Part I

Cultural logics

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Frantz Fanon and the living ghosts of capitalism's world-system

Frantz Fanon died of cancer December 7, 1961 in Washington, D.C. He had gone to the United States seeking treatment unavailable elsewhere. Given all that he stood for, he died in the most alien of lands – far from Algeria, the home of his medical practice and literary fame; just as far in social distance from Martinique, where he was born, thirty-six years before, on July 20, 1925. In a short life Fanon had traveled light years across the colonizing belt that for half a millennium had held up the pants of the capitalist world-system.

His death in Washington, at the core of the world system against which he fumed, was a final exclamation on the cruelty of Atlantic colonialism. Fanon had been trained at the medical faculty in Lyon and practiced medicine in France's North African colonies. Still, the fabled French paternalism that each day airlifts bread from Paris to the overseas departments would not deliver adequate medical care to its colonial subjects. The violence of the world system cuts even the decomposing bodies of those off whom it feeds.

And, those who die young never quite go away. They are lost but never far off. If we knew them in this life, we remember them as they were before they fell. If we knew them only by what they left behind, we imagine them in their prime. None was more ordinal to the crisis of his times than Fanon.

Black Skin, White Masks appeared in Paris in 1952 as *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*. Fanon was twenty-seven, not long out of medical school; still young to his work as a psychiatrist; still a year before taking up his post at Blida, the notorious asylum outside Algiers. The book was, among other of its rebellions, a first strike against the received wisdom of the white world whose insufferable culture was his ticket to cultural and political power.

The title, *Black Skin, White Masks*, suggests a play on the double-consciousness theme of which W. E. B. Du Bois had written fifty years before in *Souls of Black Folk*. On the contrary, *Black Skin, White Masks* was radical even by the pointed standards Du Bois had set. Fanon's

Negro is the Negro subject of the colonial system. His experience is Black through and through, but governed by a remote class of white officials administering the policies of a distant metropolis. The American Negro of whom Du Bois wrote was in daily contact with a greater number of latently aggressive whites who could be counted upon to leave the bodies burned and hung for all to see. This sort of neighborhood violence is done in and for the middle ground – a ground onto which the American Negro stepped to serve, from which otherwise he was meant to keep himself.

It is not that the colonized do not suffer racial violence. They do. But the violence upon which the capitalist world system is built gets deeper under the skin. For Fanon there was very little doubling of the Negro consciousness. The white mask has the upper hand – so much so that, against every ounce of conviction, one may be forced to turn over his body for last medical rites.

"The Black man is not a man." Thus began *Black Skin, White Masks*. For Fanon there is no middle ground for the Negro because he is formed by the white colonizers. "The Black is a Black man; that is, as a result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated." Negritude thus became the zero-signifier of the silences upon which the modern world was founded – exclusions so close to the quick of its being that its culture cannot speak of it. Any system that thrives on mute exclusion is one so morbid that only violence can overcome it.

Black Skin, White Masks is an unruly book, ranging rowdily over literary, medical, political, and psychiatric themes – always literate, unnerving, and eerily remote in its condemnations. One of its more acerbic lines is Fanon's clinical savaging of the oedipal legend so dear to his profession. Referring to his native Martinique, he says: "The Martinican does not compare himself with the white man *qua* father, leader, God." The colonial subject's primary desires are not sexual ones for the parental-Other. The Other of colonized desire is the racial Other he can never hold. No middle ground. The Black man is already white. His longing for the white-Other is the ever open wound. In wishing to be other than he is, he confirms that he is not a man. He partakes of his own devastation. "The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master" – Black skin, white mask. Therein, the first inkling of Fanon's scorching idea that the colonial system must die by the violence it has wrought. The corollary is that to kill the master, the slave must kill himself. No middle ground. This is the unspeakable violence of the capitalist world system.

Fanon saw the pages of *Les Damnés de la terre* just before dying. They gave him little comfort. But, this is the book, translated after his death as *The Wretched of the Earth*, that would become the spiritual manual of the revolutionary decade. In it Fanon slashed back at the heart of white power. "The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it." The violence of the modern world comes back to haunt. "The colonial world is a world cut in two."

