

Srivastava N.

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## Frantz Fanon in Italy: or, Historicizing Fanon

Neelam Srivastava, Newcastle University (UK)

### Abstract

This introduction to the special issue on “Frantz Fanon in Italy” provides an overview of Frantz Fanon’s influence on Italian intellectual and political life, with especial focus on the significant impact his writings had on the renovation of the Italian left in the 1960s, as well as highlighting the continuities between Italian anti-fascism and anti-colonialism. Fanon’s Italian reception is interesting for postcolonial scholars in that it differs from the Anglo-American tradition of Fanonian scholarship, and reveals a “pre-postcolonial” Fanon, prior to his revival through the “symptomatic readings” of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and other theorists in the 1980s. I also discuss the editorial history of Fanon’s publication in Italian; Italy was the first country after France in which Fanon’s work appeared, and Giovanni Pirelli’s 1971 edition of Fanon’s writings, *Opere scelte*, is possibly the only anthology that presents a selection of essays culled from Fanon’s different texts. The Italian Fanon, then, not only offers us an interpretation of the thinker that is specific to Italy, but also serves to historicize his impact in relation to the intellectual and political developments of his time.

Frantz Fanon – Italian anti-colonialism – Fanon and psychiatry – Giovanni Pirelli – Fanon and Italy

This special issue on Frantz Fanon in Italy seeks to focus on various aspects of Fanon’s location and political, cultural and intellectual relationships within Italy, a connection that has not been documented in any significant detail up until now.<sup>1</sup> Italy was one of the first countries outside France where Fanon’s thought circulated, and the Italian publisher Giulio Einaudi was the first, after the French Maspéro, to publish

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<sup>1</sup> The essays contained here were originally presented at a symposium held at Newcastle University (UK) in June 2013. The idea for this symposium came out of a series of ongoing conversations with Professor Robert Young around the legacy of Frantz Fanon and of Third-Worldist thought in Italy. The symposium was supported by *Interventions* and the Newcastle Postcolonial Research Group.

Fanon's writing—demonstrating the significant interest his work had generated among Italian readers, especially progressives and members of the “new left” that was gaining hold in those years.<sup>2</sup> The Italian translation of *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in July 1962, barely a few months after it had been published in France (at the end of 1961), closely followed in 1963 by *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina*, the translation of *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* [*Studies in a Dying Colonialism*]. Moreover, as Italy didn't censor his works in the way France did, they circulated much more freely in the public sphere, making their impact greater.

Fanon's connection to Italy is a case of reciprocal influences, as the essays featured in the special issue show. Fanon visited Italy on numerous occasions—especially Rome, where he delivered a part of his famous essay, “On National Culture”, at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1959 (later expanded and included in *The Wretched of the Earth*). As a member and spokesperson of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale, he often travelled to North Africa via Italy. In Rome, Fanon was also the target of a failed assassination attempt by French right-wing terrorists. As we shall see, not only did his ideas find an enthusiastic reception in Italy, but he and Giovanni Pirelli had conceived of producing an anthology of his writings in Italian.

There are two central moments of engagement with Fanon in Italian intellectual culture. The first one dates around the 1960s and 1970s, when his work was first translated into Italian and Italy was permeated by the enthusiasm of burgeoning radical movements, including Third-Worldism (Terzo-Mondismo).<sup>3</sup> This first moment of engagement is preserved in Fanon's cultural and political interactions with Italian intellectuals and activists such as Giovanni Pirelli, who shared a common wartime, anti-fascist experience with him (Fanon had fought with the Free French during the Second World War). He also had an important influence on Italian cinema of the 1960s, especially on Gillo Pontecorvo, the director of the two anti-colonial classics, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and *Burn!* (1969). As Pontecorvo himself acknowledged in an interview, “Many of us had read him, both within and outside the university it was a very highly regarded book” (Pontecorvo 2005: 109).

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<sup>2</sup> The first Italian translation of a text by Fanon took place during his lifetime, in April 1959, when his speech for the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists (that had taken place in Rome at the end of March 1959), appeared in the Italian left-wing magazine *Rinascita*.

<sup>3</sup> Stefano Guerriero notes that Italian Third-Worldists in the 1960s were known as “fanonisti” (2005: 440).

