

Travelling theories ?

Caribbean postcolonial thinkers today:
the cases of

Frantz Fanon

Aimé Césaire



&

Torun Reite
Christophe Premat



Sources for the images

- Fanon, source: Wikipedia,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Frantz_Fanon.jpg
- Césaire, source: Par Jean Baptiste Devaux, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39217586>

Travelling theories: identifying the colonial (patterns) connections

- Fanon and Césaire are perceived as key figures in *postcolonial studies* working on the social alienation/emancipation relations under/after colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1995)
- Both were from **Martinique** where they experienced colonialism as a **European order imposed in the Caribbean zone**. Fanon left Martinique for France and Algeria and is perceived as a strong reference for anticolonial movements, Césaire initiated a literary movement, the *négritude* that translated into politics and poetics the emancipation of colonized societies.
- « C'est seulement avec l'apparition d'Aimé Césaire qu'on a pu voir naître une revendication, une assomption de la négritude » (Fanon, 1952: 124-125).
- Both thinkers have a dual professional trajectory, Césaire is engaged with Literature and politics whereas Fanon's works mix political thought with psychiatry. Strong influence of Jean-Paul Sartre on both thinkers.

Geospatial life trajectories



Césaire and Fanon both went Martinique to Paris, France. Whereas Césaire returned to Martinique, Fanon went to Algeria. Through the connection to French intellectuals, Fanon liaised with the intellectual founders of the liberation movements in colonies of Portugal in Africa, went to Tunisia and was an ambassador to Algeria in Accra, Ghana. In Ghana he liaised with the political leaders and liberation movement leaders in many African countries

Transatlantic-African nexuses/connections

- **The perception of the Caribbean as an intermediary zone between Africa and America(s)**
- **Zone of *métissage*?**
- Cultural heritage as a form of hybridity (typical postcolonial heritage) (Mukundi, 2010)
- Transshipment / Creolization
- Édouard Glissant (strength of relations, the power of connections)

Travelling theories: identifying the colonial connections

- The link to the Caribbean zone is not the same. Fanon left the Caribbean zone for France and then Algeria whereas Césaire came back to Martinique. For Fanon, the Caribbean is a colonial space.
- Same experience of racism for Césaire with the movement of *négritude* (« le nègre t´emmerde »); experience of daily racism (« maman, regarde un nègre », Fanon, 1952: 90). « Le nègre l´ignore, aussi longtemps que son existence se déroule au milieu des siens; mais au premier regard blanc, il ressent le poids de sa mélanine » (Fanon, 1952: 122).
- « Le beau nègre vous emmerde madame! » (Fanon, 1952: 92).
- Research question: **Which factors empowered Césaire and Fanon´s radical criticism of colonialism?**

A complete denunciation of the colonial domination in both works

- 1) In/Out Caribbean, (re)connecting spaces
- 2) The strong political message in both works (psychiatric and social alienation)
- 3) The legacy of Fanon and Césaire: finding a new language of emancipation

1) Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) / Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) Some biographical characteristics

- Aimé Césaire and Fanon were born in Martinique (Basse-Pointe for Césaire and Fort-de-France for Fanon).
- Fanon had Césaire as a teacher. At the end of the war, he also supported the political campaign of Aimé Césaire.
- Exposed to a *bourgeois* background and a well-integrated family, Fanon's life radicalized his perspectives and formed his view on the impact of colonization – bringing him (ideologically) closer to Césaire

1) Césaire and the *Négritude* movement

- Césaire did not like the *bourgeoisie* of Martinique as this class adopted fake values from the European elite. The travel to France in the thirties is important.
- He is well-known for his denunciation of colonialism and the creation of the *négritude* movement with Léon Gontran-Damas and Léopold Sédar-Senghor.
- The *négritude* was not first a theoretical perspective, it was a scream, a reaction against daily racism ("Le nègre t'émmerde!"). Perspective of **self-confidence / social visibility / equality**
- The consciousness of colonial relations in Martinique preceded Fanon in Césaire's work

1) Césaire (politician and writer)

- Influence of the Communist party in 1945. Césaire was one of the two Communist MPs representing Martinique at the French National Assembly (Armet, 1973: 83). Fanon quoted one of the speeches of Césaire as a politician in 1945. « Quand je tourne le bouton de ma radio, que j'entends qu'en Amérique des nègres sont lynchés, je dis qu'on nous a menti: **Hitler n'est pas mort...** » (Fanon, 1952: 76). Reference to nazism is prevailing in Césaire and Fanon's thoughts
- He was elected as a mayor of Fort-de-France in the 27th of May 1945. Whereas Fanon lived and worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria, Césaire was a spokesperson for Martinique with the poor social conditions of people living in the countryside.
- « Faites de ma tête une tête de proue / et de moi-même, mon cœur, ne faites ni un père, ni un frère / ni un fils, mais le père, le frère, mais le fils, / ni un mari, mais l'amant de cet unique peuple » (Césaire, 1983: 49). *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*

