

Fanon's treatment of the "Internalization of the Complex of Inferiority"

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Fanon's passionate quest to understand the man behind the "Black man"

In his comments on my paper abstract, Pathé Diagne expressed the hope for an explanation of my observation regarding the availability of a substantial number of copies of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (Peau noire, masques blancs, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (Les damnés de la terre, Paris, Maspéro, 1961) in the stacks of the University of Wisconsin-Madison main library, in the late 1960's and 1970's, 15 copies as opposed to, say, 2 copies each today.

One explanation of my observation was already implied, in my abstract I believe, in my reference to Democratic Senator Joseph Biden's statement that Illinois Senator Barack Obama was "*the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and nice-looking guy*".

Another explanation of my observation is to be found, in my opinion, in the more recent outrage in the scientific world surrounding the public claims by Nobel Prize winner James Watson for the discovery of the structure of DNA that *Black people are less intelligent than White people*.

For while Fanon must be read now with a specific time framework in mind, e.g. that he was writing, not in the early years of 21st Century, but well before the sexual revolution of the 1960's and 70's, and the feminist movement of the 1980's and 90's, before the victories of the Civil Rights Movement in the US, and the Independence era in Africa, still his earnest quest remains relevant in a world where a prominent figure in the scientific field, Nobel Prize laureate and head of a major US laboratory could get away with such statements as:

"There are many people of color who are very talented, but don't promote them when they haven't succeeded at the lower level", or that "there is no firm reason to anticipate that the intellectual capacities of peoples geographically separated in their evolution should prove to have evolved identically. Our wanting to reserve [for them] equal powers of reason as some universal heritage of humanity will not be enough to make it so" (1).

Echoing George Lamming's unforgettable title of some 50 years ago, *In the Castle of My Skin*, Barack Obama wrote in his autobiography, *Dreams From My Father* (1995 and 2004), after discussing in a very compelling and honest fashion, the race question in the USA that, "It all comes down to a simple matter of escape. An escape from poverty or boredom or crime or *the shackles of your skin*" (My emphasis).

The castle and the prison metaphors - the *castle* in which we may choose to hide, the prison in which we may be incarcerated against our will, are very accurate here. My contention is that Fanon's ultimate goal in writing *Black Skin, White Masks* was to break these metaphoric castles and prisons, and liberate the beings, imprisoned or hiding in there, be they Black, White or *Métis*.

Such hideous statements as Professor Watson's bring to mind a more recent by Barack Obama, now running for the Democratic nomination for President of the USA:

“The problems of poverty and racism, the uninsured and the unemployed, are not simply technical problems in search of the perfect 10 point plan...They are rooted in both societal indifference and individual callousness...”

In the case of Professor Watson however, sheer callousness and bigotry would suffice to describe his statements.

Fanon’s book opens with a quotation from his teacher and mentor, Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*:

I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement. Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, Inc. New York, 1967, p.7 (2).

This is followed by the central statement of his endeavor:

The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- primarily, economic;
- subsequently, *the internalization* – or better still, the *epidermalization*- of this inferiority(Ibid, p.11).

I deliberately emphasize these two terms as central in Fanon’s passionate endeavor here. Fanon is deliberately using these two terms as synonymous, but the second one – the epidermalization - being more accurate, indicates that the individual victim has accepted the dominant society’s declaration of superiority and translated it into racial terms; and here race is defined by the color of one’s skin(3), because Fanon is speaking primarily as a man from the Caribbean, more exactly from the French island of Martinique.

Capétia, Nini and Veneuse

Chapters Two and Three of *Black Skin, White Masks* are titled respectively *The Woman of Color and the White Man* and *The Man of Color and the White Woman*. The analysis of the behavior and the relationships of the protagonists in these pairs is based on six fictional characters with strong autobiographical inspiration: Mayotte Capétia telling us her own story with a number of embellishments that have been researched thoroughly and with undeniable sympathy by Christiane Makward in her book *Mayotte Capétia ou l’Aliénation selon Fanon* (Karthala, Paris, 1999), Nini, a fictional character based without doubt on a real *Métisse* woman of St-Louis in Senegal, and a contemporary of the author and Jean Veneuse, a first person protagonist who seems to incarnate the thinking of the author on race relations, and personal experiences in the 1920’s and 30’s in French colonial Africa, and in Metropolitan France..

