influence on the American Black Power movement is well known and marked Fanon's initial reception in the English-speaking world,²⁵ while postcolonial critics' reading of *Peau noire, masques blancs* constituted a second reception.²⁶ More recently, scholars from Lewis Gordon to Nelson Maldonado-Torres have incorporated Fanon's thought into critical theory and philosophy, casting him as an original contributor to phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and ethics.²⁷ The English-language literature on Fanon is already voluminous and, as this special issue testifies, global scholarly interest in Fanon shows no sign of abating.

Fanon's reception in France has been more complex, and sustained critical consideration of Fanon as a thinker and philosopher is of recent vintage. Following the publication of Alice Cherki's biography in 2000, widely credited with stimulating French interest, he has reemerged as a figure of curiosity and controversy (Cherki; Canonne). France's postcolonial woes have no doubt contributed; the banlieue uprisings, *l'affaire du foulard*, the war on terror, debates over laws on the slave trade and colonialism, unrest in France's Caribbean departments, and most recently, the *Charlie Hebdo* murders, have underlined the persistent disjunction between France's republican ideals and the oppressive reality facing France's minority and immigrant populations.²⁸ In the last decade, Editions La Découverte republished *Les Damnés de la terre*, *L'An V de la Révolution algérienne*, and *Pour la révolution africaine*, and

ical and philosophical categories. Glissant 1990.

²⁵ For this initial reception, see: Carmichael 2007; Burke 1976; Martin 1999; Howe 1990.

²⁶ The two most prominent "postcolonial" interpretations of Fanon are: Bhabha 1994; Gates 1991. For criticisms of their positions, see: Robinson 1993; Lazarus 2011.

²⁷ See for example the joint meeting in 2014 of the Caribbean Philosophical Association and the Sartre Society of North America. Also: Gordon 1995; Gordon, Ciccariello-Maher, and Maldonado-Torres 2013; Gordon 2014; Maldonado-Torres 2009; Drabinski 2013.

²⁸ See: Mbembe 2013; Tshimanga, Gondola, and Bloom 2009; Kipfer 2011.

in 2011 issued the first collected volume of his work.²⁹ Essays and special journal issues followed, as did a French translation of David Macey's definitive biography (Macey 2011).³⁰

Postcolonial theory's arrival and reception in French intellectual circles has also provoked a reconsideration of Fanon. Noting the important place that he occupies in Anglo-American criticism, French writers have mobilized Fanon to both support and oppose a French adoption of postcolonial studies. Jean-François Bayart, for example, counterpoised Fanon's activist work against colonialism, his "*oeuvre... indissociable from praxis*," to the "theoreticians of *Postcolonial Studies*, more preoccupied with their university careers than concrete engagement at the side of the subalterns." Bayart cast Fanon as both a precocious critic of the postcolonial state and as an alternative to Anglo-Indian postcolonial studies (Bayart 2011a; Bayart 2011b). Achille Mbembe, on the other hand, reads Fanon alongside postcolonial, poststructural, feminist, and queer studies, situating Fanon as part of a critical discourse on the West. Fanon's work, Mbembe argues, remains charged and lives on as a still profound challenge to France, to Europe, and to Africa (Mbembe 2011a; Mbembe 2011b; Mbembe 2010).

Despite extensive Anglo-American academic interest in his work and the current return to his writings in France, Fanon's place in his native Antilles remains neglected for the most part. In this essay I have traced some aspects of Fanon's legacy that indicate the ways in which he did remain "living" for many of his near contemporaries and for the generation of Antillean activists and writers that followed him. His example of militant commitment inspired others to follow in his footsteps, and his insights into the psychology of colonialism and his scathing and prescient criticisms of national culture shaped Antillean thought in the years following his premature death. If Fanon has only recently reemerged in socio-cultural and political writing in France, it has always been impossible to think Antillean literature and culture outside his influence.

²⁹ Editions Seuil had kept *Peau noire, masques blancs* in print in its Points Essais series.

³⁰ See special issues of: *Tumultes* no. 31 (2008), *Sud/Nord* no. 22 (2007), *L'Autre* no. 13 (2012/13), and *Actuel Marx* no. 55 (2014), among others. Fanon's daughter Mireille Fanon Mendès-France has also supervised several volumes dedicated to her father.

A critic above all else, Fanon never outlined a positive political vision that would command political fealty outside his unstinting opposition to those forces that annihilated humanity, colonialism above all else. These commitments led him into open rebellion against France and it is hardly surprising that he never received the plaudits and honors accorded Aimé Césaire. Nor is his work going to become a regular part of school curricula, certainly not in a France that has responded to the difficult inheritance of decolonization with laws mandating students learn the “positive effects” of French imperialism and barring the wearing of the *hijab*.

Gauging Fanon’s place in contemporary France and the Antilles remains difficult precisely because it is not just a matter of academic or theoretic interest: the questions he first broached in the 1950s and 1960s remain palpably and bloodily present. Debates over immigration, struggles around racism and national identity, the recurrence of subaltern violence in the metropole and in the Third World, and the 2009 social uprisings in the Antilles all indicate that, in France as in much of the Western world, “the black man is not” (Fanon 2008, 206). What Fanon still offers the world is his radical demand for equality. What he still asks, of Antilleans and French alike, is: is it too soon, or too late?

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