

FRANTZ FANON AND C.L.R. JAMES ON INTELLECTUALISM AND ENLIGHTENED RATIONALITY

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores critical accounts of modern rationality and efforts to articulate a conception of reason that is tied to the idea of decolonization as project. It focuses on the work of two of the most widely known and influential Caribbean theorists: the Martiniquean psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon and the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James. The essay first focuses on Fanon's diagnosis of reason in the colonial context and the overcoming of its ambiguities and limits through what he calls "sociogeny." Sociogeny is instrumental for the combination of theory with ethics and politics, which provides the ground for a conception of the intellectual as a radical humanist and a revolutionary. James's view of rational activity in terms of making the "abstract universal concrete" and his approach to culture complements in important ways Fanon's typology of reason and human agency in important ways, but it introduces problems that a Fanonian understanding of the limits of modernity helps to address.

Keywords: enlightenment, sociogenesis, modernity, decolonization, postcolonial, intellectual

RESUMEN

Este ensayo explora recuentos críticos de la racionalidad moderna y esfuerzos dirigidos a articular una concepción de la razón ligada a la idea de la descolonización como proyecto. El mismo se enfoca en el trabajo de dos de los más conocidos e influyentes teóricos caribeños: el psiquiatra y revolucionario Frantz Fanon y el marxista trinitense C.L.R. James. La primera sección del ensayo examina el diagnóstico fanoniano de la razón en el contexto colonial y la superación de sus límites y

ambigüedades a partir del concepto de “sociogénesis.” La sociogénesis es fundamental para combinar la teoría y la ética con la política, lo cual provee la base para una concepción del intelectual como un humanista radical y un revolucionario. La segunda sección del trabajo compara el punto de vista fanoniano con la concepción de la razón de James, la cual versa a cerca de “hacer concreto el universal abstracto” y en un enfoque particular en la cultura. En esta sección se concluye que mientras el trabajo de James complementa la tipología fanoniana de la razón y de la agencia humana con respecto a puntos de importancia, éste a la vez introduce problemas que una concepción fanoniana a cerca de los límites de la modernidad ayuda a resolver.

Palabras clave: ilustración, sociogénesis, modernidad, descolonización, postcolonial, intelectual

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai explore des analyses critiques concernant la rationalité moderne et les efforts pour articuler une conception de la raison qui s'accorde à l'idée de la décolonisation en tant que projet. Il aborde les travaux de deux des plus reconnus et influents théoriciens caribéens: le psychiatre et révolutionnaire Frantz Fanon et le marxiste trinitadien C.L.R. James. La première partie de l'essai examine le diagnostic fanonien de la raison dans le contexte colonial et la manière dont ses limites et ses ambiguïtés sont surmontés à partir de ce qu'il appelle la «sociogénèse». La sociogénèse est fondamentale pour combiner la théorie avec l'éthique et la politique, ce qui à son tour fournit la base pour concevoir l'intellectuel comme un humaniste radical et révolutionnaire. La deuxième partie du travail compare le point de vue fanonien avec la conception de l'activité rationnelle de James. Celle-ci tourne autour de l'idée de «faire l'universel abstrait concret» et de son approche à la culture. On conclue que le travail de James apporte de manière importante à la typologie fanonienne de la raison et du sujets sociaux, tout en introduisant des problèmes qu'une conception fanonienne sur les limites de la modernité aide à résoudre.

Mots-clés: lumières, sociogénèse, modernité, decolonization, postcolonial, intellectuel

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The denial of humanity to peoples of African descent in the Caribbean and elsewhere has posed unique challenges to the affirmation of reason and intellectual activity in the region and beyond. The dramatic encounter with irrationality in colonized and formally (but not integrally) post-colonial settings motivate critical reflection on the meaning and possibilities of rational disquisition and argumentation, particularly in relation to the modernization agenda. These are some of the problems and concerns that are at the forefront of Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James's works. Fanon and James are two of the most original and influential radical political intellectuals in the twentieth century. They were born and raised in the Caribbean—in Martinique and Trinidad respectively—and form part of a larger array of radical political intellectuals of the African Diaspora.

The questions and concerns explored by radical intellectuals of the African Diaspora are shaped by the traumatic encounter with different forms of dehumanization such as anti-black racism and sexism, as well as by capitalism, brutal forms of deracination, and male-oriented and racist forms of nationalism. That people of African descent interpret and reflect critically about their historical experience and the collective history of modern subjects, and the fact that they also propose original ideas about how to transform the world, may sound all too natural to some now, but it truly represents a paradoxical reality in regards to the logic of modernity. The paradox lies in the exercise of reason by subjects who are considered to be devoid of all rationality. That is, in modernity rational discussions about the evils faced by African subjects were expected to occur, but not by African subjects themselves. As Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze has put, in modernity reason has color (1997). White or light skinned subjects tend to be considered as the proper mediums for truth and rationality.

This phenomenon indicates that modern rationality is not only ascetic, as Nietzsche proclaimed, but also racist—and that the latter cannot be subsumed by the former. It also means that racism is not only an attitude that affects capitalism, the state, and gender dynamics, but knowledge as well. In short, racism is not only institutional, social, and cultural, but also epistemic (Lander 2000; Quijano 2000).

The confrontation with epistemic racism shapes the thought and practice of Africana intellectuals. Fanon puts it in a suggestive way when he asserts in regards to reason: “when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer” (1968:119-120). That is, standards of rational acceptability completely change when a rational exchange with a black person is supposed to take place. The reason for this is simple: since the very existence of the Black rational body threatens the logic of the system, the paradox must be negated. For the black person who believes and trusts in the force of rational argument, the encounter with epistemic racism is traumatic. She or he is led either to choose irrationality as a means to claim her or his humanity, to abandon herself or himself purely in politics or material change, or to examine the contradictions and unsurpassable limits in the hegemonic concept of reason and propose new formulas. It is precisely such a painstaking process of reflection on the concept of reason and intellectual practice that characterizes much of Fanon and James’s work. And this is the way in which I will approach them here. I will examine Fanon and James’s critique of hegemonic rationality and their alternative conception of reason and intellectual activity.

Because they both believe that reason is dialogical and that it has a practical-theoretical *telos* of human liberation, the problem of reason is inherently tied for Fanon and James to the question of intellectual practice. This means that, very much against the grain of the forms of rationality that they both inherit from the West, they see the pursuit of truth as connected to the pursuit of goodness and goodness in large part as decolonization. The theoretical, the ethical, and the political are thus strongly related

in their conceptions of reason and intellectual activity. This reintegration characterizes much of the intellectual labor of Africana radical intellectuals. My purpose in this essay is to spell out Fanon and James's contribution to the critique of the hegemonic idea of rationality and their formulation of a conception of reason that is intimately linked with the ethical and the political. My principal argument is that Fanon and James's critique of hegemonic rationality and their re-integration of the ethical, the political, and the theoretical is both a response to the internal contradictions of modernity (which has tended to disassociate these spheres or faculties), and an attempt to overcome its unsurpassable limits as they are made evident in the historical experience of Afro-Diasporic subjects, particularly, but not uniquely, in the Caribbean. This means that instead of approaching Fanon and James's work through the lenses of the disciplines of history, sociology, or literature (or any given discipline), I approach them as providing a form of meta-critical reflection on modernity, its internal contradictions, and limits. When looked at through those lenses their work appears to respond critically to the modern enlightened project of formulating the conditions of possibility for practical and theoretical reason (Kant) by bringing theory and praxis—the true, the good, and the politically necessary—together in the investigation of the conditions of possibility for decolonization. What we have then in front of us is nothing less than basic components for a critique of (de)colonial reason, which arguably provides a necessary conceptual framework for the formulation of ways of doing theory, critique, and praxis with a de-colonial orientation. They sustain and advance the unfinished project of decolonization, which comprises the emancipation from racism, slavery, and the coloniality of power in all their forms.