From the outset, Fanon interprets the stories of *Mayotte* and *Nini* as the stories of totally brainwashed women whose ultimate dream is to marry a white man and escape from the Black misery around them.

Fanon opens his discussion of *Mayotte* bluntly and in a tone of legitimate collective indignation, by quoting right from the closing paragraph of her narrative. So in his eyes, this is the narrator’s conclusion of what he calls, “*a vast delusion[which]prods one’s brain*:

“For after all we have a right to be perturbed when we read, in *Je suis Martiniquaise*: ‘I should have liked to be married, but to a white man. But a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man’s eyes. Even when he loves her. I knew that.’”

Fanon dismisses Capécia's second book, *La négresse blanche* (Editions Corrêa, 1950) as a failed attempt to correct her earlier mistakes by somewhat "re-evaluating the black man" (*Ibid.*, p.52). She fails in this endeavor because, according to Fanon, "She did not reckon with her own unconscious. As soon as the novelist allows her characters a little freedom, they use it to belittle the Black man. All the Black men whom she describes are in one way or another either semi-criminals or 'sho'good' Blacks." (*Ibid.*, pp.52-53).

When Fanon describes the White lover's departure and his letter to the woman now on her own with his child, he quotes from his letter:

"You will bring him up, you will tell him about me, you will say, 'He was a superior person. You must work hard to be worthy of him.'" (*Ibid.*, p.52).

Fanon's indignation and anger are obvious when he comments on the above:

"What about dignity? He had no need to achieve it: It was injected now into the labyrinth of his arteries, entrenched in his little pink fingernails, a solidly white dignity" (*Ibid.*, p.52).

To be fair with Capécia, let us go back to her text:

" Il parlait beaucoup de Dieu. Il essayait de me persuader que notre amour devait passer maintenant 'dans le domaine des idées'. Il parlait enfin de notre petit François.

'Tu l'élèveras . Tu lui parleras de moi. Tu lui diras: c'était un homme supérieur. Il faut que tu travailles, pour être digne de lui. Un jour il est parti sur son bateau, et il est comme mort. Mais tu es là, toi, mon grand bonhomme. Tu deviendras comme lui. et, plus tard tu rendras à ton tour une femme heureuse'.

J'eus un mouvement de révolte.

André croyait-il m'avoir rendue heureuse pour toujours ? Croyait-il que je pourrais vivre uniquement de souvenirs ? Se croyait-il quitte enfin vis-à-vis de cet enfant qui était le sien, en m'envoyant un chèque ?

Ah! Si j'avais été seule, avec quel plaisir je l'aurais déchiré ce chèque. Je le haïssais déjà de m'obliger à le ramasser » (Mayotte Capécia : *Je suis Martiniquaise*, Editions Corrêa, 1948, p.186).

She obviously did not lack dignity and courage. She went to work and raised her child.

She describes her reconciliation with her father with some tenderness, and even with some poetry using her father's martiniquan way of skipping the 'r's;

"Il faut que je l'avoue que je n'ai pas mené non plus une vie exemplai'. Tu as t'ahi ta race, peut-êt' bien. Tu es fille mè', peut-êt' bien aussi. Mais je veux tout te pa'donner. Et je m'appr'ête à ché'i' ton fils" (*Ibid.*, p.190).

But the final judgment comes down, with no attenuating circumstances of any kind, from Fanon, the pitiless judge, in the eyes of Christiane Makward in her book, "*Mayotte Capécia, ou l'Aliénation selon Fanon*" :

"Mayotte Capécia is barred from herself.

May she add no more to the mass of her imbecilities.

Depart in peace, mudslinging storyteller...But remember that, beyond your 500 anemic pages, it will always be possible to regain the honorable road that leads to the heart.

In spite of you." (*Ibid.* p.53.ftnote 12).

There is no denying that Fanon was an angry man in search of a cure for a frightening illness that so many of his brothers and sisters were infected of. It is as if his anger prevented him from recognizing that Mayotte Capécia was only a victim and not a “traitor to her race” as her own forgiving father calls her in Capécia’s words.