1) Césaire (politician and writer)

- "In this inert town, this desolate throng under the sun, not connected with anything that is expressed, asserted, released in broad earth day-light, its own. Not with Josephine, Empress of the French, dreaming way up there above the nigger scum. Nor with the liberator fixed in his whitewashed stone liberation" (Césaire, 2013: 5). The liberator here is Toussaint Louverture.
- Images of loneliness, ontological disconnection (simply put: a sense of unbelonging). The horizon of radical alienation is prevailing (the "whitewashed stone liberation").

1) Fanon's thinking

- The continual shifting between politics and psychiatry, between the social and the subjective, between the unconscious and history, is one of the most original features of Fanon's work.
- In his thesis, he linked three dimensions of alienation: **the subjective, the cultural, and the political.**
- In the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* he also emphasized that “alongside **phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny** (Fanon 2008: xv).
- Fanon underscores the situatedness of his analysis – in strong contrast to the structuralist theorists of his time
- Compared to Césaire, he emphasizes the fundamental need for social action – revolutionary action. Even if he has a postcolonial legacy, all the leaders of revolutionary movements against colonization were inspired by Frantz Fanon (Macey, 2011).

1) Some works of Césaire and Fanon

- *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). (Many different versions of this text, Davis, 1997: 21).
- *Esclavage et colonisation* (1948)
- *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950)
- *Discours sur la négritude* (1987)
- *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952)
- *L'an V de la Révolution algérienne* (1959)
- *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961)
- *Pour la Révolution Africaine* (1964)
- *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté* (2015)
- *Various publications on Psychiatry*

1) Travelling and linking to African liberation movements

- Ghana: In the year period from 1947 to 1966 Kwame Nkrumah went from political organizer, to revolutionary party leader, to revolutionary saint, to supreme leader of a one party state, to father-of-his-country-in-exile.
 - Ghana was the first African colony to gain its independence and it did so politically.
- Fanon met with many political leaders during his time as an ambassador
- Travelling theory: from Caribbean spaces to Africa, there are common features which are linked to colonial systems. There is a necessity to decolonize, but the optics of decolonization will not be sufficient to win a social situation of autonomy.

1) Factors fuelling these (re)connections

- Fanon's life trajectory
- Fanon's multiple lenses (individual, cultural, political and social) and discussions on interrelations echoes in different disciplines and socio-political movements
- Although Fanon's theories were developed prior to the spatial turn in social theories the examples demonstrate their continued relevance towards the untangling of the interplay between social and economic orders of spatial stratification associated with decolonization on one hand, and the individuals' embodied and often conflicting orders of spatialization of sociocultural practices

2) The strong political message in both works (psychiatric and social alienation)

- Difference of style. Césaire uses the efficiency of poetry and theater to condemn the absolute scandale of colonization and its consequences. He also writes as an essayist (political meaning)
- Distinction to make between decolonization and independency. Many African countries were decolonized but were not independent. The decolonization is not sufficient to struggle against the consequences of colonization.

2) The strong political message in both works

- Caribbean is full of colonial spaces for Fanon. What happens in the French-speaking islands, happened for the Spanish-speaking islands. A footnote is mentioned: « signalons que les Caraïbes ont subi le même sort, de la part des aventuriers espagnols et français » (Fanon, 1952: 119)
- Colonial violence in Martinique, the pupils learn how to behave like a White person, they learn the history of White people (School books with « Nos ancêtres les Gaulois », Fanon, 1952: 120).
- « Mais, c'est que l'Antillais ne se pense pas Noir; il se pense Antillais. Le nègre vit en Afrique. Subjectivement, intellectuellement, l'Antillais se comporte comme un Blanc » (Fanon, 1952: 120).
- For Fanon, Martinique and Guadeloupe are not seen as spaces of hybridity, creolization. « Il y avait aussi aux Antilles ce petit hiatus qui existe entre la békaille, la mulâtraille et la négaille » (Fanon, 1952: 89).