Frantz Fanon

Ah, yes, as you can see, by calling on humanity, on the belief in dignity, on love, on charity, it would be easy to prove, or to win the admission, that the black is the equal of the white. But my

purpose is quite different: What I want to do is help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment. (Fanon 1968:30)

Fanon's analyses of the colonial condition constantly bring up the idea of how Enlightened rationality acquires particular pathological and contradictory characters in the colonial context. Humanistic discourses about the equality of human beings become a putative evasion of the problem of colonization and the challenge of liberation. Such demonstrations of love and solidarity with humanity subsist alongside denials of self-determination and self-creation for colonized peoples. Discourses about humanity are complicit with structures of power that deny the humanity of the colonized. Such discourses make it appear as if issues such as racism were problems concerning a few irrational individuals and not the colonial condition as a whole (Fanon 1988:39). For Fanon, colonialism involves the *dehumanization* of one group of people through the devaluation of their customs and the denial of mechanisms of self-expression. Fanon also questions the basis of a humanist discourse that does not attend to such issues and that thus slips through the surface of racism and dehumanization. He wonders how humanism can proceed in an inhuman context, or else, how a humanist discourse about non-humans can proceed. Such discourses become monologues by virtue of a monopolizing notion of humanity that gives to the colonizer's values all ontological weight. There is no confusion about what Man is, since the colonizer already knows what is to be human, and since the colonial condition renders impossible for the colonized to assert their own view of the matter.

In the colonial condition reason is proffered from a standpoint of highness. For this reason even what may be taken as objectively valid is likely to produce a series of pathological reactions that render rationality ineffective. Fanon comments in several places about how objectivity is rendered ineffective in the colonial context. *A Dying Colonialism* is perhaps the most distinctive text in this regard. Here Fanon observes how the colonized systematically

reject any value or practice of the colonizers without any particular consideration of the 'objective' validity or usefulness of what is introduced. Fanon explains,

Behind these psychological reactions, beneath this immediate and almost unanimous response, we again see the overall attitude of rejection of the values of the occupier, *even if these values objectively be worth choosing*. It is because they fail to grasp this intellectual reality, this characteristic feature (the famous sensitivity of the colonized), that the colonizers rage at always 'doing them good in spite of themselves.' Colonialism wants everything to come from it. But the dominant psychological feature of the colonized is to withdraw before any invitation of the conquerors. (1965:62-63, italics mine)

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon brings up a similar point:

When the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife. The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the way of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him. (1991:43)

The point in these passages is that monological violent colonial rationality cannot expect to reason with those whom it oppresses and silences, no matter how praiseworthy, advantageous, and close to 'objective validation' its ideals might be. As Fanon well puts it, "[t]he truth objectively expressed is constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial condition" (1965:128). In this context, objectivity cannot be but an approximation to truth that awaits for inter-subjective confirmation. And Fanon's point is precisely that such confirmation is not rendered possible by the colonial condition. Reason itself, Fanon would argue, is violated when the humanity of the colonized or sub-other is denied. The universality of reason can only be grounded on the mutual recognition of human beings and not on the one-sided projection of the interests and views of a limited group of humanity. This means that the prospects of confirming universal validity cannot be fulfilled if the racialized

subject does not first become a human being who is free to be her and his own self and thus acquire the necessary capabilities to affirm or deny a particular claim. Fanon is emphatic in asserting that the colonial condition renders reason irrational, which means that coloniality and not only instrumentality is a fundamental part of the pathology of modern rationality. To appeal to anything that does not take the problem of the restoration of the humanity of the colonized and thus the cessation of the colonial condition is deeply misguided. That is why appeals to the rights of Man cannot be but manifestations of bad faith (Gordon 1995a; Gordon 1995b).

The chief problem to be attended to for Fanon is the problem of restoration. And the task of restoration cannot rely on abstract concepts that dissolve urgent ethico-political imperatives in detached abstract considerations. This position is made very clear when Fanon states in *Black Skin*: “In the absolute, the black is no more to be loved than the Czech, and truly what is to be done is to set man free” (9). There is a contrast here between a mystifying appreciation of reality from an ‘absolute’ philosophical perspective, and an ethico-political approach that is responsive and responsible in the face of the real condition of concrete human beings in history. This is the basis of the differentiation between the question “what is?” and “what is to be done?” Responsible action that is attentive to the condemned of the earth becomes the point of departure of Fanon’s theorizing and his conception of rationality. The rationality of absoluteness is counterpoised by an intersubjective conception of reason with ethico-political implications and demands. What is at stake here is a radical transformation of the idea of philosophy: from philosophy as the love of wisdom to philosophy as the wisdom of love (Lévinas 1998; Maldonado-Torres forthcoming).

For Fanon, the restoration of reason can only proceed from the restoration of humanity. The “major basic problem” for him is “that of restoring man to his proper place” (Fanon 1968:88). We should be aware that when Fanon refers to the restoration of *Man*

he does not think so much of a pristine metaphysical condition as to structural changes in society that enable human beings to be self-determined and free. Fanon is clear in making this materialistic qualification: "There will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places (Fanon 1968:12). Only a change in social organization can bring about liberation and restoration.

An important point for Fanon is that social changes would have to be brought about by the colonized themselves. This is one of the pivotal ideas of Fanon's work and efforts:

Ah, yes, as you can see, by calling on humanity, on the belief in dignity, on love, on charity, it would be easy to prove, or to win the admission, that the black is the equal of the white. But my purpose is quite different: What I want to do is help the black man to *free himself* of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment. (1968:30, italics mine)

Fanon aims to break with the patterns that have made the Black assimilate or merely react to the colonizer's standards of value by allowing them to reach a level in which they can truly act. We can understand Fanon's concept of sociogeny in this direction. With sociogeny Fanon aims at making explicit the connection between the subjective and the objective, in this case, between the inferiority complexes of Black and colonized peoples on the one hand, and the particularly oppressive structure of colonial society on the other. In addition, sociogeny also includes the idea that "society, unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure" (Fanon 1968:11). Fanon hopes that the revelation of the connection between the subjective and the objective will make the Black aware that the only alternative for liberation resides in acting towards social change. Individual liberation cannot proceed without social liberation. The alleviation of the psychological conditions of the colonized can only be attained by

the end of colonialism. Fanon is emphatic on this:

As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become *conscious* of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure.... In other words, the black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, *turn white or disappear*; but he should be able to take cognizance of a possibility of existence.... My objective will not be that of dissuading him from it by advising him to “keep his place”; on the contrary, my objective, once his motivations have been brought to consciousness, will be to put him in a position to *choose* action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of conflict—that is, toward the social structures. (1968:100)

And as Fanon clarifies later in *Black Skin*: “I will tell him, ‘the environment, society are responsible for your delusion.’ Once that has been said, the rest will follow of itself, and what that is we know. The end of the world (1968:216).

In Fanon’s work sociogeny becomes more than simply a science of Man. It becomes a science *for* humanity. Analysis is correlative here to restoration. Sociogeny is a kind of pedagogy, the role of which is not to “educate” in the traditional way, but to enable Blacks to liberate themselves by acting against the structures that oppress them and deny their ontological weight (Fanon 1968:35).¹ By analyzing the lived-experience of the Black, by revealing the structures that militate against the recognition of her and his humanity, and by making clear that the natural aspect of such structures is only apparent, Fanon attempts to put the Black in a position to *choose* (Gordon 1995b). The role of the analyst resides first and foremost in enabling the Black to reach this point and not so much in making any particular substantive proposal concerning the project of liberation. The analyst, in a sense, works like a catalytic formula whose function resides in enabling the possibility of proper agency. As Fanon puts it: “To educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who having taken thought, prepares to act (1968:222). And

as he reminds us, “What is important is not to educate [Blacks], but to teach the Negro not to be slave of their archetypes” (Fanon 1968:35). Fanon becomes then a kind of pedagogue or Socratic teacher of sorts—a midwife of decolonial agency—who aims to facilitate the formation of subjectivity, self-reflection, and the praxis of liberation. And it is precisely in enabling the sub-other to take a position in which he or she can recognize and do things for himself or herself—that is, to act—that the teaching consists. Everything is done so as to refer to and making everything rest on the agency of human beings. It is in this context that we can understand the significance of Fanon’s guiding questions in *Black Skin*, “What does a man want?, What does the black man want?” (1968:8). Faithful with his intentions Fanon only responds to these questions in a tautological form, that is, without adding any substantive content beyond the presuppositions of the question. His response is that the Black man wants to be a human being (1968:113), which has certain implications: “The Martinican is a French-man, he wants to remain part of the French Union, he asks only one thing, he wants the idiots and the exploiters to give him the chance to live like a human being” (1968:202). The task is to end up with inhumanity and to restore humanity. In this light Fanon’s statements in the conclusion of *Black Skin* become clear.

I, the man of color, want only this:

That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be. (1968:231)

And as he puts it elsewhere,

I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: That of demanding human behavior from the other.