We could have expected more sympathy from Fanon, but as Jocelyne Laâbi commented recently when we were discussing informally Christiane’s book: “those were the days of a bitter struggle, there could be little room for mercy or indulgence; the prevailing stance was: ‘take no prisoners’!”

Critics and writers such as Jack Corzani, Maryse Condé, and many others who understood Christiane Makward’s desire to rehabilitate Mayotte Capécia, and who would admit that Fanon could have been less condemning of Capécia, the victim, were still ready to reaffirm that Mayotte Capécia was profoundly, if not hopelessly “*alienated*” and “*naïve*” . Corzani who found Christiane Makward’s endeavor commendable enough to accept to write the preface to her book, put it right when he wrote in an earlier piece:

“Jamais une Martiniquaise n’a aussi naïvement et sincèrement avoué sa propre ‘aliénation’, son désir de ‘blanchiment’, son mépris du Nègre ‘sauvage’, toutes choses que Frantz Fanon et quelques autres devaient violemment dénoncer...*L’essentiel demeure: cette plongée en profondeur dans la réalité psychologique antillaise qui confère à son œuvre une valeur documentaire irremplaçable* » (My emphasis).

I emphasize the last sentence of Corzani’s statement to stress the generosity of its implication. It goes without saying that Fanon, or even Maryse Condé who is also quoted by Christiane Makward could not afford to be so kind or obliging, on reading the following, in the closing paragraphs of *Je suis Martiniquaise*:

“Et je pensais que je pouvais bien avoir péché, mais que plus tard, lorsque je mourrais, cette vie que j’avais reçue de mon père, passerait à son tour dans mon fils, que j’avais eu raison d’avoir un fils et que j’étais fière quand même qu’il soit[sic]blanc » (Ibid. p.201).

Maryse Condé was very clear in her statement to Christiane Makward about the severity with which Capécia’s writings were received by her compatriots from the Antilles and others; nonetheless, she did not sound ready to exonerate the author of *Je suis Martiniquaise* and *Une Nègresse blanche*, or turn her into a legendary creole “*Ti-Jeanne*” heroine:

“Ce malaise, cette honte, cette sévérité nous paraissent peu justifiées. Que sont les préjugés de couleur sinon le reflet tenace du rapport de dominant à dominé, d’exploiteur à exploité ? la blancheur du maître recouvre sa force et sa puissance.

Nous l’avons dit, Frantz Fanon, Etiemble, Léonard Sainville ont tour à tour accablé Mayotte Capécia. Avec une surprenante naïveté, elle conte le récit de ses amours avec un Blanc, André qu’elle n’aime que pour sa blancheur et qui en fin de compte l’abandonne avec le fils qu’il lui a fait. En outre, le personnage du Blanc est parfaitement odieux : c’est un partisan du Maréchal Pétain en pleine période de résistance.’ *Ibid.*P.46.

Nini, the next Fanon target for analysis of *the Woman of Color and the White Man* relationship comes from Africa, from St-Louis in Senegal exactly. She is also a *métisse*, and without any doubt, based on a real person, but she is not telling her own story; we have a Senegalese school teacher and writer narrating. *Nini* is just as prejudiced as *Mayotte*; she too wants to marry a White man so he can take away to a better place; she thinks of herself as “*almost white*”, and too good for any Black man however respectable and caring he may be. She too will be abandoned by the White man she gives herself to, and will end up leaving her native land, for

obviously greener pastures. For Fanon, there is no fundamental difference between these two brainwashed *Métisse* women – one from his native Martinique, and the other from Africa; both are moved by the same aspiration to acquire “assets that were originally prohibited [to them]. It is because the Black woman feels inferior that she aspires to win admittance into the white world” (Ibid, pp.59-60).

Fanon indicates that his book is the “result of experiences and observations ‘which led him to conclusions such as “the Blackman is enslaved by his inferiority, the white man by his superiority”, and they both “behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation” (Ibid.p.60).

But Fanon is definitely not as harsh with *Nini* as with *Mayotte*, for the former is not telling shamelessly her own story. She is, after all, a fictional creation of Abdoulaye Sadj, even if most certainly based on a real person; and she is not expressing with no restraint whatsoever, her total acceptance of the imposition of racial hierarchy based solely on skin color. No one would deny that there is a total absence of any indulgence whatsoever towards *Mayotte Capécia* on Fanon’s part.

