

## No Longer in Heaven: Approaching Fanon's *L'an cinq de la révolution Algérienne* Fifty Years Later<sup>1</sup>

Nigel C. Gibson

Fanon saw his political work as a contribution to transforming the African continent, to liberating it from the colonial system and its mind-set, and setting forth a new humanism. Socialist in orientation, this humanism is defined by the actions of the people in struggle. This definition is especially apparent in *L'An V de la révolution Algérienne*.

*L'An V de la révolution Algérienne*<sup>2</sup> was, as the title suggests, published in 1959, the revolution's fifth year. Though Fanon wrote and collected the essays in a short period, breathing in “the oxygen of the revolution” as he worked at his characteristically breathtaking pace, he had in fact been thinking about writing a book that would reflect the radical changes in social life emanating from the Algerian revolution and affecting all corners of Algerian society.<sup>3</sup> After all, he had experienced the changes firsthand, not only at Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital, which he joined in December 1953 and resigned in 1956, but also in the period after his public identification with the Algerian revolution when he worked openly with the radical nationalist group, FLN.

The accusations that Fanon is overly optimistic about the changes that took place during the revolution emerge in part from a misunderstanding of the historical specificity of *L'An V*. In fact, to evaluate Fanon's attitude about the emergence of a new society in terms of optimism or pessimism<sup>4</sup> shores up a failure to fully historicize his work and understand its methodology. To understand *L'An V* today, fifty years out of context, depends in part on engaging with Fanon's practice of dialectics. For him, practice elucidates rather than obscures political differences and problematics, and *L'An V* is a work that celebrates revolutionary practice. Also important to keep in mind is that what became clearer by the time he wrote *Les Damnés* in 1961—namely the contradictions in the revolutionary movement—was far less clear in 1957 and 1958, when *L'An V* was conceived. Additionally, in the midst of the unfolding struggle of 1957 and 1958, he was unwilling to make abstract criticisms that jumped over concrete history and the experience of revolution.<sup>5</sup> To understand Fanon's thesis of radical mutation, therefore, it is necessary to resituate the book in its historical context.<sup>6</sup>

Conceived in the spring of 1959, Fanon believed that *L'An V* stood as a work of historical specificity, reflecting a revolutionary moment with all its excitement and celebration of the possibilities of that period. He argued that the book shed light on the Algerian Revolution, its originality and what he calls its “impatient richness” (179). But his documentation of the rich and restless changes that took place in Algerian society since the beginning of the Revolution in November 1954, has often been contested by a “presentist” pessimism that is rooted in the fact that the promise of change Fanon documented had ultimately remained unrealized. This, though, is to miss the point. That the changes were not realized merely underscores the ongoing fluidity of the situation, as well as the challenges of postcolonial society he goes on to articulate in *Les Damnés*.

For *L'An V* cannot be separated from Fanon's experiences of the Algerian war,<sup>7</sup> which created a continual crisis, not only in “French Algeria,” but also in the French republic and across the French colonies. Indeed, while *L'An V* claims to document the death of colonialism, it also documents an Algerian struggle that was far from over, with the French military and European settlers continuing to believe in victory, provided that it was not compromised by politicians in Paris favoring a negotiated settlement. Thus, on May 13 1958, 40,000 French settlers demonstrated against a proposal by Pierre Pflimlin, the French premier, to negotiate with

Algerian nationalists. They demanded a Committee of Public Safety with the torturer, General Massu, as president, while the French army generals in Algeria begged Charles de Gaulle to take over the government. In what essentially amounted to a *coup d'état*, the National Assembly granted de Gaulle power to rule by decree for six months before a new constitution, which would confer on the executive branch vastly increased powers, was drafted. In Algeria, a plebiscite was held. There, despite FLN directives, 80% of the Algerian electorate (with women allowed to vote for the first time) voted for de Gaulle's vague proposal of a French commonwealth,<sup>8</sup> thus shaking the FLN's credibility as the representative of the Algerian people, leading French democrats to ask how the Algerian nation was possibly coming into being.<sup>9</sup>

De Gaulle's regime is hardly mentioned in *L'An V*, despite its relevance as backdrop, and yet *L'An V*, which demands a self-determining Algeria, is undoubtedly directed at de Gaulle's conjuring trick. Thus, one of the purposes of *L'An V* was to apply pressure on the French liberals and left. After all, even while the French left and Algeria's European democrats had both proven powerless to stop de Gaulle's coup, the left was massive and could not be written off.<sup>10</sup> But Fanon was also not without skepticism. In *El Moudjahid* (May 1958), he explicitly remarks that French left parties are "prisoners of a doctrinal oversimplification ... [a] mechanization of thinking and ... fetishism of causes taken in the most automatic and least dialectical sense." And, for Fanon, it is precisely this lack of dialectical thinking that had blinded both the left (and for that matter many in the FLN) to the fact "that today a new humanism, a new theory of man is coming into being, which has its root in man."<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, Fanon's new humanism is born out of a rejection of the colonial world, but he also recognizes that a new society cannot be built by a simple reaction to the Other. In his essay, "Algeria Unveiled," he argues that revolution was a double process that simultaneously dictated both organized action and invention. Far from a simple reaction, there had to be a radical mutation in consciousness, politically and psychologically. As he puts it in *El Moudjahid* (April 16, 1958): "the Algerian combatant is not only up in arms against torturing parachutists. Most of the time he has to face problems of building, of organizing, of inventing the new society that must come into being." Later, he articulates an idea of a permanent revolution without stages set in motion necessarily by the *people's* own self-determination:

That is why colonialism has lost, has irreversibly lost the battle in Algeria ... This contempt for the "stages" that break the revolutionary torrent and cause the people to unlearn the unshakeable will to take everything into their hands at once in order that everything may change, constitutes the fundamental characteristic of the struggle of the Algerian people.<sup>12</sup>

Yet some critics have misread *L'An V*, seeing radical mutation not as a dialectical movement but a celebration of anti-colonial Manichean hatreds. These readings tend to view colonized culture as inert and unchanging and end up repeating the same errors as colonial sociologists and those Fanon calls "Islam specialists" (64) who, in their "mechaniz[ed] thinking," gloss over the idea that radical mutation unfolds over time, missing the workings of Fanon's historical narrative. For example, Fanon quite clearly distinguishes three periods of the Revolution: before the rebellion of 1954, then the initial phase of the rebellion, and finally the period of the Battle of Algiers and after. Additionally, the revolutionary agency of the lumpenproletariat Fanon insists on in *Les Damnés* is an objective phenomena linked to the massive migration that took place between 1954 and 1960, during the period of revolutionary transformation. In his 1977 *A Savage War of Peace*, the liberal historian Alistair Horne writes of the agrarian reforms that had a profound and far reaching effect on the "traditionally

conservative consciousness of agrarian Algeria.”<sup>13</sup> Historian John Ruedy further notes that by 1960, over two million people were “piled up in internment centers,” the “policy of that regroupment and the effects of unending war, end[ing] [the village] way of life for ever.”<sup>14</sup>

In *L’An V*, Fanon discusses the dialectic of “regroupment,” its violence and repression, which created, alongside the fragmentation of the Algerian family, an elemental solidarity across Algerian society that brought, for example, greater and unprecedented participation of women in the war (116-117). *L’An V* opens with “Algeria Unveiled,” which is inspired in part by women’s actions in the Battle of Algiers.<sup>15</sup> Written just as the Battle of Algiers was entering the second phase, the appendix to “Algeria Unveiled” was the first article Fanon penned after he arrived in Tunis to work with the FLN. It reflected not only women’s actions in the battle of Algiers but also the changes of attitude in the FLN toward gender issues and women:

[R]evolutionary war is not a war of men ... The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and his inhumanity. As a nurse, a liaison agent, fighter, she bears witness to the depth and the density of the struggle (66).

Positing women as an integral part of revolutionary war, Fanon was the first to catch this radical change in Algerian society. It became a measure of his thesis of revolutionary change and thus an important and radical articulation at the time. So while critics have charged that the essay essentializes gender and sex and normalizes gender inequality by attributing to women a “natural talent” for mimicry which, in the end, denies women’s autonomy by subsuming woman’s agency in the discourse of nation where the veiled woman stands in “metonymically for the nation,”<sup>16</sup> especially from the standpoint of world politics of the late 1950s, Fanon does give an important place to the “creation of new forms of being a woman” that keeps his work at the heart of an anti-imperialist feminism.<sup>17</sup> Privileging cultural creativity, *L’An V*, in other words, offers a nonessentialist and nuanced framework for understanding the functioning of the veil and women’s activity during the Algerian war of liberation that does not succumb to orientalist projections of “Third World” women as passive objects, but rather posits them as a force that threatens patriarchal power.

