FRANTZ FANON: Portrait of a Revolutionary Intellectual

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves.

In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity.

— Sekou Toure

Practice without thought is blind; thought without practice is empty.

— Kwame Nkrumah

Emmanuel Hansen

When Frantz Fanon died in December 1961, he was relatively unknown except among his fighting Algerian comrades, a small group of French Leftists who had been attracted to his writings, and a handful of radical Africans. Today in the United States and to a lesser extent in Western Europe, his name is a household word. Even the Russians, who have for a long time ignored his writings, are now beginning to break their silence about him.[1] Books and articles about Fanon are appearing with increasing frequency, and research centres have been erected in his memory. He has taken his place together with Che Guevara, Herbert Marcuse and Regis Debray as intellectual and ideological mentor of the New Left.

Ironically, in Africa, where he spent a large portion of his adult life dedicating himself fanatically to the fight for African liberation, he is relatively unknown except in Algeria. And in Ghana where he lived as an Ambassador of the Algerian Provisional Government, today his name hardly draws a ripple.

There are a number of reasons why we in Africa should be concerned with Fanon. His was the most intriguing personality; he was a man full of apparent contradictions: one of the most assimilated of France's sons and yet perhaps its most passionate critic; a dedicated fighter of racial oppression, he was to die in Washington, the heart of racist America; a man to whom violence was personally abhorrent, he was one of the most strident advocates of violence. Secondly, Fanon's life and work provide us with a model of what the African intellectual ought to be: a man who reflects and yet does not allow reflection to inhibit him from social action, and a man whose social action is guided by thought. To him the role of the intellectual and that of the political activist were not mutually exclusive. Like Marx he believed that what mattered was not to interpret the world but to change it, and he used his knowledge as a weapon in the battle for freedom. For him it was not enough to analyse a social situation and expose its undesirable nature. One must also include a programme of action to change the undesirable situation, and actually embark on activities which lead to change. In short he was a man who lived his ideas. Thirdly, Fanon's message is of extreme importance to Africa and the Third World. And if today Fanon is not read in Africa it is not because he is less relevant to Africa. It is because the national bourgeoisie which holds the reigns of power in Africa is committed to maintaining the colonial-bureaucratic state and is not

prepared to propagate ideas which would change the status quo which benefits it so handsomely.

Who was this extraordinary person whose life and ideas raised a controversy which has by no means been settled? What kind of life did he live? What were his ideas and what was his message to Africa and the Third World? What were his hopes, desires and aspirations, and what do we learn from his experience? These are some of the questions we hope to touch on in this article.

Frantz Fanon's life history falls into five main parts: his birth, bourgeois upbringing and early education on the island of Martinique; his service in the French Army; his higher education in France and his exposure to the French intellectual Left; his work in North Africa as a psychiatrist committed to the cause of the Algerian revolution; his life and work as a professional revolutionary, both in North Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa. It is useful to look at Martinique in 1925 to understand the social environment in which Fanon grew up and the forces which moulded his early life.

MARTINIQUE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The island of Martinique, where Fanon was born, was one of the Overseas Departments of France. Together with Guadeloupe it forms what is known as the French Antilles. As in other French Overseas territories, Martinican society consisted of a rigid class structure.[2] Society was pyramidal. On top of the pyramid was a small group of whites, called *creoles* or *bekes*. The whites formed a status group and they consisted of native whites, and whites from metropolitan France. Small in number, they formed a closely-knit endogamous community. In the eyes of most Blacks, the whites consisted of a single homogeneous and monolithic group. However, small as they were, some gradations could be discerned among them. Edith Kovatz has identified three main sub-groups: *gros beke*, the *beke moyens* and the *petits blancs*.[3]

Below the white group was a small but fairly prosperous middle class of Blacks and, at the bottom were the bulk of the Black population. As happens in all cases of rigid class structure, those at the top of the pyramid tried to stress their social distance from those below them, and those at the bottom tried to stress their social nearness to those above them. In the non-white group also, there were some sub-groups: the mulattoes and the Blacks proper. The former were a socially well-to-do bourgeoisie, mostly city dwellers. They were mostly in the public service, business, and in the liberal professions, like law and medicine. Though economically some of them were better off than some of the whites, as a group they were considered socially inferior to the whites.

Status coincided, though not absolutely, with color. The small white group formed a reference group for the mulatto and the Black bourgeoisie, who tried to emulate it in every imaginable way. They tried to speak impeccable French, since it was the language of both the white upper class and the metropolitan power. In Martinique, as indeed in all colonial countries, the colonizer's language is associated with social class. In Martinique, the more impeccable one's French, the higher was one's status. And one was considered human to the extent to which one mastered the language of the master and approximated his manners and ways of doing things. One writer has commented on the magic power of the white man's language on the island:

> Disembarking at Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, a person having good French or English is whisked through customs, while Creole-speaking blacks are searched for contraband goods. [4]

Victor Wolfenstein, writing about Gandhi, remarks about a similar case:

> ... *Gandhi had tried to be like the English in order to be a man;* he was unable to master the task and he reverted to his mother's Hinduism, thereby arriving at a workable identity with himself. (emphasis added) [5]

This is perhaps the most pernicious aspect of colonial rule. To be human one has to be white.

The whites, though less than one per cent of the population, owned the large firms, the construction companies, the newspapers and most of the port facilities. They controlled the social, economic, and political life of the island. They were an ingrown, clannish group and, like their counterparts in other parts of the colonial world, namely pre-independent Algeria or Kenya, or today's Rhodesia, they were hostile even to the whites of the metropolis.

The lower class Blacks who constituted the majority of the population did mostly manual work. Many worked in the fields as cane cutters, or on the banana and pineapple plantations. Some also worked in the sugar refineries or as dock workers, truck drivers, or domestic servants. Unlike the situation in other colonial areas, the non-white bourgeoisie of Martinique chose the path of assimilation instead of national independence.

BIRTH, FAMILY BACKGROUND, AND EARLY EDUCATION

Into one of these bourgeois families of small property owners Frantz Fanon was born on July 20, 1925. Of the father we hardly know anything except that he was a customs inspector and that he died in 1947, having been born in 1891.[6] His mother was described as a mild-mannered and heavy-set woman, who considered herself just another French citizen.[7] The family was described as "conventional." They were integrated into the Martinican society in spite of the fact that in conversations, the brothers tended to agree with Frantz's analysis of European racism on the island.[8] Fanon's elder brother worked with a French separatist organization and for this reason he was exiled from the island. Fanon's father was described as a "free thinker" and "a freemason." In Catholic Martinique this provided the atmosphere in which independent thought could be developed, at least in matters of religion.