In Fanon's last months, liberation struggles were severing the already cut parts of the Francophone colonies. The French lost Tunisia and Morocco in 1956 and Vietnam in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. They would lose Algeria in July, 1962, months after Fanon's death at the end of 1961, the year that Patrice Lumumba, having liberated the Congo from Belgium, was assassinated by the CIA. Those were the years when the colonial egg began to totter slowly toward its shattering fall.

Immanuel Wallerstein, but five years his junior, met Fanon in 1960 in Accra, Ghana at the World Assembly of Youth. Wallerstein recalls that "since neither of us had any obligations at this meeting (apart from my talk), and we hit it off, we spent a lot of time together." Many years later, he would claim Fanon as a "substantial influence" on his work. There is poetic symmetry in the off-chance of their few days together in decolonizing Africa. Though neither Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in 1961 nor Wallerstein's *Modern World System* in 1974 would normally be considered works of poetry, there is a literary justice in their having framed the decade that cracked the blithe innocence with which modernity mistook its global colonial empire for providence.

Frantz Fanon was the first of the great French social theorists of the dismantling of the colonial world from which capitalism extracted its wealth. More even than his fellow Martinican, Aimé Césaire, or his fellow North African, Albert Memmi, Fanon set down the terms of colonization as a global system of racial terror. He was not the first to define racism as the foundation of the capitalist world system. In his later years, W. E. B. Du Bois did much the same. Nor was Fanon a world systems analyst before the fact. But he did unravel the inscrutable knot in which modern culture had tied itself. Modernity's enlightened reasonableness so dazzles the gullible eye as to blind it to the brutality that subsidizes its cultural finery. And no more so than in its sweet inducements to see the world as one, when in fact it is inherently and necessarily divided in two.

Therein may lie the appreciation that led Wallerstein to read Fanon in French even before they hit it off in 1960 in Accra. Wallerstein, in turn, began his work as a specialist in African studies. This may be why the younger of the two men understood before others what Fanon, by experience, understood before him. The global system of capital greed was first and foremost based on the Atlantic violence of the slave trade triangle since the painfully long sixteenth century. Fanon and Wallerstein mark off, in effect, the beginning and the end of the time of the French social thought that arose in the decolonizing movements of the 1960s to grow into an acute heaviness in the world revolutions of 1968, after which, all the king's men of the modernist dream could not put their humpty back together again.

Though worlds apart, in work and experience, Fanon and Wallerstein were, in their youths, both students of France and her colonies; from which, by different lessons, they learned that, dreams aside, the modern world is a system united in the illusion that capitalism's violence is benign. Now, in the face of realities hard to deny, that world is more evidently one always divided in two – a prosperous powerful core; a bleak, eroded periphery. Being colonial to the core, it is a world of incommensurable parts, joined by a pervasive violence from which there is no escape. The truth of this fact is hard to swallow, especially in the early years of the twenty-first century when the global viscera are regurgitating modern violence back up through its over-stuffed gullet.

Ghosts are beings without bodies. When they appear, they are more real than the living. They visit with impunity, by their own pleasure. The living cannot easily shake them off because even the courageous would rather not hear what they have to say.

During his last months in hospital in Washington D.C., Wallerstein was reunited with Fanon. "I don't know," he recalls many years later, "if I was the only white American to have that kind of relationship with him. Maybe. In any case, there couldn't have been very many. There were hardly any Americans, white or Black, who had even heard of Fanon in 1961. For one thing, he wasn't translated yet into English." Fanon died young, before his time had come. This sad fact of Fanon's death may be among the reasons he continues to haunt the colonial world system. He died before the core of the system could know him.

Whoever conjures up the ghosts – whether it is the living searching for what they lost or the dead refusing to go away until their stories

register – ghosts haunt the living for some good reason. Whatever it may be, Fanon is the apparition that appears in the bad dreams of the capitalist overlords who, having drunk too much and stuffed their guts too full, awake restive in the stupor. They will not very often know Fanon's name, but they recognize him in the faces of those they skip over as they surf the channels of their late night insomnia.