2) The strong political message in both works

- A strong tribute to the movement of *négritude*. Fanon quotes a lot Césaire as one of the first thinkers to start the revolt (Fanon, 1952: 100). Ambivalent relation to the other front figure of *négritude*, Léopold Sédar-Senghor. There is a tribute to poems of Sédar-Senghor but Sédar-Senghor adopts an essentialistic perspective by refinding negro values that existed before colonialism. Revolutionary perspective of Fanon. Even if Fanon recognized the necessity of revolt through *négritude*, he distanced himself from this movement as it could fix a perception of Black/White relations (Lane, 2012: 135)
- « Au début, nous voulions nous cantonner aux Antilles. Mais la dialectique, coûte que coûte, reprend le dessus et nous avons été obligé de *voir* que l'Antillais est avant tout un Noir » (Fanon, 1952: 139).

2) The strong political message in both works

- *Discourse on colonialism* (1950)
- « The fact is that the so-called European civilization – “Western” civilization – as it has been shaped by two centuries of bourgeois rule, is incapable of solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem » (Césaire, 2000: 31)
- « And since I have been asked to speak about colonization and civilization, let us go straight to the principal lie that is the source of all the others. Colonization and civilization? » (Césaire, 2000: 32).

2) The strong political message in both works

- Fanon perceived the colonial system as a contact of races always in favour of a specific category. You are white because you are rich and you are rich because you are white. Monopole of power.
- Model of social psychology. Internalization of a deep structure of domination. Internalization of a fundamental lack of self-confidence. In psychiatry, you had the terrible experience of white and european psychiatrists taking care of Black patients.
- Risk for Fanon: the decolonization could be a collusion between a national bourgeoisie and a colonizing bourgeoisie that could perpetuate the colonial rule (Jinadu, 1976: 612).
- Fanon experiences colonial racism in Fort-de-France in 1940. After the defeat of France in 1940, many French citizens travel to Fort-de-France and import the structures of French colonialism. This experience provoked the revolutionary consciousness of Fanon. Even when black people succeeded in their studies, they were perceived as Negroes, which means an inferior race (Haddab, 2004). Text of Fanon ("Antillais et Africains"): "Les histoires raciales ne sont qu'une superstructure, qu'un manteau, qu'une lourde émanation idéologique, revêtant une réalité économique".

2) The strong political messages in both works

- There is a deep contradiction in the colonial system. The colonial system establishes a distinction between the white and the black conditions (whiteness and blackness refer to ontological categories of dominating (dominated) but at the same time those who try to look like white people will never been recognized.
- The colonial system does not give any space for emancipation. Even people who want to abide by the colonial norms will never be treated as white people. The absence of perspective compels colonized people to react.

3) The legacy of Fanon and Césaire: finding a new language of emancipation

- Some authors affirm that the politicization of Césaire fragilized the more radical message he had in his works (Confiant, 1993).
- Strong debate on the legacy of Césaire (Toumson, Henry-Valmore, 1993; Ngal, 1974; Le Brun, 1994).
- Aimé Césaire, l'inconsolé (Toumson, Henry-Valmore, 1993): he accompanied the different steps of emancipation in Caribbean and in Africa but he never saw the real independencies. Something is unachieved.
- Achille Mbembé deals with the idea today of « afropolitanism » to adapt a new form of cosmopolitanism which is too close to the neoliberal globalization. *Critique de la raison nègre* (Mbembé, 2013: 6-10).

3) Fanonian practice and thinking today

South Africa

Example 1:

”Mashupye Herbert Maserumule (2015) wrote an essay for the Rand Daily Mail on why the “influence of Steve Biko is as apt today as it was in the 1980s”.

”Maserumule observes that Black Consciousness seems to appeal to the “country’s black youth born after the end of apartheid in 1994” and quotes Frantz Fanon, who said: “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it.”