Of Fanon's pre-school life we know very little. He was the youngest of the four sons, and as a child was quite restless and prone to getting into trouble. He was also the darkest of the eight children. Those who are attracted to psycho-history attach a great deal of importance to this.[9] Among the speculations is that Fanon's preoccupation with recognition may have originated from maternal rejection which he might have interpreted in racial terms. The significance of colour on the island is invoked to give weight to this. Preoccupation with recognition however is not a

peculiar trait with Fanon. It is found in varying degrees among all colonial intellectuals. The tendency to interpret the drama of Fanon's life as an attempt to solve a personal psychosis is to say the least shallow, and I find totally unsatisfactory theories which class all innovators as psychopaths.[10]

Fanon's early education followed strictly along the lines laid down by French assimilationist policy. The only books available were the official school textbooks concentrating on the glories of the metropolitan power and the French Empire. As in other French colonies, the official policy was assimilation, by which the Blacks or a chosen few of them, were promoted to the status of French citizens, enjoying in theory all the privileges of the white man's existence.

Assimilation and French education were intertwined. Martinican children read the same books and took the same examinations as white students in metropolitan France. Their classrooms were decorated with pictures of the wine harvest in Bordeaux and winter sports in Grenoble.[11] They were taught the history of France as if it were their own history.[12] Fanon and his brothers learned French patriotic songs. French culture was exalted to the skies; French language, French literature, French history, French mannerisms were accepted with uncritical adulation as the only legitimate way of life. The effect of this was clear. It made the children develop a deep sense of personal identification with French culture and the French way of life. Corresponding to the exaltation of the French way of life was a deprecation of the African way of life. Training at home was no different. Fanon recounts that whenever he misbehaved he was told to "stop acting like a nigger."[13] The Martinicans, like some members of the older generation of Black Americans accepted the racist stereotypes about Africans. They did not regard themselves as Africans. They were Martinicans. The Africans lived in Africa. They spent evenings talking about the savage customs of the Africans in the same way as whites did. And of the Africans the Senegalese were held up as the worst of the Black savages. They were the real Africans of whom the most incredible tales were told.

Looking back on these incidents of his personal life, Fanon writes:

> As a schoolboy, I had on many occasions to spend whole hours talking about the supposed customs of the savage Senegalese. In what was said there was a lack of awareness that was at the very least paradoxical. Because the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. *Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man.* (emphasis added)[14]

We would here add that Fanon was not talking of the ordinary poor Martinican, but the educated bourgeoisie. He was thus subjected to colonial education in one of its most intensive forms. Thus, like most of the children of his age, his early training was to end in his alienation. His education led to identification with French culture and its values. It was not only identification with white French culture but also a deprecation of African culture. Several years later Fanon was to write: "I am a white man for unconsciously I distrust what is black in me, that is the whole of my being."[15] Little did he know that in France, no matter how much he approximated to the French European style of life, intellectual posture and achievements, he would still be regarded first and foremost as a Black and different from the white Frenchman. He would be known not simply as a "doctor" but as a "Black doctor", not simply a "student", but a "Black student", etc. Europe would never forget his colour.

VICHY TIMES

In 1940, after the fall of France to the Vichy Administration, the French fleet in the Caribbean declared its allegiance to the regime of Vichy. The United States immediately imposed a blockade on the island. In response, the French governor instituted a military dictatorship on the island with the support of the leading property owners.[16] Consequently, 5,000 French sailors descended on the island's city population of 45,000 for a prolonged holiday. Geismar gives a vivid description of the incident:

> The soldiers expropriated Fort-de-France's bars, restaurants, hotels, whorehouses, beaches, shops, sidewalks, taxis and better apartments... The military could afford to order the civilians around. The servicemen were rough too... What money failed to do brute power accomplished. Cafes were immediately segregated: black waiters and women, white customers. In the stores sailors expected to be served before Martinicans. At first segregation came about for economic reasons: With the influx of military money prices went up and the islanders could no longer afford to be customers. By 1941 ... the colour lines were firmly established. The servicemen weren't going to fraternize with black males. The women were another matter: The white visitors requisitioned them; they considered every young girl on the island a prostitute. Rape often replaced the remuneration of those unwilling to conform to the soldiers expectations. The police, used to operating in a colonial environment where blacks were always in the wrong, dismissed rape victims as overpriced prostitutes. In the military courts, the navy's word always carried more weight than the Martinican's complaints. It was a totalitarian racism.[17]

This was the condition of the island at the time of the Vichy regime. Overnight the island came to look like an occupied territory. The regime came to represent "rape, racism and rioting."[18] What effect did these incidents have on the young and sensitive mind of Fanon? Did Fanon begin to hate France and all that it stood for at this moment? Fanon was at this time beginning to develop what one might call "political consciousness." Like many other Blacks on the island, he resented the "totalitarian racism" of the Vichy Administration. But at this time he did not link this to a questioning of the whole French presence, nor did he link racism with the colonial relationship. It was a resentment and hatred directed against the Administration and the soldiers, and not the French as such. He identified them more with the Germans than with the French.

It was in such circumstances that Fanon left the island in 1943, halfway through his baccalaureate, in company of two of his close friends, to respond to the call of General de Gaulle to save France. Their enthusiasm to fight for the French was underlined by the fact that they had to pay their own fares to the Dominican Republic where they underwent military training. By 1943, however, Admiral George Robert had capitulated to the pressure of the American blockade and Fanon once more returned to the island. However he did not obtain a discharge after the ouster of the Vichy Administration, but enlisted in the French Army and left for North Africa to fight for the "Free French."

Fanon left the island in the company of two of his close friends—Mosole and Manville. Mosole was described as a cynic and a well-informed person, who by 1943 knew all about racism and exploitation. Manville was the son of a Martinican socialist, who defended Blacks in lower courts without any fee. Manville, whose close association with Fanon might have had some impact on him, attempted to follow in his father's footsteps, and while at the *lycee* he was always taking up the cases of the defense of other students before the higher authorities.[19] Fanon, then grew up in the company of two important catalysts: Mosole with a knowledge of racism and exploitation, and Manville with his emphasis on the need for action on behalf of the helpless.

After a short stay in southern Morocco, they arrived in Algeria, which was to become Fanon's country of adoption later on in life. While in Algeria, Fanon and his two companions volunteered for service in Europe. The rampant racism in the army and the conditions of poverty were too much for them. He left the army with the rank of a corporal in 1946 and he was cited for bravery.

THE FRENCH ARMY

Fanon's experiences in the French army and the war were to have lasting effects on him. In the army he came face to face with blatant racism. Admittedly the island had experienced racism in some of its worst forms, particularly during the time of the Vichy administration. This was resented by Fanon and all Blacks, but, as we have said earlier, in the minds of the Martinicans, the Vichy Administration was identified more with the Germans than with the French. The French were different. They held the values of *fraternite, egalite and liberte*. All through school, Fanon had been taught to regard himself as a Frenchman and he was quite unprepared for the treatment which awaited him. He realized that France reserved a different place for its Black Frenchmen. On the trip to North Africa the white French troops had attempted, to "requisition the 'services' of a group of female volunteers from Martinique and Guadeloupe."[20] Fanon was deeply upset by this incident, which raised further doubts in his own mind about the nature of the reality of the Black-white relationship and the hypocrisy of the white world.