Durkheim's ghosts in the culture of sociologies

There are risks ahead at the turn of a phrase like *Durkheim's Ghosts*. None is more fraught than the dread that a sacred corpse is about to be defiled. Still, the risk is worth taking. Like most of his age, Durkheim is dead. Like few others, his body of work lives on to haunt the present.

Durkheim's claim on the minds of generations of social thinkers owes, as these things often do, to an ever heightening sensibility to the concerns he addressed in his time. The industrial and social conflicts that shocked his generation in the waning years of the nineteenth century have, in the early twenty-first century, passed on, but not away. Perturbations interior to a national-community have not so much disappeared as been caught up in a jumble of global conflicts. As a result, it is no longer possible to look for the cause of social disorders where Durkheim did – in the entrails of an encompassing Society defined implicitly by a territorial polity covering a purportedly distinct national culture.

Whether global conflicts are more or less severe than those of early industrial nation-states is an open question. But they are more pervasive – normal enough to require ever more explosive outbursts of violence to keep media attention focused; or, if not more pervasive, then more visible. Durkheim's generation saw what it saw of the wider world through glasses dimmed by the blush of European colonial domination. In the comparison, the unsettlements in Europe in Durkheim's day – even those leading up to the Great War which ended the innocence of his generation – seem local and passing. Today's troubles may be different in degree, perhaps modified in kind, but they are similar enough to render Durkheim's definition of the crisis, if not his solutions, disconcertingly apt to a much different time.

It may be that the dead stir up dread because they are not dead-enough. Legion are they who prefer their dead to stay put as are, say, Comte and Spencer who haven't budged in years. We visit them, if at all, as curiosities. Then there are ones like Durkheim and Marx, who are far from ready for the wax museum. The living dead, when they are not a comfort (as, remarkably, they can be), disturb the hold people like to have over their

own times and places. Yet, they haunt variously according to their several natures.

Durkheim disturbs for reasons different from the others. Marx and Freud are two contrary examples of theorists from another time, who, while living, wrote convincingly of ghosts haunting Europe and of uncanny visitations from the Unconscious, which may be why, while dead, they will not quit the scene even when hunted down by detractors. They exposed themselves to attack on the critical flank of their daring theories of modernity's dishonest social veneer. Though differently, to be sure, Marx and Freud believed as Weber and Durkheim could not: that to understand modern societies of the industrial age it was necessary to begin from the assumption that the appearances of the new technological wonders were false representations of the underlying realities. For them, the facts of modern matters are haunted by hidden and contrary forces – the mode of production in Marx's case; the Unconscious in Freud's.

Durkheim, in this one respect, was more like Weber. Each struggled, in his way, to explain the new world as it presented itself. Neither could quite believe that what met the eye was as far as it was from the whole truth. Weber, however, and unlike Durkheim, had the stronger inkling that something inscrutably perverse was wrong on the surface of social things. Still, unlike Marx and Freud, the best Weber could do was to describe the enigma where the others insisted that the perversities of modern life were, in truth, interpretative guides to the underlying and contrary realities. In the end, Weber could do little more than bemoan the facts that cut both ways at once – modern rationality enhanced human freedom, while at the same time trapping the modern in the iron cage of rational efficiency.

Durkheim, at least in the early empirical studies, notably *Suicide*, was barely skeptical at all – a character trait lacking in Durkheim to the extent that it was prominent among the other three. For Durkheim, the social facts he took as social things in and of themselves were drawn up in numerical rates he had culled from Europe's dusty archives. This – the naïve move of an ambitious younger man – led him down the slope of scientific trouble greased by the all-too-comfortable slippage from reality to gathered data to fact to analytical stabs at the truth. The others held fast to a higher, if equally vulnerable, ground.

Marx and Freud, by developing their reconstructive sciences of material and emotional netherworlds, complicated the logic of daily life at some embarrassment to their methodological boasts in the triumph of the aggravated revolution and the patient therapy of the talking cure. Weber, by setting forth the grand interpretative method of understanding, was in his way the more daring of the lot, though at the cost that accompanies

even so astute an appeal to the intersubjective: that of freezing modern man in his tracks, the lost soul cut off from the traditions, looking foolishly for the charismatic prophet. By contrast, one could make the case that Durkheim's caution, though it cost him dearly on the political side, left him the option he chose, however unwittingly, of revisiting the scientific side to supply the traction his early theories lacked.