Federica Colleoni's essay for this special issue explores his influence on many other Italian film-makers of that generation, especially Valentino Orsini, the director of a relatively forgotten but extraordinary film, *I dannati della terra* (1969), whose title replicated the Italian translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Relying heavily on montage and pastiche, it presents an extended reflection on the failure of the European left to connect with Third-World liberation struggles. It engages in an intense dialogue with Fanon (as is foregrounded when the main character is reading *Black Skin, White Masks* alongside Mao and Che Guevara).

More generally, a focus on Fanon's presence in Italy contextualizes Italy more fully as a site of anti-colonial activism, conveniently located in the South of Europe, a symbolic gateway to Africa and the Mediterranean, and a country more politically sympathetic to the Algerian independence movement than most other European nations. At the time in which Fanon's ideas circulated in Italy, young progressive Italians sided actively with the Algerian liberation movement against French colonial occupation, and identified in the dialogue and engagement with anti-colonial struggles an occasion for the renovation of the Italian left, which it perceived as tired and sterile, linked to a retrograde and rigid Soviet-inspired communism. An internationalism rooted in the support for anti-imperialist movements in revolt against European colonial domination appeared as the way forward for re-defining what to many seemed merely "rhetorical" manifestations of anti-fascism, so as to include emerging nations beyond the confines of Europe. We can call this first moment of engagement the "activist" one, where the lessons gained from reading Fanon were aimed at implementing concrete political action.

This activist engagement with Fanon did not only mean politics in the mainstream arenas; it also meant the revolutionization of psychiatry in Italy, a new approach to mental illness, which Giovanni Jervis would call "post-Fanonian", in a recognition of the profound influence Fanon exercised on pioneering Italian psychiatrists such as Franco Basaglia (Jervis 1971: 13). Filippo Menozzi's essay for this special issue explores the fertile and complex interactions between Fanon and Italian psychiatry. The activist moment of engagement centred around the *The Wretched of the Earth* and later around Pirelli's *Opere scelte* [*Selected Works*], a collection of essays by Fanon in which Pirelli "dismembered" the trajectory of reading established by *The Wretched of the Earth*. Further below, I argue that Fanon's Italian reception cannot be understood without a careful consideration of the *Opere*

*scelte* in contrast to the already published volumes of *Les Damnés de la Terre* and *Pour la Révolution Africaine*. Moreover, Fanon's Italian reception can offer us a different approach to reading Fanon which is more in line with Fanon's own take on his work during his lifetime, which especially in latter years focused centrally on theorizing pan-African revolution and revolt in the Third World.

The second, more recent, and "academic" moment of engagement with Fanon's thought occurred with the arrival of Anglophone postcolonial theory in the Italian academy in the early 21st century. Though it was primarily an "academic" engagement, it was in part spurred by a new intellectual attention to the socio-political effects of non-European, postcolonial migrations to Italy, from the late 1990s onwards. The diffusion of postcolonial studies was in part effected thanks to small independent publishers such as Meltemi, which over the past few years has issued translations of major postcolonial theorists including Robert Young, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and some *Subaltern Studies* historians such as Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty. In the wake of the impact of the "postcolonial" in Italy, Miguel Mellino re-issued two of Fanon's works with the Italian radical publisher DeriveApprodi. These are *Per la rivoluzione africana* in 2006 ([*Pour la Révolution Africaine*], never before published in Italian) and *L'anno V della rivoluzione algerina* in 2007 [*L'An V de la révolution algérienne*], previously published in 1963 with the title *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina*.

Mellino's introduction to *Per la rivoluzione africana* shows how this latest moment of engagement with Fanon's thought in Italy is part of an enthusiastic reception of postcolonial theory on the part of Italian scholars, conceived as a wholly Anglophone body of writing, and almost entirely identified with the work of iconic theorists such as Bhabha, Young, and Spivak. While these two volumes edited by Mellino do important work in re-acquainting Italian readers with the forgotten figure of Fanon, there is little sense or memory here of Italy's more direct confrontation with his thought, which dates back to the beginning of the 1960s, primarily thanks to the painstaking editorial work of Giovanni Pirelli, who promoted and encouraged the publication of Fanon's writing. It is impossible to understand the spread of Fanon's ideas in Italy without the mediation of Pirelli, an ex-partisan, socialist, historian, novelist and pro-Algerian activist who had met Fanon in early 1961 and had been completely taken both by his anti-colonial ideas and by the man himself. Rachel

Love's essay for this special issue sheds new light on the relationship between Pirelli and Fanon, drawing on a wealth of archival material.