Fanon also observed that Black troops were always sent to the worst areas of the war, and were quartered in some of the most unhospitable areas. He did not fail to notice that white troops were treated differently and preferentially. The whites looked down on the Arabs who also looked down on the Blacks. And Blacks from the Caribbean also looked down upon Blacks from Africa. The Martinicans, on account of their supposed cultural assimilation, were treated in minor ways as whites, but in things which mattered were treated like the rest of the non-whites.

Manville reports how African troops were sent back and forth, to and from southern France. Their classification as Europeans or Africans depended on changes in climatic conditions. The classification and assignment of the soldiers to areas in France was apparently done on the basis of the level of fluency in French and the degree of acculturation. Thus, though Martinique was in the tropical zone, its troops were sent, not to southern France where the climate was warm, but to northern France where the climate was cold, because that corresponded to their assimilated status! The white man, being civilized, lives in cold climates, so as the Black man approximates the status of the white man through the process of assimilation, he is supposed to develop the same resistance to cold and be able to respond to the physical environment of the white world in the same way as the white man! Correspondingly, the Africans, who were supposed to be less culturally assimilated, were sent to southern France where the climate was warm, since that approximated to the level of their culturally assimilated status. One is supposed to be civilized to the extent to which one finds the hot weather unbearable. Fanon comments on the sudden inability of the Martinican to withstand the tropical heat after a visit to Europe:

> They need a minute to two in order to make their diagnosis. If the voyager tells his acquaintances 'I am so happy to be back with you Good Lord, it is hot in the country, I shall certainly not be able to endure it very long,' they know: European has got off the ship.[21]

Fanon was deeply angered by the record of German destruction of North Africa. He was also touched by the poverty, famine and destitution in Algeria. His concern about the conditions of poverty and destitution among the Algerians is even more remarkable if we remember that he was aware that Arabs looked down upon Blacks as social inferiors.

> Some ten years ago I was astonished to learn that North Africans despised men of colour. It was absolutely impossible for me to make any contact with the local population.[22]

His luck was to be better in the future. It is interesting to note that Fanon did not react to Arab racism in the same way as he did to European racism. In a way he tended to think that Arab racism was part of the superstructure, a reflection of colonial racism occasioned by the colonial experience. He viewed it in the same terms in which he viewed Martinican expression of racist attitudes towards Africans.

In Europe too there were incidents which made him more bitter against the French. In Toulon he had to watch white Frenchwomen dancing with Italian prisoners of war after turning down requests from Black servicemen who, needless to say, had risked their lives to save them (the French) from the Italians and the Germans.

By the end of the war, Fanon was becoming increasingly cynical about France and the French values he had been taught to admire at school.

RETURN TO MARTINIQUE—CESAIRE'S CAMPAIGN

A short period of political activity was to intervene between Fanon's war years and his higher education. This was when he went back to the island after the war to campaign for Aimé Césaire, who was running on the Communist ticket as a parliamentary delegate from Martinique to the first National Assembly of the Fourth Republic. There is no evidence that Fanon was at this time sympathetic to the Communist cause. He was more interested in the cultural nationalism of Césaire and his negritude philosophy at this time. His participation in the campaign activities of Aimé Césaire was very

instructive. His brother, Joby, alerted him to the problems of political and social mobilization in a place like Martinique and pointed out to him the flaws in Césaire's campaign in that he never succeeded in reaching the peasants and the countryside.[23] It is significant to note that his brother, Joby felt that it was important to involve the peasants in the politics of the island.[24] Fanon was not only to come to the same conclusion several years later but to make the peasantry the cardinal point of his revolutionary decolonisation.

With the campaign over, Fanon went back to the *lycee* to complete his education. This was in 1946. The picture we have of Fanon at this time was that of an introspective, withdrawn, and serious student. It is possible to surmise that he was brooding and turning over in his mind his experiences in the French army. He turned his attention to the study of literature and philosophy and he studied the works of Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers, Kierkegaard, and Hegel. He was particularly interested in the works of Césaire and Jean-Paul Sartre, and for a while he thought of a career in drama.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN FRANCE

In 1947, after the death of his father, Fanon went to France for higher studies. He first enrolled in dentistry in Paris, but after three weeks introductory courses he abruptly left Paris for Lyon to study medicine, complaining that there were too many "niggers" in Paris. Geismar gives as Fanon's reason that there were too many fools in dental school. He is also said to have claimed that he could live more cheaply in Lyon. These reasons, however, are hardly satisfactory, especially when we know that Fanon has always had the tendency to withdraw from an intolerable psychological situation. We have already noticed this "withdrawal syndrome" when he was in the Army.[25]

If the statement "There are just too many niggers in Paris" is a reference to the revulsion which Fanon felt at the disgusting behaviour of the Black bourgeoisie in Paris which tried to be more French than the French, and which tried to imitate and assimilate French culture in every imaginable way, then one can say that, even at this early stage, he was keenly aware of the problems of cultural and intellectual alienation which afflict the Black man in a white-dominated world, a theme he was to deal with so well in *Black Skin, White Masks*. If this interpretation is accepted, then how do we account for the fact that with such a knowledge he did try to assimilate French culture? The plain fact was that he had no choice, either he had to leave France or to stay in France and be assimilated. It could be argued that he sought full assimilation like anyone else, and to support this contention we may quote the following exclamation:

> What is all this talk of a black people, of a Negro nationality? I am a Frenchman. I am interested in French culture, French civilisation, the French people... I am personally interested in the future of France, in French values, in the French nation. What have I to do with a black empire.[26]

It is quite conceivable that Fanon was plagued all the time by an internal conflict between the demands of assimilation and the need for autonomy, the need to be oneself and that sometimes he repressed one or the other. His abrupt flight from Paris could therefore be attributed to the constant reminder which the presence of the Black bourgeoisie in Paris brought to him of his internal conflict, something which he was trying desperately to suppress. He thought Lyon would provide the conditions for psychic harmony. He was sadly mistaken in this.

After a year's preparatory work in chemistry, physics and biology, Fanon entered medical school. At school he worked hard to earn the respect of his professors as a bright student.

While at the university, Fanon continued his interest in philosophy and literature. He read the existential philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. He also read Marx and Hegel, and he attended the course of lectures of Jean Lacroix and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He was greatly influenced by Sartre, especially his *Anti-Semite and Jew* and later by the *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*. According to Simone de Beauvoir, what impressed Fanon most about the *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* was Sartre's analysis of terror and brotherhood.

