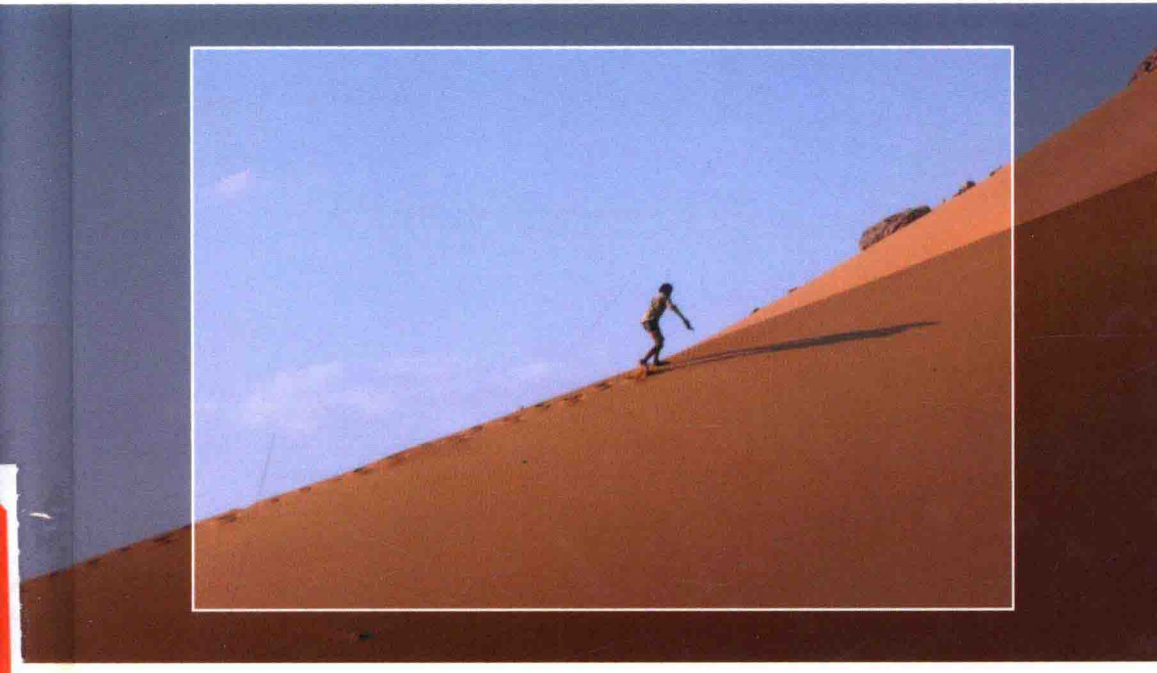
FANON AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF PHILOSOPHY

With a foreword by Mireille Fanon-Mendès France



EDITED BY ELIZABETH A. HOPPE AND TRACEY NICHOLLS

PHILOSOPHY · POSTCOLONIALISM

"Fanon, unbowed and rebellious, fought tenaciously and victoriously against the supremacy exerted by the powerful over the weak. . . . This volume brings together twelve contributors wanting to illuminate, forty-nine years after his death, how Fanon thought and acted, the ways his thinking is still pertinent to our knowledge of the places he affected, and the ways his thinking confronts the experiences, problems, and issues of the present."

—**Mireille Fanon-Mendès France**, from the foreword

"If what we call 'philosophy' is to rise to the task of decolonizing itself, it must take stock first of its erasures, then of the critical tools still available to it—many of them coming from beyond the 'tradition.' This important volume answers both these imperatives. It offers us a return to Fanon's thought at a crucial time when globalization and neoliberalism have reshaped older colonial patterns of international disempowerment and poverty. In so doing, it shows the pertinence—in fact, the indispensability—of Fanon in our time."

—**Bettina G. Bergo**, Université de Montréal

"Elizabeth A. Hoppe and Tracey Nicholls's impressive and welcome collection of essays is invaluable reading for those anxious to evaluate and counter the juggernaut of neoliberalism that is transforming human possibility through the shaping of human and capital flows. . . . Their fascinating, brilliant, and valuable collection explores wide-ranging topics responsible to a refreshingly generous orientation." —**D. Moore**, DePaul University

Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy explores the range of ways in which Frantz Fanon's decolonization theory can reveal new answers to perennial philosophical questions and new paths to social justice. The chapters in this book explore aspects of Fanonian thought as diverse as humanistic psychiatry, the colonial roots of racial violence and marginalization, and decolonizing possibilities in law, academia, and tourism. In addition to examining philosophical concerns that arise from political decolonization movements, many of the chapters turn to the discipline of philosophy itself and take up the challenge of suggesting ways that philosophy might liberate itself from colonial—and colonizing—assumptions. This vision of social justice is endorsed in the foreword by Fanon's own daughter, Mireille Fanon-Mendès France, a noted human rights defender in the French-speaking world.

