

***Malinchismo* and Misogyny in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: Reading Fanon from the Hispanic Caribbean**

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In the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* (BSWM), “The Women of color and the white man” (1967[1952]), Frantz Fanon makes some assertions about black Martiniquais women that gained him the criticism of some feminist theorists as a misogynist. Fanon will find in the expressed xenocentrism or malinchismo of black Martiniquais women a perhaps radical expression of the “dependency complex” he will attempt to document for Negroes in general. Reading Fanon against the backdrop of a Caribbean literary tradition of romantic novels, it is hoped, will help achieve two things: placing Fanon’s writing in the cultural and geo-political context in which it was produced, and where his statements about female malinchismo can be read in a new light; and consequently, pointing to the pitfalls of the feminist critique of Fanon as misogynist. The election of reading Fanon against a fictional literary tradition seems justified by the fact that Fanon himself would recur to a novel, Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1948), as a paradigmatic example of the phenomenon of malinchismo that he was trying to document.

In the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Mask* (BSWM), “The Women of color and the white man” (1967[1952]), Frantz Fanon makes some assertions about black Martiniquais women that garnered him the criticism of some feminist theorists as a misogynist, and as promoting a perverse (anti-miscegenational) form of black nationalism (cf. Bergner 1995; Andrade 1993; Doane 1991; Sharpley-Whiting 1998). Fanon’s rapport with his subject is that of a psychiatrist attempting to understand the effects of colonialism and racism on the colonized subject’s psyche: that is, the internalization of racism and the development of a “dependency complex.” Among black Martiniquais women, Fanon argues, this dependency complex is evidenced, among other places, in their expressed xenocentrism or, as the phenomenon is most

commonly referred to in Hispanic America, *malinchismo*: that is, a preference for white sexual partners, and a distaste for black men.

Fanon finds in the novel of Martiniquais female writer Mayotte Capécia, *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1948), a scriptural trace of this behavior: an autobiographical novel where Capécia (a black woman) narrates her romance with a white man, and expresses her malinchismo in an open and explicit manner. She would like to marry, “but to a white man” (Fanon 1967[1952]: 42). This malinchismo exhibited by Capécia, Fanon further suggests, can be generalized to Martiniquais black women:

a great number of [black] girls from Martinique... admitted to me with complete candor... that they would find it impossible to marry black men. “Get out of that and then deliberately go back to it? Thank you, no... As far as I am concerned, I wouldn’t marry a Negro for anything in the world”. (Fanon 1967[1952]: 47—48)

This second chapter of BSWM is, without a doubt, among the most provocative pieces of writing ever produced in the Caribbean pointing to the presumed malinchismo of the Caribbean women; but certainly not the only one. In writing this chapter, Fanon echoes the anxieties and predicaments of Caribbean societies with inter-racial romances, specifically anxieties about *malinchismo*, *mestizaje* (miscegenation) and incest, and the inter-connections between them. And nowhere do these anxieties and predicaments find their most explicit expression, leaving a clear scriptural path, than in the long pan-American tradition of romantic novels involving inter-racial couples—a fact which helps explain why Fanon would choose *a novel*, Capécia’s novel (an autobiographical novel, but nonetheless a novel), as the empirical ground upon which to build his assertions about Martiniquais women. Reading Fanon against the backdrop of this Caribbean literary tradition of romantic novels (and the anxieties and predicaments they reveal in Caribbean societies), it is hoped, will help achieve two things: 1) placing Fanon’s writing (the second chapter of BSWM in particular) in the cultural and geo-political context in which it was produced, and where his statements about female malinchismo can be read in a new light; and 2) consequently, pointing to the pitfalls of the feminist critique of Fanon as misogynist.