In the next chapter, Fanon uses the story of Jean Veneuse, the first person central character of René Maran’s novel, *Un homme pareil aux autres* (Paris, Editions Arc-en-Ciel, 1947) to discuss the relationship between “the Man of Color and the White Woman”. The 1928 Prix Goncourt winner for his first novel *Batouala* opens his novel stating clearly his goal, an attempt to bridge the gap between the two races by telling the story of his love for *Andrée Marielle*:

“Je m’appelle Jean Veneuse. Le nègre que je suis a peut-être tort de publier les confidences qu’on va lire. On m’a pourtant conseillé de le faire parce que le moment semble venu d’en saisir l’opinion publique.

Je crois entendre déjà les critiques qu’elles susciteront. Le Français, affirmera-t-on, n’a jamais eu de préjugé de couleur. Quelle erreur est-ce là ? Il est indéniable qu’il existe aujourd’hui, en France, des traces plus ou moins profondes de racisme.

Un amour secret, lui servant de consolation et de refuge, est venu un jour alléger ses désillusions et sa détresse...

*Le livre que voici n’est, au fond, que le voyage d’une race à une autre »*Ibid, p.6. My emphasis.

While Fanon does not fail to note that Maran’s story is autobiographical and he calls Veneuse, at least on one instance, alias René Maran, he never treats the author directly as the subject of his analysis, as he does with *Mayotte*. Jean Veneuse is a Black intellectual who is in love with a White woman who makes it very clear that she loves him in return, but because of the prejudice that he feels all around him, he is full of self doubt, and literally tortures the poor woman with his doubts, because as Fanon puts it, “he wants to be loved completely, absolutely and forever”.

Quoting abundantly from Germaine Guey’s “*La Névrose d’abandon*” (Paris, P.U.F. 1950), and also from E.Minkowski’s *La Schizophrénie* (Paris, Payot, 1927), Fanon diagnoses Veneuse as:

“A neurotic, and his color is only an attempt to explain his psychic structure. If this objective difference had not existed, he would have manufactured it out of nothing.” (Ibid.pp.78-79)... ‘*Un homme pareil aux autres*’ is a sham, an attempt to make the relations between two races dependent on an organic unhealthiness”(Ibid.p.80).

His final words on Veneuse sound perfectly clinical; and they do not ring like an expression of anger as the words with which he dismissed *Mayotte Capécia* and her “500 anemic pages”:

“He is a neurotic who needs to be emancipated from his infantile fantasies. And I contend that Jean Veneuse represents not an example of black-white relations, but a

certain mode of behavior in a neurotic who by coincidence is black. So the purpose of our study becomes more precise: to enable the man of color to understand, through specific examples, the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Blacks... But let us remember that our purpose is to make possible a healthy encounter between black and white” (Ibid. p.80).

It goes without saying that while Veneuse is dealt with as a sick patient who is perceived by the psychiatrist Fanon as curable, while Mayotte is clearly “a hopeless case” in the eyes of the author of “*Black skin, White Masks*”..

Mannoni and the So-called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples

This chapter Four of “*Peau noire, masques blancs*” in which Fanon discusses critically Octave Mannoni’s landmark book “*Prospéro et Caliban: Psychologie de la colonization*” (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1949) is central to his entire endeavor here.

He begins with praises for Mannoni’s honesty and his grasp of the psychological phenomena that govern relations between colonized and colonizer. But he disagrees with him when he postulates that “the complex of inferiority *antidates* colonization, that is, that, “Not all peoples can be colonized; only those who experience this need [for dependency]... Wherever Europeans have founded colonies of the type we are considering, it can safely be said that their coming was unconsciously expected – even desired – by the future subject peoples. Everywhere there existed legends foretelling the arrival of strangers from the sea, bearing wondrous gifts with them” (Ibid, p.99)..