To begin to understand *L’An V*, therefore, it is necessary to position Fanon’s work in the context of the first five years of the Algerian revolution, especially from the beginning of his commitment and contact with the FLN before and during the Battle of Algiers to his appointment to *El Moudjahid* in Tunis. In this sense, it may be informative to consider *L’An V* and *Les Damnés* as representing the two periods of the Revolution, where the first, “November 1954 to September 1958, constitutes a synchronous whole centered upon the primary task of converting and mobilizing the Algerian people and proving the authenticity of the revolution,” while the second, which extends from late 1958 to independence, is “predominantly political.”<sup>18</sup> While it is only in *Les Damnés* that Fanon fully develops the problematics of political independence, it is precisely in the early *L’An V* that he engages with the issue of “the authenticity of the revolution,” namely “the thesis” that men and women change at the same time that they change world (30).

## Historical Contexts

Though the “Battle of Algiers” is often dated from September 30, 1956, when Zohra Drif, Djamila Bouhired and Samia Lakhdari, took off their veils and place bombs at a Milk Bar, a Cafeteria at the Air France terminus, the preamble<sup>19</sup> began on June 19, 1956, when two members of the FLN, Ahmed Zabane and Abelkader Ferradj, were guillotined in Barberousse Prison in Algiers. Between June 21<sup>st</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> the FLN responded by shooting 49 civilians in Algiers.

On August 10<sup>th</sup> European “settlers” retaliated by setting off a massive explosion directed against FLN “insurgents.” The bomb destroyed three buildings in the Kasbah killing seventy.

With Fanon and other staff sympathetic to Algerian nationalism on board, Blida-Joinville Hospital had become somewhat of a safe-haven to the FLN during the early months of the Revolution, sheltering and assisting FLN militants. There, Fanon treated fighters tortured and traumatized by the war, while also treating members of the security forces often at the same time.<sup>20</sup> However, as the “Battle of Algiers” intensified, it became increasingly difficult for Fanon to operate as both director of psychiatric services and a clandestine member of the FLN.<sup>21</sup> By late 1956, the situation had become untenable. With the Hospital viewed as a “den of fellaghas,” police planned raids. In consultation with FLN leaders, Fanon tendered his resignation.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, in the midst of the Battle of Algiers, the most important congress of the FLN took place between August 20 and September 10, 1956 in the Soummam valley in Kabylia. Right under the noses of the French (90), the congress mapped out the principles and direction of the Revolution. As the political leader of the internal revolutionary forces, the most important figure at Soummam was Ramdane Abane. Fanon had met and established a friendship with Abane, a fiercely critical intellectual and activist, in Blida in 1956.<sup>23</sup> Born in the mountains of Kabylia in 1920, Abane was forcefully enlisted into the French military from 1944 to 1946. In 1946, he joined the Parti de Peuple Algerien, and quickly nominated to become head of the wilaya at Sétif, he decided that Algerian liberation could only be won by armed struggle and began a clandestine existence until his imprisonment by the French in 1950.<sup>24</sup> Upon his release in 1955, he became one of the leaders of the wilaya of the Algerios. Fiercely critical of the politics of personal loyalties and open to dialogue and an exchange of view, he commanded the respect of those around him as a serious revolutionary organizer and thinker.<sup>25</sup> He viewed the revolution as “popular, social, unitary, anti-sectarian and national,”<sup>26</sup> and under his intellectual guidance, the forty-page Soummam Platform (much of it published in *El Moudjahid*) was hashed out over a three-week period. It explicated organizational structure and political principle and argued that the Revolution had reached a new stage that had changed the political climate in Algeria. Indeed, the new stage which Fanon calls a “radical mutation” had “provoked a psychological shock that had liberated the people from torpor, their fear, and from skepticism.”<sup>27</sup> Now a new thinking had become necessary.

Thus, at Soummam, a balance sheet was taken, and other political formations, including French strategy, lessons from other anti-imperialist struggles and revolutionary forces—peasants, workers, and women—were reviewed. Developing a coherent program and an “effective organization” to reflect the new stage was the order of the day, and the “Revolution,” which had been up until then somewhat “unorganized” was given some structure and political principles. Critical of the autonomy of the military districts (wilayas), the “platform” declared that the struggle was to be “an organized revolution and not an anarchist revolt,” “a step forward in the history of humanity and not a return to feudalism,” and “a struggle for the birth of an Algerian state in the form of a democratic and secular republic, and not a restoration of a monarchy or dead theocracy.” In effect, FLN underwent a restructuring, with military leadership now coming under the command of political leadership and external leadership coming under the command of the internal one to counteract a “cult of personality” from developing around one leader. An executive coordinating committee (CCE) of five members, including Abane, was then charged with running the day-to-day operations of the FLN.

Immediately after the conference, the leadership of the FLN moved to Algiers and took over the ZAA (the Autonomous Algiers Zone). They met regularly to coordinate a new stage of

the struggle to bring the war from the countryside to the heart of French colonial power, Algiers. By doing so, they anticipated bringing the war into the consciousness of the world community. Abane, at this time, was considered the “secretary general,”<sup>28</sup> and though collective decision-making was practiced, with political considerations taking priority over military ones, it was Abane (signing his name “Ahmed”) who called an eight-day general strike on January 28, 1957 to coincide with the opening of the United Nations session in New York and to underline Algerian support for the FLN. The French response was to cordon off the Kasbah with barbed wire and round up hundreds of people and begin a systematic torture of the Algiers population. Over the coming months, information gathered by the torturers would lead to more round ups and more torture.

Detractors argue that the Battle of Algiers was an event run by a small elite of terrorists, but in fact the Battle depended on the organization of thousands. Even the American *Time* correspondence Edward Behr (no supporter of the FLN) calculated that the FLN operations depended on a huge majority of the Moslem population, along with aid from a small number of Europeans. Indeed, those arrested for terrorism came from every sector of Algiers society, from the poor to the wealthy.<sup>29</sup> Though many in the FLN later called the strike a failure and a bad miscalculation, it is a contested and contestable point. Abane, Youssef BenKhedda<sup>30</sup> and Saad Dahlab (at the time the latter two were members of the CCE in Algiers) considered it a success<sup>31</sup> because while the strike did not catalyze general action, it brought the struggle into international view. Fanon also considered it a success, arguing in *El Moudjahid* (September 10, 1957) that it “reaffirmed the national unanimity of the struggle and the maintenance of the objective.” In other words, it was “the first real action of a united people with a national consciousness,”<sup>32</sup> and in this sense, it was a turning point.

Ultimately, from an international perspective, the French dependence on torture to win the battle and its general criminalization of the Algiers population (Edward Behr estimates 30-40% of the male population of the Kasbah was arrested) became more important than the battle itself. Despite the ensuing military stalemate, it became clear that the French would not broker a political settlement. Thus Fanon proclaims quite legitimately in *L’An V* that French colonialism was finished in Algeria; the only question was, when? As it turns out, Charles de Gaulle and the discovery of oil would strengthen French resolve to stay.

The French had begun prospecting for oil after World War Two, and at the beginning of the Algerian war, a large field was found near the Libyan border. On January 7, 1958, oil began flowing at Hassi-Messaoud, and the French were excited that they had tapped an asset that could satisfy all of France’s needs. Was this why the French hung on for so long and so dearly to Algeria? Added to the psychological reasons—the belief in “Algeria as France” and the trauma of defeat at Dien-Bien Phu around this time—oil seems to have given the French, as Quandt puts it, “a new motive for winning the Algerian war.”<sup>33</sup>

Upon resigning from Blida hospital, Fanon was ordered to leave the country by January 11, 1957. By that time, most of his interns at Blida, including Charles Geronomi (who authored the appendix to Fanon’s “Algeria’s European Minority”), had been arrested, and the noose of the counter-insurgency was tightening. Before leaving, Fanon met with two of the CCE’s political leaders, Abane and BenKhedda. As biographer David Macey puts it, the meeting “signaled that the FLN’s confidence in Fanon was now total.”<sup>34</sup> For it was here that Abane advised Fanon to move to Tunis and become involved in the reorganization of the *El Moudjahid*.