Romantic novels of the New World

The literary tradition of romantic novels involving inter-racial romantic couples in the New World is as old as the post-independence (post-colonial, post-slavery) history of the region, and is inextricably linked to political nation-building projects based on *mestizaje*. Upon achieving independence from their colonial empires (Britain, Spain, Portugal) in the late-18th or early-19th centuries, American nations saw themselves immersed in civil wars and continued racial tensions. The newly emerging nations embarked on a desperate search for an ideology that could serve to pacify and reconcile historically antagonist racial groups: Europeans whites, African blacks and native Indians. *Mestizaje* would provide the ideological building block upon which the new nations would be constructed, allowing at the same time the pacification of their violent and barbarous sectors and the elimination of racial differences altogether. The *mestizo*, the New Man, would no longer be white or black or Indian, but rather a member of the new *mestizo* race—the “cosmic race,” as José de Vasconcelos called it. Romantic novelists would assume the (political) task of narrating the acts of “love” through which the *mestizo* was conceived; and propose their main characters, the romantic couples, as mythological Fathers and Mothers of the newly emerging nations.

Thus, as Doris Sommer has beautifully shown, these romantic novels did much more than entertain: they were an exhortation to mix with other races, reproduce and populate the land, allowing in such way for the new nation to be born. It is in this sense that Sommer would label these romantic novels “foundational fictions” or “national romances.”

At a pan-American level, the romantic novels first gained expression and popularity among North American novelist and readers, and it would be James Fennimore Cooper, with *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (1826), who would establish the “model for New World writing” (Sommer 1991: 55). Thus, the North-American tradition inaugurated by Cooper would immediately be copied by emerging Latin American and Caribbean nations, thereby becoming in such way a pan-American phenomenon. In Latin America, these included texts like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s

Sab (Cuba, 1841); José de Alencar's *O Guarani* and *Iracema* (Brazil, 1857 and 1865 respectively); Jorge Isaac's *María* (Colombia, 1867); Manuel de Jesús Galván *Enriquillo* (Dominican Republic, 1882); or Romulo Gallego's *Doña Barbara* (Venezuela, 1929); just to mention a few. The literary canon of these American "national romances" would dictate: 1) romances involving inter-racial couples; 2) romances based on "true" love, free of any form of coercion or force; 3) successful reproduction; and 4) happy endings. In their endings, love would always triumph against all adversities and social conventions, and the couple will live "happily ever after."

But building a new nation based on the figure of the mestizo was not an enterprise free from controversy. Because apologists of mestizaje needed to explain the way in which this process of mestizaje was actually carried out in history, they were forced to confront a historical "truth" which, in the case of the Americas, has tragic dimensions. "True" history will reveal violence, rape, female xenocentrism (or malinchismo) and incest hidden in the moment of inception of the nation: e.g. the white master raping the black slave woman. In this sense, the histories of mestizo nations are always already haunted by what Worrell has called a "veritable phylogenetic residue:" the realization that the mestizo, in his most seminal origins, is the "shameful offspring of a violation" (Worrell 2011: 159) or, even worse, the shameful offspring of a malinchista whore. In the Latin American context, the idea of a "veritable phylogenetic residue" finds its most vivid expression in the figure of La Malinche (from which the concept of malinchismo derives).

The history of Hernán Cortés and La Malinche

The earliest historically documented account of an inter-racial romance in the Americas is that of Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador of Mexico City, with the Mayan woman Malinche, circa 1520. As is well known, La Malinche was the translator and lover of Cortés during the conquest of Tenochtitlan, and is widely perceived by contemporary Mexicans as a prostitute and a traitor of her own people—commonly referred to as *la chingada* [the fucked one, or the whore].

Perhaps nowhere does the anxiety provoked by La Malinche's story become more evident than in the figure of a Mexican "indiano"¹ in Alejo Carpentier's novel *Concierto Barroco* (2006). In the novel, the Mexican "indiano" attends the premier of Antonio Vivaldi's opera *Moteczuma* in Venice, in 1733, only to watch in indignation the travesty that Vivaldi (and Alvisi Giusti, the scriptwriter) had operated on history. While the opera stages the final battle for the conquest of Tenochtitlan by Hernán Cortés, the figure of La Malinche disappears altogether from the story. Another woman is introduced in her place by the name of Teutile (in historical reality, the name of the admiral of Montezuma's army), interpreting the role of the daughter of Montezuma (in historical reality, there is no known daughter of Montezuma). In the climatic part of the opera, Teutile enters Cortés' headquarters (where Cortés keeps her father, Montezuma, a prisoner) and turns herself in. She is able to trade the life of her father in exchange for his consent to the marriage of Cortés' younger brother, Rodrigo, and herself. In the final scene, the Aztecs and the Spaniards appear in the wedding of Rodrigo and Teutile "en júbilos, vítores y aclamaciones" [in joyful celebration, in cheers and acclaims]. After the opera comes to an end, the incredulous *indiano* approaches Vivaldi and complains:

False, false, false; everything is false!... There was never such an empress in Mexico, nor daughter of Montezuma that married a Spaniard... And Teutile, that is turned into a female?... Montezuma was lapidated... And where did you put Doña Marina [Christian name given to La Malinche] in all this Mexican mess? (2006: 172–73)

Vivaldi responds: "La Malinche was a whore and a traitor and people don't like traitors. No singer would have ever accepted such role..." The "indiano" insists: "But history tells us...;" only to be interrupted by Vivaldi before he finishes his sentence: "Don't fuck with History anymore... What counts here is the poetic illusion..." (2006: 172–73).²

¹ In the Latin American context, the term "indiano" is often used to refer to persons of Spanish descent who have made their wealth and fortune in the Americas. Thus, it is completely unrelated to the term Indian.

² Translated from Spanish. Original text reads: ¡Falso, falso, falso; todo falso! – grita... —

Thus, when Vivaldi set about writing, in 1733, an opera about the conquest of Tenochtitlan, he was confronted with the same dilemma that would confront American romantic novelists approximately one hundred years later: i.e. must they strictly adhere to the historical “truth” behind *mestizaje*, no matter how unpleasant and shameful this might be; or must they re-write history and narrate the story of a romantic drama in which *mestizo* love triumphs against all obstacles? Vivaldi, like American canonic novelists, would choose the latter option. Had Vivaldi chosen to depict La Malinche as the mythological mother of all Mexicans (the “Mexican Eve,” as Octavio Paz called her), the effects would have been catastrophic for the nation and its people. In Paz’s account, it would lead to isolation: it immerses Mexican subjects in a “labyrinth of solitude” (Paz 1994[1950]). Speaking of Hernán Cortés and La Malinche as mythological parents of the *mestizo* nation, Paz says:

They are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we [Mexicans] have still to resolve. When he [the Mexican] repudiates La Malinche... [as prostitute and traitor]... the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude. (Paz 1994[1950]: 86)

The predicament of *mestizo* nations (and of the Mexican nation in particular) is, to put it in Paz’s terminology, how to accept *mestizo* identity while simultaneously avoiding solitude; or, more specifically, how to avoid solitude in a context in which the exhortation to mix with other races and reproduce, to give birth to the New Man (this time born out of an act of love, not rape), was elevated to the level of patriotic act. The predicament that confronted

¿Falso... que? – pregunta, atónito, el músico.” – “Todo. Ese final es una estupidez. La Historia...” – “La ópera no es cosa de historiadores.” – “Pero... Nunca hubo tal emperatriz de México, ni tuvo Montezuma hija alguna que se casara con español... ¿Y ese Teutile, que se nos vuelve hembra?” – “Tiene un nombre pronunciable, que puede darse a una mujer” ... – “Pero Montezuma fue lapidado.” – “Muy feo para un final de ópera...” – ¿Y dónde metieron a Doña Marina, en toda esta mojiganga mexicana?” – “La Malinche esa fue una cabrona traidora y el público no gusta de traidoras. Ninguna cantante nuestra habría aceptado semejante papel...” El indiano, aunque algo bajado de tono, seguía insistiendo: “La Historia nos dice...” – “No me joda más con la Historia... Lo que cuenta aquí es la ilusión poética...” (Carpentier 2006: 172–73).

apologists of mestizaje, thus, was that they needed to figure out a way to eradicate from the collective memory of the masses the remembrance of horrendous and immoral acts hidden deep in the seminal origins of the nation. Fictional literature would prove to be a useful tool.