Indeed, comparing the earlier Italian with the contemporary postcolonial reception of Fanon allows us to trace the shift in perceptions of his status in Western culture: whereas now, Fanon is generally known as a key *postcolonial* thinker within academic circles, in the 1960s and 1970s, he was known as an anti-capitalist and *anti-colonial* thinker, within radical culture and political movements. Fanon's canonization within postcolonial theory is a phenomenon that dates to the 1980s, and is linked to the ways in which Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Edward Said and Robert Young began to re-read his work within new theoretical paradigms underpinned by post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. Thus, comparing activist and academic trajectories of reading Fanon can help us understand better the puzzling disconnect between anti-colonial and postcolonial modes of thinking about empire and its legacies. It also helps us to historicize more fully his theories as they were read and appreciated by his contemporaries. Moreover, an attention to the relationship between Fanon and Italy can begin to address the effects of Fanon's translations into other languages beyond English, an aspect which has been neglected up till now.<sup>4</sup> In the following section, I discuss how Fanon's work has become a theoretical cornerstone of postcolonial studies through a series of "symptomatic readings" of his work from the mid-1980s onwards, in order to show that, as with Italy in the 1960s, Fanon's writings have had a shaping effect on the development of radical theories against race and class discrimination, as they apply to situations internal to Europe itself.

### **Postcolonizing Fanon**

Fanon's place within postcolonial studies today is largely shaped by the tendency to read him as the author of *Black Skin, White Masks*, first translated into English in 1968, and *The Wretched of the Earth*, first translated into English in 1963, with relatively less consideration for his other political writings, namely *Studies in A Dying Colonialism* and *Toward the African Revolution*.<sup>5</sup> The Anglophone reception of his

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<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Batchelor at the University of Nottingham is heading an exciting new project that is looking at the translations of Fanon in different world languages, including Italian, Spanish, Farsi, and Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris: Maspéro 1961) was first translated into English with the title *The Damned* in 1963, by Constance Farrington, and published by Présence Africaine. A subsequent English edition appeared with Penguin in that same year, but with a different title, *The Wretched of the*

texts has also suffered from a critical hiatus, much like that of his Italian one. *The Wretched of the Earth* had an astounding global resonance when it was first translated into English, and most notably among African American radical groups, with one American edition of 1968 subtitled it “The handbook for the black revolution that is changing the shape of the world” (New York: Grove Press, 1968).<sup>6</sup> Fanon’s attention to violence as both ethical foundation for liberation and method of anti-colonial struggle struck a chord with the radicalized youth in American university campuses and beyond: in many ways, it was an iconic text of the 1968 student movement in Europe and America.

So how did Fanon become known as a theorist to be obligatorily included on almost any syllabus of postcolonial theory and literature? Fanon first entered what at the time was the new field of postcolonial studies thanks to Homi Bhabha’s celebrated Foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks* “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”.<sup>7</sup> Bhabha’s essay constituted the first important re-reading of Fanon’s work since the radical era of the late 1960s; in the Britain of the 1980s, Fanon’s ideas were “effectively out of print” (Bhabha 1986: vii).<sup>8</sup> In this essay, he presents a new reading of Fanon from a psycho-analytic and post-structuralist perspective. For Bhabha, Fanon’s greatest insight was about the ambivalence of identification, namely that the subject is always constituted in the tension between the self and the other. In what Stuart Hall would call Bhabha’s “symptomatic reading” of Fanon’s text (others would be less generous), Bhabha argues—and here is the real shift in the uses of Fanon within postcolonial studies—that Fanon’s work cannot be placed in a seamless narrative of liberationist history; he doesn’t wholly belong to a history of the left, as previous readings would have it. For Bhabha, Fanon is important as “the purveyor of the transgressive or transitional truth” (ix). Bhabha’s reading of Fanon emphasized the aspect of his thought that “rarely

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*Earth* (the definitive one that would enter the mainstream of postcolonial theory). A new translation of the text by Richard Philcox came out with Grove Press in 2004.