3) Examples of Fanon today

South Africa

Example 2

Mail & Guardian,

August 25, 2017

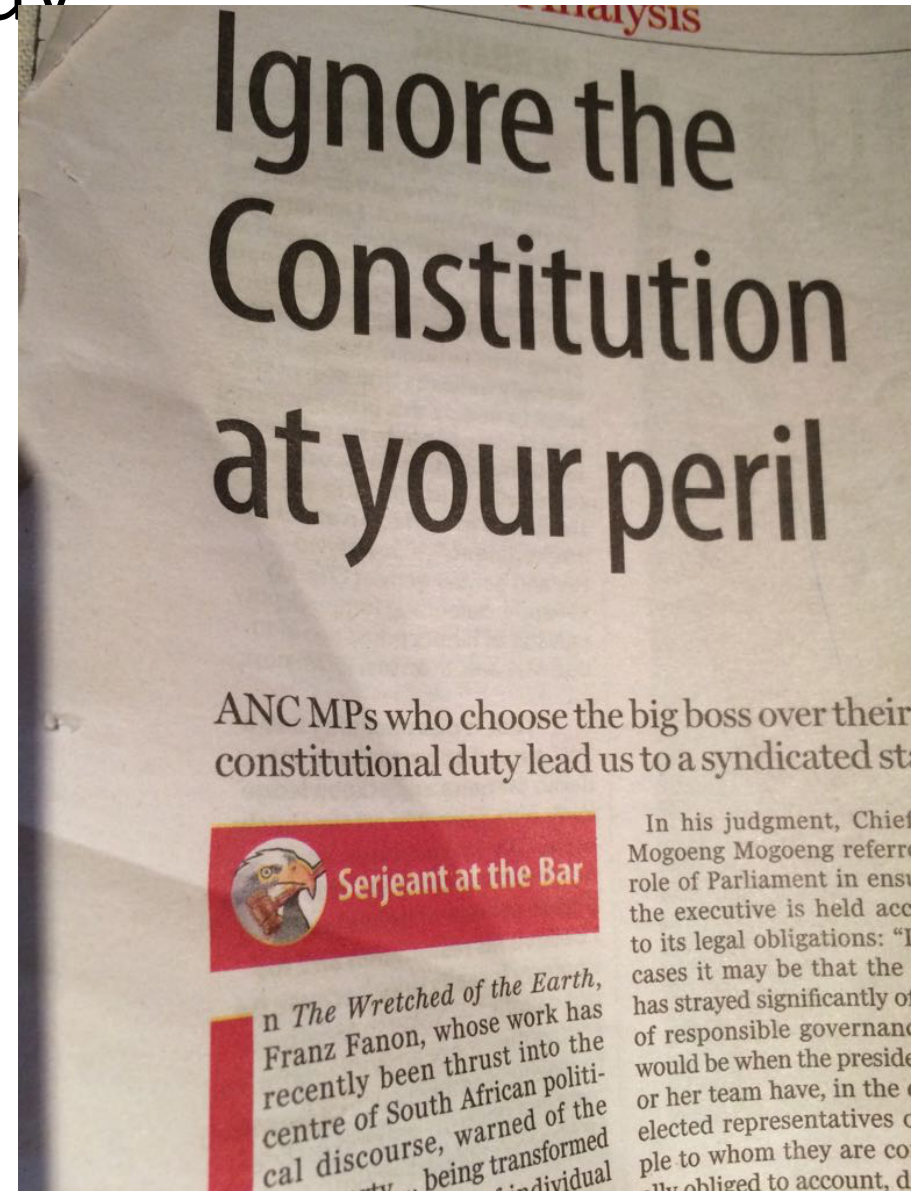
Reference to

The Wretched of the Earth

Criticism of Zuma and his

Interventions on vote in

Parliament



3) The legacy of Fanon and Césaire: finding a new language of emancipation

- Fanon discussed under the Arab Spring (Alessandrini 2014)
- In ongoing struggles against racism, oppression, and dehumanization (such as #BlackLivesMatter in the United States) and for the decolonization of higher education (such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in South Africa)
- Unpublished reflections of Mozambican former freedom fighter on Fanon in Mozambique:
 - probably, the ethnic-social origin of Amilcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto and Marcelino dos Santos influenced their non-rejection of the colonizer. Neto, Cabral and Marcelino dos Santos, by birth were not totally black - in their veins circulated the blood of the "other."
 - By adopting Marxist/socialist ideologies race became subsumed by the class struggle
 - Socialist ideology – focus on the NEW MAN – their attitude was distinct from the Negritude and the Black Consciousness movement .
 - A spatial reading of Fanon: Borders and boundaries. Material and mental. - spatializing sociocultural practices
- Even in Brazil – the racial aspects of Fanon were not embraced in the 60s – but emerged later

Conclusions

- Mutual respect and tributes between Césaire and Fanon. Fanon read Césaire who read Fanon. About Fanon, Césaire declared that it was necessary to read *Peau noire, masques blancs* for the understanding of the brutality of colonialism and then *Les Damnés de la Terre* for the understanding of decolonization (Lucrece, 2011).
- Two attitudes on the relation to Caribbean. Fanon died in the early 1960s and Césaire in 2008. The difference is obviously due to the evolution of social contexts. For Fanon, Caribbean is perceived as the import zone of colonial patterns whereas Césaire refers to the horizon of social emancipation. He represented *Martinique* with the risk of facing the contradictions of French policies for overseas departments.
- In Caribbean, other postcolonial thinkers expressed their identity in other ways (Creolization with Patrick Chamoiseau, the philosophy of relations of Édouard Glissant). Maryse Condé also tried to go over this strong heritage as both figure are kind of founding fathers of studies on (de)colonization (Selao, 2016).
- They have a strong legacy as they could connect social problems of Caribbean to Africa.