And, even when it is true that the 19th century romantic novelists were fairly successful in achieving their objectives, and that identities based on mestizaje have achieved a high degree of hegemony among most American citizens, observing a form of collective amnesia over their controversial origins, the shadow of La Malinche extends over the whole territory with force, in the form of a “veritable phylogenetic residue.” This last statement, as we will attempt to show, will prove particularly true for romantic novels produced within the Caribbean region, as compared to their counterparts emerging from the continental region.

Anti-romances of the Caribbean

Something awkward occurs with national romances produced in the Caribbean region, as opposed to those produced in the continental context. While the canon of the 19th century literary sensibilities dictated mixture of races, true love, successful reproduction and happy endings, the romantic novels produced in the Caribbean region will instead reflect a preference for anomalous and iconoclastic forms that deviate from the prescribed canon. In fact, because of their preference for tragic and sad endings, without reproduction, Caribbean romantic novels deserve to be classified not so much as romances, but rather as “anti-romances”—to use Donette Francis’ characterization (Francis 2011: 53). Two paradigmatic examples of Caribbean anti-romances will serve to illustrate the point: Jorge Isaac’s *María* (1867, staged in Colombia’s Caribbean region) and Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel* (1879, Cuba).

Despite achieving the status of “national romance” of the Colombian nation, Isaac’s *María* departs from the continental canon in almost every possible way: the couple is never able to reproduce, and the novel has a sad

ending. But perhaps the most anomalous characteristic of *María* is the fact that the lovers (María and Efraín) are not from different races. María and Efraín are not only from the same race (white), but also from the same class (planter's class), the same community (Jewish), and even the same family. The lovers are first cousins, and almost brother and sister (María's parents died while she was very young, and she was adopted by her uncle, Efraín's father, who raised her as a daughter with Efraín). Thus, as Sommer has argued, it will be the Jewishness of María and Efraín which Isaac will use to establish a metaphorical link between Jews and Blacks; considering that "[b]y the end of the [19th] century Jews, like blacks, were often seen as diseased through their 'aberrant' sexuality, incest for Jews and lasciviousness for blacks" (Sommer 1991: 191). In fact, the novel suggests that María's illness (epilepsy, perhaps hysteria) is a hereditary condition triggered by familial inbreeding.

But the intricacies connecting mestizaje and malinchismo with incest in the specific context of the Caribbean region, while only metaphorically hinted at by Isaac's *María*, will be laid out in crudely explicit manner in the other paradigmatic example of Caribbean anti-romance previously mentioned: Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*. Cecilia, the novel's heroine, is almost white, and the presence of black blood in her is only discretely revealed by her wavy hair, which nonetheless allows her to *pass* as white. She falls in love with Leonardo Gamboa, a white young man from a wealthy planter family. Leonardo's father, Don Cándido, opposes the relation with excessive insistence. At the climactic moment, Cecilia discovers why Don Cándido is so insistent in keeping her and Leonardo apart. A friend explains to Cecilia that "Madalena [Cecilia's black great-grandmother]... had had a daughter with a white man, Chepilla; who in turn had another daughter with a white man [Leonardo's grandfather, and Chepillas's half-brother], Charito; who in turn had another daughter with a white man [Don Cándido, Leonardo's father], Cecilia" (Villaverde 1879). The whitening of Cecilia's family line on the female side (which is all Cecilia knows) evolves from Madalena, who was black, to Chepilla, who was "parda" (brown), to Charito, who was "parda clara" (light brown), to Cecilia, who could already easily *pass* as white. In *Cecilia*

Valdés, then, it is the promiscuity and malinchismo of the black women, and the absence of knowledge of who one's father is, which increases the chances that mestizaje and malinchismo could lead to incest, even in an involuntary manner. In the closed context of the Caribbean plantations, where the only whites belonged to a small group of families, incest was almost assured.