One duty alone: That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices. (1968:229)

Fanon finds himself wanting what he as a human *can* want and has the right to ask for, a truly human social structure, one that permits humans to be self-determined and to express themselves according to their own choices in relation to the will of others. This is a context that contains a free cultural space in which humans are able to manifest the complexities of their identities and forms of being.² This is also a context in which mutual recognition is possible and in which reason, in its intersubjective character, finds an adequate locus.

For Fanon the possibility of substantive change in colonial societies depends on the action of the colonized subjects themselves. It is important to note that Fanon maintained this thesis, and thus what I have called his Socratic pedagogic position, even and perhaps especially in the midst of what he saw as a period of strong assimilation on the part of the colonized. The apparent absence of a historical subject of change did not alter his fundamental belief in that only the condemned can produce radical change. The intellectual, therefore, is never called to withdraw from the public arena or abandon her and his direct contact with the people, but rather to constantly remind the condemned that everything depends on them. And this is a task that Fanon never abandons. The same idea occupied a central place in the context of his examination of the Algerian struggle for liberation:

To hold a responsible position in an underdeveloped country is to know that in the end everything depends on the education of the masses, on the raising of the level of thought, and on what we are too quick to call "political teaching." In fact, we often believe with criminal superficiality that to educate the masses politically is to deliver a long political harangue from time to time.... Now, political education means opening their minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence; as Césaire said, it is "to invent souls." To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward

it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. (Fanon 1991:197)

The revolutionary endeavor and the formation of a new nation must be centered on the action of the *damnés* (condemned). Fanon is emphatic on this: "To educate the masses politically is to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of each of its citizens" (1991:200). Fanon is clear that in order for the people to exercise their will and to sustain the nation by themselves the political structure has to undergo drastic changes. He therefore opposed the forms of colonial organization and their reduplications in the programs of strict nationalistic visions, and argued for a radical decentralization in the social and political sphere (1991:197-198). A transformation in the structure of society is necessary. Fanon urged the leadership to take this direction and to "avoid regression" by taking a step "from national consciousness to political and social consciousness" (1991:203). It is in this way that Fanon comes to define his own kind of humanism:

But if nationalism is not made explicit, if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into a humanism, it leads up a blind alley.... It is only when men and women are included on a vast scale in enlightened and fruitful work that form and body are given to that consciousness. Then the flag and the palace where sits the government cease to be the symbols of the nation. The nation deserts these brightly lit, empty shells and takes shelter in the country, where it is given life and dynamic power. The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women. (1991:204)

Humanism and true enlightenment, Fanon argues, do not reside in the abstract recognition of the common humanity of the people, or in the celebration of the highest artistic and cultural

achievements of civilization; humanism, rather, resides in “a consciousness of social and political needs,” and in the effort to create a social structure that facilitates the location of power in the *wretched* or condemned. The new humanism called forth by Fanon refers to the emergence and sustenance of a popular consciousness and a popular will. The social structure must be designed so as to make the people the ultimate ground of validation and support.

We have seen that Fanon works with a concept of rationality that is intersubjective in character. What is central to reason is a liberation praxis that allows non-people or the condemned to overcome their situation of subjugation and the creation of a public social space that foments interaction among all the different sectors in the social body. It is one of Fanon’s most illuminating points that ideas of freedom, equality, and fraternity can only emerge as a result of this transformation in social relations and individual perceptions. For instance, Fanon argues that equality between sexes does not enter in the mind of the colonized through the proclamation of freedom and equality held in congresses during the colonial period. It is only when the patterns of violence and imposition perpetrated by the colonizer are broken by the self-activity and organization of the colonized, particularly by women themselves, that these ideals come to emerge and be practiced.³ It is in the very dynamics of free action by concrete human beings that freedom comes to shape consciousness and culture. This is exactly what happens during the revolutionary period. The allusions to abstract conceptions of freedom by the colonizer can be contrasted with the concrete freedom that emerges in the social context of the colonized in the revolution. Fanon’s argument suggests that allusions to abstract freedom may be revolutionary when opposed to theological conceptions of the subject, but they fail to respond to the problems faced by populations who are positioned in a sub-human level. In respect to the fight against modern colonization, racism, and the coloniality of power, abstract universals appear as inefficient and despicable as theocratic principles. They

help to delay transformation and to make certain problems invisible, but not necessarily inexistent. It is from here that for Fanon the struggle of decolonization necessitates the articulation of alternative ideas of reason and freedom.

Fanon demonstrates that reason and freedom are related in a particularly concrete way. The self-determination of the condemned is the condition of possibility for the emergence and practice of the highest ideals of reason. And since reason and freedom are the simultaneous result of the self-determination of the condemned, it is clear that the intellectual's activity should be defined first and foremost by the kind of "political education" that Fanon endorses. The intellectual is not called so much to enlighten people by proffering particular opinions and ideals, but to work in favor of the creation of a reality in which the colonized may come to occupy a position where they are able to play a foundational role. This foundationalism is a kind of anti-foundational foundationalism since the condemned, as human beings, are fundamentally an *empty* fundament, that is, the basis for self-understanding as well as the formation of their own representation proceeds through difference and can never become a fixed point or foundation in the usual sense. From here Fanon's insistence that the people be oriented by the future, by a fundamental openness that would impede the ossification of the structures under which power resides. The institutions themselves and the whole system must rest on the will of the *damnés* in their effort to overcome damnation.

Fanon's conception of leadership and intellectual work, along with the idea of centering power on the activity of the people (with constant reference to the *damnés*), remain central to all his works, although they are expressed differently. Scholars tend to contrast *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* in relation to Fanon's conception of the means towards liberation. It is said that while in *Black Skin* Fanon proposes persuasion as a means of liberation, he became persuaded later on about the need of violence as the one effective means of liberation (Bulhan 1985). I do not

think that this explanation is adequate. The role of persuasion and analysis in *Black Skin* does not rule out the necessity of a violent confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized. The “teaching” of sociogenic analysis is designed to enable the Black to *decide* and to *act* against the oppressive structures that militate against her or his being. Indeed, in *Black Skin* Fanon suggests that proper actionality can only come about in a context of struggle (1968:221-2). It is possible to say that what he does in *Black Skin* is to work so as to make it possible for such struggle to come about by the very initiative of the Black. The basic differences between Fanon’s views on leadership and the intellectual in his two studies mainly lie on the differences between the contexts which are analyzed in each case. In *Black Skin* we find Fanon studying a colonial society that suffers the imposition of colonial power and the tremendous efforts to render invisible the humanity, identity, and cultural realities of the Black. In *The Wretched*, on the other hand, we have a society in the midst of revolutionary activity now concerned with the establishment of a new nation. The recommendations that Fanon offers in the two texts are consistent with the idea that power must be founded on the agency of the damned as they struggle to become a people. This is also basis of Fanon’s new humanism and his concept of reason—linked as it is with the ethical and the political. Fanon, as a good pedagogue, recognizes the difference in context and uses different strategies to maintain one and the same basic point.

Now I want to point out two difficulties that I find in Fanon’s analysis. They concern precisely the contrast between the two contexts that I have just mentioned. For they are not only contexts studied by Fanon, but also represent determinate points in a particular Fanonian typology. I refer to his distinction between assimilation, reaction, and proper actionality. *Black Skin* primarily explores contexts of assimilation and reaction, while *The Wretched of the Earth* focuses on revolutionary struggle as the privileged expression of the action of previously assimilated and reactive individuals. Of course, there are also patterns of assimilation

and reaction in *The Wretched*, the central perhaps being related to the tendencies of the native bourgeoisie and some intellectuals towards a construction of the nation in continuity with the structure of power in previous colonial countries. There are also descriptions of actionality in *Black Skin*—the text describes a path through hell that culminates in the appearance of the analyst qua critical social thinker, who would later in texts such as *A Dying Colonialism* and *Wretched of the Earth* become a revolutionary. The first problem that I see in Fanon's analyzes is that his focus on assimilation does not enable him to observe carefully the ways in which the colonized resisted and struggled with the colonial imposition. For Fanon, colonization is a systematic project of domination pursued by a whole set of institutions that have as their prime goal the incorporation of the native by the disintegration of any traces of her own modes of expression, culture, and values (1988:31). Colonialism has a tremendous power of submission for him. Fanon believes, as Neil Lazarus has perceptively pointed out, that colonialism is "utterly destructive of precolonial culture" (1999:85). The idea here is not that Fanon argues that there were no remnants of colonial culture at all during the colonial period, or much less that he held the native's culture in contempt. The point is rather that for him the violence of the colonial situation altered every mode of conduct of the colonized to the point of making his culture obey the logic of colonization. As Lazarus puts it, "the culture of the colonized is for [Fanon] a starkly colonial projection, bespeaking a colonial logic that, from the standpoint of the colonized themselves, cannot be redeemed except through the destruction of colonialism itself" (1999:86). Fanon's insight into the pathological forms adopted by the psychological life and cultural forms of the colonized are indeed of great value. But a recognition of this tragic objective reality of the colonized cannot obviate the many attempts and ways of dealing with the colonial imposition in a way that keeps the colonized culture and systems of identification alive (through mutation, reconstitution, etc.). Fanon's point cannot be lost from perspective, though, since we