Fanon found himself in Paris in early January, and by February, Larbi Ben M’Hidi,<sup>35</sup> a member of the CCE, was arrested in Algiers. Five days after M’Hidi’s arrest, BenKhedda,

Belkacem Krim, Abane and Dahlab, the four remaining members of the FLN's CCE, left Algiers in a car driven by the European wife of an Algiers doctor, who was arrested several days later.<sup>36</sup> M'Hidi was later murdered in jail.

Fanon stayed in Paris with the Trotskyist psychiatrist Jean Ayme, devouring books on the first Congresses of the Communist International. While Ayme quickly realized that Fanon was "politically uninformed" about revolutionary movements and the history of nationalism in Algeria, after long conversations, he concluded that Fanon was right to join the Algerian revolution. Unlike others who wondered about the validity of Fanon's choice—Memmi, for example, thought he should not be involved in the Algerian revolution but should return to Martinique—Ayme, an internationalist, understood that Fanon would not give up the opportunity to take part in a revolution.<sup>37</sup> For him, Fanon's meeting with the inner circle of the CCE proved not only Fanon's importance to the Revolution, but also Fanon's commitment to it. Other friends tried to convince him to stay in France but, according to Francis Jeanson,<sup>38</sup> Fanon was not interested in supporting the FLN from France; he wanted to have an immediate effect on the direction of the struggle. Some have explained away Fanon's insistent "need" to take the "most radical" option in pathological terms,<sup>39</sup> but this "need" can also be understood as both a political position and a sharp critique of solidarity work. Around this time, FLN had become increasingly rife with internal conflict, and Fanon was beginning to dismiss the support network as having been "duped by the political façade of the French Federation of the FLN that answered to a military leader whose identity would never be revealed."<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Fanon knew that to take part in a revolution—to have any say about its direction—meant being *engaged*, not just supporting it from an overseas colonial metropole.<sup>41</sup>

Either at the meeting with Abane and Benkhedda in December, or while he was in France, Fanon was invited by Abane to meet up with the FLN leadership now headed to Tunis to work on *El Moudjahid*. By then, Soummam had effected the reorganization of *El Moudjahid*, and to prove it, the third issue carried a report by Abane on Soummam, titled "A New Chapter of the Algerian Revolution Opens." A special fourth issue (November 1956) carried extracts of the platform, including sections on political perspectives, as well as an initial, though limited, discussion of the "women's movement."<sup>42</sup> The section on the "Jewish minority" included a letter from a group of anti-imperialist Jews in Constantine that Fanon would quote in *L'An V* (157) a few years later.

The importance of Soummam to Fanon cannot be underestimated.<sup>43</sup> And though the Platform is only a beginning point for Fanon's *L'An V*, it colors all of his essays. Fanon arrived in Tunis in late March/early April 1957, and his main contact remained with the FLN leaders who had left Algiers shortly after him. Abane and Dahlab traveled to Morocco on foot, then to Tunis through Madrid and Rome. According to Mohammed Harbi, Fanon grew close to Abane during Abane's eight-month stay in Tunis.<sup>44</sup> Abane and Fanon shared a concern about the development of a future society after independence, and in Tunis, Abane began to consider the economic questions that Algeria would face after the revolution. Thus, Fanon's "exile" to Tunis put him right back in the thick of the discussion, and his friendship with Abane gave him an inside view of the intrigue and "pitfalls" of the nationalist political and military leadership, allowing him to hone his ideas about Algerian liberation. It would be several years later, in *Les Damnés*, that Fanon would go on to fully develop the concern shared by Abane: what was to happen to Algeria after independence?

During Fanon's Tunis period, between August 20 and September 18, 1957, the first formal session of the Conseil national de la révolution algérienne (CNRA) met in Cairo. It

rejected the Abane, Dahlab and Behkhedda proposal to keep the CCE small and to return to Algeria. Essentially rejecting the Soummam platform,<sup>45</sup> Ben Bella, one of the leaders of the CCE, reestablished his titular authority through an alliance with the military and other external representatives.<sup>46</sup> The CCE expanded to include five wilaya colonels, three liberals (including Ferhat Abbas) and five of the leaders (including Ben Bella) who were held in French prisons. Benkhedda and Dahlab were “removed,” and Abane was isolated.

Meanwhile Fanon played a role in the reorganization of *El Moudjahid* in Tunis and began writing for it. After August 1957, the paper’s masthead began to note the day of the revolution. On September 6, 1957, the 1041<sup>st</sup> day of the revolution,<sup>47</sup> Fanon published two articles: “Deceptions and Illusions of French Colonialism,” which ran on page one, and “Algeria Face to Face with the French Torturers,” which ran on the back page. On the 1305<sup>th</sup> day of the revolution (May 29 1958), the front page mourned the death of Abane.<sup>48</sup>

On his way to Tunis, Abane traveled through wilaya 5, controlled by Boussouf and Boumedienne,<sup>49</sup> and was shocked at their authoritarianism.<sup>50</sup> Loyal to the Soummam principles and to his own observations, he charged that the organization was succumbing to “wilayaism”<sup>51</sup> and refused to be silenced. Seen as a threat to the CNRA’s unity,<sup>52</sup> he was lured to Morocco and was eventually “liquidated” under Boussouf’s direction. It was not until several years later that rumors began to circulate that Abane might have been murdered.<sup>53</sup> Cherki argues that Abane, like Fanon, hoped for a multicultural Algeria in which Algerian Jews and Algerians of European descent would be included. Abane, Cherki continues, “believed in the possibility of a new form of human interaction, a new society that could be achieved only through a revolutionary dismantling of the colonial state.”<sup>54</sup> And for Fanon, it was precisely the lack of vision of a new society grounded in the actions of the Algerian masses that posed the greatest threat to its development. Thus he would go on to articulate in *Les Damnés* the need to work out new humanist concepts. This viewpoint was shared by other FLN leaders Fanon got to know in 1956. A high school student, Safia Biaz, who joined the *maquis* in 1956, remembers that

Many of our leaders couldn’t see beyond independence. Most of the young volunteers couldn’t either. Abane and Ben M’Hidi were different. Ben M’Hidi had a very human side. He would talk to us, some of us were still high school students, wanting to know more about our motivations, our ideas about the future of the country. Abane was more radical. One night he told us this is going to be a long struggle; many of you will not live to see the end of it. And independence, when it comes, will be only the beginning.

It was clear even to Biaz that “the volunteers of wilaya 4 were not all motivated by the same things: some wished only for independence and didn’t concern themselves with political change, some wanted to create a new society, and some simply wanted to defend Islam.”<sup>55</sup>

Concentrating on political change from below and emphasizing the dual process of the revolution—the destruction of the old colonial society and the construction of a new society—*L’An V* is positioned as a revolutionary text *within* the Algerian revolution. Fanon concludes the book with this claim: “The essence of the revolution, the true revolution which changes mankind and renews a society is ... the oxygen which brings about and sustains a new kind of human being – that too is the Algerian revolution” (180-181). In other words, convinced of the truth of his revolutionary concept, Fanon saw *L’An V* as a challenge both to the half-million-strong French colonial military machine in Algeria recently defeated at Dien Bien Phu and to the attitude that saw the struggle as one that would arm the people and end violently. For Fanon, the problem was that the colonialists (and I would include the narrow nationalists) had shut their eyes to the *real facts* of the problem; they had imagined “that our power is measured by the number of our heavy machine guns. This was true in

the first months of 1955. It is no longer true today ... The power of the Algerian Revolution *henceforth resides* [not in the military but] in the radical mutation that the Algerian has undergone” (31-2, my emphasis). Following the spirit of Soummam and anticipating political negotiations with France, it was clear to Fanon that neither the military nor external leadership but only internal mass struggle could truly liberate the nation. What was at stake, therefore, was not violence *per se*,<sup>56</sup> but the *humanism* that had to be born, self-reflexively, out of the revolutionary process itself:<sup>57</sup>

Because we want a democratic and renovated Algeria, because we believe one cannot rise and liberate oneself in one area and sink in another, we condemn with pain in our hearts, those brothers who have flung themselves into revolutionary action with physiological brutality that centuries of oppression give rise to and feed (25).