Fanon was also influenced by Aimé Césaire, an influence which is particularly noticeable in *Black Skin, White Masks*, with its numerous quotations from Césaire. While a medical student, he also immersed himself in playwriting and he completed three works: *Les Mains Paralleles, L'Oeil Se Noie, La Conspiration*. These were written between 1949-1950. They still remain unpublished and according to Fanon's widow, it was his wish that they remain so. Dr Marie Perimbam, who has read them, says they reveal Fanon's attempt to solve human problems within the existential framework. They give the impression that Fanon was thinking of the world as a stage, life as an existential drama and people, as the actors. This was a period of intense reflection introspection and self-analysis. Some have called this the existentialist phase of Fanon's life. It should also be remembered that this was the time when he began to compose the essays which later were to appear collectively as *Black Skin, White Masks*. It deals with the problem of colonial alienation, the relations of superordination and subordination, the norm which guides all relations between the colonizer and the colonized, and the creation of a dependency complex. In short it is an examination of the ontological existence of the Black man in a white-dominated world and covers the subject matter of the psychology of colonial rule, a topic notoriously neglected in college and university courses on colonialism.

Fanon was a restless student and side by side with his medical studies, he was also active in politics. While at the medical school, he helped to organize the Union of Students from Overseas France in Lyon, and put out the short lived newspaper, *Tam-Tam*. He was always involved in debates, or going to left-wing meetings and touring occupied factories.

In November 1951, Fanon defended his medical thesis and left for Martinique. Much has been made of the fact that the thesis starts with a quotation from Nietzsche —"I dedicate myself to human beings, not to introspective mental process". But if a medical doctor does not dedicate himself to human beings to what else is he to dedicate himself? While in Martinique he presented a copy of his thesis to his brother with the inscription:

> To my brother, Felix,
> I offer this work—

> The greatness of a man is to be found not in his acts but in his style. Existence does not resemble a steadily rising curve, but a slow, and sometimes sad, series of ups and downs.
> I have a horror of weaknesses—I understand them, but I do not like them.
> I do not agree with those who think it possible to live life at an easy pace. I don't want this. I don't think you do either. . .[27]

These remarkable lines bring out forcibly some aspects of Fanon's personality: his restlessness, his impatience, his hatred of weakness and the apparent contradictions of his personal life. For it is puzzling that a man who showed a deep sense of commitment to praxis, should here place style above acts.

In the same year he went back to France to do his residency under Professor Francois Tosquelles, who was carrying out innovative experiments in the field of sociotherapy. He was to make a deep impression on Fanon, who worked with Tosquelles for two years during which time they jointly published a number of research papers. His pioneering work in psychiatric medicine in Algeria and Tunisia bore strongly the impact of this association with Professor Tosquelles.

In 1952, he married Josie Dublé, a Frenchwoman whom he had met while at the *lycee* in Lyon.[28] Certain Black radicals who have adopted Fanon have been uneasy about the fact of his marriage to a white woman. They claim it was not right and goes against Fanon's position. This is a complete misunderstanding of Fanon's position. Fanon never preached separation or segregation. His writings about the Manichaean world are descriptive and not prescriptive. It is precisely this idea of the Black man being sealed in his blackness and the white man being encased in his whiteness which he wanted to avoid. Specifically on the question of marriage he says: ". . . I do not feel that I should be abandoning my personality by marrying an European, whoever she might be."[29] Admittedly, Fanon has castigated the Black bourgeoisie for deciding to marry white. It should, however, be remembered that his objection was not to marriage across colour lines *per se*, but to marriage into the white society in order to escape one's blackness. In this case it is an indication of shame and hatred of one's colour. Geismar comes near to suggesting that Fanon married a white woman because of the paucity of Black women in Lyon or as a consequence of his yearning for "lactification".

> . . . it seems that Fanon fell in love only with white women. Maybe this was because there were few blacks living in the city, but Fanon himself gave a more interesting possible explanation in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. He describes there the neurotic behaviour pattern of a black man attempting to become white through love of a white woman.[30]

Such a suggestion rests on a misunderstanding of Fanon. Fanon was not a man to marry a woman because she is Black or white. This is precisely the Manichaean world he denounced in the most strident terms. In Fanon's view, colour or nationality should be entirely extraneous to the choice of a marital partner. His commitment was neither to a black nor to a white world. It was to a non-racial society. If Fanon avoided Black women it was less on account of the colour question. It was the same reason which occasioned his abrupt departure from Paris. Fanon has told us in *Black Skin, White Masks* of the kind of Black women he encountered in France:

> I know a great number of girls from Martinique, students in France, who admitted to me with complete candor —completely white 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.)[31]

Again,

> I knew another black girl who kept a list of Parisian dance-halls 'where-there-was-no-chance-of-running-into niggers'.[32]

If these were the sort of Black women in France at the time no psychological explanation is needed to account for Fanon's action. Any Black man with his head on his shoulders would avoid such women.

Although Geismar does not cite anything from the text to support his claim of Fanon's marriage arising out of lactification, his contention perhaps rests on this passage:

> I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.[33]

Although *Black Skin, White Masks* is autobiographical in tone, incidents related in the book do not always refer to incidents in Fanon's personal life. Sometimes it is only the style, not the incidents which are autobiographical. The work is an attempt to understand the world, and the Black man's place in it through introspection. The danger of using statements in *Black Skin, White Masks* indiscriminatingly as incidents in Fanon's personal life is evident from Geismar's work. Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* writes:

> A prostitute once told me that in her early days the mere thought of going to bed with a Negro brought on an orgasm. She went in search of Negroes and never asked them for money. But, she added, 'going to bed with them was no more remarkable than going to bed with white men.'[34]

Although there is nothing in the text to indicate so, Geismar turns this into an incident in Fanon's personal life.

> Not even the city's prostitutes wanted black clients. Except for one Fanon found, who confided she wanted him *because* he was black. She later admitted that she had had an orgasm the first time before he had begun sexual intercourse.[35]

Fanon has discussed in detail in *Black Skin, White Masks*, buttressing his arguments with copious quotations from Mayotte Capecia's *Je suis Martiniquaise*, Abdoulaye Sadji's *Nini*, Rene Maran's *Un homme pareil aux autres*, the phenomenon of "lactification" by marriage to the white woman, or *vice versa*. It is unlikely that a man so keenly aware of these problems which he analyzes would himself become a victim. Also, we know that *Black Skin, White Masks* was completed in 1951, and published in 1952. His marriage to Josie Dublé did not take place till 1952. Geismar's suggestions are therefore extremely unlikely.

In France, Fanon was exposed to the writings and the company of the French intellectual Left. He moved in the circles of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. He was particularly friendly with Dr Colin, a leftist intellectual who edited a clandestine newspaper during the resistance. Fanon arrived in France when negritude was still fashionable among a number of Black intellectuals in Paris. He was initially attracted to it and he

reacted strongly against Sartre's criticisms of negritude. Sartre, though regarding negritude as revolutionary, nevertheless described it as "anti-racist racism" and pointed out its limitations, indicating that it is only a movement in the dialectic. Fanon's reaction to Sartre was swift and angry.