Still, none of them would come to life today were it not for one or another nod to the finitude of social life – its politics and sciences included most especially. With or without a theory of ghosts, all were consumed by the past. They were at the head of the short list of survivors from a generation preoccupied with the lost past – a preoccupation without which what today we call the social sciences might not have come into being in their present form. Sociology, in its earliest days, was nothing if not a running commentary on the fate of traditional values in the caldron of modern times. It was precisely the question of human values that united all the European men, if not others. The quest for values in a value-less world led to the classic European experiments with four of the essential methods still at work in social theory and sociology. Marx's foundational value of the elementary labor process as a transcending critical tool, Weber's intersubjective value as the probative method of the ideal typical, Freud's imputation of scientific and therapeutic value to the chaos of dream talk, Durkheim's imbrication of social values upon the isolated individual – these were the subtly hidden, but evident, concerns that moved the European men of classic social theory. Each was an attempt to measure the continuity of the new modes of social order against what was to them a dead or dying past.

Durkheim led both academic and social movements promoting the reform of science and of the educational system in France. He believed, and many agreed, that the science he conveyed could heal the discord in and among over-individualized moderns. While controversial in his day, this aspect of Durkheim's life work seems a bit pathetic today – and no more so than when imagined as a solution to the divisions in the wider global spheres. Still, in surprising ways, Durkheim's ideas stand among the living-dead – even when, in some aspects, their enduring viability courses along a thin vein oblique to the heart of much social theory.

The surprise is palpable because Durkheim, more than the others, was the one forced by his times as by the mistakes of his early method to change course later in his work. Without getting onto the line Louis Althusser made famous in regard to Marx – whether there were two of him, the one young and the other mature, from which we get the question of whether there *can* be two anyones other than Jesus and Wittgenstein – it is fair to say that, though all purportedly great thinkers change their

minds to some degree, few changed theirs as much as Durkheim did his.

Though it could hardly be said that Durkheim was the most intellectually courageous of the four, when compared to standard fare in that or this day, he was in his own fine way. And no more so than in the notable change of emphasis he came to in the last years of his life and work – a change all the more difficult to make because those were the years of his public life when his ideas were most exposed to scrutiny for his work as the leader of a school of social thought but even more as the leader of a movement to reform the foundations and practices of public education in France.

It is too easy to complain, as some do, that Durkheim was the conservative among the founding fathers. The merit of the plaint is barely sufficient to the lie it covers. By contrast to, say, Marx or even contemporaries in the European Diaspora – writers like W. E. B. Du Bois and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the United States – Durkheim was among those more comfortable against the odds of social facts. But when measured against garden variety social thinkers, he was far from hide bound. Otherwise, he would not haunt. The method of the early years, which may have required the change of heart and mind in the later years, turned on a concept that has enjoyed a robust staying power – a power that outruns, in many ways, its generator.

The concept, of course, is his most famous: *anomie* – the state of mental confusion caused by the absence of workable norms for the conduct of daily life. A century later, the exact conditions for which Durkheim invented the concept have passed. Still, *anomie* reminds that, whatever else might be among the necessary functions of the larger social things, the group, however massive (even global), must provide some effective grade of social regulation. When individuals are left without guidance by the group, the anomic state of mind undermines the benefits of individual liberty, leading to confusion of which suicides, as horrifying as they are, are not the most terrible of social tragedies, as survivors of ethnic wars and terrorist attacks in our time will testify.

In a century well after Durkheim's, the inability of the larger social wholes to guide the lonely individual is all the more salient in proportion to the individual's inability to know what exactly a social whole might be. At the end of the nineteenth century, even when one was, as Durkheim, a member of a stigmatized minority, a Frenchman had little trouble imagining France as somehow the name for a society capable of ministering to his need for protections of various kinds. Durkheim, with Zola, was on the winning side of the Dreyfus Affair. But, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, not even the wine merchants of Burgundy can locate