**PHI395: Decolonial Philosophy Seminar – Reading Fanon, FS 2024**

**Protocol for the 10/7/2024 seminar session**

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Following our discussion of Ch 6 last Monday, we began by identifying themes in the chapter to help structure our discussion. We found three main themes of importance: Firstly, the theme of social construction and cultural imposition. Secondly, the collective unconscious and archetypes, and how they relate to this cultural programming. Thirdly, activity and passivity in sexuality and the psyche.

We began our discussion with a focus on the supposed ‘passivity’ of white women in the text, and how this relates to white men and black men in Fanon’s schema of racial neurosis (black women being conspicuously scarce in his argumentation). We noted the apparent essentiality ascribed to women’s psychosexuality in this chapter, which contrasts with the fluid and non-essential manner in which he discusses black men. The common language view of activity and passivity, which focuses on agency, is not what applies here – as Tessa pointed out, black and white women are described as actively ‘wanting’ white and black men respectively, while white men with a sexual inferiority complex ‘passively’ accept that white women do not desire them the way they desire black men.

Instead of agency, the psychoanalytic conception focuses on modes of cathexis centered on genital anatomy. We discussed the views of Helen Deutsch and Marie Bonaparte, who saw boys and girls alike as beginning in the Sadistic Phallic phase but differentiate when the ‘castration complex’ sets in, which leads women to transition from clitoral sadism to vaginal masochism. Though Deutsch and Bonaparte differ on the fixedness of this transition, both have an essentialized view of the female body and psyche being teleologically driven towards motherhood alone. This is interesting because Fanon is an avowed anti-essentialist, but still cites Bonaparte as an authority on the female body and mind. How, then, does Fanon see the gendered psyche – as essential, or as contingent on socialization?

To help examine this, the discussion turned towards homosexuality. Though not his focus in this chapter, homosexuality is important to his argumentation – if the gendered roles which create the racial neurosis are essential, we would expect any forms of queerness to be pathological in nature, since they deviate from predetermined roles. Discussing homosexuality would also help clarify the broader political question of Fanon’s work – who, and in what ways, does Fanon see as normal, healthy, and worthy of ‘belonging’? On p. 157-158, he differentiates neurotic homosexuality from non-neurotic, or “expedient” homosexuality, but we found this phrasing ambiguous.

Returning to the central question of the text, the disalienation of black men, we discussed a quote from p. 135 that “the negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual.” The reasoning was that negrophobia involves fetishization of black men as sexually potent, which involves, for men as for women, the focus on the black man as a potential sexual partner. The uniting thread in all of these seemingly disparate discussions is 'myth’, in the Jungian sense. The sexual and racist complexes of white men and women are not directed towards specific black individuals, but towards the imagined – mythological – “n-word.” This suggested that the issue with ‘neurotic homosexuality’ to Fanon might not be same-sex attraction alone, but the fact that the fascination is rooted in racist myth. His disgust, where it appears, seemed more of a rejection of racial fetishization than homophobic sentiment, with the primary issue being the racist society that creates and instills such complexes.

Shabab pointed to Foucault’s view of sexuality as a sociogenic construct, positing that Fanon might see it similarly – which would oppose the psychoanalytic view, which tends to see sexuality as biologically programmed. With this, our discussion returned to the recurring question of the place of psychoanalysis in Fanon’s methodology. It is clear that Fanon sees colonized worlds as inherently neurotic, but also states that “neurosis is not a basic component of human reality” (p. 130). This raises interesting questions: does psychoanalysis require the existence of neurosis? Furthermore, a few people reiterated that despite his anti-essentialist and potentially anti-psychoanalytic leanings, there is no evidence from Ch 6 that he sees womanhood as anything but essential - Deutsch and Bonaparte are treated as axiom. Why does Fanon see the psychoanalytic lens as adequately representing gender roles, while something about psychoanalysis seems inadequate to examine race and colonialism? We left the discussion with no clear answer.

Before we ended, we touched on what Fanon sees as the ‘way out’ for the disalienated black man – the almost Nietzschean down-going of the black man into the “black hole” of his psyche to "lose myself in my negritude” (p. 163). We discussed Fanon’s heavy reliance on Cesaire, despite conflicting political views, as well the strangeness of a return to negritude after Ch 5. The significance of killing “the white man in himself” (p. 175) was identified as a key difference between Cesairian negritude and Senghorian Negritude, which Fanon is critical of – Senghorian negritude accepts the white gaze and its view of black people, while Cesairian negritude involves rejecting and indeed ‘killing’ the white gaze within the colonized psyche. This can be seen from a Fanonian-Jungian lens as a sort of narrative restructuring within the individual psyche – the white-constructed myth of the n-word is rejected, and through the power of poetry, a new narrative and a new self-perception is forged to replace the old myth.

The key points of last class’s final discussion – narrative reframing, sociogenic mythology, and negritude – inform our analysis of Ch 7. Ch 6 presents an extensive view of racial neurosis through a psychoanalytical lens, and then presents a reclamation of Cesairian negritude as a way out, but does not directly address negritude from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. We believe Ch 7 clarifies an unanswered question of our last discussion – the place of psychoanalysis in colonized societies – through this lens. The deficiencies of the psychoanalytic discipline are closely tied to Fanon's ambiguous re-definition of negritude, not as a national or historical movement (“What am I supposed to do with a black empire?” p. 179), but as an identification process.