In other words, Fanon’s critique of the “barbarism” of the cycle of violence and counter-violence is also an implicit critique of the elitism, substitutionism and adventurism of the military model of revolution. Going behind the reciprocity of violence (exponentially increased by the colonialists), Fanon challenges the idea of a military solution. In *L’An V*, Fanon explicitly wonders about the relation of means and ends and asks, “Was freedom worth the consequences of penetrating that enormous circuit of terrorism and counter-terrorism?” His concern, in other words, is with the oxygen, the new human relations, that *sustains* a society, not the opposite.

Thus, Fanon insists that “The new relations are not the result of one barbarism replacing another barbarism, of one crushing of man with another crushing of man. *What we Algerians want is to discover the human being behind the colonizer*” (32, my emphasis). For discovering the human being behind the colonizer opens up a discussion far beyond the political rhetoric of anti-colonial Manicheanism. This is not a salve to the French liberal humanism, however, but a challenge to it. Because, for Fanon, it was precisely the French intellectuals who had attempted to stay “above” the battle who now needed to take an active anti-imperialist position. That is why while Fanon writes about the horrors of the French occupation—the “countless tortures”—to appeal to the nation’s human beings,<sup>58</sup> *L’An V*’s power ultimately lies in its reporting of the lived experience of Algeria in revolt. After all, liberals who decried torture did not necessarily support the Algerian struggle or want an independent Algeria. *L’An V*, therefore, focuses on the new reality of the nation<sup>59</sup>—breathing, living Algeria, which had been attempting, even in the midst of such brutal oppression, to build and invent a new society that “must come into being.” This new nation is furthermore always already radically multicultural because being Algerian includes all who are willing to fight for new human relations and is thus grounded in revolutionary beginnings in which the peoples of Algeria are judged by what they do and how they act, not by ontological abstractions.

Ultimately, for Fanon, the reconfiguration of Algeria has to be based on the reconstruction of the self, what he calls “an inner mutation” (179) stripped of the “mental sedimentation of the emotional and intellectual handicaps which resulted from 130 years of oppression.” Here Fanon comes close to articulating what he does in *Peau noire, masque blancs*,<sup>60</sup> where he speaks of the immanent dialectic of consciousness that is validated by its own action and does not look to an Other for meaning. But whether we are talking about an “inner mutation” or an immanent dialectic of consciousness, we have to first be cognizant of the phases of anti-colonialism and Fanon’s dialectic.

### **From Manicheanism to a Radical Mutation: three elements of Fanon’s dialectic in L’An V.**

In each essay of *Year Five* Fanon moves beyond anti-colonial manicheanism, criticizing colonial attitudes to Algerian society and emphasizing the changes in life and attitude caused by the Revolution. In “Algeria Unveiled” this is expressed through an analysis of the transformation of the value associated with the veil, while in “Algeria’s European Minority,” it is the European



involvement in the movement that collapses colonial boundaries and makes everybody suspect. In “Medicine and Colonialism,” he focuses on the radical change in attitudes toward “modern” medicine during the war of liberation and problematizes the division between “tradition” and “modernity” associated with mainstream sociology, thus challenging the idea that the colonizer is the harbinger of progress, and in “This is the Voice of Algeria,” he offers a critique of the idea of technological neutrality.

Fanon has often been caricatured a Manichean thinker, a philosopher of violence whose idea of reality, in the case of *Les Damnés*, becomes a Sorelian myth, or in the case of *L'An V*, a poet enamored by the myth of women’s liberation.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore necessary to focus on Fanon’s idea of dialectic and its three phases: first as a Manichean reaction, second as a self-conscious dismantling of colonial rule, and third as a dialectical leap which prefigures new historical protagonists and a new society.

In “This is the Voice of Algeria,” Fanon’s notion of dialectic is embedded in the lived experience of the colonized, from the first phase in which there is neither a dialectical movement nor historical time possible to the last phase in which a new history is born. For colonialism is not a simple occupation of a territory; it is a total occupation that enters the body and mind so that the initial struggle against it becomes desperate and almost neurotic. Indeed, for Fanon, this is “one of the laws of the psychology of colonization. In its initial phase, it is the actions of the occupier that determine the resistance around which a people’s will to survive becomes organized” (47). In short, colonialism is absolute, homogenous, and without qualification, and the people’s reaction to it is homogenous, absolute, and without qualification. In this situation, “it is not possible for the colonized society and the colonizing society to agree to pay tribute to a single value”; rather, every qualification is perceived by the occupier as a confession of congenital impotence and as an invitation to perpetuate the oppression, against which the people’s reaction is simply an “immediate and almost unanimous” rejection of all colonial values, even if the values are objectively worthwhile (63-4). Thus colonial schoolteachers, doctors, engineers are dismissed in “one lump” alongside the police and military (123), and rightly so, since they are seen as part of the whole “system” and are sometimes coextensive (as when doctors become part of the torture system). And any compromise with colonialism is viewed as an evil, a threat to psychic and bodily integrity, and thus an internalization of colonialism. Indeed, in such a Manichean reality, truth itself is absolutely split; what is truth for the colonizer is a lie for the colonized so that in reaction to “the enemy’s congenital lie[,] ...the people’s own lie...suddenly acquire[s] a dimension of truth”(87). This becomes viciously clear, for example, when the “objective truth” of an antibiotic treatment for an infection becomes “constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial situation” (128). And a whole series of cultural resistances—around the veil, or in reaction to the radio and to “Western” medicine—are enacted to reject the occupier’s presence (93). As Fanon writes of the phenomenology of colonialism in the appendix to “Algeria Unveiled”:

There is not occupation of the territory, on the one hand, and independence of person on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. From this point on, the real values of the occupied quickly tend to acquire a clandestine form of existence (65).

Thus, in the anti-colonial context, there is nothing neutral about the technology of a transistor radio or the science of medicine; the “truth” of such technologies is determined by the types and forms of

oppression they communicate and impose.

A shift occurs in these Manichean attitudes in the second phase, and in this case it occurred after the outbreak of the struggle for liberation in November 1954, when the former reactive passivity was replaced by a more active subjectivity. In the course of the fight for liberation and the crystallization of a new attitude, the foreign tactics used by the colonizer were stripped of their alien characteristics (142) so that “the ‘truth’ of the oppressor formerly rejected as an absolute lie [wa]s now countered by another, an acted truth” (76). Thus, Fanon writes, “the Algerian’s reaction was no longer one of pained and desperate refusal. Because it avowed its own uneasiness, the occupiers’ lie became a positive aspect of the nation’s new truth.” (76). By grasping the truth of the situation, the true value and power of the once-foreign technologies and tactics, the Algerian people had not only reclaimed their ability to act against the colonial system, but had taken over the colonizer’s technologies and tactics to dismantle its absolute power and dominance, unsettling the settlers. Thus, by reclaiming their subjectivity as historical protagonists, there came a shift away from a Manichean reaction toward a dialectic of liberation.

One site at which this struggle played out is the veil. In the initial Manichean reaction to colonialism, there was no individuality and no agency for women. As a metaphor for the civilizing mission on one hand, and anti-colonial reaction to it on the other, she was a metaphor for a nation that was physically fought over. In this context, the veil was a site of struggle, not only against “siege from within,” but quite literally against the French attempt to “liberate” women by “breaking her resistance” and breaching the nation: “Every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare” (42). Thus, the colonizer’s desire to unveil the Algerian woman stood as a double deflowering, a rape and a possession, both of which Fanon saw as a product of the sadism of the occupier whose history in Algeria literally included the pillaging of the country and the raping of woman. Thus, Fanon says, “on the level of individuals[,] the colonial strategy of destructuring Algerian society very quickly came to assign a prominent place to Algerian woman” (46), and “the tenacity of the occupier in his endeavor to unveil the women ... had the effect of strengthening the traditional patterns of behavior” (49). While the veil had become a center of resistance under colonialism, in the first phase, it was in fact a reaction to the colonialist desire to feminize and strip the nation of its essence and integrity.