If *Cecilia Valdés* is “the foundational myth of Antillean nations” (Rodríguez Juliá 2012: 70)—in fact, “the first great novel of Antillean literature” (Rodríguez Juliá 2012: 41)—the question emerges: how can Caribbean nations (and literature) be founded in such a way, with the anti-romantic novel as its foundational text? If the history of mestizaje in the Caribbean region begins with the early-colonial account of La Malinche and Hernán Cortés, the novelized history of mestizaje in the Caribbean begins with *Cecilia Valdés*—a novel that breaks with the canon and sensibilities of the 19th century literary tradition of “national romances,” and which explicitly and tragically bear out the reason for this Caribbean social anxiety with mestizaje and malinchismo—and their intricate connections with incest. If there is a pan-American social anxiety around the possibility of being “the shameful offspring of a violation,” in the Caribbean region this anxiety extends to include being the shameful offspring of a malinchista whore—something which would make the citizens of those nations, quite literally, “hijos de puta” or “hijos de la chingada” [sons-of-bitches].

Moreover, like La Malinche or Capéia, neither Cecilia nor María could ever fit the role of mythological mothers of their nations. If indeed *María* is Colombia's “national romance,” and if *Cecilia Valdés* is the Antillean “foundational fiction” *par excellence*, how come the heroines are unable to bear off-spring? In contrast with other “national romances” where love was able to overcome innumerable obstacles and triumph, in *María* and *Cecilia Valdés* the mythological mothers end their love lives tragically. In the case of *María*, the heroine simply dies from a strange disease (probably hysteria) still a virgin, unwed and childless. Cecilia, on the contrary, would remain alive to suffer in the flesh the radical impossibility of being with her “true” love. These sad and tragic endings are perverse in a double sense: there is perversion on the part of the authors, who chose to write novels with such tragic

endings; but there is also perversion on the part of the readers, who preferred reading *María* and *Cecilia Valdés* over and above the other more familiar national romances with “happily ever after,” Pocahontas-style, endings. It was the readers, after all, who erected *Cecilia Valdés* to the stature of “foundational myth of Antillean nations,” and who turned *María* into “probably the most popular nineteenth-century novel in Latin America—more widely read and imitated than any other” (Sommer 1991: 172).

The iconoclastic and perverse tendencies of 19th century Caribbean anti-romances will further find continuity in other Latin American 20th century literary traditions—a fact particularly evident in the Magical Realism of the Latin-American literary “Boom” movement of the 1960s—whose novelistic production was widely read by Americans north and south, and beyond. The literature produced during and after the Boom will evidence (as will evidence TV soap operas in more contemporary times) a shift from “happy-ending” romances to perverse anti-romances: that is, not only will the contemporary fictions narrate stories of failed mestizo romances, but also stories that attempt to make evident the failures of 19th century nation-building efforts in general, and the failure of mestizaje in particular. The mestizo nation is a failure—they seem to wish to say—because the mestizo, the New Man, turned out to resemble more a member of the incestuous-driven Buendía family in Gabriel García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*³ (born with a pig’s tail) than a member of the “cosmic race” that Vasconcelos envisioned. In the final analysis, this failure of the mestizo nation serves to explain the “deficient” economic and political modernity of Latin American and Caribbean nations during that same period, and up to the present.

In any case, Caribbean anti-romances, as well as Fanon’s second chapter of BSWM, speak broadly to the anxieties and perversities of societies trapped between, on the one hand, patriotic mestizaje and heterosexual male privilege; and, on the other hand, malinchismo, incest, absence of “true love,” solitude, and being unable to ever erase that “veritable phylogenetic residue” at the heart of the Caribbean societies which produce and harbor those literary traditions. And it is against this background, we would argue, that

³ Like Isaac’s *María*, Márquez’ novel is also staged in the Caribbean region of Colombia.

Fanon's second chapter of BSWM, as well as Mayotte Capécia's novel *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1948), should be read.

In other words, if Caribbean nations are trapped inside the insoluble tensions of inter-racial romances (e.g. between malinchismo and incest, between "true" history and the novel, or between romances and anti-romances), then Fanon should be read as an author interested more in pointing to (or perhaps diagnosing) the existence of an insoluble tension, *qua* insoluble tension; rather than attempting to propose a means for the resolution of the tension. Fanon's writings resemble Caribbean anti-romances in that, as Francis has pointed out, in them one can always evidence "a reluctance to offer grand narrative closures, settlement, or any satisfaction derived from other genres, such as tragedy's 'catharsis' or romance's joy of witnessing eventual agonistic triumph. [They] def[y] reconciliation: [they] yield no catharsis, no enlightenment, no surety of the path forward" (Francis 2011: 54).