Alfred Adler, who is often cited in this book as an authority on neurotic behavioral disorders, is used in Ch 7 as a stand-in for psychoanalysis as a whole. Fanon’s criticism of Adler is that he created a “psychology of the individual” (p. 188) that entirely ignores sociogenic factors of the kind essential to colonized societies. Fanon begins the chapter with a quote from Adler that defines neurosis of all sorts as oriented towards “an imaginary fictitious goal” (p. 185). Adler’s argument is compelling, and Fanon has previously agreed that his findings can be applied to some forms of neurosis – with the caveat that one should not “infer laws from them that would necessarily apply to infinitely complex problems” (p. 73). Fanon presents a case study of narcissistic Martinicans, with narcissism and compulsive competitiveness stemming from overcompensation. Where Adler falls short is in identifying the source of their overcompensation. A psychoanalyst might seek the source of the neurosis in early childhood - “the father, the boss, God” (p. 190). In Martinique, however, the inferiority has a clear real-world orientation – towards the metropole, and towards European money, mannerisms, and society. Ch 1 presents us with the transfixing power of France on Martinican society, as well as the constant urge to avoid Creolisms; Ch 6 reintroduces accusations of Creolism as an insult to an educated Martinican (p. 186). This fixation on whiteness and European society might be unobtainable, irrational, and psychologically damaging to the Martinican, but is not ‘imaginary’ in the sense of only existing in the mind of an individual - it is seen as wholly rational by French / Martinican society to seek cultivation in the French model and to avoid the ‘savagery’ associated with the fictionalized black man. The “governing fiction is not personal but social” (p. 190). However, an Adlerian governing fiction must be rooted in personal circumstance alone. With his fundamentally individualistic outlook, Adler no framework for neuroses that arise from a society that directly cultivates them – the only explanation that traditional psychoanalysis would have for a population-wide neurosis would be a Mannoni-esque conjecture of a pre-existing complex.

The deficiencies of the individualistic outlook go beyond psychoanalysis – they apply also to Hegel, whose writings significantly influenced the field and have been applied by Sarte to matters of race and colonialism. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, seemingly directly suited to the question of trans-Atlantic black populations, still falls short in Fanon’s view of the Antilles. “In order to achieve certainty of oneself, one has to integrate the concept of recognition.” (p. 192) - a prerequisite for the master-slave dialectic is self-recognition from both sides of the dialectic. Only then can a fight-to-the-death of the two consciousnesses take place, and only then does one seek to escape absolute negation and “loses himself in the object” of his work (p. 195). To Fanon, the intellectual and social pursuits of black America exemplify this sort of dialectic; the Black American “fights and is fought against” (p. 196), through which they recognize themselves as a demographic with common circumstances and goals. The issue with this view of the Antilles, however, is that here emancipation “reached the black man from the outside” (p. 194). The enslaved Antilleans were told one day, and continue to be told by French society, that “there is no difference between us” (p. 196). This may on the surface seem like a good thing – after all, Fanon believes in the non-essentiality of race – except that the entire book so far has shown us that the black Antillean is not white, no matter how much individual Antilleans try to be. Black Antilleans are not Gauls in the white French gaze (p. 126), as exemplified by the endless microaggressions faced by a black Antillean in France. Since the black Antillean wants to “be like his master... he is less independent than the Hegelian slave” (p. 195) - they are stuck in a limbo where they think of themself as essentially white, and yet know that they are not. Along with a white worldview comes white mythology, including the myth of the n-word, and the Antillean neurosis develops as they wrestle with the fact that they are not a wild and hyper-sexual savage, and yet know that white society sees them as closer to that archetype than to a white man.

Fanon seems to argue that for the Antillean to create a new world view – to kill the white gaze in their mind, and set in motion the Hegelian master-slave dialectic – they must first identify themselves as distinctly nonwhite, subjected to societal discrimination but not defined by it. This, we argue, is the importance of Fanonian Negritude; it is synonymous with self-recognition. Adlerian psychoanalysis has shown Fanon that the black Antillean is neurotic; Jung has shown him that there exists a black myth in the white psyche; and Hegel has shown him that for two consciousness to recognize themselves as recognizing each other, they must first each recognize themselves. Fanon’s synthesis seems to be a distinct form of negritude: a rejection of the black myth, a Hegelian self-recognition, and a way to dismantle societal neurosis, but not a historical reconstruction of a black past, or a call for a black empire.

For discussion, we propose the following questions. Fanon seems to advocate for the master-slave dialectic as a path to true equality – he sees the black and white populations of the United States as eventually standing “hand-in-hand" (p. 196). What, then, would he see as the end result of this process in the Antilles? How do we reconcile his ambiguous articulation of negritude with his rejection of black nationality (p. 179), and how does it differ from Sarte’s view? Our second question returns to psychoanalysis. The deficiencies of the discipline as it exists are clear, and yet Fanon often uses psychoanalysis to describe the manifestations of neurosis. Does Fanon’s rejection of Adlerian thought completely reject psychoanalysis – and if so, how do we account for its use in this text? If not, is Fanon creating a revised ‘Fanonian’ psychoanalysis, that incorporates sociogenic imposition and mythological archetypes? Can psychoanalysis be linked to a dialectic conception of society, and does Fanon make such a link?

**References:**

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* 1952. New York, Grove Press, Cop, 2008.