In the second phase, however, women not only joined the revolution and demanded to be part of it, but “her activity assumed really gigantic proportions.” Able to move more freely than men, women became absolutely indispensable during the Battle of Algiers. They carried messages, guns and then bombs under the veil, which they strategically abandoned in their passage into European sectors. For Fanon, this was a completely new process: “Removed and reassumed again and again, the veil has been manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means to struggle” (61). Once a double seizure for women, the veil was now taken over, reappropriated—indeed *reclaimed*—by women, and used in the struggle, taking even the FLN by surprise. It would take Fanon to see and appreciate the radical implications of the women’s actions, which clearly exceeded the limited classification delineated by the Soumman Platform. For Fanon, it was precisely this attitude and *action* of women that provided the clearest proof that Algerian society had undergone important modifications.<sup>62</sup>

Likewise, “before 1954, in the psychological realm, the radio was considered an evil object, anxiogenic”: “[S]witching on the radio meant giving asylum to the occupier’s ... [and] having a radio meant accepting ... being besieged from within by the colonizer” (89, 92). Quite simply, the radio was an instrument of occupation, a “violent invasion” (88). After 1956,

however, rather than an alien object of conquest, the radio became a source of information for the struggle as well as a means through which the people could identify with the Revolution. Just as the veil (along with antibiotics and “Western” medicine in general) became important for the resistant fighters, the radio was transformed into a kind of social glue. For listening to “The Voice” on the radio not only provided a new objectivity for those relatively uninvolved in the struggle, but also brought into being historical protagonists who began to communicate, live and breathe with the revolution (83).

The colonial regime reacted to the changes by jamming the airwaves and restricting the sale of radios, as well as restricting and monitoring the use of antibiotics and other medical equipments. The whole Algerian population was now suspect and put under surveillance. With the two sides locked across a now Manichean *national* divide, siege was now the order of the day, but this was also the time “during which men, women, children, the whole Algerian people, experienced at one and the same time their national vocation and the recasting of the new Algerian society” (62). Even among European Algerians, there were some “awakening of consciousness” of belonging to an Algerian nation, and more than a few European Algerian students, who had never spoken with Moslems, began to meet and talk and read about the history of Algeria. As Charles Geronimi puts it in the appendix to “Algeria’s European Minority,” “it was [now] up to the Algerian people to decide; ... be[ing] with the people...was the only way to transform the national revolution into a social revolution” (169).

In his presentation to the First Congress of Black Writers in 1956, Fanon argued that “In order to achieve this [total] liberation, the inferiorized person brings all their resources to play, all the acquisitions, old and new, their own and those of the occupant.” Taking over radio and medicine, as well as including members of the European community, are examples of using the occupants’ “acquisitions.” But such a takeover was not just strategic. In “This is the Voice of Algeria,” Fanon makes clear that the taking over of an “alien” technique and using it against the colonist does not merely give the people “a fighting instrument for the people” but also gives technologies like the radio itself “totally new meanings.” Describing the collective struggle to find “The Voice” across the bandwidths and hear it through the static, Fanon describes an almost physical and strategic struggle with colonialism:

[B]y common consent, after an exchange of views ... a real task of reconstruction would then begin. Everyone would participate, and the real battles of yesterday and the day before would be re-fought ... The listener would compensate for the fragmentary nature of the news by an autonomous creation of information (86).

In other words, in the seemingly ordinary struggle with something as meaningless as static, the truth of the radio is created “out of nothing”(96), and a national consciousness—indeed a national culture—is born, “open[ing] up limitless horizons,”<sup>63</sup> It reflects the radical openness of the postcolonial subject's own self-activity born out of the revolution. For it is through such radical openness that the autonomous creation of a social collective—indeed the “nation”—becomes real. And while there is the question of organization, which Fanon also addresses in *L’An V*, his emphasis is on the social and the actional precisely because national consciousness cannot ultimately be brought about by vanguard parties or an elite. Again we must remind ourselves of the historical situation. Fanon was not celebrating the pathological imaginings of individual dreamers; he was concerned with what happens to a population in an ongoing struggle and how it can be viable.

Thus, for Fanon, the technical takeover also suggests a fundamental change in values born out of a new identification with the revolution, and it is this that Fanon considers “a

mutation, a radical change in valence, not a back and forth movement[,] ... not the emergence of an ambivalence ... but a dialectical progression” (90n). And, for Fanon, this mutation was evident, for example, in the fact that Algerian women not actively involved in the struggle had also “formed the habit of abandoning the veil” (61). For if Fanon describes the phenomenology of colonial life as an “occupied breathing,” his phenomenological descriptions of the being-in-the-world of the Algerian woman who undertakes the action of unveiling can be seen as a clandestine “combat breathing.” Having to renegotiate their bodies in space and time, Fanon insists that “The absence of the veil distorts the Algerian women’s corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent the new dimensions for her body [and] new means of muscular control,” she has to create a new identity for herself in a “totally revolutionary fashion” where a “new dialectic of body and of the world is primary” (59). While many of young women in the movement in Algiers had in fact already negotiated the European sectors, the point is that she had to now negotiate a new sense of bodily disintegration arising from her fear of being frisked, being caught, being raped, being tortured.<sup>64</sup> This negotiation is a vicious cycle, caught in a Hegelian master / slave dialectic, in which the slave’s gaining of a mind of her own is dependant on the experience of an absolute disintegration of self, where certainty and protection (which in this case is associated with the veil) has to be absolutely unsettled. As to how women might overcome this “vicious cycle” of debilitating fear, Fanon had no precedent, no example to work with, though he knew that overcoming such fear would create a “calm that [would] t[ake] hold of us and sharpen our senses”<sup>65</sup> and thus create a “new dialectic of the body and of the world.” As he had put spoken of Black consciousness *Peau noire*, now women’s “consciousness had to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain a consciousness of self.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, for Fanon, the drama of negotiating the forbidden spaces of the European quarters is intimately connected to challenging not only colonial Manichean truths, but also the patriarchal hierarchies within “traditional” Algeria. Of course many have pointed out that there is a tradition of women’s resistances to French colonization. But joining the revolutionary movement *as militants* was an unprecedented act, and women initially found themselves having to learn her revolutionary role “instinctively.” Akin to Fanon’s description of the dialectic of Black consciousness as imminent in its own eyes, women’s actions, he argues, were “an authentic birth in a pure state, without preliminary instruction.” Without a character to imitate, “there [wa]s an intense dramatization, a continuity between the woman and the revolutionary” (50);<sup>67</sup> the young, urban women were the “original characters.”<sup>68</sup> After 1955 some of these women, who had also become media celebrities,<sup>69</sup> became models for other women and “constitute[d] the points of reference around which the imagination of Algerian feminine society was to be stirred to the boiling point” (108). This was another part of what Fanon calls the “inner mutation” of family and social relations. As he puts it, “women were no longer silent ... *she literally forged a new place for herself by her sheer strength*” and “men’s words were no longer law”(109). During this period, “even the Algerian father, the founder of every value” underwent a radical change. Living side by side with the male militants, women broke away from the traditional way of life (47). Thus, as with the radio, Fanon’s hope in the future is no more apparent than in his writing on women in *L’An* where he insists that the action of the revolutionary woman had an effect on Algerian society as a whole, liberating women from a double dependency of the “feudal traditions” on one hand and colonialism on the other, and mobilizing others to become part of the struggle.

However, for Fanon, the practice of Revolution “reopens” all the problems, enlivening contradictions, not only of colonialism, but also those of colonized society, making everything—positive *and* negative—possible. During the revolution “the people came to realize that if they

wished to bring a new world to birth they would have to create a new society from top to bottom... The truth[,] for once, eluded its traditional trustees and placed itself within reach of any seeker” (102-3). This was clear even in the people’s changing attitudes towards the French language. The leaders’ use of French at Soumman, he opines, stripped “the French language of its negative connotations”(92) and liberated it from its “historic meanings,” while the ongoing revolution “stripped the Arabic language of its sacred character.” Now, as the language of discussion in “The Voice,” French had become not only one of many of the nation’s languages, but also “an instrument of liberation.” And, for Fanon, it is this radical openness manifest in “The Voice’s” ability to include and integrate these multilingual transmissions and thereby unite the nation’s “fragments,” that attested to both the untidiness of the process through which national culture is conceived and to the “multiracial reality of the Algerian nation.”(157). And though Arabic became the official language in postcolonial Algeria, Ato Sekyi-Otu, for example, deems Fanon’s insistence on language’s openness to dialectical transformation “a daring possibility”<sup>70</sup> because such dialectic of national consciousness, articulated in this way, opens up to the world its liberating potentials. In short, the Revolution had created an opportunity—what Fanon also calls a choice—for the common people to refashion social relations, and what is at stake in Fanon’s dialectic is not simply the realization of the historic Revolution, but also something quite new.