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Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy

Foreword

Mireille Fanon-Mendès France

Decolonizing Philosophy is an engagement to think and enact philosophy within a context of emancipation. If we want to fully understand and inhabit this orientation, the necessary consequence is our obligation, as we adopt the injunction to "decolonize philosophy," to formulate a parallel understanding of what "a philosophy of decolonization" requires. It is certainly only by starting with this chiasmus, with a full understanding of its dynamics, that we can come to grips with the position and the praxis of Frantz Fanon. It is through such an approach that the twelve contributors to *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy* attempt their emancipation of philosophy, in their examination of Fanon's psychiatric practice, his positions in relation to sexuality and racism, and, more generally, his understanding of the mechanisms through which colonialism continues to assert itself as a power struggle such that those in power do not conceal their intention to seize what does not belong to them. This volume is an opportunity to think about the contributions that Fanon's thinking has made to a world where the relation of forces in fact has never changed but instead, in this age of globalization, displays all of its violence.

While the relevance and the impact of Fanon's thought are examined through different frameworks and from different points of view in each of this volume's chapters, the relevance of the knowledge of decolonization and its impact on postcolonial thought is never forgotten. All of these interrogations consider, to some extent, Fanon's notion of violence, a central theme without which his contributions to philosophy cannot be understood.

Attention to the question of violence is not uninteresting, particularly in the context of today's world, where globalization imposes on people, on women and men, its military and economic violence in an attempt to homogenize their spirits and attitudes by denying them their right to self-determination, their right to have and control their natural resources, and their right to freely choose their political systems. This is the sole aim of safeguarding for the powerful their use and abuse of the means of manipulation (the media, education, security measures): the seizure of goods and the enslavement of people.

If the Sixties announced the end of colonization with its affirmation by the international community that:

> [t]he subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation . . . [thereby leading us to assume that] the process of liberation is irresistible and irreversible and that, in order to avoid serious crises, an end must be put to colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination[1]

today the world is faced with new forms of colonization. These new forms require us to re-read Fanon or, at the very least, to revisit some of his works, and also to take note of other works which raise the question of the decolonization of philosophy, together with its connection to liberation theology.

If we are to think of human beings as liberated (in the sense of standing upright in the face of challenges), the question posed by the professional and political engagement that Frantz Fanon demands of us is one of reflection on and identification of that which binds us, from the point of view of the individual as well as the collective, and hence, the question that Fanon has always faced, beyond the paradigmatically philosophical "why." How to liberate ourselves from dominating and colonizing systems—this question never ceased to concern him.

In effect, Frantz Fanon, doctor and psychiatrist, activist in the *Front de Libération Nationale* [the National Liberation Front of Algeria], editor of the El-Moudjahid, and ambassador, never stopped questioning the forms of domination, be it of the human spirit or of entire nations.

When it came to madness, racism, the concept of "universalism" confiscated by the powerful, Fanon never stopped trying to posit a "living together," identified as that which Édouard Glissant called an "identity-relationship,"[2] a transformation into situations in which the dominated and the dominant each have everything to lose from the perpetuation of existing orders and disorders.

Fanon, unbowed and rebellious, fought tenaciously and victoriously against the supremacy exerted by the powerful over the weak. His thought engages and illuminates us still today because of his fundamental articulation of, on the one hand, the right of rebellion in the face of a social, political, and economic system that plunges the world into disorder and, on the other hand, a new type of colonization.

In confrontation with the model of violence and violations imposed by the defenders of a liberal economy, there is more than ever a need for creativity, for liberation, and for refusal of a historical determinism. This determinism, that was plotted out upon the colonized of yesterday, is still being projected onto the globalized of today, who must subject themselves to the demands of market forces. It is a determinism imposed by the powerful in the guise of "the free market."