should avoid any idealization of the condition and status of a group of human beings who are capable of struggling in such a violent context. But at the same time neither can we lose from our perspective the particular ways in which they are able to do so. There are two reasons for this, first because this kind of struggle is linked to the everyday struggle of individuals in modern societies, and second, because knowledge of it is indispensable for formulating in more precise ways how the pedagogue, the political educator, and the intellectual are to proceed in the task of relating to the people in order to maintain the notion that it is on them and only on them that political power should rest.

Similar problems to those confronted by Fanon's alignment of colonialism with assimilation appear in relation to his notion of revolution and actionality. What becomes problematic here is that Fanon's representation of the participation of the masses in the revolutionary struggle as the pristine manifestation of actionality and freedom make him unaware of the real aspirations of the people and of the proper dynamics of the involvement of the masses in the struggle. This point also has been sharply put by Lazarus: "But even in his representations of the Algerian peasantry as a revolutionary force, there is no sustained consideration of the ways in which the peasant's views *fail* to match those of the FLN leadership or aim at *different ends*, or reflect *another social logic*" (1999:80). Lazarus argues that Fanon 'overreads' "anticolonial militancy to construct it as the objective correlative of a revolutionary philosophy" (97). Elsewhere, Lazarus makes a similar point in reference to what he calls "Fanon's revolutionary optimism" in the context of the "setbacks and defeats" of the postcolonial era, and to the role of the masses after the revolution (1990:30). The point made here is that it is not altogether clear that the participation of people in the revolution necessarily leads to the emergence of a new state of consciousness in which freedom and self-determination become their principal motivation. Neither it is altogether clear that they enter the revolutionary process with those interests in mind, or that they will be so inspired

once they are integrated into the revolutionary process. Lazarus repeats this point in relation to the fragmentation of the national liberation forces after independence:

The most plausible explanation for the fragmentation of the national liberation forces after independence remains invisible to Fanon: namely, that far from “splintering” after independence, these forces had only seemed to be united before. Fanon speaks adamantly of the “awakening” of “the people,” of their “intelligence and the onward progress of their consciousness.” One is led increasingly to the conclusion that what is at issue here is either an intellectualistic romanticization of “the people” as spontaneously revolutionary or, more likely, a messianic misreading of their political bearing during the anticolonial struggle.... In taking up arms against the French, in other words, the Algerian peasants were fighting a traditionalist fight to reestablish a way of life that colonialism had decimated. In spite of the proselytizing work of the revolutionaries like Fanon, the peasants were not aiming their actions at the “Algeria of tomorrow,” but seeking, rather, to restore that of yesterday. (1990:32)

The recognition of this issue has the immediate consequence of making clear that the labor of the intellectual in contact with the people is more arduous and ambivalent than what Fanon was probably able to recognize or concede. That the people do not seem to be so susceptible to take the positionality and attitude that Fanon attributed to them leads to the idea that the labor of “political education” is more difficult than he thought. But Fanon was not completely unaware of this either—and we cannot by any means forget that apparent oversimplifications may be the result of strategic decisions by the revolutionary intellectual in the midst of an all too real and violent war. Fanon writes of the necessity to “shake the people” (1991:22), and also recognizes that “[t]he awakening of the whole people will not come about all at once” (1991:193). That the intellectual should take this role and that everything must be done to make power rest on the people are ideas that are sufficiently substantiated by Fanon’s theorizing. But

still it seems that the typology that interprets social reality in the terms of assimilation, reaction, and action is not altogether successful in providing an adequate analysis of the embodiment of resistance and the consciousness of freedom in the condemned. Without this, it is not clear how the intellectual should proceed, and how she or he is going to fulfill her or his Socratic role of “awakening” the people. The intellectual needs a more precise idea of how to locate the sources of resistance and the manifestations of freedom by the condemned of the earth. We need thus an analysis that is able to capture with more sobriety the “social logic” of the *masses* and one also that spells out a conception of the intellectual according to the resulted vision. It is precisely on these points that the work of C.L.R. James becomes crucial.

C.L.R. James

We have seen that Fanon’s intellectual endeavor in *Black Skin, White Masks* opens up and is oriented by the question of desire: “What does a man want?” (1968:8). I have argued that this question leads Fanon to articulate a special kind of pedagogical strategy directed by the idea of the promotion of self-determination. Fanon’s answer to this question draws on a phenomenological existential analysis of the lived experience of the Black in the context of colonialism, and is thus oriented by a particular interest in the problems of mutual recognition (love and understanding) and human agency. The human being, argues Fanon, wants to be a human being, which for him means to be actional, to have the necessary resources for self-expression and self-determination, and to give to and receive from others with generosity. I have argued that this perspective on the problem of colonialism gives priority to the problem of the restoration of humanity, that it advances a new conception of rationality, and that it promotes a particular conception of the role of the intellectual and political leadership. The work of C.L.R. James also offers an account which gives a suitable expression of these same points, while at the same time evades the difficulties aroused by the Fanonian typology of

assimilation, reaction, and actionality in the study of culture and in the explanation of popular dynamics. At the same time, as we will see, James's work faces limits that are detectable and can be addressed by a Fanonian intervention.

"What do the people want?" (James 1993a:272). This is the Jamesian version of the Fanonian concern with desire formulated in the questions "What does man want?" and "What does the black man want?" We perceive here the same intention to direct the intellectual's work around the basic idea that radical social change can only come through the people's own activity. But there are two fundamental differences between the Fanonian and the Jamesian question. First, there is a difference between the reference to "man" (l'homme) in Fanon's question, and the reference to "the people" in James's formulation. The former points to philosophical conceptions of the human and the latter to sociological and political ideas about nations or communities. This difference in meaning translates into differences of approach: Fanon's *Black Skin* has a distinct philosophical tone, while James's writings for the most part acquire the form of historical, cultural, and socio-political analyzes. The difference must not be exaggerated since they both pursue a number of philosophical and socio-political questions in different texts. Fanon's philosophical anthropology is the foundation of what he refers to as a "sociogenic" analysis of human reality, while James's cultural and socio-political analyses rely in part on a particular understanding of the "dialectic." The second difference is more important. Fanon's question "What does a man want?" is immediately followed by another question "What does the black man want?" (1968:8). For Fanon, the question of black humanity in particular appears as a necessary complement to the question about humanity in general and vice versa. As Fanon put it, "In the absolute, the black is no more to be loved than the Czech, and truly what is to be done is to set man free" (1968:9). The liberation of humanity in general requires dealing with the specificities of black humanity in particular; and the liberation of black humanity in particular can only be achieved

by claiming what belongs to humanity in general. The focus on blackness is justified because it is the site of a contradiction and veritable limit: the Black is a human being who is not considered to be a human being. In Fanon's terms, "At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man" (1968:8). The thesis of the non-humanity of the Black introduces Fanon into unknown territory. He has to design a discourse to be able to talk about the production of non-humanity and its lived consequences. The denial of humanity introduces the ethical, political, and epistemological question of liberation, which is the goal of Fanon's writing. Liberation is not in opposition to reflection on the absolute. It is rather the true expression of a philosophical reflection on universality, when there is the willingness to eliminate its contradictions and overcome the limits of excessively abstract categories. *Black Skin* can be thus read as a reflection on the human through its patent contradictions. The second question (what does a black man want?) is thus a necessary complement of the first one (what does a man want?). The second question also leads Fanon to uncover peculiar challenges confronted by the Black, and more generally by what Fanon would later call the *condemned of the earth*, which can be easily lost from view when focusing on more general terms such as the human or the people. This basic difference between the Fanonian and the Jamesian questions leads to differences in content and approach that I am going to discuss later. We will see that while some of James's ideas help to overcome some of the limits in Fanon's theorizing, the opposite is also true. But it is important to focus on the similarities first.