Fanon’s interpretation of this is that what his mentor and teacher Aimé Césaire called the “*old courtly civilizations*” of humanity, good will and basic courtesy - and that in Senegambian Wolof tradition is called *Teranga*, or hospitality - is translated erroneously by Mannoni into “*inscribed fateful hieroglyphics*” making the white man the awaited master! This interpretation echoes the initial attitude of several cattle breeding communities of Southern Africa who saw the first Dutch settlers, the future *Boers* and *Afrikaners* of the Southern tip of the continent, not as *Gods* or *Masters*, but as common cattle thieves.

Re-reading for the purpose of this Fanon Colloquium Mannoni’s initial text written at the time of the 1947 upheaval in Madagascar followed by the French authorities’ ruthless repression, was highly enlightening in view of the fact that my first acquaintance with his work was Césaire’s devastating comments in *Discours sur le colonialisme*; his more contemporary piece, *The Decolonization of Myself* written for the English Review *Race*(London, April 1966), was equally telling. Mannoni’s 1966 text is revealing of a thoughtful and honest thinker; definitely not a racist as he reflects on why, instead of writing about what the White man - le Blanc - had become amidst Blacks - les Noirs – on whom he no longer ruled, or rather no longer ruled in the same way, he would rather try to

“find out how the ghost of the former colonized haunts, without their knowing it, the relationships between the Whites who have never left Europe, because, after all, I have some experience of this”(Ibid, p.210).

On racism, Mannoni wrote the following, in his 1966 piece:

“ La portée de l’explication psychologique est limitée; elle permet de venir à bout de certaines attitudes racistes, ou en tout cas de les dénoncer quand elle est incapable de les corriger. La question d’ailleurs, n’est pas facile ; le racisme n’entre pas d’une façon définie dans une classification nosographique; c’est plutôt, du point de vue de la pathologie, un symptôme qui n’a pas du tout la même signification chez un paranoïaque par exemple, chez un pervers, et

peut se retrouver parfaitement dans des personnalités « normales » par ailleurs. Ce genre de questions peut intéresser, doit intéresser tout psychanalyste. » (Ibid. p.210).

Mannoni notes candidly that while it may be appealing, with all the changes that have taken place in the former colonies, to write a psychology of decolonization, he had to admit that that did not tempt him at all. In his eyes, his study's aim was to “*do away with racial and colonial myths - but it did not touch the implied universalist convictions.*” (Ibid, p.211).

On the one hand, I came out of re-reading Mannoni's book and his more contemporary pieces with the conviction that here was a truly dedicated scholar and clinical practitioner whose intellectual integrity and honesty could not be doubted; on the other hand however, his so-called “*self-decolonization*” did not seem to translate into a review, or even a slight alteration of his initial premise elaborated some twenty years earlier.

He wrote, in effect, in 1966 that he would concede to the ‘*universalists*’ that

“*racial differences have absolutely no meaning in the natural order. But it is in the same way that the various phonemes that constitute the babblings or gibberish of human babies have no meaning in themselves. They will acquire one later. Any discussion, scientific or not, on the nature in itself of racial differences cannot move any further the question which remains elsewhere. These differences will become signifier - signifiant in French - which will allow clearly or with confusion, to posit finally the statement between people as if the encounter of the White man and the Black man, far from being of two men without difference, was the encounter of difference in its purity, difference without natural meaning, which becomes the symbol, at the same time evident and absurd of what is wrong in human relations, and in our own case, what is wrong in the world of whites.*” (Mannoni's italics. Ibid, p.213).

And still on difference, :

“Difference has been credited to the Black man (4). He has been saddled with it like an original sin. Why doesn't he want to have this sin washed away in the *universalist* baptismal? What is the meaning of this stubbornness, of this stiffness of the neck? Why does he pick up this difference when we are ready to take it away? He does so because it has become the *signifier - le signifiant* in French - of his own claim: he can no longer ask to be recognized as just a human being, he wants to be known as a **Black man.**” (My emphasis. Ibid. p.214).

Mannoni seemed to believe that *difference* among humans was fundamental, and would never go away, when he wrote, in the 1966 piece which I quoted from earlier:

« Je n'ai nulle envie de prophétiser, mais je reste fidèle à mon premier projet en essayant difficilement, de dégager les erreurs qui se cachent dans les attitudes présentes; et ce n'est pas étonnant s'il m'apparaît maintenant que mon ancienne analyse était pour une moitié encore captive de *ces erreurs*, même si l'autre moitié était déjà une libération.(Ibid.p.215.