Faced with the alternatives that presented themselves yesterday, the capitalist system and the socialist system, Fanon called for the inauguration of another way. And today, this same choice of alternatives presents itself as being between a universalism that has been appropriated by the powerful in the context of a capitalist system, also called globalization, and the struggles to build an international society founded on the solidarity, cooperation, and friendship of all peoples. This third way is yet to be constructed.

This collaborative work is interesting because it problematizes that which Fanon himself did in the different lands to which he committed himself. His work drew links between places which otherwise seemed quite separate from each other, geographically (France, the Caribbean, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa) and institutionally (the psychiatric hospital and the political arena).

This volume brings together twelve contributors wanting to illuminate, forty-nine years after his death, how Fanon thought and acted, the ways his thinking is still pertinent to our knowledge of the places he affected, and the ways his thinking confronts the experiences, problems, and issues of the present. In this respect, one of the important characteristics of Fanon's thought emerges: its situatedness in the world of the human being and his desire for a human world.

> That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it may be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be. . . . My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions![3]

Notes

This foreword was translated from the French by Tracey Nicholls and Elizabeth A. Hoppe, with assistance from Charley and Marilyn Nissim-Sabat and Yvan Tétreault.

1. Resolution 1514, General meeting of the United Nations, *On the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples*, December 14, 1960.

2. Edouard Glissant et Patrick Chamoiseau, *Quand les murs tombent: L'identité nationale hors-la-loi?* (Galaade: Institut du Tout-Monde, 2007).

3. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

Acknowledgments

This anthology would not have been possible had it not been for Lewis University and Brother James Gaffney, FSC, President. Since 1996 Lewis University has hosted an annual philosophy conference, and the topic of the 2007 conference, *Fanon and the De-colonization of Philosophy*, led to the development of this anthology. We would like to thank the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office for its continued support of this annual event.

Many were instrumental in the success of the 2007 conference, and in particular we would like to thank the faculty moderators and student respondents: Laura Baltuska, Katrina Binaku, Brian Brown, Emily Custardo, Arthur Horton, Laurette Liesen, George Miller, Laura Miller, Judy Mrgan, Buzz Pounds, Kenneth Stikkers, Karen Trimble-Alliaume, and Sarah Vitale. In preparing the proposal for this volume Lewis University's Faculty Development Committee and the Office of the Provost provided financial support. A special thank you goes out to Ying Xie and Sue Sollie for their technological expertise and guidance.

Our acknowledgments would not be complete without expressing our gratitude to Chimaobi Enyia, a Philosophy of Law and Political Science major, who compiled the section titled Suggestions for Further Reading. Chima is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science Honors Society and Phi Sigma Tau Philosophy Honors Society, and he has been a student respondent at several conferences, including the annual Lewis conferences on Immanuel Kant and bell hooks. He intends to pursue graduate studies in Ethics and Political Philosophy.

We would especially like to thank all of our contributors for their incisive essays and their collaborative efforts in ensuring that this book lives up to its promise of a new approach to Fanon studies. Deserving of special thanks are Lewis Gordon, for asking Mireille Fanon-Mendès France—daughter of Frantz Fanon and director of the Frantz Fanon Foundation—to write a preface for this book, Madame Fanon-Mendès France herself for contributing her thoughts, and Bill Martin of DePaul University and Bettina Bergo of Université de Montréal for their help on elements of this book. Finally, we would like to thank Matt McAdam, Jana Wilson, Mirna Araklian, and Ginny Schneider of Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington Books for their support and assistance in bringing this book into existence.

Introduction

Elizabeth A. Hoppe and Tracey Nicholls

Our aim in this book is to showcase some of the ways in which contemporary philosophers are extending Frantz Fanon's enduringly influential decolonization theory in response to new challenges of oppression and colonialism. We gathered together the work of important Fanon scholars, several of whom presented papers at the 2007 Lewis University philosophy conference of the same name. The list of authors ranges from recognized experts in Fanon studies to those who are just emerging as important voices in the field. Their chapters all reflect a growing awareness among North American philosophers of the value that Fanon's social and political philosophy offers, and constitute a new critical engagement with his work.

Readers unfamiliar with Frantz Fanon will find in these pages reflections on a remarkable thinker. Reared in the French-Antillean culture of Martinique, he was educated in France and initially went to Algeria as a psychiatrist for the French Army, which was then engaged in trying to put down the Algerian war of independence and maintain its control over the colonized nation. Fanon recognized the humanity, the courage, and the unquenchable desire for freedom of the emerging Algerian nation, and left his position with the French in order to aid the Algerians in their struggle to build a new nation. His thinking, and the writing he did on decolonization and liberation struggles before his untimely death in 1961, has been integral to such diverse philosophical questions as "what is race?" and "who has the right to use violence?" and is being used here to explore the entire breadth of contemporary philosophical concerns.