In *Black Skin* the question about the desire of the Black takes the form of an insight into the very conception of humanity through the study of the pathologies of affect and self-identification brought about by the colonial context. The study of such pathologies leads Fanon to affirm that the Black in colonial societies *is not a man* (1968:8), and then his argument turns to clarify that what the Black wants is precisely to be a human being. The

Black does not ask anything else than that which the colonial context purports to be providing, that is, a human context. But the problem is that, for the colonizers, humanity is defined in a way that requires assimilation to white Western values and forms of expression. The idea of humanity takes then a double prescriptive character, first, in relation to Blacks who are submitted to the process of assimilation and who begin to reproduce the very order that oppresses them, and second, in relation to the colonial context itself which violently takes away that which it praises itself for providing. In both cases we are dealing with some kind of immanent criticism: on the one hand the Black in the colonial society *is not a man* (that is, this human being in fact *is not being human*), and on the other the colonizers deny with one hand, what they claim to offer with the other. *Black Skin* centers its argument on the idea that the Black does not want or aim to be a “sho’ good eatin” (1968:112), or a being subservient to tradition and the ancestors. In contrast the Black man *wants* to be a human being, which means that the alleviation of the Black’s pathological conditions are found in recovering this humanity. *Black Skin* reveals a series of phenomena expressed by the Black’s desire to be a human being: from the pathologies of self-identification, Negritude, and the intellectual’s references to the intellect and the universality of the Negro, to the reclamation of freedom and the attainment of a perspective that is oriented by the future. It is this final position that Fanon aims to clarify and to present as the most appropriate path towards the full restoration of humanity and the question of a human context.

As with Fanon, I would argue that for James the answer to the question “what do the people want” takes a prescriptive character and serves as the basis to submit an immanent critique of traditional political forms of organization. But for James the question and the alleged normative nature of the answer have a different character. When he asks “what do the people want?” he asks in fact what do they want, demand, and desire as a particularly modern people. James believes that the examination of modern societies

reveals the emergence of the self-consciousness and spontaneity of peoples who are increasingly directed by ideas and values that take freedom, equality, and individuality at their center. James's investment in the idea of connections between modernity and the emergence of a new kind of people is perhaps the main point of differentiation between his and Fanon's theoretical orientation. We shall discuss this aspect of James's argumentation more carefully in order to uncover his particular vision of reason, and his proposed model for the role of the intellectual.

For James, "modernity" refers to the life and social organization under particularly modern systems of production. And with modern systems of production James refers to the consequences of the integration of technology in a productive sphere which is at the same time increasingly dependent on the work of the masses. This connection between production, the masses, and technology is crucial for James's argumentation. What is central for him is that modern systems of production are basic instruments of modernization. They simultaneously exploit the subject and promote modern attitudes, desires, needs, and ideas about happiness and freedom. When James asks "what do the people want?" he aims precisely at determining these desires, attitudes, and particular needs of modern peoples. He believes that it is there that we would find a reservoir of revolutionary force aimed at maintaining freedom and at promoting the good life.

For James it is necessary to recognize that modern colonialism also produces modern colonial subjects by virtue of a particularly modern industry and technology:

The history of the West Indies is governed by two factors, the sugar plantation and Negro slavery.... The sugar plantation has been the most civilising as well as the most demoralizing influence in West Indian development. When three centuries ago the slaves came to the West Indies, they entered directly into the large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation, which was a modern system. It further required that the slaves live together in a social relation far closer than any proletariat of the time. The cane when reaped had to be rapidly transported to what

was factory production. The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloth the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported. The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life. That is their history—as far as I have been able to discover, a unique history. (1992b:296-297)

A modern life emerges out of a particularly modern condition. According to James, the transformation of society in the context of the new means of communication, the integration of technology in the working sphere, and the access to technology and other goods by the people, awakens in them a sense and desire for equality, liberty, and the expression of their spontaneity and individual personality never seen before in history. James argues that what the people now demand and desire is what the philosophers have tried to achieve only in abstract thought: the harmony of a society conflicted by class struggles.

From Plato to Hegel, European philosophers were always struggling to make a total harmonious unity of societies riddled by class struggles. They were attempting the impossible, organizing in the mind what could only be organized in society.... But the time for that is past. The development of science and industry has brought men face to face with the need to make reasonable their daily existence, not to seek in philosophical systems for the harmony that eludes them. Over a 100 years ago in one of his greatest passages, Marx saw that religious and philosophical systems had had their day, and men *would soon face the realities of social life as phenomena created by human beings*, to be organized by human beings in concrete life, and not in the escapism of abstract thought or the mystic symbolism of religious ceremonial. This intellectual clarification had been achieved not by intellectuals but by bourgeois society itself. (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:65-66)

We should also consider the following,

Thus today the average advanced worker accepts as legitimate certain human and social values which make him, as a human being, infinitely superior to these men of past ages, infinitely

superior in intellect, learning, and nobility of character. His values, instinctively and weakly as he holds some of them, are the only values that count today.... The slow accumulation, century by century of the thoughts of the great philosophers, which they could only hold often as ideals, are now the common property, *as a matter of everyday life*, of millions upon millions of ordinary people. The tremendous ferment in India, China, and Africa shows that, owing to the progress of technology (steamship, plane and radio), the poverty-stricken, starving backward millions of Oriental peasants are demanding these things for themselves.... *"Idealism" is being forced into material form in the lives of the people.* There was never a more highly civilized age than ours—never were the basic ideals of a good full life so desperately desired by so many people. (James 1992c:149)

Two things are worth noting in these passages. First, and this has to be emphasized, that for James modernity provides a context which enables the development of a consciousness and a mode of life for which self-determination and freedom are central. The bourgeois epoch is distinguished from the former ones in the "constant revolutions of production, the uninterrupted disturbance of social conditions," etc. (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:66). In these conditions the standpoint of tradition and the material (though not merely economic) bases of society are affected in such a way that human beings are compelled "*to face the sober realities of life as phenomena created by them.*" That is, the dislocation of social reality by the new operating forces make human beings more aware of the connections between humans and social structures. In this position both the naturalization of the life-world and the supposedly ultimate anonymous character of power come to be questioned by the spontaneous activity of a people who increasingly claim for themselves the virtue of founding political power. It would seem that for James, to put this in Fanonian terms, modern people live in a context which propels or promotes actionality. At least he would argue that they spontaneously have some insight into the relation between society and human beings, which, as we observed above, is one of the critical

points of Fanon's definition and use of sociogeny. It is clear then why James is not particularly inclined to analyze colonial reality from the perspective of assimilation. For James, modern colonial reality restricts but also enables; it enslaves but also creates the possibility of mass revolt. James is thus attentive to the ways in which the imposed culture is reshaped and appropriated by the native in line with his or her particular modern consciousness and mode of life. James carefully looks at sites of transformation and resistance knowing that they do not necessarily have to express or foment the explicit public political character that a revolutionary may want to find—or at least, in the form that they would look for it. James's look extends thus from the most public to the most intimate dimensions of society and the individual, from the revolution of San Domingo, the social dynamics that occurred around the game of cricket, to his wonderings in poetry, soap opera, and the individual initiatives of people (James 1989; 1992c; James 1993b). For James, every sphere of life becomes a field of political struggle and action: "Politics today comprises *all* aspects of life, and more than ever, wages, conditions of labor, employment, etc., and the political party must deal with these elemental necessities primarily or promise to deal with them" (1993a:141). The dichotomies between the public and the private break as the field of political activity and resistance is extended to the most intimate spheres of existence.

It is necessary to point out that the break between the private and the public is in some sense also achieved by Fanon in his notion of sociogeny. In it the subjective and the objective are related in such a way that the colonized is made conscious that the transformation of her or his self cannot follow but from the transformation of the social structure. But this correlation between subjective and social liberation falls short of expressing the complex ways in which a subjective expression may be taken as a political form that transforms, alters, and/or opposes the established order of the day. Fanon's exploration of the subjective tends to be dominated by a series of dichotomies: between assimilation, colonialism,

and irrationality on the one hand, and actionality, revolution, and rationality on the other. On the contrary, James's distinctive view of modernity and his idea about the extension of the political field of struggle in modern societies is in line with an interest in the *middle* spaces: between colonialism and revolution, between assimilation and existential actionality, and between irrationality and reason. Modern social reality and subjective existence shows for James a curious mixture of attitudes, social expressions, and political and economical policies. The rational and the irrational survive in the same modern reality. And the task becomes for James, in this very much like for Fanon, to articulate a view that would trace the conflict between the rational and the irrational, and that locates rationality on the founding political powers of the people.