My italics).

The errors that Mannoni is referring to here are what he calls the “*universalists'view*” that postulate that there is only one universal human nature. Having written earlier about his awareness and his natural disapproval of his French compatriots' bigotry and racist attitudes in Madagascar in no uncertain terms:

“Si nous consultations les colonialistes, ils nous diraient: ‘*Les Malgaches n'ont pas besoin de liberté. Ils ne savent pas ce que c'est. Si on la leur impose, ils seraient malheureux, et le malheur les rend méchants.*(Ibid.p.).

Mannoni states that a broader mind (« *plus de largeur d'esprit* »), more tolerance, perhaps more psychological 'finesse' will not be enough:

“Cela ne suffit pas si cela conduit finalement à dire que *d'être un Noir n'a ni importance ni signification; car le Noir ne peut pas nous en croire, et il trouve au contraire que cela a beaucoup d'importance et de signification.* »(Ibid.p.2150).

Reading these lines again, one is tempted to say, that “this is exactly the point. Having been cornered by the label, having locked himself up in this *Castle of his skin* - as in *The Castle of My skin*, the title of Barbadian novelist George Lamming - or tied down by *the shackles of one's skin* - as stated in a highly thought provoking passage in Barak Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from My Father* (5)

On reading the above, we can only say that if Mannoni, who lived through the advanced age of 90 - He was born in 1899 and died in 1989 – had read Césaire, or Fanon, or Toni Morrison, he must have misread them; or, he may not have read them all the way, but only up to the middle of their respective intellectual journeys. We will show in our conclusion that the ultimate goal in Fanon's quest was to convince his reader, and himself, that at the end of a long road through a thousand and one pitfalls,

“The Black man is not. Anymore than the white man” (Ibid.p.231).

Mannoni was definitely not a racist, and Fanon never accused him of bigotry, but he dismisses him for not understanding ‘*the real coordinates*’ of the colonial situation, “*for lacking the slightest basis on which to ground any conclusion applicable to the situation, the problems, or the potentialities of the Malagasy in the present time*”(Ibid.p.108).

On Being Black: Reading Our Black Poets and intellectuals and some sympathizing Africanist Scholars.

Having dismissed Mannoni for his incapacity to really understand the plight of the colonized peoples of the world, for uttering such statements as “*France is unquestionably one of the least racist-minded countries in the world*”(Ibid, p.92), or that “*European civilization and its best representatives are not responsible for colonial racism*”(Ibid.p.91), for not trying “*to feel himself into the despair of the man of color confronting the white man*”(Ibid, p.86), Fanon moved on to discuss in a variety of ways, using anecdotes, personal observations, above all, readings and comments - some of them very biting critical, some exalting and even lyrical and yet critical - of writings by Black poets and writers, and also readings from prominent European Africanist scholars and intellectuals.

Fanon uses effectively as a leitmotiv the phrase “*Look! A Black man! Mama! See the Black man! I'm frightened! Frightened! Frightened!*” in the same effective way that Césaire uses the phrase “*Au bout du petit matin*”(At the end of the dawn) in the poem *Le cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (A Return to my Native Land), as an awakening call to the “*reality*” and the “*unreality*” of being a black man”

He tried laughing it off, but he couldn't, because he,

“*Already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all, historicity, which I had learnt about from Jaspers...*

I was responsible...for my race, for my ancestors...I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics, and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho'good eatin'”(6).

Fanon's critical treatment of Senghor's assertion about *Rhythm* in his 1939 landmark *Ce que l'homme noir apporte*, his multifaceted analysis of Sartre's often quoted *Orphée noir*; his honest disagreement with Alioune Diop when the latter makes inferences based solely on Reverend Tempels's *La philosophie bantoue* characterize eloquently his approach, i.e. the initial apparent readiness to espouse enthusiastically the Black man's exaltation in asserting his pride in the specific artistic and philosophical contributions of African peoples followed by a genuine call for caution. His comment on Alioune Diop's statement on "the genius of the Blackman" rings indeed as a warning against a dangerous oversight:

"The inference is nonetheless dangerous...Be careful! It is not a matter of finding Being in Bantu thought, when Bantu existence subsists on the level of nonbeing, of the imponderable. Being a closed society, it does not contain that substitution of the exploiter for the ontological relations of Forces. Now we know that Bantu society no longer exists. And there is nothing ontological about segregation. Enough of this rubbish. (Ibid.p.185.My emphasis).