Unlike many of the books that have been published about Fanon in the years since his death, ours is not a biography, nor is it an examination of the relevance to political science and development studies of his work as a doctor and psychiatrist during the Algerian war, nor a recasting of Fanon as a theorist of contemporary international relations. Instead, our contributors expand the types of questions that Fanon's analyses can shed light on, thereby encouraging a sharper and richer appreciation of the central role Fanon can play in contemporary philosophy. The refocusing on the philosophical that is common to the

chapters in this volume allows our contributors to consider not just Fanon's importance, but the full spectrum of philosophical positions on such questions as race, interpersonal relations, human agency and empowerment, and social liberation, not to mention the implication of these positions for philosophy itself.

After a long period of inattention by philosophers, Fanon's analyses of existentialism, psychiatry, and decolonization are now the object of increasing engagement in the classroom and at academic conferences. Attention to his writings on decolonization has tended to focus on the necessity to re-interpret Fanon in order to retrieve out of his writings that portion which remains pertinent to us today. The question of continued relevance is a pressing one for many of his re-interpreters because Fanon's engagement with decolonization took place in circumstances very different from our own contemporary political reality. Fanon's optimism about the power and influence that emerging "non-aligned" nations in Africa and South East Asia could exert on the "Cold War" relations between the United States and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is clearly dated so, in order to make the case for his continuing relevance, his optimism is either translated into a more modern pessimism about "Third World" liberation or dismissed outright. There are, however, at least two significant problems with this updating for relevance: either the translated view is contemporary but is no longer Fanon, or the Fanon who remains is a muted utopian voice without much to say about current political relations. Our volume represents a departure from this attempt to demonstrate relevance through re-interpreting Fanon. Instead we seek to demonstrate Fanon's continuing importance by showing that the scope of questions benefiting from his analyses is wider than previously acknowledged. We have paired chapters that explore similar themes in an attempt to show the nuance and complexity that can be drawn out of his thought and writings. In addition, we have arranged these pairs of chapters such that they suggest fruitful connections with the other topics examined in this volume.

In order to show the importance of Fanon to philosophy and epistemology in general, the first part of this volume concentrates on the idea that knowledge itself needs to be decolonized. Of course, from a historical standpoint, colonization implies the oppression of peoples. But perhaps as important as physical oppression is the role that colonization continues to play in knowledge formation. Certain types of knowledge are privileged or accepted as true, while others fall outside the philosophical discourse that calls itself epistemological. In chapter 1, "Fanon on Decolonizing Knowledge," Lewis R. Gordon calls us to meditate on the ways that will truly transform a world of contradictions, uncertainty, and unfairness. He demonstrates that as colonialism spread so too did epistemological developments that created groups of people who in turn were viewed as problems. Gordon rightly argues that there is something wrong with the social systems in which we live. He then investigates the decadence associated with those disciplines that claim legitimacy based on logical rationality. This issue in turn reveals the radicality of Fanon's thought insofar as he calls into question the epistemic colonization that corresponds to colonialism itself. As Gordon points out, Fanon's sociogenic analysis offers much for a postcolonial epistemology in

which the subjects of liberation are able to transform the social world through a reconfiguration of concepts. One of the ways we can achieve such a radical alteration would be through changing education itself. In chapter 2, Tracey Nicholls' "Opening up the Academy: Fanon's Lessons for Inclusive Scholarship," envisions a new form of scholarship that would posit multivocity and empowerment as the characteristic features of a liberatory and progressive academic communities. She undertakes this task by examining contributions to progressive politics by theorists of decolonization—either inspired by or consistent with Fanonian thought—who have challenged traditional Eurocentric academic discourse. In demonstrating that both academia and colonized societies share a common feature of social control, Nicholls focuses on the ways in which academia can be transformed in order to become liberatory. She argues that this liberation of scholarship can only be achieved through adoption of a decolonizing attitude, one in which all would-be scholars would feel welcome, visible, and heard. Additionally, Nicholls shows us that within the classroom setting instructors can build community and solidarity by encouraging students to treat each other as fully participating community members.