The second point that I wish to address connects with the idea of the contradictory shape of a modern reality that shows both rational and irrational tendencies. This contradiction resides, more precisely, in the explicit contrast between the abstract ideals recognized by Western civilization and their concrete expression in ordinary life, as well as between the needs, desires, and intellectual development of the people and the way in which society, economy, and politics are organized. These two are correlated because, as James puts it, what the people do in their daily practice and in their struggle for freedom is attempt to make the abstract universal concrete, that is, to create a reality in which fundamental notions such as that of the equality of human beings are truly embodied in social structures and practices. As James puts it, "The history of man is his effort to make the abstract universal concrete. He constantly seeks to destroy, to move aside, that is to say, to negate what impedes his movement towards freedom and happiness" (1992a:164). For James, people are the motor of history. Theirs is a history of constant struggle to make the abstract concrete. And for him, it is today, in the contemporary modern reality, that one sees that the extraordinary has reached an ordinary level, that the desire and the recognition of the value

of freedom is lived and desired by the people themselves and not merely by particular enlightened figures. As James puts it, “the intellectual consciousness of society rests with the mass, that and the great heritage of Western civilization” (1992c:150). The Enlightenment has gone into the streets, one may very well say in the spirit of James. Yet, or precisely because of this, society lives in contradiction:

Our age is the most barbarous...precisely because of the civilization, culture, and high aspirations of the great masses of the people. Nothing but the most unlicensed brutality can keep them down. These are not slaves in Imperial Rome or peasants in ancient Assyria. A modern working man,...lives by the ideas of universal secondary education, religious toleration, care of children and the aged, freedom of speech and assembly, mastery of technical processes and self-government in industry, world peace—elevated conceptions which would stun into awed silence the most gifted minds of Western Civilization from Plato to Aristotle to Kant and Hegel. (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:76)

The world witnesses the emergence of a *new society* and a *new people* who are prepared and actually desire to take upon themselves the task of governing and legislating a social structure that promotes freedom and happiness. But the current organization of labor and of society in general militates against this realization. True enlightenment is refrained by the secular and autonomous institutions that emerged out of the Enlightenment itself. This would be James’s own version of the dialectics of the Enlightenment. The recognition of this dialectic stands side by side another conception of the dialectic that makes us think rather of what is known as the unfinished project of the Enlightenment.

We owe the conceptualization of the idea and the defense of the “unfinished project of the Enlightenment” to Jürgen Habermas (1987; 1997), but it is also suggested by Marx. As Stuart Hall points out,

Of course, Marx also understood the one-sided and distorted character of the modernity and type of modern individual

produced by this development—how the forms of bourgeois appropriation destroyed the human possibilities it created. But he did not, on this account refuse it. What he argued was that *only socialism* could complete the revolution of modernity which capitalism had initiated. As Berman puts it, he hoped ‘to heal the wounds of modernity through a fuller and deeper modernity.’ (1996:229)

James’s theoretical work may be interpreted as a further elaboration of this Marxist approach, extending it to the consideration of culture and evading the strictures of a focus on class and the primacy of the economic in traditional Marxism. James conceives the task of emancipation in terms of a completion of the modern project in the sense of the concrete realization of Enlightenment ideals and the satisfaction of the needs and desires of modern peoples in a political and economical system that takes them as the central source of power. The accomplishment of the Enlightenment consists in bringing to completion the process by which freedom, equality, respect, and fraternity come to be embodied in a system founded on the self-determination and expression of the people. I believe that a careful study of James’s essays on Lenin, Nkrumah, and other revolutionary figures would show that his recommendations are generally in agreement with Fanon’s proposals in *The Wretched*, where decentralization and the foundation of power in the people occupies the primal space. For both the construction of an authentic democracy becomes central to their political writings. This is not to say, of course, that there are not important differences between the two as I have already pointed out and as I will further elaborate towards the conclusion.

It must not be thought that James lacks awareness of the oppressing modes of production, politics, and culture in the modern world. He never forgets that “the whole social arrangement of life bears the stamp of...mechanization” (1993a:116).

In city after city, street after street, are the two or three rooms, kitchen and bath, the same breakfast cereal, however disguised, the same ride to work, the work itself, the same evening paper, the same radio commentator, the packaged foods, the

neighborhood movie. However different, they all combine to a deadly uniformity and monotony. (1993a:116).

James recognizes that the modern life-world is mechanically regulated, but he interprets this as a betrayal of modernity. But James is more interested in the dynamics of the contradictions than in the tragic proclamation of an equally tragic end of history. The recognition of the mechanization of life does not make him deny the more positive aspects of the transformations that occur in modernity, particularly the emergence of a new people. He therefore avoids falling into pessimism and the attitude of detachment from the popular “masses” that is sustained by some philosophers and intellectuals in the tradition of Theodor W. Adorno, to name only one of the most known (see Adorno 1978; Lazarus 1992; Therien 2003). For him modern peoples have their own reservoir of knowledge and critical aspirations. Opposition to them sets up the stage for the ambiguities of modernity:

Upon a people bursting with energy, untroubled by feudal remains or a feudal past, soaked to the marrow in a tradition of individual freedom, individual security, free association, a tradition which is constantly held before them as the basis of their civilization, upon this people more than all others has been imposed a mechanized way of life at work, mechanized forms of living, a mechanized totality which from morning till night, week after week, day after day, crushed the very individuality which tradition nourishes and the abundance of mass-produced good encourages. The average American citizen is baffled by it, has always been. He cannot grasp a process by which a genuine democracy escapes him. (1993a:116)

In short, James argues that the contradiction between official society and the new society that is emerging may be tragic in some cases but is by no means final or total. The struggle continues and James hopes that the new society will one day emerge thus bringing to reality the promise of the Enlightenment, perhaps in ways that its ideologues never expected. As Alrick Cambridge puts it:

James believed that the ultimate values towards which humanity was striving were freedom and happiness, and he was convinced that they would eventually come about, but only through integration into the social community—socialism: this was the absolute condition, he claimed, that would make it possible for people to realize their dream of a *just society* in which *the good life* would be the norm. (1992:178 n.6)

The ideologues themselves and their particularly rationalistic ideologies will have to stand to the side in this process and let the people take up the lead and finally give concretion to enlightenment's ideas:

[T]he trained elite no longer represents liberation of mankind. Its primary function is to suppress the social community which has developed inside the process of production. The elite must suppress the new social community because this community is today ready to control, order, and reduce to human usefulness the mass of accumulated wealth and knowledge. This antagonistic relation between an administering elite calculating and administering the needs of others, and people in a social community determining their own needs, this new world, our world, is a world which Descartes never knew or guessed at. As an actual liberating philosophy of life, rationalism is dead. (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:68)

In C.L.R. James's writings reason is dislocated and relocated in the spontaneous activity of a people who embody and enact the abstract rational ideals of universality and freedom. James expresses a kind of anti-elitism mixed with an anti-foundationalism that posits the true locus of rationality on the people—similar to what was said of Fanon's proposal. It is this view that informs James's protests against the former soviet leadership, conceptions of the avant-garde party, and which also informs his diagnosis of Toussaint's failure in culminating an effective leadership in the Haitian revolution (1989:283-288).