> When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance. I said to my friends, 'The generation of younger black poets have just suffered a blow that can never be forgiven. Help had been sought from a friend of the coloured peoples, and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what they were doing.[35A]

He was later to recognise and acknowledge the same limitations.

While in France, he also experienced and reacted against white racism, and the hypocrisy of the French with regard to their claims to be committed to universal ethical values. In Martinique it was easy to rationalize and interpret such behaviour as the aberration of particular Europeans, and in the army one could always argue that soldiers everywhere are coarse and rough, and do not typify the most decent and gentle of the nation. But when Fanon experienced the same things in France, and even from the Leftist intellectuals, his reaction was no longer a matter of doubting French values, but it was a rejection of France and all that it stood for. Relating some of his experiences, Fanon writes:

> When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color, When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.[36]

Frenchmen could never forget that he was black and different from themselves. Colour always played a central role in everything. Again Fanon writes:

> Not so long ago, one of those good Frenchmen said in a train where I was sitting: 'Just let the real French virtues keep going and the race is safe. Now more than ever, national union must be made a reality. Let's have an end of internal strife. Let's face up to the foreigners (here he turned toward my corner) no matter who they are'.[37]

The Blacks were never to be part of the French nation, no matter what their assimilated status was. They were the foreigners who had to be faced up to. He was treated primarily as a Black man, not just as a human being. Fanon writes:

> A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least like a nigger.[38]

Even in intellectual circles Fanon was not safe from this humiliation

> . . . more than a year ago in Lyon, I remember in a lecture I had drawn a parallel between Negro and European poetry, and a French acquaintance told me enthusiastically, 'At bottom you are a white man.' The fact that I had been able to investigate so interesting a problem through the whiteman's language gave me honorary citizenship.[39]

Fanon was suspicious, and to his way of thinking the remark amounted to saying that for a Black man his intellect was amazing. Incidents of this nature aroused his indignation, anger and resentment and he hated France and all that it stood for.

Fanon was deeply affected by the hypocrisy of the French—even the Communist Left. He was also disgusted by the self-demeaning attitude of the Black bourgeoisie who tried in every way to look as French as possible. He was angered by the oppression of man by man, by the dehumanization of man, and by the fact that France was a living negation of the values it claimed. As he was to say afterwards:

> When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.[40]

Fanon was entirely disillusioned with Europe and France, and if he had one consuming desire at the time it was to get away from it. No wonder that he was to write later:

> Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done of talking about Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all corners of the globe.[41]

It was no longer a question of appealing to Europe to live up to its proclaimed values. That was useless. He wanted to get to a place where he could search for his own identity and think of a way where he could contribute to the saving of humanity. The burden now was to be on the oppressed to do what Europe had been unable to do. Fanon writes:

> "Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth."[42]

He wanted a place where he could feel solidarity with those who were contributing to the "victory of the dignity of the spirit," where man was saying "no" to "the attempt to subjugate his fellows." Algeria was godsent.

ALGERIA

In 1953, Frantz Fanon passed the all-important *Medicat des Hopitaux Psychiatriques*, and was offered the directorship of a Martinican hospital. However, he turned it down and took up a position as *chef de service* in Algeria, after a short stay at Pontorson, a small quiet town on the Atlantic coast of France. Geismar contends that his choice was motivated by a consideration for his career, since Martinique lacked facilities for psychiatric care on research. He uses this to back up his claim that it was the Algerian situation which made Fanon a revolutionary, and that it was not for political reasons that he went there. Renate Zahar, however, maintains that Fanon had decided at the time of his marriage to Josie to work for a few years in Africa and then return to Martinique.[43] If we accept Zahar's account, then Geismar's position is somewhat weakened. If Fanon turned down the Martinican position because of his considerations for his career, i.e. lack of adequate equipment for the hospital, then how can we explain his plan to go back after a few years? There is no likelihood that in a few years the position at the hospital would have changed considerably. One would think that if Fanon was all that concerned with his career, Africa would be the least attractive place, if equipment for his work was very important to him. Zahar's claim is supported by the fact that Geismar himself admits that Fanon sought a position in Senegal, writing to Leopold Senghor, later to become President of Senegal, but his letter was not answered. He had known Senghor as one of the people connected with

the Society of African Culture and *Presence Africaine*. He wanted to leave France and go to Africa, which at that time was in a state of nationalist ferment. Ghana was making rapid advances towards self-government and Nigeria was following rapidly behind. In Central and East Africa there was political agitation. In Uganda, there was political agitation; in Kenya, politics was beginning to take a militant turn; Mau Mau had just begun.

Fanon wanted to be in the center of things. He wanted to be where the action was. We must not forget his commitment to praxis. We must also not forget that Fanon as a schoolboy had heard a lot about the Senegalese, and it is quite conceivable that Senegal still fascinated him and he wanted to go there himself. Reflecting on his boyhood Fanon, had this to say about the Senegalese:

> All I knew about them was what I had heard from the veterans of the First World War: 'They attack with the bayonet and when that doesn't work, they just punch their way through the machine-gun fire with their fists.[44]

If the above argument is accepted, then it means that Fanon had a political motive for wanting to go to Africa and his departure for Algeria should be seen in the same light. In sub-Saharan Africa, due to language difficulty, he could only go to French-speaking Africa; his attempt to go there was unsuccessful, so he went to North Africa. Here he would not have a language problem. Fanon had already shown some interest in North Africans in France by his essay "the North African Syndrome"[45] in which he discusses the racially discriminatory practices against the Arab minority even among doctors in France. Besides, in Algeria, politics was beginning to take a militant turn. Geismar's position is further weakened by his own admission that Blida, where Fanon worked, did not have facilities for work therapy.[46] Why then should he want to go there? His argument that Fanon overcame his political phase towards the end of his studies and set himself up to be a successful professional is unpersuasive. This interpretation tends to regard Fanon's political interests and his commitment to praxis as the restless actions of an adolescent. He seems to think that Fanon was converted to revolutionary violence due to the existential situation in Algeria. It is quite plausible that towards the end of his medical training, Fanon tried to concentrate more on his studies, but that he was committed to revolutionary violence before his trip to Algeria is evidenced in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he writes:

> I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight.[47]

This he wrote long before the trip to Algeria. Furthermore, Fanon quotes Hegel with relish to substantiate his contention for the necessity of revolutionary violence in the pursuit of freedom.