One is tempted to say that, structurally speaking, perhaps the form of the novel would have fit better Fanon's message in BSWM.⁴ Attempting to understand why, in writing BSWM, he instead chose to adopt the form of an academic essay is something that goes beyond the objectives of this work. In any case, it is from an understanding of Fanon as a writer of the insoluble and incommensurable elements of social life that his statements about malinchista women in the second chapter of BSWM should be read and analyzed. It is also from this comprehension of Fanon that one must recognize the shortcomings of the feminist critique of Fanon as misogynist; for it is only when Fanon is read as attempting to find reconciliation, closure, and synthesis that such critique can be sustained.

⁴ While Fanon's BSWM is obviously a non-fiction book, its references to novels and non-fiction books is ample. It not only includes references to Capécia's *Je suis Martiniquaise*, but also to another of her novels, *La négresse blanche*, as well as to works by fiction writers of the stature of Paul Morand, André Gide, René Maran, Georges Duhamel, Richard Wright, and even William Shakespeare. Thus, while proposing to read Fanon against the background of a fictional literary tradition, or as an "anti-romance," may seem incongruous, there is a special relationship between Fanon and novels that (particularly in BSWM) should not be overlooked.

Final remarks

As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has argued, the feminist critique of Fanon (i.e. of being a misogynist) “demands reevaluation” (1998: 19). It is a critique that results from a superficial and erroneous understanding of Fanon’s second chapter of BSWM. Some revisionist thinkers, like Bergner (1995) and Andrade (1993), have attempted such reevaluation, but, in our view, in an unsatisfactory manner. They have argued that, while Fanon may have been right about the malinchismo of Caribbean women, it was only natural that, under slavery, some women would be tempted to seduce their white masters as a mechanism of survival, a form of adaptation to the hardships of slavery. Anthropologist Katherine Browne argues, along this line, that:

The lessons inherited from slavery were not the same for black men and women. Compared to women, who might be able to curry favor from the master through their sexuality, slave men were more likely to secure advantages for themselves through deceit, trickery and theft. (Browne 2004: 207)

For Bergner and Andrade, then, “Capécia’s predilection [for white men] is a matter of survival... , using the only commodities of exchange she has to eke out her existence in the colonies: her body” (Sharpley-Whiting 1998: 38). But, as Sharpley-Whiting has also suggested, such lines of argumentation (i.e. a materialist interpretation of malinchismo) run the risk, when stretched too far, of turning the critique of being anti-miscegenational against the feminists themselves; that is, insofar as they can be interpreted as saying that black women are racially endogamous by natural inclination, but miscegenational and malinchista only by convenience or force. “In their logic,” says Sharpley-Whiting, “the only way a colonized black woman would ever acquiesce emotionally/sexually to her oppressor was under extreme economic duress; it becomes unfathomable that a black woman would *desire*, ‘love,’ or [willingly] ‘sleep with the enemy,’ so to speak” (1998: 39).

Hardly could the expressions of Mayote Capécia in *Je suis Martiniquaise*, or those of Fanon about Martiniquais women in the second chapter of BSWM, be interpreted as adhering to this materialist interpretation of ma-

linchismo. In Fanon, no materialist interpretation could ever account for the psychic dimension of malinchismo in its full complexity. And the same is true for Fanon's own interpretation: it is as incapable as the latter of grasping the full complexity of the phenomenon of malinchismo.