James, then, endorses leadership that "bases itself upon the instinctively expressed desires of the mass and then acts in accordance" (1993a:270). As he points out elsewhere,

Those who succeed in leading [the masses] do so because they will have learnt to formulate the needs of the people and to be foremost in the struggle for them. But the whole impetus will come from the mass, its concrete actions, its attempt to break the bonds and traditions of centuries. (1993a:275)

James reiterates this point about the necessity to give primacy to the needs and demands of the people in the context of his discussion of U.S. American intellectuals, and of intellectuals generally:

[I]t is the whole thesis of this book [*American Civilization*] that intellectuals as such, as they have expressed themselves in Europe, and as every sign shows they will express themselves in America, have and will have nothing to say to stop the pattern I have described here.... Opposite to this I shall pose as an elemental sociological force the instinctive rebelliousness and creative force of the modern masses. (1993a:226)

And,

So I pose the two: the intellectuals, the men who are the guardians of the traditional ideas and develop new ones; who do not necessarily wield to power but who express in scientific, artistic and political form the ideas which spring from new economic and social developments. And on the other hand, instinctive mass movements such as Jacksonian democracy, 1830-62, the C.I.O., movements which have leaders and sometimes distinguished intellectuals, but which are best exemplified by the formation (to be seen within the period) of the Republican Party which was an example of free association if ever there was one, born exactly no one knows where, springing up out of the ground with not one single national politician or leader of any status having anything to do with it, until *after* it was formed and people saw its power. (1993a:226-227)

Here we find again a conception of leadership and intellectual work not too different from the above discussed notion of Fanonian pedagogy—with an important exception that will be discussed later, marked by James' celebration of Jacksonian democracy and the Republican Party. In both cases the model of

mere representation is rejected and a sense of an organic relation between the intellectual and the people emerges. It would seem that James and Fanon defend the Gramscian idea of the organic intellectual, yet, as Anthony Bogues perceptively notes, such a concept does not fully describe radical political intellectuals like Fanon and James (2003).

The organic intellectual, as proposed and understood by Gramsci, refers primarily to a social function performed by intellectuals (Gramsci 1971). He or she is someone who attempts to articulate and direct the aspirations of the class to which he or she organically belongs. The other category that Gramsci uses to describe the social function of the intellectual is “traditional.” The traditional intellectual is oriented by the imperatives of their particular professions (professor, researcher, writer, etc), which often disguise class interests. While it is clear that figures such as Fanon and James are not “traditional,” it does not mean that they are merely or solely organic. As Bogues notes, the notion of “organic” focuses on a function and not on the modes of operation of an intellectual exercise that has to confront the legacy of racism, colonialism, and false processes of canonization (2003:6). The black radical intellectual may be organic to a group but is also “heretic” in regard to the dominant group and its preferred canon. Another way of saying this is that the black radical intellectual not only contents with class interests, but also with epistemic racism, which changes the horizon of radical intellectual practice by introducing peculiar challenges. Confrontation with the trauma and continuous affirmation of different forms of dehumanization linked to the devaluation of black slaves and colonized populations in modernity demands a form of intellectual activity that is also different from the tasks usually associated with the social critic (Walzer), the exilic theorist (Adorno), and even the postcolonial public intellectual who speaks “truth to power” (Said) (see Bogues 2003). This form of intellectual practice is represented by the heretic for Bogues. The heretic is in an ambivalent relation with hegemonic discourses. The reason

for this is that the heretic is the product of both their indoctrination and their radical exclusion. As such, heretics rely to some extent on hegemonic narratives, but continuously explore both their limits and their internal contradictions while also seeking to rewrite history, achieve some level of representation (under new codes), and formulate new values and epistemic frameworks. One could also add with Fanon that different from those who are usually considered theorists and critics, Bogue's "heretics" form part (either because of their inescapable situation or by affiliation) of the community of the *damnés*, which means that any action or lack thereof, including exile, is predicated on a previous and more fundamental denial of their humanity or ontological weight. The *damnés* find a world with *no exit*, just as if they were condemned. The possibilities of going in exile are nulled or very reduced, as they lack either the means to move or the hope of true hospitality elsewhere. Such is in part the legacy of the constitutive role of the coloniality of power and negrophobia in modernity. In that sense the experience of exile, but also that of being a prisoner or a refugee (Agamben 1998), is different from the experience and the structure of colonial racial damnation. It is from this perception of the world that black heresy emerges.

For James, one of Bogue's heretics, the intellectual occupies an empty space that only exists relationally in connection to the instinctive energies of the people. This idea is exemplified in the characteristic seductive tone of James in his answer to the question as to what radicals should "*do* if they wanted to promote the revolution," to which James responds, "People don't promote the revolution. The revolution takes place because an instinctive mass of the population feels that it can't live as it's been living so it breaks out. And people who are writing and speaking take part in that" (Nielsen 1997:124). The role of the intellectual is not to enlighten people. James makes clear that if education is important it is not because the people are utterly devoid of significant ideas, and because they must be freed and awakened from a systematic manipulation that has made them dull. As mentioned above,

James believes that on the contrary “the intellectual consciousness of society rests with the mass, that and the great heritage of Western civilization” (1992c:150). “Now,” James adds,

anyone who thinks at all must know this and never forget it. More than that—his duty is wherever possible to try and make the workers conscious of it. The more conscious they become, the safer the great values of civilization are. Always, always, always, the task is to develop the consciousness, the independence, the sense of destiny, the sense of responsibility, among the masses of people. Anything else serves the forces of reaction which aim at the destruction of this enormous power which faces them. (1992c:150)

We see here a distinction between elite or professional education and another kind of activity apparently more similar to Fanon’s conception of political education. For both Fanon and James education cannot mean but to work in favor of the people’s own self-determination, making everything so that they take a conscious position of their role as foundational pivots of political power. For Fanon, this is understood in terms of consistent decolonization and the prospect for mutual recognition under a new humanism, while James sees it more in terms of the concretion of the abstract universal in relation to his idea of the people as motors of history. Here the consequence of their respective investments on two different heritages from Hegel are clear: one inspired on the dialectics of human recognition (from Hegel, Kojève, Lacan and Sartre to Fanon), and the other on the dialectics of history (from Hegel, Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky to James). This is not to say that for James the problem of recognition and colonial damnation is not somehow also central to his project,⁴ but only that he does not thematize it around the idea of the ontological invisibility of people to whom their humanity is denied (as Fanon does in *Black Skin*). James rather conceives this issue in relation to the idea that people have already proved to have the capacity to engage in common action, and that nowadays the self-consciousness of the people has reached an unprecedented level. However, his theoretical perspective leads James, for example, to celebrate

Jacksonian democracy and the Republican Party as modern mass movements without elucidating the extent to which such masses presupposed a racist concept of “we the people”—the subject of such republic and democracy. This problem points to another difference between Fanon and James. While Fanon structures his discourse around the concepts of the Black, the colonized, and the condemned, James privileges the concepts of the masses, the worker, and the people. These clusters of concepts lead or sustain different ideas. While Fanon focuses on the limits of modernity and the bad faith of Western civilization, James accentuates the denied potential released by modernity, advocates its full completion, and celebrates the great values of European civilization. In Fanon’s writings one finds the different idea of leaving Europe behind in order to finish what could be rendered as the incomplete project of decolonization (Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar 2005). The completion of this project requires focus not on what the “people” want, but on what the non-people or condemned of the earth desire but cannot attain in the present conditions. Focus on the worker, the mass, and the people, without sufficient attention to the condition of the non-people, one would retort to James critically from a Fanonian perspective, can lead to problematic glorifications of the modern masses or the “people” and to misplaced celebrations of modern Western culture and values. While James’s focus on popular culture and the desires of the modern masses complement Fanon’s typology of revolutionary agency, it is Fanon who makes more clear and patent the horizon of decolonization.

Fanon conceives decolonization as the construction of the conditions of possibility for the *damnés* or condemned to become fully humans or people. The intellectual has a crucial role in that process. Since European modernity, including Marxism, is put into question by Fanon, the intellectual has to engage seriously in the task of building new conceptual edifices. As Fanon puts it, “We must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man” (1991:316). Fanon calls us to “reconsider the question of

cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connections must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanized” (1991:314). The way in which the intellectual contributes to make the colonized conscious that “everything depends on them” (Fanon 1991:197) clearly surpasses the Jamesian task of giving information to the people “about themselves and their own affairs” (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:165). The way in which James’s conception of intellectual work would hold true is if one conceives the intellectuals as being part of the people or the condemned so that giving information about them also involves knowing the history of ideas developed by those who happen to be intellectuals. And such is precisely the image of radical political intellectual work that we find in Fanon himself who was simultaneously a medical doctor, a philosopher, and a revolutionary. These tasks feed each other rather than being divorced. Fanon is not an exception. Radical political intellectuals of color rarely perform a specialized social function, but rather engage at many different levels in the task of liberation (Bogues 2003; Gordon 2000; Henry 2000). This means that informing the *damnés* of their achievements and potentialities should by all means include the history of ideas and the achievements of intellectuals whose work advances the project of emancipation from mental slavery and decolonization.