<sup>6</sup> According to David Macey, by 1985 *The Wretched of the Earth* had sold 155,000 copies worldwide, mainly thanks to the American edition, which was reprinted twice before it got to the bookstores and went through five paperback reprints within a year (Macey 2000: 17).

<sup>7</sup> This was the first re-edition of the text since the 1967 Grove Press edition (the translator had remained the same, Charles Lam Markmann).

<sup>8</sup> This is apart from Said’s far-sighted engagement with him in the lectures that would become his 1994 text *Culture and Imperialism*, and Sivanandan’s early discussions of Fanon in the journal *Race and Class*, as Bhabha reminds us. James Procter notes that Hall had been engaging with Fanon’s work since the late 1970s, (see *Policing the Crisis*, pp. 384-386); and Procter 2004: 94-95).

historicizes the colonial experience”, which was easier to argue for *Black Skin, White Masks* than for *The Wretched of the Earth*, given the many specific references in the latter to the Algerian war of liberation and to other anti-colonial struggles taking place in Africa at the time.

Bhabha reads *Black Skin, White Masks* in terms of the psycho-analytic process of identification, rather than identity, a process that never ends and is characterized by ambivalence and splitting. Thus, “the politics of race will not be entirely contained within the humanist myth of man or economic necessity or historical process”, argues Bhabha (xx). And further more: “Fanon opens up a margin of interrogation that causes a subversive slippage of identity and authority” (xxiv). Against the Manichean duality of white versus black typical of Négritude and other essentialist theories of blackness, Fanon emphasizes the constant process of reversal between black and white. Bhabha reads Fanon’s work almost as a postmodern collage, with its eclectic and multi-generic juxtaposition of texts, traditions, even oral dialogue—in such a way that the “last word” remains unspoken.<sup>9</sup>

Bhabha’s symptomatic reading was swiftly and ferociously criticized by those who advocated against a post-structuralist reading of Fanon; but really, as Hall had acutely guessed in 1996, what was really at stake was the future direction of postcolonial studies. It was largely around Fanon that the proponents of the materialist strand of postcolonial studies such as Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus began their battles for hegemony. Parry in a 1987 article for the *Oxford Literary Review* criticized Bhabha’s reading of Fanon as a “premature post-structuralist” (2004:17), a sort of “black Lacan”. Against the split self of Bhabha’s Fanon, Parry juxtaposed Fanon’s “construction of a politically conscious, unified revolutionary self” (Parry 2004: 15), which she recuperates in her reading of *The Wretched of the Earth*. It can be said that if Bhabha establishes Fanon as a “proto-postcolonialist” with an emphasis on ambivalence, the power of the dominant gaze, and the split racial self, *The Wretched of the Earth*, on the other hand, was placed in a rather different trajectory of reading and is mobilized in different senses by postcolonial scholarship, into a more overtly

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Young notes that Bhabha himself echoes Fanon’s “many-voiced” prose style, by constantly teasing the reader with “the difficulty of his texts, his oxymoronic phrases and indirect allusions” (Young 2004: 197).



“Marxist” tradition of anti-colonial revolutionary violence, a sort of “handbook” of anti-imperialism and anti-Western thought.<sup>10</sup>

However, despite his vocal detractors, Bhabha was “central to the creation of a new interest in Fanon” from the mid-1980s onwards; and in a sense the debate around his legacy has never ended (Gibson 1999: 10). Moreover, as Hall reminds us, Bhabha’s reading always explicitly aimed to go beyond “his Fanonian brief”, and for political reasons that were relevant to the situation in Britain at the time (Hall 1996a: 25). Bhabha expressed his dissatisfaction with Fanon in this essay, as when he says that Fanon seems “fearful of his most radical insights: that the space of the body and its identification is a representational reality; that the politics of race will never be entirely contained within the humanist myth of man or economic necessity or historical progress” (Bhabha 1986: xx). Bhabha was recuperating Fanon for a black British politics whose theoretical basis could not derive from Négritude or a black identitarian politics as it had been outlined within the African American context.<sup>11</sup> This “black British identity” was from the start suspicious of cultural authenticity precisely because it was so composite, representing diverse diasporic groups such as Afro-Caribbeans, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, West Africans, and others. Bhabha’s conclusion to the essay was anything but apolitical, showing how a deconstructionist approach could be mobilized for an activist cause: “in Britain, today [1986], as a range of culturally and racially marginalized groups readily assume the mask of the Black not to deny their diversity but to audaciously announce the important artifice of cultural identity and its difference, the need for Fanon becomes urgent” (Bhabha 1986: xxv).