Ultimately, for Fanon, the practice of revolution, the commitment to action, is the source for real change and towers above theoretical speculation, but this does not mean that he was anti-intellectual. Far from it, but rather than stand as an abstract critique, theory has to be grounded in the concrete situations of the revolution.<sup>71</sup> Two examples of his critique of theoretical abstraction should suffice to explain the unique element of his dialectical method and the importance he gives to the way subjectivity transforms objectivity. In *Peau noire*, Fanon is critical of Sartre’s dismissal of Black consciousness as a “minor term” in the dialectic. Fanon argues that rather than jumping over the experience in a drive for synthesis, a dialectic of negativity “draws its worth from an almost substantive absoluteness. A consciousness committed to experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and the determinations of its being.”<sup>72</sup> For him, the absolute can become a new beginning posited phenomenologically as a movement from practice, as experience that people had to have in order to be. In this sense Black consciousness is posited as an absolute “immanent in its own eyes,”<sup>73</sup> lacking nothing, even though Fanon agrees that “Black experience is not total” because, having to painstakingly work through the negations and contradictions it encounters, a dialectic of experience cannot ever know the outcome.<sup>74</sup> And while he admits in *Peau noire* that this might be a misreading of the processes of history, in *L’An V*, it describes precisely the history of the Algerian Revolution. In the 1959 presentation at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Rome, he sums up this dialectical movement as a philosophical principle: “The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication. Philosophic thought teaches us, on the contrary, that it is its only guarantee.”<sup>75</sup>

*L’An V* is perhaps Fanon’s most under-read work, and “Algeria Unveiled” perhaps the most deconstructed of his essays.<sup>76</sup> As well as disparaging Fanon for his confidence about the changing meaning of the veil—that it was abandoned in the course of revolutionary actions—critics have asked why there has not been the kind of permanent mutation in these women's situations as he had envisioned. Limited by its historical specificity, *L’An V* cannot adequately address, much less answer, this question, and in *Les Damnés*, Fanon himself acknowledges that though such revolutionary struggle hints at new possibilities, it does not guarantee the outcome.<sup>77</sup> Thus, he claims

that even a reappearance of the “reification of attitudes” that characterized the colonial situation is possible,<sup>78</sup> and in fact, such a situation occurred in May 1958, when a massive “reveiling” took place in reaction to forced unveiling. Fanon explicitly calls this incident a “regression” and a “turning back,” but he does not elaborate the point in *L’An V*, except to say that the veil had, by then, become strategic. While this may be true, it also perhaps brings to light the continual struggle of women against the continued politicization of their bodies and the silencing of individual voices for the sake of the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>79</sup> Moreover the “turning back” also brings into relief the importance of Fanon’s analysis that sees the obsessive French colonial policy of unveiling, not as an act of liberation as many liberal feminists in the West today might see it,<sup>80</sup> but as an act of sexual desire and violence.

One question that emerges in reading *L’An V* then, is whether by identifying women’s liberation with national liberation, Fanon’s thesis of radical mutation itself is limited. Fifty years later Fanon is also in a double bind. Writing in a period before the birth of the women’s liberation movement, he was the first to write about the centrality of women’s involvement in the Revolution. So while he recognized women’s marginalization and saw the development of women’s autonomy during the Revolution, he remains limited by a lack of knowledge of women’s lives and acknowledges that this knowledge was a work in progress: “the woman in the city, in the *djebel*, in the enemy administration; the prostitute and the information she obtains; the women in prison, under torture, facing death, before the courts. All these chapter headings after the material has been sifted will reveal an incalculable number of facts essential for the history of the national struggle” (60, n.15). Needless to say, Fanon is not a feminist, and one cannot expect a feminist analysis, but his hope in the future is no more apparent than in his writing on women in *L’An V*. In a sense Fanon’s optimism about women’s agency was expressed at the conclusion of the revolution when a civil war that broke out between the different wilayas came to an abrupt halt, not as a result of political action, or any change of heart on the part of Boumedienne (who proceeded to enter Algiers as planned), but because the people of Algiers—among them women bearing children in their arms—threw themselves between the fighting men. “We want bread. We don’t want war,” they shouted. “Barakaet, Sebaa snin barakat—Enough, seven years of it, enough.”<sup>81</sup>

To be sure, women’s near total removal from political life soon after independence underscored the victory of the conservative wing of the FLN over Fanon’s vision, but if the transformation of imagination (108) is understood psychoanalytically as well as politically, an important sediment remains. For if there was a “turning back” after independence, and if there was a counterrevolution against women immediately after the war, it was because women had won a revolutionary—indeed threatening—level of autonomy. So while many like Fatima Beosmane, an FLN militant, lamented that “Each woman went home saying, ‘Let others deal with it.’ We should have never said ‘Sebaa snin barakat,’”<sup>82</sup> it was clear that an “inner mutation” had taken place. As Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne puts it, “the years spent fighting, which the women always remember ...[,] helped them to open out and to renegotiate their relationships with their families.”<sup>83</sup> Contested and often marginalized, women’s participation in the war—her infiltration into the “forbidden quarters” of school and work—did have a lasting impression on Algerian national consciousness, and perhaps what is remarkable about *L’An V* fifty years later is that it continues to be one of those rare books that unequivocally convey the “hope, confidence and exhilaration that arise in revolutionary movements.”<sup>84</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This foreword would not have been completed without the help of Kate Josephson for her persistent

encouragement, Katie Hunt and Richard Pithouse for their critical remarks and especially Asako Serizawa for her tireless editorial work.

2. Frantz Fanon, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). Original publication, *L'An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne*, Paris: Maspero, 1969). Future citations referenced in the text.

3. As a sociologist doing field work in the late 1950s in Kabylia, Pierre Bourdieu also caught the reality of these changes and described them in his 1962 book, *Sociologie de L'Algérie*: “No one is unaware of the fact that a deep gulf now separates Algerian society from its past and that an irreversible change has taken place . . . The Revolutionary situation has upset the former social hierarchies, now associated with the system of outmoded values, and has substituted for them new men to whom authority was granted for reasons other than birth, wealth, or moral or religious ascendancy.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians*, originally published as *Sociologie de L'Algérie*, translated by Alan C.M. Moss (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962) p. 182. At the same time he insisted that rebellion cannot go further than resentment since “those in the condition of the subproletariat cannot comprehend it” “The Algerian Subproletariat,” *Les Temps Moderne* 199 (1962) in I. William Zartman (ed.) *Man, State and Society in Contemporary Maghrib* (New York: Praeger, 1973) p.91. Compare this to Fanon’s writings on the lumpenproletariat in *Les Damnés*.

<sup>4</sup> Just as *L'An V* is considered mythically “optimistic,” *Les Damnés* is considered “pessimistic.”

<sup>5</sup> For example, Fanon was unhappy when his publisher, Maspero, changed the title in 1961 from *L'An V* to *Sociologie d'une révolution* on the grounds that it was no longer the revolution’s fifth year but it’s seventh. In other words, Fanon believed the work was historically specific.

<sup>6</sup> In as far as the purposes and audience of the books are different, *L'An V* and *Les Damnés* both revolve around the issue of radical mutation, its strengths (*L'An V*) and possible weaknesses (*Les Damnés*), arising from the revolution.

<sup>7</sup> *L'An V* was interrupted not only by the Rome Congress of Black Writers (26 March – 1 April 1959) where Fanon presented “On the reciprocal foundations for national culture and liberation struggles (the talk becomes part of the chapter, “On National Culture” in *Les Damnés*), but also by a back injury when the car he was traveling in turned over, either as a result of a bomb or the driver’s loss of control. Later, he returned to Rome for an operation, and it was on his return to Tunis after that that Fanon finished the book, completing the introduction himself as Ferhat Abbas, a well respected liberal leader of the FLN, backed out of the task. Fanon, by then, was considered too much of a radical Marxist. In fact, in Rome, gunmen had raided his hospital room, but savvy to the attempted assassination, he had already moved to another room. See David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: Life* (London: Granta, 2000) p. 394.

<sup>8</sup> Later analyzing the figures, Joan Gillespie notes that many Muslims, “perhaps as many as 1,000,000[,] avoided registration, even though French soldiers personally visited many villages to obtain the names of voters . . . The figures also indicate that almost 1,000,000 of those registered did not vote.” She concludes that “almost half the adult [Muslim] population, managed to show its opposition to the French colonial regime in some way.” Joan Gillespie, *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution* (London: Ernest Benn) p.166.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that Guineé had the audacity to say “non” to de Gaulle was in fact a greater blow. Even the 65% vote in a subsequent vote in Algeria in November could not hide de Gaulle’s lack of credible alternatives.