> It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus it is tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not *bare existence*, is not the merely immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.[48]

Fanon continues in his own words:

> ... Human reality in-itself-for-itself can be achieved only through conflict and through the risk that conflict implies.[49]

Again he quotes from Hegel:

> The individual who has not staked his life, may no doubt be recognized as a person, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.[50]

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon advocates fundamental change in society. Echoing Marx, he writes:

> But when one has taken cognizance of this situation, when one has understood it, one considers the job completed. How can one then be deaf to that voice rolling down the stages of history: 'What matters is not to know the world but to change it.'[51]

In another passage he writes:

> In no way should my color be regarded as a flaw. From the moment the Negro accepts the separation imposed by the European he has no further respite, and 'is it not understandable that henceforth he will try to elevate himself to the white man's level? To elevate himself in the range of colors to which he attributes a kind of hierarchy?'
>
> We shall see that another solution is possible. It implies a restructuring of the world.[52]

"Restructuring of the world" is the change of social structure and value systems. In another passage Fanon is even more explicit:

> What emerges then is the need for combined action on the individual and on the group. As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become *conscious* of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure.[53]

It is clear from the above that at the time of the composition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon was already convinced of the need for a change in social structure. When this commitment to fundamental change of social structure is viewed in conjunction with Fanon's argument for the necessity of violence to achieve freedom, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was committed to revolutionary violence for the purpose of achieving freedom before he went to Algeria. His experiences in Algeria confirmed a thesis he had already arrived at intellectually. We can say that before he went to Algeria, Fanon was intellectually committed to revolutionary violence, but due to his experiences in Algeria, his commitment took a personal and practical form.

Fanon arrived in Algiers in November 1953. By then the revolution which was to engulf both France and Algeria was beginning. There were isolated incidents of terrorism which caused the French to isolate the *casbah* from the European quarter, and to institute check points everywhere.

Initially, Fanon collaborated with the *Front de Liberation Nationale*. During the day he treated the French torturers and by night he treated the Algerian tortured. By 1956 this double life was becoming impossible. There was terror all around him; his nurses were beginning to disappear, and he began to feel that he was becoming less effective. In the circumstances he resigned.

Fanon had also come to the view that in a colonial territory like Algeria, characterized by economic oppression, political violence, racism, torture, murder and

inhuman degradation, the psychiatric disorders from which the people suffered were the direct result of the social situation; it was, therefore futile to treat a patient and send him back to the same environment. What had to be changed was not the people but the social and political conditions prevailing in Algeria.

In Algeria, Fanon saw a confirmation of the thesis he had developed earlier as a result of his observations in Martinique, namely that for the colonized the most serious problem standing in the way of self-realization and freedom was alienation. This alienation could only be cured by the destruction of the colonial system. In his letter of resignation he states:

> If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation.
>
> ... the function of social structure is to set up institutions to serve man's needs. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced.[54]

And to underline his own commitment for praxis, he adds: "...there comes a time when silence becomes dishonesty."

After participating in a strike of doctors sympathetic to the FLN, Fanon was expelled from Algeria in January 1957. Thus ended his short stay in Algeria.

FANON IN TUNISIA

After Fanon's expulsion, he stayed in Lyon for a short time with Josie's family and then left for Tunisia to work for the FLN. He was now a "professional revolutionary." He now belonged entirely to the organisation. The Algerian Revolution was his life. He assumed whatever role the organization called upon him to perform. Whatever academic and intellectual interests he had were now only relevant to the extent to which they furthered the cause of the Revolution.

While in Tunisia he worked as a member of the editorial staff of *El Moudjahid* the FLN mouthpiece. Fanon turned it into a radical paper commenting on the social economic and political aspects of the revolution. He also published a number of articles on Black Africa and on African Unity.

In spite of his new status as a professional revolutionary, he also taught at the university of Tunis and practised medicine at a government psychiatric hospital at Manouba, where he worked under the assumed name of Dr Fares.

Here Fanon did not get along very well with some of his colleagues. The doctors resented his innovations and regarded him as overbearing. He on the other hand was a perfectionist, and tried to impose on others the same dedication which he applied to his work. The resentment against him from the doctors was such that they began to refer to him as "the Nigger." Things got to such a pass that the head of the unit, Dr Soltan tried to fire Fanon on the ground that he was a spy for Israel, because he had earlier taken a stand against anti-semitism.

> Anti-Semitism hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white by an appalling battle, I am deprived of the possibility of being a man. I cannot disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother.[55]

Fanon's singleness of purpose, his sincerity and dedication to the cause of freedom and justice, stand out clearly when it is noticed that not even incidents of this nature shook for a moment his total dedication to the cause of Algerian freedom.

It was while he was in Tunis that he published *The 5th Year of the Algerian Revolution*. In some ways it bears a close resemblance to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. It is a sociological study of the effects of the revolutionary war on Algerian society. It documents the changes which take place in social structure, social and political institutions and in consciousness as a result of the war of liberation. In a way it should be seen as a sequel to Fanon's more illustrious work *The Wretched of the Earth*, since it indicates the changes which would occur in the colonized society if the recommendations contained in *The Wretched of the Earth* were put into effect. The importance of the book for the liberation effort is evidenced by the fact that six months after its publication the French government ordered all copies seized and banned further publication.

In Tunis Fanon seemed to have achieved a total fusion of the role of the intellectual and that of the political activist. His life showed total dedication to the cause of Algerian liberation. In his writings, the reflective "I" which had characterized *Black Skin, White Masks* gave way to the committed "we," the Algerians.

Another role which Fanon played in the FLN was that of a diplomatic representative. In December 1958, he attended the All-African People's Conference in Accra, where he met Kwame Nkrumah and other nationalist leaders, including Patrice Lumumba, Felix Moumie, head of Union Populaire de Cameroun, (UPC) Tom Mboya and Holden Roberto, who was to become leader of the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA). At the Conference he argued for the necessity of violence for decolonization. In a report on the Conference which he later wrote for *El Moudjahid*, he stated:

> The end of the colonial regime affected by peaceful means and made possible by the colonialist's understanding might under certain circumstances lead to a renewed collaboration of the two nations. History, however, shows that no colonialist nation is willing to withdraw without having exhausted all its possibilities of maintaining itself.
>
> Raising the problem of a non-violent decolonization is less the postulation of a sudden humanity on the part of the colonialist than believing in the sufficient pressure of the new ratio of forces on an international scale.[56]

In March 1959, he attended the Second Congress of Black Writers in Rome, and there he spoke as a member of the Antilles delegation. Fanon's internationalism was beginning to appear. Though completely dedicated to the Algerian cause, this did not inhibit him from participation in the Antillean delegation. In January 1960, he also participated in the Second Conference of African Peoples in Tunis as a member of the Algerian delegation. He was seen as the man who could bridge the gap between the predominantly Arab North Africa

and the predominantly black sub-Sahara Africa.

Fanon's singular contribution to the cause of the Algerian liberation at this time was to internationalize the Algerian struggle. In his writings and presentations at conferences he tried to project the Algerian struggle not only as an Arab nationalist movement, but as part of the whole world movement for the liberation of Africa and the Third World.

ACCRA

In March 1960, Fanon was appointed ambassador for the Algerian Provisional Government in Accra. In various other conferences which he attended—the International Conference for Peace and Security in Africa, the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Conakry, Guinea, and the Third Conference of Independent African States at Addis-Ababa in June 1960—he went as the official representative of Algeria. As an ambassador in Accra he concentrated his attention on three main aspects of the African liberation struggle: the establishment of a southern flank in Mali through which recruits could be channelled to fight in Algeria; the attempt to recruit volunteers to fight in Algeria, the armed struggle in Angola and the events in the Congo.