Part II delves into Fanon and psychiatry. Marilyn Nissim-Sabat in chapter 3, "Fanonian Musings: Decolonizing/Philosophy/Psychiatry," shows the ways in which Fanon's account of psychiatry advocates a new form of humanism. She argues that Fanon's philosophical perspective, existential phenomenology, is such that decolonizing both psychology and philosophy are necessarily conjoined. These insights point towards a new postcolonial humanism that is truly transformative. Fanon's thought emanates from a schema of embodied thinking that Nissim-Sabat refers to as *Fanonian* humanism, which shows that victims of oppression have been stripped of the actuality and inner sense of freedom and the sociality that constitutes our humanness. In his critique of psychology, Fanon contends that the origin of the black man's alienation is sociogenic. The Manichean world will only be transformed into a human world through a revolutionary process that will need to deontologize whiteness. By abstaining from commitment to ontological beliefs, people can examine them as phenomena, as possibilities, and examine as well their potential ramifications and consequences for human life. In chapter 4, "Fanon, Foucault, and the Politics of Psychiatry," Chloë Taylor compares both Fanon's and Michel Foucault's critiques of psychiatry in order to show the ways in which Foucault's thought both converges with and also counters Fanonian thought. According to Taylor, a key distinction between Foucault and Fanon is that while Foucault raises the political—rather than the scientific—character of the psychological disciplines in order to oppose their practice, Fanon acknowledges but also takes up the non-scientific and political function of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, using them as tools for anticolonial engagement. Taylor also considers the significance of the fact that Fanon opted to raise and respond to these criticisms from within the psychiatric and psychoanalytic disciplines, whereas for Foucault these same problems were reasons to resist all psychological practice. But there is an interesting convergence between the two: both Fanon's works on colonization and Foucault's mid-career

writings on delinquents and madmen examine the oppressive impact of psychiatry on subjects whose freedom is most likely to be curtailed within their societies.

The third section, "On Fanon and Violence," takes up Fanon's continuing relevance to questions of violence through analysis of the role it plays in facilitating state power. Here, a decolonization of philosophy is suggested through arguments that cast into doubt the dictum handed down to us from Max Weber, that the government of a particular territory has an exclusive monopoly on the right to use force. Closely related to this point of classical political theory is a movement common to both chapters: they draw our attention away from a preoccupation with the West as political paradigm and urge us to realize instead the extent to which political expectations of rulers and citizens have been shaped by non-Western resistances to colonial power. Chapter 5, "Fanon on Turtle Island: Revisiting the Question of Violence," looks at Fanon's conception of revolutionary/decolonizing violence through the lens of decolonization movements within First Nations/Native American communities. The author, Anna Carastathis, argues that Fanon's famous first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* is not merely a rhetorical glorification of revolutionary violence, but a crucially important phenomenological analysis of colonization and liberation. Her chapter contrasts Fanon's claims about the necessity of violence in decolonizing movements with recent theorization of "nonviolent militancy" by indigenous political philosophers in North America, and argues that these different positions on the question of violence are ultimately attributable to differences in the ways colonial state power manifests itself in the post World War II French colony of Algeria and the contemporary liberal democracy that is Canada. Its pair in this section, chapter 6, is Peter Gratton's "Sovereign Violence, Racial Violence." Gratton traces important lessons in Fanon's thinking on decolonizing violence for the writings of contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. What Agamben theorizes as "the state of exception" (the suspension of rule of law that a leader can declare in times of national emergency) is shown as an overemphasis on government as the locus of politics. In contrast, Fanon directs us to the politics of "the population at large," and Gratton demonstrates that the concept of "bare life" we find in the political theorizing of Agamben, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault is the same racialized other that Fanon analyzed in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. The violence that state power visits upon this degraded form of life is thus a repression that was perfected in the colonial context before being imported back to the West. Both chapters deal, albeit in different ways, with questions that keep alive Fanon's relevance in this age of war and terror: whether, once a cycle of violence has started, it is possible to end it; and where we locate the power of the state—in the capacity to coerce, or in the legitimacy that we grant to it as habitual followers of its laws?

Part IV, "Fanon on Racism and Sexuality," also takes up questions of violence, but in the more specific form of racism. Both chapters present the notion of decolonization of the self as a constructive response to racism. Chapter 7, Mohammad H. Tamdgidi's "Decolonizing Selves: The Subtler Violences of