The new interpretation of Fanon in the 1980s was the product of collaborative discussions among those who would emerge as key theorists in postcolonial and cultural studies, such as Bhabha and Hall. As of today, there is an unresolved tension

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<sup>10</sup> Neil Lazarus concedes that Fanon cannot be called a “nationalist” in any sense of the word, and calls him a “nationalitarian”, a revolutionary socialist (Lazarus 1999: 81). Lazarus, like Parry, is at pains to read Fanon as a revolutionary, rather than a theorist of colonial discourse, as Bhabha would have it (p. 80).

<sup>11</sup> Kobena Mercer also noted how blackness as linked to racialized codes of colour in the US context differed from the UK context: “One point about the political translation of *black*, which finds its counterpart in *people of color* in the US, as both connote coalition-building identifications in which the racializing code of “colour” is put *under erasure*, cancelled out but still legible in the deconstructive logic of the counterdiscourse that displaces it, is that it remains a political achievement otherwise specific and unique to British conditions” (Mercer 1994: 28). I am indebted to James Procter for this reference and for the discussion of Hall’s reading and appropriation of Fanon.

around the reading of Fanon within postcolonial studies, which this special issue seeks to address by moving beyond the ways in which his work has been canonized by post-structuralist and materialist approaches. Hall, the new theorist of black movements of the 1970s and 1980s, differentiating himself from the language of African American identity politics in favour of a more multi-valent theorizing of the subject which focused on a politics of representation, found in Fanon an ideal interlocutor (as well as in Gramsci). Hall's seminal essay "New Ethnicities", which sought to re-theorize black cultural politics with a focus on difference and anti-essentialism against binary notions of white versus black, invoked Fanon for his insistence on the "internalization of the self-as-other", and that "epistemic violence is both inside and outside" (Hall 1996b: 445). Hall's theorization of blackness based on the idea of difference was dictated by the specific political urgencies of Thatcherite Britain, in which various non-white groups found a commonality of struggle in combating British racism, "creating a new form of symbolic unity out of the signifiers of racial difference" (Mercer 1994: 271).<sup>12</sup> While Hall recognized black identity politics as a "necessary fiction" for combating racism, he also drew attention to its constructedness. In this sense, the two "Fanons" of post-structuralist and Marxist postcolonial critics are equally important for him; "the as-yet deeply unresolved question in so-called 'post-colonial studies' as to how to reconcile... in its paradigm of explanation and reading, *both* Fanon's spectacular demonstration of the power of the racial binary to *fix*, and Bhabha's equally important and theoretically productive argument that all binary systems of power are nevertheless, *at the same time*, often if not always, troubled and subverted by ambivalence and disavowal" (Hall 1996a: 27). It is undeniable, then, that the "postcolonization" of Fanon (i.e., not in his previous incarnation as a Third-Worldist, anti-colonial thinker, but as a black thinker who radically questioned the very foundations of the racialized subject) comes out of the emergence of cultural studies as a political movement that rejects the duality of black versus white, and is in part based on Hall's own work.

And so for the "postcolonial" Fanon. The very critics who revived Fanon in the 1980s were the first to acknowledge that they were deliberately appropriating him

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<sup>12</sup> James Procter draws attention to the "conjunctural" character of Hall's recuperation of post-structuralism for the formulation of a black cultural politics: "Hall's primary concern with his essays on identity is not with keeping abreast of the latest theoretical trends, but with identifying and trying to explain certain historical shifts he sees taking place within the culture of the Caribbean and black British diaspora" (Procter 2004: 121-122).