Diop had characterized black people as having

"that youth of spirit ,that innate respect for man and creation, that joy in living, that peace which is not a disfigurement of man imposed and suffered through moral hygiene, but a natural harmony with the happy majesty of life...One wonders too what the Black man can contribute to the modern world...What we can say is that the very idea of culture conceived as a revolutionary will is as contrary to our genius as the very idea of progress. Progress would have haunted our consciousness only if we had grievances against life, which is a gift of nature." My emphasis.

Fanon's warning is quite clear, and refers to the obvious irrelevance of a discourse on *Bantu thought* when Bantu life is being suppressed through colonial oppression and *Apartheid*, quoting from I.R. Skine's "Apartheid en Afrique du Sud" in *Les Temps Modernes*, July, 1950; and inviting us to read Alan Paton's widely read *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a vivid documentary on the misery of the African people of South Africa under White rule.

Conclusion

Statements such as "*Whenever a man of color protests, there is alienation. Whenever a man of color rebukes, there is alienation*"(Ibid.p.60) explain, in my opinion, Fanon's lucidity in reading the lyrical expressions of Black pride, or Black "*specificity*", sometimes with proud exaltation, sometimes with a sharp critical eye. He does the same with Sartre's lyrical analysis of the poetry in Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*" in his landmark preface *Orphée Noir* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

Taken out of context, Fanon's statements about Sartre's analysis of the poetry of *Negritude* may be misinterpreted as bitter criticism, which it is not really, if one follows carefully Fanon's complete itinerary:

For some time there has been much talk about the Black man. A little too much. *The Black man would like to be dropped, so that he may regroup his forces, his authentic forces.*

One day he said: "My negritude is neither a tower..."

And someone came along to Hellenize him, to make an *Orpheus* of him...the black man who is looking for the universal. He is looking for the universal! But in June 1950, the hotels of Paris refused to rent rooms to Black pilgrims. Why? Purely and simply because their Anglo-Saxon customers (who are rich and who, *as everyone knows*, hate Blacks) threatened to move out... (Ibid.p.186)

OrphéeNoir is a date in the intellectualization of the experience of being black. And Sartre's mistake was not only to seek the source but in a certain sense to block that source...Jean-Paul Sartre, in this work, has destroyed black zeal...In any case I *needed* not to know..." (Ibid.pp.134-135)...

The following passage takes us to another level, where Sartre has to be seen as helping *Fanon's* patient out of his exalted illusion, *out of his neurosis*. The first person singular used by Fanon throughout the is deliberate, because the sick person here is the Black man which *includes him* : What is certain is that, at the very moment when I was trying to grasp my own being, Sartre, who remained *The Other*, gave me a name and thus shattered my last illusion. While I was saying to him:

*My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral,
it thrusts into the red flesh of the sun,
it thrusts into the burning flesh of the sky,
it hollows through the dense dismay of its pillar of patience...*
(A. Césaire: *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*)

While I was shouting, in the paroxysm of my being and my fury, ***he was reminding me that my blackness was only a minor term...My cry grew more violent: I am Black, I am Black, I am Black...*** (Ibid, pp137-138).

Taken in the context of Fanon's own approach in his effort to cure his readers - Black and White alike - of their obsession with race and difference, these statements should be read as part of the process that will eventually lead to his closing statements which ring as the final goal of the whole process:

"No, I do not have the right to go and cry out my hatred at the white man. I do not have the duty to murmur my gratitude to the white man...
No, I do not have the right to be a Black man.
I do not have the duty to be this or that...
If the white man challenges my humanity, I will impose my whole weight as a man on his life and show that I am not that "sho'good eatin'" ("Ya bon nyam nyam) that he persists in imagining...
My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values.
There is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence...
The Black man is not. Anymore than the white man.
Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible. Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation...
Superiority? Inferiority?
Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?" (Ibid.229-231).