Although James tends to emphasize a different conception of the intellectual and her or his relation with the “people,” he clearly understood and agreed with the Fanonian vision of intellectual work. In his concluding comment to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, James writes:

I want to end by saying this: the work done by Black intellectuals, *stimulated by the needs of the Black people*, had better be understood by the condemned of the earth whether they’re in Africa, the United States or Europe. Because if the condemned of the earth do not *understand* their pasts and *know* the responsibilities that lie upon them in the future, all on the earth will be condemned. That is the kind of world we live in. (1968:29)

The legacy of Black intellectuals is relevant for the condemned, not only because it is part of their collective history or the history of humankind, but also because it reminds them of their responsibilities. Fanon and James agree that the *damnés* should become responsible historical agents. The question here is whether the elucidation of such responsibilities can be properly articulated through an examination of the people's desires. If one follows Fanon then one must argue that those responsibilities have also to contend with their phobias. And as he made clear in *Black Skin* both modern peoples and the condemned (including Blacks themselves) tend to share a distinct fear of blackness or negrophobia. Without attention to the constitutive phobias of modern subjects the people's desires can only extend the reality of damnation. And this is precisely one of the contributions of Black intellectuals who are "stimulated by the needs of the Black people": an elucidation of the needs of Black folk (to use Du Bois's concept) entails a critique of anti-black racism and the articulation of a new humanism. Thus, it is important for Fanon that the question "what do the people want?," be complemented by the more specific question about what is it that the Black and the condemned want—and the two questions must not be either confused with each other or completely divorced. This idea is central for Fanon's concept of political education. As he puts it in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

It is not only necessary to fight for the liberty of your *people*. You must also teach that people once again, and first learn once again yourself, what is the full stature of a man; and this you must do for as long as the fight lasts. You must go back into history, the history of men *damned* by other men; and you must bring about and render possible the meeting of your people and other men. (1991:293, italics mine)

The liberty of the "people" cannot be achieved without reference to the general meaning of humanity or the universal on the one hand, and the history and present reality of the *damnés* (the concrete reality that embodies the very limit or crisis of modern universals) on the other. The defense of liberty cannot rely solely

on abstract considerations of humanity, on purely self-referential politics of identity, or on the elucidation of the desires of the people. Liberty is accomplished in the interplay of universality, identity or particularity, and the consideration of the history and present reality of the condemned, consistently dehumanized subjects, or sub-others. This is Fanon's approach to the decolonization of modern political concepts and ideas.

James contributes to decolonial political thought by focusing on areas that are difficult to categorize in terms of the distinction between assimilation, reaction, and action with which Fanon works. This typology fits very well within the situations that Fanon encountered and what he wished to investigate: radical assimilation and reactionary behavior among the Black middle class in Martinique, and revolution in Algeria. While James writes about the revolution in Haiti, he spends a considerable amount of time reflecting on the spaces in between Fanon's typology. His studies on sports and popular culture contribute with fundamental elements for the task of political education that both Fanon and James considered so important for liberation. James's studies are testaments to the people and the *damnés* of their own accomplishments through a history of suffering, domination, and struggle. In a similar way his studies of individual figures like Garfield Sobbers, Paul Robeson, and Mighty Sparrow, (all of them ordinary-extraordinary figures) aim to demonstrate how an individual comes to embody a diverse group of social forces that to a great extent manifest something central to the people's own desires and ambitions. By portraying their existence, James also presents to the "people" (but most significantly to the Black and the condemned) the most pristine expressions of their own achievements. James, the intellectual and the activist, writes so that people can see what they themselves have done or are capable of doing. His goal is none other than to maintain people's consciousness of themselves, their achievements, their demands, and their agency. The intellectual has to act as a catalyst for change and empowerment, as well as someone who offers her and his resources for

the creation of institutions whose power and energy reside in the collective (James, Lee, and Chaulieu 1974:163). This point is also fundamental for Fanon who conceived the creation of cultural spaces that would allow the Black to emit her and his own voice and create her and his own representation of herself or himself, the world, and of society in general as indispensable to the process of humanization. And, indeed, this point is fundamental if we are to argue for a conception of intellectual work that cannot satisfy itself with going in exile to the margins of the marginal peoples in society, but that on the contrary must attempt to incessantly asks what is it that the *damnés* want?

Final Remarks

Intellectualism takes for Fanon as well as for James the forms of a pedagogy of liberation. A pedagogy, indeed, but in quite an unusual way. In their conceptions, the pedagogue becomes mainly a facilitator, someone who works in favor of the self-expression of those whose voices have been shattered by the process of colonization and by the constant expansion of an oppressive political and economical system. Detachment from the people signifies a betrayal not only to the people, but to the very idea of freedom and equality that many times inspire these conspirators. All of them, freedom, equality, and reason find their proper locus on the self-determination and self-expression of the people. With the people everything, without the people nothing, everything depends on them, so Fanon and James insistently argue.

Fanon and James trace with much diligence and effort the appearance of a *new humanity*. James saw a new human being and a new society emerging from modernity; Fanon saw one in the midst of the revolution. Their message to post-colonial leaders and intellectuals is clear: decentralize power, integrate the people to the process of political decision, open spaces where people can express themselves, hear them, talk to them, report their achievements, comment on their cultural expressions, and make clear where they stand so that they may *decide* accordingly.⁵

True democracy can only begin by the recognition and application of this. The abstract recognition of the humanity of people has to be concretized in the establishment of a context where people achieve mutual recognition and where they can become the foundational base of a government or nation. This is the basis of post-colonial reason: one in which reflection on the universal (human reality as a whole) is tied with attention to the particular (people or identity) and the liminal (damnation) and where ethics and politics combine to direct the energies of all subjects, including intellectuals, to the task of creation of a human world.

Fanon believes that the condemned *want* to become human beings. Sometimes the prospects might seem obscure and the intellectual is called to reveal the contradictions between the people's attempts and the actual results in particular contexts. James reminds us that it is also necessary to clarify those subtle and not so subtle transformations occurred in the process of violence and imposition. For James, it is clear that the people *want* freedom. The marks of this desire are imprinted on everything they get in contact. It is necessary to look at the interstices even of the most inhuman society in order to find there the ray of the possibility of a brilliant expression of freedom—without of course relinquishing the much needed tasks of the radical critique of society, politics, and popular culture and the heretic creation of new meaning, ideas, and concepts. The conjunction between the intellectual's activity and the people's own goals and initiatives cannot be abandoned. This act of recognition and communication between the intellectual and the people may be in fact one of the most significant steps towards the emergence of a context in which human beings truly recognize each other and are propelled to *act* according to their own choices. The true completion (for James), or perhaps better put, inspired by Fanon, the overcoming of the sinister contradictions and limits of the Enlightenment and modernity at large, may very well find here one of their most crucial and positive events.

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Notes

- ¹ Kenneth Mostern intelligently presents some other aspects of Fanon's alleged pedagogics in relation to his "ethical theory of liberation" (1994:266). There are some interesting parallels between his exposition and mine, particularly concerning his view of the "ethical responsibility of the revolutionary intellectual" (266).

- ² The importance of culture and the point of the necessity of cultural spaces for self-expression are clear in Fanon's view of the relation between the cultural situation in colonial contexts and the subjective condition of the black. "With the exception of a few misfits within the closed environment, we can say that every neurosis, every abnormal manifestation, every affective erethism in an Antillean is the product of his cultural situation. In other words, there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs. In the Antilles that view of the world is white because no black voice exists" (1968:152-153)
- ³ This is one of the most fundamental points in Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (1965). In this text, the revolution, in particular, the Algerian Revolution, is presented as a context that promotes change, and breeds, as it were, a new society and a new human being. Important in this context is the following idea: "Every Algerian faced with the new system introduced by the Revolution is compelled to define himself, to take a position, to choose" (102). The revolution brings up new values, but in an essentially different way that did humanist discourses under the period of colonialism. Here, the formation of new values is accompanied with the exigency that the colonized take a definite position (a position that no one can take for him).
- ⁴ Take into consideration the following commentary of James to his beloved: "The problem is not a higher standard of living or no employment. The problem, and dear lady, this will rejoice your heart, the strictly scientific, economic problem, the solution of the capitalist crisis, lies in precisely the recognition of man as Man. That is Marxism, that is Marx's philosophic theory, that is his economic theory, that is, his political theory. The act out of the revolution makes him man" (James 1992c:133). Note that James not only alludes to the issue of recognition but also to the link between the attainment of 'humanity' and the revolutionary act. These two ideas are, of course, fundamental to Fanon.
- ⁵ For a reflection on the significance of decision in Fanon's work see Gordon 1995b.