against the textual grain of this work; and “rather than trying to recapture the ‘true’ Fanon, we must try to engage the after-life of Frantz Fanon [...] in ways that do not simply restore the past in a cycle of the eternal return, but which will bring the enigma of Fanon [...] flashing up before us at a moment of danger” (Hall 1996a: 14). The work of this special issue in a sense, is also a “symptomatic reading”, but with a historicist intent. It seeks to relocate the reading of Fanon from the French and Algerian context within which he was normally placed, with an emphasis on the ways his theories travelled throughout Italy in a variety of disciplinary fields, at a specific conjuncture of European politics and culture. Ashley Bohrer’s essay for this special issue, for example, examines his influence on Italian feminism. We are mindful of Macey’s remark that “the ‘postcolonial’ Fanon is in many ways an inverted image of the ‘revolutionary’ Fanon of the 1960s” (2000: 28). But as we show below and in the essays which follow for this special issue, the contribution of Fanon influenced how European revolutionaries (both in political and cultural work) thought and operated, and is symptomatic of the ways in which Third-Worldism renovated and questioned European Marxism of the postwar era, extending the anti-fascist struggle to the anti-colonial world. The Italian reception of Fanon also serves as a useful reminder of how, in the 1960s and 70s, revolutionary anti-colonialism and its theorizations used to be situated *outside* the academy and within radical political activism.

### **“Are the Europeans the damned of the earth?”**

The Algerian war of independence has earned a special status in the numerous anti-colonial struggles that characterized the era of decolonization between the 1950s and 1960s. The Algerian revolution was widely considered a model for other anti-colonial revolutions taking place across the African continent, and Fanon campaigned extensively to extend the revolution to other areas of sub-Saharan Africa, most notably Angola.<sup>13</sup> As is well known, the war produced a profound split in the collective identity of the postwar French nation. What is perhaps less studied is the effect the Algerian struggle had on other European nations, and specifically Italy, where, as the Italian journalist Sergio Romano notes, the war “had an extraordinary moral and civil echo, a resonance that is only equalled by the Greek, Polish and

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<sup>13</sup> See his essays in *Toward the African Revolution*.

Italian national events” (1982:17). This solidarity for Algeria cut across the political spectrum, with the Christian Democrats supporting a pro-Arab policy more generally (which sat uneasily with their “Neo-Atlantic alliance” with France and the US), and the Italian Communist Party being the most pro-active of all European communist parties in providing both ideological and concrete support to the FLN (see Stéphane Mourlane 2010).

At the same time, the Italy of the early 1960s was a place of great cultural and political ferment, when many young people began radically questioning both bourgeois culture and what they felt to be the complacent Marxism of the Italian Communist Party, wedded to directives from Moscow, and which had failed to condemn the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Pontecorvo, the future director of *The Battle of Algiers*, had left the PCI in disgust in that year; as had many other intellectuals, including Italo Calvino and Pirelli. In many ways, the early 1960s were a period of incubation for the explosion of the enormous radical energies of the 1968 student movement, foreshadowed by the student occupation of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Rome “La Sapienza” in 1966. The Algerian war touched a profound chord in the imagination of the Italian left, and 1962 was a key year for this mobilization in favour of Algeria, and also of anti-colonial African movements more generally.<sup>14</sup> The radical journal *Quaderni Piacentini* published a notice of an exhibition in favour of Algeria organized by Pirelli and others that took place in Milan in June 1962 (34). The exhibition showcased photos of the atrocities committed by the French paras against Algerians, and also the manifestoes of the FLN and images of the Algerian people struggling for independence. The Italian press at the time often likened colonialism to fascism, so as to make it relatable to an Italian audience; and similarly, anti-colonialism was likened to the Italian anti-fascist struggle during the *Resistenza* in the course of the Second World War. As Jim House notes in relation to the French context, the memory of the Vichy regime and its rounding up of the Jews was used by pro-Algerian organizations after WWII as a “rhetorical strategy” that compared it with the discrimination against Algerians in

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<sup>14</sup> *Quaderni Piacentini* reported that Italian activists had been arrested for displaying a poster condemning Italy’s connivance in bringing about the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the nationalist leader of the Congo, in 1961, in which CIA and even UN involvement was widely suspected. The poster said: “The Italian government leaders, who with indifferent cynicism have always sided with the United Nations against oppressed and persecuted peoples, are complicit in the vile crime perpetrated by colonialism, which barbarously massacred Lumumba” (*Quaderni Piacentini*, n.1 1962, n.pag.).