I would like to close here with some of the answers that Marie N'Diaye, the author of "*En famille*", "*Rosie Carpe*", and other novels and of the play, "*Papa doit manger*" performed at the *Comédie Française* gave in a recent interview to *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Thursday, April 13, 2006. No.2162) on the questions of *Race, Racism and self definition*:

“Aucune définition de ce que je suis censée être ne peut me venir à l’esprit. En revanche, j’entends de plus en plus d’injonctions de se définir(en tant que noire ou métisse, métissee en France, etc.). Se définir c’est se réduire, se résumer à des critères, et par le fait entériner ce que d’autres seraient ou ne seraient pas ».

Her answer to the question: « Have you suffered from racism? And how?» reveals her awareness of being privileged while deploring the persistence of bigotry in society and sympathizing with its victims:

“Si j’en ai été personnellement victime, je ne m’ensuis pas rendu compte. Sans doute ce que je fais me préserve : je n’ai pas à postuler pour quoi que ce soit, pas de CV à envoyer et on ne me jamais sur un terrain de football...J’en souffre à travers ceux qui en souffrent, parce que c’est une des formes les plus violentes de la bêtise satisfaite ».

While I find these answers helpful in understanding the complexities of human interactions, I could not agree with the friend whose comment was that Marie N’Diaye represented a welcome post-Fanon era and understanding of race. While half a century has gone by since “*Peau noire, masques blancs*” was first published, the folly that led its passionate author to write it is, to my sadness, far from having completely disappeared from the surface of the earth.

One final thought is how to compare Marie NDiaye’s high brow reaction to bigots and bigotry in France with the recent reminiscences of Amadou Mahtar M’Bow, the former Director General of UNESCO about his first trip to the USA in 1958 as a guest of the State Department. He was then Minister of Education in the autonomous *Loi-Cadre Government* of Senegal. He was recalling the nervous reaction of his State Department escort and translator when he insisted on going to dinner in regular restaurants rather than in designated cafeterias, in *Jim Crow* Alabama and the Southern United States. His own comment was that he chose to deliberately dismiss the bigotry around him, and behave as he would anywhere in the world.

Notes:

(1) These statements were made in an interview with the *London Times* of October 17, 2007.

(2) I am using here the American edition of Fanon’s original *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1952. The excellent English translation is by Charles Lam Markmann. The only correction I feel compelled to make in quotations from the English translation is that, in view of the different historical contexts in the US and among Black French intellectuals of the 20th Century, A.Césaire and contemporaries, and their French supporters like Sartre, Breton, Queneau and others, the word *Nègre* as used by Fanon, should always be translated by “*Black*” in English, and never by “*Negro*” or “*Nigger*”.

(3) Christiane Makward calls this process a “*complexe de lactification*”, a verdict delivered by Fanon against Mayotte Capécia, the author of an autobiographical narrative *Je suis Martiniquaise* in his 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*. Hers is a legitimate feminist re-reading of Fanon’s understandable harsh condemnation of Mayotte Capécia writing in the early 1950’s. It is true that Fanon characterizes Capécia early in his discussion of her autobiographical account as putting us on notice that “*what she wants is a kind of lactification*”.

We will revisit this approach in the course of our discussion of Fanon and the *internalization of the complex of inferiority* among colonized peoples.

(4) Mannoni uses the word “*Noir*”, and not “*Nègre*” like the *Négritude* era intellectuals like Senghor, Césaire, Damas and those who sympathized with their struggles, like Sartre, Queneau, Breton and others

(5) The statement comes at the end of a compelling discussion of the *race* issue in the United States of America as: “It all comes down to a simple matter of escape. An escape from poverty or boredom or crime or *the shackles of my skin*(My emphasis).

(6) Great English translation of the original French ‘*Ya bon Niam-Niam!*’ by Charles Lam Markmann, Grove Press Inc. New York, 1967], p.112]. Just like the common insult French racist ‘*sale bougnoule*’, this loaded pejorative reference is a borrowing from the Wolof language of Senegal and The Gambia. While *gnoule* and *bougnoule* refer to the color Black in Wolof, with no derogatory implication whatsoever, *nyam* (verb and noun) means “food” and “to eat” in Wolof as well as in a number of African languages with equally no derogatory implication.