Conclusion (2)

- The geospatial expansion of life trajectories— linking to intellectuals, revolutionaries and political elite
- The multidisciplinary nature – multifaceted theories – resonate with many disciplinary spaces
- The dual professions
 - All three factors fuelling mobility, (re)connections – transfer to new spaces - travelling theories
- **Critical mass of contemporary thinkers in the Caribbean**
- In the Caribbean case racial and ethnic social stratification changed over time – this is reflected, particularly in Fanon's texts. The Martiniquais(e) represented the middle tier between the white and the black plantation worker. This created tensions between (un)belonging to the (un)privileged. Their position could have given a stronger voice (and agency) compared to other colonized theorists
- Shared living experience of alienation (unbelonging/ontological disconnection (that Fanon labels: social, cultural and subjective alienation)
- The political, economical and social organisation of the Caribbean colonial system – and particularly the one of Martinique, seems to resonate with other colonial systems thus accentuating the power of their theories
- Here again, could the Caribbean's geographical location and geopolitical importance also accentuate the power of their theories?

Theoretical perspectives

- Three journals in our department (*Iberoamericana*, *Karib*, *Nordic Journal of Francophone Studies*)
- More focus on postcolonial studies and problems (as we teach and work with postcolonial languages)
- Pedagogical aspects (tools for stimulating the self-confidence aspects in higher education). Strong message of Fanon and Césaire is useful outside political perspectives.

References

- Armet, A. (1973). "Aimé Césaire, homme politique", *Études littéraires*, vol. 6, n. 1: 81-96.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. (1995). *The postcolonial studies reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Beneduce, R. (2006). "L'apport de Frantz Fanon à l'ethnopsychiatrie critique", *Eres*, n. 89: 85-100.
- Césaire, A. (1983) [1939]. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Paris/Montréal: Présence africaine.
- Césaire, A. (2000). *Discourse on colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. *A poetics of anticolonialism*, Robin D.G. Kelley. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Césaire, A., Eshleman, C., & Arnold, J. (2013). *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land : Bilingual Edition*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan.
- Confiant, R. (1993). *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle*. Paris: Stock.
- Davis, G. (1997). *Aimé Césaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1952). *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Seuil.
- Fanon, F. (1955). *Antillais et Africains*. Paris: Esprit.
- Fanon, F. (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*.

References

- Gibson, N. (1999) *Rethinking Fanon. The Continuing Dialogue*. Humanity Books. New York.
- Gibson & Beneduce (2017), *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics*. Wits University Press.
- Haddab, M. (2004). “La violence et l’histoire dans la pensée de Frantz Fanon”, *Insaniyat*: 27-35.
- Jinadu L. Adele. (1976). ”Language and Politics: On the Cultural Basis of Colonialism”, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, vol. 16, n. 63-64: 603-614.
- Kipfer, S. (2005) *Fanon and space: colonization, urbanization, and liberation from the colonial to the global city*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2007, volume 25, pages 701-726.
- Lane, (2012). “Leaving the South: Frantz Fanon, Modern Jazz and the Rejection of *Négritude*”. In: Martin Munro, Celia Britton (eds.), *American Creoles, The Francophone Caribbean and the American South*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press : 129-146.
- Le Brun, A. (1994). *Pour Aimé Césaire*. Paris: J.-M. Place.

References

- Lucrèce, A. (2011). *Frantz Fanon et les Antilles*. Paris: Le teneur.
- Macey, D. (2011). *Frantz Fanon, une vie*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Mbembé, A. (2013). *Critique de la raison nègre*. Paris: La découverte.
- Mukundi, Paul M. (2010). *Preventing Things from Falling Further Apart: the Preservation of Cultural Identities in Postcolonial African, Indian and Caribbean Literatures*. London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers.
- Ngal, G. (1974). *Aimé Césaire, un homme à la recherche d'une patrie*. Paris: Présence africaine.
- Razanajao, C., Postel, J. (2007). "La vie et l'œuvre psychiatrique de Frantz Fanon", *Sud/Nord*, 1 (n. 22): 147-174.
- Renault, M. (2014). ""Des inventeurs d'âmes" – Fanon, lecteur de Césaire", *Rue Descartes*, vol. 83, n. 4: 22-35.
- Selao, C. (2016). "Maryse Condé et les pères fondateurs de la Caraïbe francophone", *Études françaises*: 73-90.