He spent much time travelling to present the case of Algerian liberation and to propagandize for the formation of an African Legion for the fight for African liberation. Fanon's work in Accra was quite trying. His English was not fluent enough for him to be much involved in the social life of the country. Even if he had spoken very well, it is not likely that he would have got on very well with the Ghanaian national bourgeoisie which was steeped in corruption, conspicuous consumption, authoritarianism and a shameless display of affluence in the midst of poverty, the very issues which Fanon was to denounce most vehemently in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In Accra, he did not do any medical or psychiatric work. His official position as an ambassador would not allow him to do that.

In 1961 Fanon unsuccessfully sought posting to Cuba. There have been a number of speculations about this. One opinion has it that he was seeking to return to Martinique and wanted to go to Cuba to study it as a model.[57] It is also claimed that he wanted to go to Cuba as an ambassador to compensate for an earlier wounded pride in maternal rejection.[58] Such an interpretation invests Fanon with a vanity out of keeping with the delineation of his character and personality. The more likely reason was that Fanon was becoming intellectually and politically bored with Accra. True enough Accra remained the headquarters of African liberation south of the Sahara, but behind the thin veil of political rhetoric there existed among the Ghanaian political leadership residuary conservatism, ideological bankruptcy, political insensitivity, parochialism, incredible ignorance or tolerance of international capitalist machinations which any serious revolutionary like Fanon would find most distressing. Looking around for a place to escape from such a revolutionary graveyard, Cuba appeared most attractive.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS

Fanon's importance to the Algerian movement and to the whole of the liberation forces in Africa is underlined by the numerous attempts to assassinate him. In 1959 while he was travelling to a camp on the Algerian-Moroccan border his jeep was blown up. There are a number of speculations about the incident. Some claim that it was an accident, some that his car hit a land mine planted either by the French or someone within the ranks of the FLN who wanted to do away with Fanon. A third opinion is that there was a bomb planted in the car in which he was travelling. The true story is shrouded in mystery. Fanon was flown from Tunis to Rome for specialized treatment. In Rome there were two more assassination attempts: one was when the car of the FLN representative who was to pick him from the airport was blown up and the second was when the ward in which he was supposed to be occupying was machine-gunned. Fanon had had a premonition and had secretly requested a change of rooms the same night. The fact that there was strong evidence linking these attacks with the French Red Hand gives cause to think that it was the same group involved in the Algerian-Morocco border incident.

In 1960, there was another attempt to capture him. While an ambassador in Accra, he travelled frequently to various countries in West Africa trying to open the southern flank where arms and men could be channelled to Algeria to aid the war effort. On one occasion he was returning to Conakry from Monrovia when there was an attempt to capture him. Geismar reports:

> ... Fanon was informed that his scheduled flight to Conakry Guinea was filled. He would have to wait until the next day to get an Air France flight to the same city. His overnight expenses would be paid by the airline. That evening when a charming French airline hostess stopped at the hotel to tell him that the plane would be two hours late the next day, Fanon was suspicious. It was the kind of personal attention he had come to dread—especially after the 1959 incident in the Rome hospital. Revising plans, he and an FLN colleague left the Liberian capital by jeep and entered Guinea through the dark forest surrounding the border town of N'zerekore.
>
> Air France still had Fanon, under the pseudonym of "Doctor Omar," on its passenger list for the next day. French intelligence had arranged for the plane to change courses from Guinea to the city of Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast... Despite the fact that the final list didn't include "Omar" the aircraft was searched thoroughly at Abidjan before it was allowed to return to its normal flight plan.[59]

It is something of a mystery that in spite of all this, Fanon eluded his enemies.

ILLNESS AND DEATH

Late in 1960, it was found that Fanon was suffering from leukemia. He went to the Soviet Union for medical treatment. The Russians advised him to go to the United States where the best center for the cure of leukemia was the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. But he could not bring himself to go to the "nation of lynchers." He refused to allow the fact of his illness to dampen his activity. The treatment he had in the Soviet Union gave him relief for some time. He returned to Accra and threw himself furiously into his work. He began to plan projects as if nothing unusual existed.

By May 1961, Fanon was working on the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. As Geismar describes it,

it was "a ten-week eruption of intellectual energies." After completing the drafts, he went to France to see Sartre who had agreed to write the introduction.

Back in Tunis, Fanon had a relapse and his friends arranged for him to go to the United States for treatment. Joseph Alsop, a syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, claimed that it was the CIA which arranged for the transportation to Washington, and that the CIA had an interest in Frantz Fanon. He went on to mention the name of Ollie Iselin, a member of the US diplomatic service, who was involved in the whole case. The story that the CIA managed to get information from the dying Fanon has been vigorously denied by both his wife Josie and his brother Joby.

There were some suspicious circumstances, however. Fanon was kept in Washington's Dupont Plaza for eight days before he was taken to the hospital, in spite of the fact that there were vacant beds at the hospital at this time. This raises the question of why he was not taken immediately to the hospital, considering the sad condition in which he was when he arrived in the country.

Fanon refused to recognize his illness and while on his death-bed he was still planning book projects. One was to deal with the extent and functioning of the FLN organization within metropolitan France; another, a psychological analysis of the death process itself, which was to be called *Le Leucemique et son double*. While he was in the hospital he received a number of visitors including Holden Roberto, and Alioune Diop, editor of *Presence Africaine*. Fanon had another relapse and died on December 6, 1961, after reading the proofs of *The Wretched of the Earth*, the work on which his reputation rests. In it he diagnoses the ills of Africa and the Third World. He argues that there has been no effective decolonization in Africa because the colonial structures have not been destroyed. What happened at independence was the Africanization of colonialism. There can be no effective decolonization and consequently no freedom so long as the colonial structures obtain. And to destroy colonialism effectively violence is indispensable. Violence destroys not only the formal structures of colonial rule, but also the alienated consciousness which colonial rule has planted in the mind of the native. Unlike the so-called dispassionate native intellectuals, he is not content with a mere description of the structure of politics or a catalogue of colonial injustices. He propounds a theory of social action and makes a passionate plea for revolutionary decolonization and the creation of a free society in which man would acquire authentic existence. His vision of the ideal society was that of a socialist populist democracy, a combination of Marx and Rousseau, in which man would be free to maintain and express his nature. We may criticise his vision or the means of its attainment, but we neglect the issues he raises only at our peril.

After his death a collection of some of the editorials he wrote for *El Moudjahid* and some of his presentations at international conferences were published collectively as *Towards the African Revolution*.

*

The portrait which emerges from this is that Frantz Fanon was a man of considerable courage, sincerity and will power. He was a very sensitive person who dedicated his life to bringing about the end of oppression. His whole life was devoted to the cause of human freedom. He was a man of keen intellect and revolutionary zeal. Simone de Beauvoir described his intellect as "razor sharp." He was one for whom the role of the intellectual and that of the political activist posed no contradictions.