<sup>10</sup> In “Algeria’s European Minority” (first published in *Les Temps Moderne* in July 1959), Fanon argues that “it can be said of Algeria’s European democrats what has been endlessly repeated of the French parties of the left: for a long time history is made without them”(149). Just as the massive French left had not stopped de Gaulle’s coup, the Algerian democrats were “passive under Lacoste [and] powerless before the military coup of the 13<sup>th</sup> of May.” Yet Fanon reminds us that while the left had done nothing in France, “it ha[d] prevented a number of things,” for example the movement against the death sentence given to Djamilia Bouhired or the outcry against Henri Alleg’s book on torture, *La Question*.

<sup>11</sup> *El Moudjahid*, July 22, 1958. There is a resonance here with Marx’s 1844 essay on Hegel: “Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself.” Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*.”

<sup>12</sup> *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Alistair Horne *A Savage War of Peace*, (New York: Penguin, 1977) p. 407.

<sup>14</sup> John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indian University Press,

1992), p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Gillo Pontecorvo brilliant film “Battle of Algiers” has made the images of the battle familiar. He denies having read “Algeria Unveiled” which indicates that some of what Fanon writes about—not only hiding guns and bombs under the veiling and women unveiling to “pass” as Europeans, but also women as combatants or FLN leaders presiding over wedding ceremonies—was generally known.

16. Diana Fuss, “Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification,” reprinted in Nigel C. Gibson ed. *Rethinking Fanon* (Humanity Books: Amherst, New York, 1999), p.304.

<sup>17</sup> Drucilla Cornell, “The Secret Behind the Veil,” *Philosophia Africana* 4:2 p.34

<sup>18</sup> See Ruedy p.174.

<sup>19</sup> Pontecorvo’s film, begins with the death of the two members of the FLN on June 19, 1956.

<sup>20</sup> See the case studies number four in *Les Damnés*: “A European policeman in a depressed states meets while under hospital treatment one of his victims, an Algerian patriot who is suffering from stupor.”

<sup>21</sup> Alice Cherki describes the situation at the hospital as explosive: “When I arrived at HPB [Blida Psychiatric Hospital], in late 1955, early 1956, intensive psychiatric work was matched by equally important political activity ... support[ing] the November 1954 Movement and fighters of wilaya 4 ... on a daily basis.” Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2006), p.79.

<sup>22</sup> Fanon letter of resignation was not a sudden decision. He had already met with and was working the FLN leadership in Algiers, and given his importance to the FLN, this is the most probable reason for his resignation.

<sup>23</sup> The Italian radical and translator of Fanon who was writing on the Algerian revolution, Giovanni Pirelli, insists that Abane was “a great friend and model of Fanon” (Gendzier 251). For both, their “friendship” is perhaps better thought of as a comradeship since it was deeply political.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, the beginning of the Algerian Revolution can be dated to the “Victory in Europe day,” May 8, 1945, when French planes and French ships bombed Sétif and the surrounding village after “illegal” demonstrations for Algerian independence. Algerian nationalists estimate (as does Fanon in *Les Damnés*) that 45,000 people were killed.

<sup>25</sup> William B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969) p.100 note 33. Quandt speculates that Abane “might have been the one Algerian who could have held the elite together after independence.”

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in [www.amighworld.org/history/personalities/ramdane\\_abane.php](http://www.amighworld.org/history/personalities/ramdane_abane.php)

<sup>27</sup> Sections of the Soummam Platform are reprinted in Panaf, *Frantz Fanon* (Panaf Books, London, 1975). The second chapter of Fanon’s *Les Damnés*, the “Spontaneity: its strengths and weaknesses,” can also be read in relation to this period of the Algerian revolution.

<sup>28</sup> See Quandt, p.104. In Algiers, Youssef Benkhedda was in charge of liaison with French sympathizers, and Ben M’Hidi with groups in the Kasbah, while under him Saadi Yacef was in charge of the Algiers network. Yacef was behind the decision to send Zohra Drif, Djamila Bouhired and Samia Lakhdari to place bombs in the “European zone” on September 30, 1956.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Behr, *The Algerian Problem* (London: Penguin, 1961) p.112.

<sup>30</sup> Like Abane, Benkhedda was among the small, educated elite of Algerians who attended the Blida Lycée.

According to Quandt his political education occurred in prison where he had time to read about revolutions (Quandt p. 48).

<sup>31</sup> William Quandt p.105. Abane planned to intensify the struggle with another call for a general strike (See Lou Turner’s excellent essay, “Fanon and the FLN,” in Nigel C Gibson (ed.) *Rethinking Fanon* p. 388).

<sup>32</sup> See [www.amzighworld.org](http://www.amzighworld.org)

<sup>33</sup> Quandt p.210. I thank Irene Gendzier for bringing my attention to France’s oil interests in Algeria. Writing in July of 1958, Fanon considered oil as the latest expression of imperialist adventure. He notes, “The oil of Iraq has removed all prohibitions and made concrete the true problems ... The Marines who today are being landed in Beirut are the brothers of those who periodically are sent to reestablish ‘order’ in Haiti, Costa Rica and Panama.” America, he adds, seeks global domination, but the larger issue was that the anti-colonial struggles have exchanged political independence for economic dependence. Thus, characteristically he argues that a “second phase of total liberation” is necessary (*El Moudjahid*, July 1958 article, “First Truths on the Colonial Problem”). This article has a contemporary resonance since it speaks of how “the economic battles between France, England and the United



States in the Middle East ... give the measure of the imperialist voracity and bestiality.... Today in Lebanon and in Iraq, if we are to believe Mr. Malraux, it is *homo occidentalis* who is threatened," which has a resonance with contemporary discourses about the clash of civilizations.

<sup>34</sup> Macey p.300. The meeting on December 26, 1956 was arranged by Dr. Pierre Chaulet, a key FLN activist and editor of *Conscience Maghreb*. He met Fanon in the winter of 1954 and they had become close. Chaulet was arrested the day before he was supposed to drive Abane out of Algiers (see Cherki p. 90).

<sup>35</sup> Ben M'Hidi was one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action (CRUA) in 1954. He was he nominated to form a committee to direct the revolution which divided the country into zones or wilayas. Ben M'Hidi became the leader of Oran and, with Abane, was particularly important at the Soummam conference. After the conference he joined Abane and the other members of the CCE in Algiers.

<sup>36</sup> Saadi Yacef was left in charge of operation in the city (His assistant and operative Djamila Bouhired was arrested in March and sentenced to death).

<sup>37</sup> See Cherki p.94

<sup>38</sup> Sensitive to "theoreticians" who often criticize the revolution from afar, Jeanson himself worked to create "a remarkable network—reminiscent of the French underground"—which sheltered FLN militants and smuggled money. See Horne, p.238. Horne calls Jeanson, who was a friend of Sartre's and de Beauvoir's, a "Marxist, professor, writer, publisher and editor" p.237. Indeed, critical of the French in Algeria, Jeanson had published *L'Algérie hors la Loi* in 1955.

<sup>39</sup> Jeanson calls it a "terrible need." His reaction is summed up by Macey, p.303.

<sup>40</sup> Cherki p.98.

<sup>41</sup> Solidarity work could lead to an uncritical attitude toward internal political developments justified as the same way Jeanson justified FLN "atrocities" because they were "made inevitable by the hostility of the entire world" (quote in Horne p. 238).

<sup>42</sup> Mostly illiterate, women were excluded from public life until 1954. Like other anti-colonial nationalist organization, women members were part of "women's organization" and inconsequential to the parties. In the Soummam platform, women's roles were mainly limited to "support" and care taking.

<sup>43</sup> Macey claims "most of the statements made by Fanon—and especially those on the conditions for independence and peace negotiations—when he became an FLN spokesman, can be traced back to the Soummam conference." Macey, p.278.

<sup>44</sup> Macey p.337. Cherki writes that "Fanon felt a special connection to Abane during this period; he admired his intransigent side and saw him as a true revolutionary leaders of the new Algeria." She add that Fanon and Abane were frequently outspoken and shared a similarly dim view of some of the leadership

<sup>45</sup> The organizational questions raised at Soummam, including the attempt to stop a cult of personality developing around a leader, continued to haunt the FLN.