In reading Fanon, all one can hope to find are expositions of insoluble tensions, *qua* insoluble tensions. This is why Fanon's writings are marked, as we have argued elsewhere (Galanes 2007), by an abundance of incommensurable statements and a "reluctance to offer grand narrative closures" (Francis 2011: 54). This fact has also been pointed out by several Fanonian scholars. De Oto, for example, points out that the problem with Fanon is that his writings are "inhabited by a paradoxical situation" insofar as they "rest in a tension between statements that seem to be mutually excluding, or at least opposed, to each other," and where some statements work to "leave in uncertainty what seemed to have been established two lines earlier" (De Oto 2003: 116, 163, 131).⁵ Gates, for his part, has gone so far as to label Fanon a "Rorschach bolt with legs," adding that everything he wrote was written in such a way that its meaning was left "wide open to interpretation" (Gates 1999: 252). Fanon's writings, De Oto adds, are crossed by:

A kind of rhetorical pact that moves between two distant points, from the acceptance of a strong voice... as found in his extreme arguments in favor of negritude... to the universal images contained in his discourse on mankind, which in order to be sustained requires that all other conditions be practically erased. (De Oto 2003: 162)⁶

⁵ Translated from Spanish. Original text in Spanish reads: "...la situación paradójica que habitan sus textos..." (De Oto 2003: 116); "...se asienta en las tensiones entre enunciados que parecen ser mutuamente excluyentes o al menos opuestos" (De Oto 2003: 163); "...dejando en la incertidumbre lo que parecía afirmado dos líneas antes" (De Oto 2003: 131).

⁶ Translated from Spanish. Original text in Spanish reads: "...una especie de pacto retórico que se mueve entre puntos distantes, desde la aceptación de una voz poderosa... como la que se encuentra en los argumentos extremos de la negritud... hasta las imágenes de universalidad de su discurso sobre el hombre, el cual para ser sostenido requiere que todas las otras condiciones prácticamente no estén presentes" (De Oto 2003: 162).

An example taken from BSWM will help illustrate the point. In the “Introduction” of BSWM, Fanon says: “I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color” (1967: 8). Two sentences later, he will claim: “However painfully it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (1967: 10). The confusion thus emerges: is the liberation of the man of color achieved by means of *mestizaje* and whitening—as he seems to want to say in chapter two of BSWM, when he claims that for the Negro “there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world” (1967: 51)—, or is it rather that the liberation is achieved by means of a confrontation with the reality of blackness, leading to the development of a sense of dignity and pride in blackness. In both of these phrases, was Fanon being “realistic” or “pragmatic” (i.e. “is the only way out”)? Or was he being “fatalistic,” perhaps with an ironic twist (i.e. hoping the fatalism would provoke the exact opposite reaction from what the text is saying)? Or was he rather being “prescriptive” or “apologetic” of whitening (i.e. endorsing miscegenation and *malinchismo* as mechanisms of liberation)? In the text, the answers to all these questions remain, to use Gates’ characterization once again, “wide open to interpretation” (1999: 252). If one searches for something—a phrase, a paragraph—resembling or approaching a clarification of Fanon’s “true” position on the issue, all one will be able to find is (towards the last page of the book) the ungrammatical and paralogistic phrase: “The Negro is not.” (1967: 231); that is, a phrase which only contributes to increasing the confusion.

The same confusion will also be present in the discourse produced by Martiniquais black women. As Benita Parry has insightfully pointed out, there are important similarities between Fanon’s voice and the voice of the “pathological” Negro (or *malinchista* woman) he was trying to understand and describe. “The incommensurable enunciations in BSWM produce a dissonance that is something other than ambivalence,” says Parry, “for the adoption of heuristic procedures in order to establish *negritude* as a pathology involves the speaking subject voicing opposing stances with an equally passionate intensity” (Parry 1999: 237–38).

This fact becomes particularly evident in the second chapter of BSWM, when Fanon addresses the discourse produced by Martiniquais black women about the need to “save the race” (meaning to “improve or whiten the race,” or “mejorar la raza,” as is commonly said in the Hispanic Caribbean). The Martiniquais black woman “knows this, says it, repeats it” (1967: 47); that they need to “save the race.” But, as Fanon explains, on occasions these allusions should be interpreted:

not in the sense that one might think: not “preserve the uniqueness of that part of the world in which they grew up, but [instead] make sure that it will be white”. (1967: 47; emphasis added)

A similar thing happens with Fanon: that often—or so we have attempted to argue—he should also be read and interpreted “not in the sense that one might think”—and not in the sense that feminists who criticize him for being a misogynist might think.

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