Peter Worsley, in a vivid description of his encounter with Fanon, gives us an insight into his qualities and personality:

> In 1960, I attended the All-African People's Congress in Accra, Ghana. The proceedings consisted mainly of speeches by leaders of African nationalism from all over the continent, few of whom said anything notable. When, therefore, the representative of the Algerian Revolutionary Provisional Government, their Ambassador in Ghana, stood up to speak I prepared myself for an address by a diplomat—not usually an experience to set the pulses racing. I found myself electrified by a contribution that was remarkable not only for its analytical power, but delivered, too, with a passion and brilliance that is all too rare. I discovered that the Ambassador was a man named Frantz Fanon. At one point during his talk he appeared almost to break down. I asked him afterwards what had happened. He replied that he had suddenly felt emotionally overcome at the thought that he had to stand there, before the assembled representatives of African nationalist movements, to try and persuade them that the Algerian cause was important, at a time when men were dying and being tortured in his country for a cause whose justice ought to command automatic support from rational and progressive human beings.[60]

Like all revolutionaries Fanon was sometimes impatient, brusque, and arrogant towards people whose commitment never went beyond the talking stage. He also tried to impose on others the same discipline which he imposed on himself, people who perhaps by temperament and constitution were not fit for the arduous tasks to which he subjected himself.

Aimé Césaire, in a tribute to Fanon, goes farther than anyone in delineating his character, qualities and personality. He writes:

> If the word 'commitment' has any meaning, it was with Fanon that it acquired significance. A violent one, they said. And it is true he instituted himself as a theorist of violence, the only arm of the colonized that can be used against colonialist barbarity...
>
> But his violence, and this is not paradoxical, was that of the non-violent. By this I mean the violence of justice, of purity and intransigence. This must be understood about him: his revolt was ethical, and his endeavour generous. He did not simply adhere to a cause. He gave himself to it. Completely, without reserve. Wholeheartedly. In him resided the absoluteness of passion...
>
> A theorist of violence, perhaps, but even more of action. By hatred of talkativeness. By hatred of compromise. By hatred of cowardliness. No one was more respectful of thought than he, and more responsible in face of his own thought, nor more exacting towards life, which he could not imagine in terms other than of thought transformed into action.[61]

It is clear from the portrait above that simplistic interpretations of Fanon as "apostle of violence," "glorifier of violence," "apologist for violence," "prisoner of hate" should be rejected. Fanon was a great humanist. It was in the name of man that he rose up

against oppression; it was in the name of man that he fought against degradation and it was in the name of man that he affirmed the dignity of man. If Fanon was a prisoner, he was a prisoner of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of freedom. In a letter he wrote to Roger Tayed, one of his friends, just before he died, he said:

We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all, slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty.[62]

Che Guevara once said: "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love." This we can say of Frantz Fanon. □

FOOTNOTES

1. See Y. Kransin, *The Dialectics of Revolutionary Process*, (Moscow, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1972.)
2. For a detailed description of the life, politics and social structure of Martinique, see Geismar, *Fanon*, (New York, Dial Press 1971). pp. 5-28: Arvin Murch, *Black Frenchmen: The Political Integration of the French Antilles* (Cambridge, Mass. Schenkman Publishing Co., 1971); Emanuel De Kadt, ed., *Patterns of Foreign Influence in the Caribbean* (London, Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 82-102.
3. Edith Kovatz, *Mariage et Cohesion Sociale Chez les Bl ncs Creoles de la Martinique*, (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Montreal, 1964) p. 49ff., quoted in Arvin Murch, p. 15.
4. Peter Geismar, *Fanon* p. 20
5. Victor Wolfenstein, *The Revolutionary Personality* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 208.
6. Renate Zahar, *L'oeuvre de Frantz Fanon* (Paris, Maspero, 1970), p. 5.
7. Geismar, p. 8.
8. *Ibid.* p. 11.
9. See Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York, Pantheon, 1973), p. 10.
10. Lewis S. Feuer, *Marx and the Intellectuals* (New York, Anchor Books, 1969) p. 51.
11. Geismar, p. 15.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 191.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
16. Zahar, p. 5.
17. Geismar, pp. 22-3.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
21. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 37. Incidents of this nature may appear improbable to those unacquainted with colonial alienation. However in Ghana, where it is claimed that on account of the indirect rule, the natives did not suffer such cultural emasculation which gives rise to such manifestations of alienation, it was not uncommon, especially in the fifties and early sixties for recent returnees from the white man's country to complain bitterly about the heat. Press them closely and you will find they were away for only a couple of months and in most cases in the summer.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
23. Geismar, p. 40.
24. See Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin, 1967).
25. This tendency to withdraw from an intolerable social situation seems to have characterized Fanon all his life: When Martinique fell to the Vichy forces he "withdrew" from the island by enlisting in the French army; while in North Africa, he "withdrew" by volunteering for service in Europe; in Paris he "withdrew" to Lyon; in France he "withdrew" to Algeria; in Accra, he wanted to "withdraw" by asking for a diplomatic post in Cuba. This shows his restlessness. For a man committed to praxis this is rather difficult to explain.
26. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 203.
27. Geismar, p. 11.
28. There have been some inconsistencies in the records about the date of Fanon's marriage. Irene Gendzier (p. 272) writes: "According to David Caute, *Fanon* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 99, it occurred in 1953; Tosquelles in our interview recalled, but with some hesitation, that it was in 1953; Geismar, on the other hand (*Fanon*, p. 52), states that it occurred in 1952; *Zahar* in *L'oeuvre de Frantz Fanon* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1970), p. 7, gives October 1952 as the date." To make the issue more complicated, Philip Lucas, *Sociologie de Frantz Fanon* (Alger, Societe Nationale d'Edition et Diffusion, 1971), p. 195, gives 1950 as the date of the marriage. It is hoped that further research will throw more light on this
29. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 202.
30. Geismar, "Frantz Fanon: Evolution of a Revolutionary: A Bibliographical Sketch", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 21, No.1 (May 1969), p. 24.
31. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 48.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 63
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9
35. Geismar, p. 47.

35A. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 133.

36. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 116.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
40. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 252.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
42 *Ibid.*, 252.
43. Zahar, p. 7.
44. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 162, fn.
45. Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, (New York, Grove Press 1968).
46. Geismar, p 64.
47. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 224.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
54. *Toward The African Revolution*, p. 53.
55. *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 88-9.
56. *Toward the African Revolution*, pp. 154-5.
57. *Geismar*, p. 173.
58. Gendzier, p. 16.
59. Geismar, p. 163.
60. Peter Worsley, "Revolutionary Theories" *Monthly Review, op. cit.*, pp. 30-1.
61. *Presence Africaine*, Vol. 12, No.40, 1962 pp. 131-132
62. Quoted in Geismar, p. 185.