<sup>46</sup> The Cairo conference reflected the new situation. Though the majority of CCE (everyone excluding Krim, a colonel) still believed that they should return to Algeria, the French effectively limited border crossings with construction of the 200 mile electrified "Morice line" along the Tunisian border.

<sup>47</sup> A typo on the newspaper puts it as the 1401<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Thus Fanon's title, *L'An V*, has a resonance with both the French revolution and the very specific daily calendar of the Algerian revolution.

<sup>49</sup> Abane thought that Boussouf and Boumedienne (who had become President after removing Ben Bella from power in 1965) were "real dictators," and Cherki says that Fanon's "loathing of the two B's became even greater after Abbane's disappearance." Horne writes that Boussouf had qualified as a teacher in 1954 and had taken a correspondence course in psychology, p.225.

<sup>50</sup> As Ferhat Abbas put it, "they think they have life and death over the people in their command. They embody the exact opposite of freedom and democracy we want for an independent Algeria."

<sup>51</sup> The wilaya structures were not homogenous; the hierarchical structure of wilaya 5 can be compared to the democratic structure of the Algérois wilaya 4. The profoundly different organization can be a considered a consequence (in Abane's terms) of lack of a political leadership and political/organizational program.

<sup>52</sup> To both Ben Bella and those with powerbases in the wilayas.

<sup>53</sup> Simone de Beauvoir reports that Fanon still had Abane's death on his conscience in 1960, when he told her,

shortly after Lumumba's murder, that he felt responsible for not "forc[ing] them [Abane and Lumumba] to follow his advice." (*Hard Times: Force of Circumstance, II* (New York; Paragon House, 1992) p. 317). Whatever that advice was de Beauvoir does not disclose, but it is clear that Fanon knew of the intrigues and antagonisms among the leaders and probably suspected the details of Abane's disappearance, though it is not certain how much of the facts he knew. Since Fanon mentions Ouamrane and Krim positively in "This is the Voice of Algeria" (84), he could not have known of Krim's involvement in Abane's liquidation. Though he opposed death, he was instrumental in removing Abane to Morocco and to his death.

<sup>54</sup> Cherki pp.104-5. It is this "new society" that Fanon argues is already in existence in *L'An V*. In fact, in its final chapter, he articulates the hope of a multicultural Algeria which was dear to both men, quoting sections of the Soummam platform on the "Jewish question" and arguing that the majority of Jews in Algeria considered themselves Algerian (155).

The "Algeria's Jews" section of "Algeria's European Minority" is probably the most sociological of his writing. He argues that a "socio-economic analysis" afford a complete explanation of different attitudes among the Jewish community and divides the community into two groups. An elite, tradesmen and so forth, whose fate is closely tied with colonial rule and the mass of Jews, three-quarters of the population, who he calls "an Arabized mass" who suffer from European racism and consider themselves "natives."

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Cherki, p. 105.

<sup>56</sup> This is unfathomable to those like Homi Bhabha who considers Fanon "a poet" of violence. See Bhabha's foreword to the new English translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*. For a critique see Nigel C. Gibson "Relative Opacity: A New Translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*—Mission Betrayed of Fulfilled," *Social Identities*, (13:1) January 2007, pp.69-95.

<sup>57</sup> *L'An V* is also essential to our understanding of the conceptual difference between the existential humanism discussed at the end of *Black Skin* (222, 232) and the new humanity invoked at the end of *Les Damnés* (1968 204, 246, 316). As we see in his idea of radical mutation, *Year Five* announces a new humanity born of the revolutionary process underway in Algeria. Though Fanon is a lot more confident about the existence of a new humanity in *L'An V* than he is in *Les Damnés*, where such a humanity is put off to the future in the face of a number of stumbling blocks, what has radically mutated by the writing of *L'An V* is his earlier idea of humanism.

<sup>58</sup> Such writings, including Henri Alleg's *La Question* and Jérôme Lindon's *La Grangrène*, were already famous in France.

<sup>59</sup> In fact, Fanon's first title for *L'An V* was "The New Reality of the Nation."

<sup>60</sup> *Peau noire, masque blanc* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1952). The references here are to the English edition, *Black Skin White Mask* translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), p.135.

<sup>61</sup> For example, see Marie-Aimée Helie-Lucas, "Women, Nationalism, and Religion in the Algerian Liberation Struggle," in Nigel C. Gibson (ed) *Rethinking Fanon*.

<sup>62</sup> Writing of the women in the djebels (mountains), Horne echoes Fanon's argument: "for the first time she met and coexisted with unmarried men on equal terms and with equal rights" and "was treated with a respect never experienced before." He adds, "For the women, perhaps even more than the FLN men revolution and the pursuit of independence – with the promise of personal liberation at the end of the road—became an irrecusable way of life." Horne, pp. 402-3. Pierre Bourdieu also commented on the veil in terms of a *social mutation* in "Guerre et mutation sociale en Algérie," *Etudes Maghrébines* 7 (Spring 1960) pp. 25-37.

<sup>63</sup> For the importance of Fanon's essay, "This is the Voice of Algeria," to the dialectic of organization, see Nigel C. Gibson *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* pp. 148-156.

<sup>64</sup> Thinking of the horrible tortures that many of the women endured after capture by the French police or army, Fanon, for example, writes that "the Algerian woman rises to the level of tragedy." For example, Djamilia Boupacha was raped with a broken wine bottle. Louise Ighilahriz, who joined the FLN after her father was seized by colonial authorities, was imprisoned and tortured in Algiers' notorious Barbarossa prison in 1957.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Marna Lazreg *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.131.

<sup>66</sup> *Black Skin* pp.133-4)

<sup>67</sup> Though the majority of the women were fighting in the rural areas, it was probably the young women active in the Battle of Algiers that he had in mind when he wrote these lines.

<sup>68</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya uses this term to speak of Rosa Luxemburg in *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981). The women were often middle-class graduates of French *lycées* like Saadi Yacef and her comrade Djamila Bouhired and Hassiba Ben Bouali (who was blown up with Ali La Pointe). Others like Samia Lakhdarai and Zohra Drif were among the very small number of Algerian law students. When she asked her brother how to join the movement, Zohra Drif was told that the war was not "woman's business." See Marna Lazreg, op cit. p. 121

<sup>69</sup> For example, Djamila Bouhired, who was drawn into the underground nationalist struggle by her brother, became a *cause célèbre* after her arrest in 1957.

<sup>70</sup> Ato Sekyi-Otu *Fanon's dialectic of experience* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P. 1996), p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> Fanon was not alone in this conceptualization of praxis. For example, Hussein Ait Ahmed, one of the intellectual leaders and founders of the FLN, argued that "the revolutionary must ... descend from the pedestal of his theory to root himself in concrete life, in order to draw upon and verify there his principles of action" (quoted in Joan Gillespie, *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution* (London: Ernest Benn, 1961) p.80.

<sup>72</sup> *Black Skin* pp. 133-4.

<sup>73</sup> *Black Skin* p. 135. On the absolute as new beginning and the movement from practice as a "form of theory" see Raya Dunayevskaya's *Philosophy and Revolution* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1989).

<sup>74</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Oxford U.P.), p. 800.

<sup>75</sup> Reprinted in *Les Damnés (The Wretched of the Earth)* [New York: Grove, 2005] p. 179).

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, the essays collected in *Rethinking Fanon: Marie-Aimée Helie-Lucas, "Women, Nationalism, and Religion in the Algerian Liberation Struggle"; Anne McClintock, "Fanon and Gender Agency"; Diana Fuss, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification"; T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "Fanon's Feminist Consciousness and Algerian Women's Liberation: Colonialism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism."*

<sup>77</sup> *Les Damnés*, p.178.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.170.

<sup>79</sup> See Marna Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence*.

<sup>80</sup> It is also revealing that though guaranteed political rights, women in post-World War Two France were expected to stay at home and have babies. Women's involvement in the anti-colonial movement in France was seen as a sign of the moral collapse of the Republic, not liberation. See Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance* (Berg: Oxford, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> Arslan Humbaraci *Algeria: A Revolution that Failed* (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp.79-80.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, "Women and Politics in Algeria from the War of Independence to Our Day," *Research in African Literatures* 30.3 (1999) p. 69.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*. p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "Eliminating the Cycle of Violence" *Philosophia Africana*, 4:2 (2001). Bernasconi's paper was first presented at an event organized by the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University in 1999 celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fanon's *L'An V*