France. As the French at the time had little awareness of anti-colonialism or colonial violence, “the only way of approaching the racialized colonial power relations affecting Algerians in France was often through an analogy with apparently ‘noncolonial’ forms of racism practiced during the Occupation” (House 2010: 24).

*Quaderni Piacentini* is paradigmatic for its attention to anti-colonial struggles as the way forward for renovating and extending European revolutionary movements, disillusioned by the Kremlin and let down by their own national communist parties. They carried a 1962 review of the *The Wretched of the Earth* (then just out with Einaudi) with the following title: “Are the Europeans now the damned of the earth?” Not only did the review condemn the Italian left’s almost complete lack of attention to the Third World; they also remarked that “for Fanon Europe is not in crisis: it is dying. But this doesn’t interest him much. If he speaks of [Europe], it is to only to dissuade the new nations from imitating it, and from becoming Europe in their turn” (*Quaderni Piacentini* 1962: 28). They felt that the European left needed to show concrete demonstrations of solidarity with the Third World; as they remarked, “capitalism will not be defeated in Europe if it is not at the same time thrown out of Africa” (*Quaderni Piacentini* 1963: 21).

The publication of Fanon’s work happened exactly at the right time for it to have a huge impression on the young, impatient Italian radical left, who longed to renovate both the theoretical paradigms and the political praxis of European Marxism. Writing in 1971, ten years after Fanon’s death, and at a moment in which Italy was taking stock of its radical political engagements in the 1960s, the Italian psychiatrist Giovanni Jervis remarked that above all, the lesson to be learnt from Fanon’s writings was his invitation to European intellectuals to bring revolutionary discourse closer to home, to Europe (Jervis 1971: 8). Jervis’s insight is borne out by Fanon’s 1957 essay “French Intellectuals and Democrats and the Algerian Revolution”, in which he emphasizes the need for European leftists to support anti-colonial struggle (and perhaps acknowledging the benefits of their support for the Algerian cause). They need to realize that a colonialist state is a fascist one; it is not enough to condemn the worst excesses of colonialism, as liberals tend to do, but also to recognize colonialism as a system of domination, namely the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people (Fanon 1967: 81).

The initial interest for Fanon’s work in Italy arose, then, out of two separate concerns: firstly, as we have noted, an interest in the Algerian cause that continued

after the moment of independence and was an inspiration for many artistic masterpieces of the time, especially cinema. Secondly, his writings on decolonization and especially his advocacy of violence in revolution had a huge impact on the student movement that was gaining momentum in those years. It is well known that Italian radical groups, in the wake of 1968, turned to armed struggle in their fight against the Italian state, most notably the Red Brigades; Fanon's essay "On Violence" received a particular, "symptomatic reading", which in part distorted these ideas but also updated them for the Italian situation.<sup>15</sup> Fanon's construction of the colonial world in Manichean terms and his theorization of violence as "a cleansing force" (Fanon 2004: 51) that restores humanity and self-respect to the colonized individual against the colonizer found a ready audience among proponents of violent political actions against those perceived as "class enemies" belonging to the Italian socio-political elite.

Additionally, Fanon's psychiatric work, and especially the radical new therapies he experimented in the Algerian clinic of Blida, deeply influenced the emergence of the "anti-psychiatry" movements of the 1960s and 1970s (see Menozzi's essay in this special issue for further discussion of this). Fanon's letter of resignation to the Governor General of Algeria in 1956, in which he outlined his reason for giving up his post as psychiatrist in the hospital of Blida in French Algeria posed the central dilemma of colonial psychiatry: "If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. What is the status of Algeria? A systematized dehumanization" (1967: 53). Jervis finds that Fanon's psychiatric activity was one of his biggest contributions to political activism; and conversely, that his political writings are Fanon's biggest contribution to psychiatry (1971:12). Jervis was writing within a consciousness that contrasted Fanon's "non-oppressive psychiatry" with the institutionalizing psychiatry that Jervis and other practitioners were trying to abolish, also inspired by a radical political stance. Insanity is recognized by Jervis as the

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<sup>15</sup> In 1970, Hannah Arendt had noted Fanon's great influence on "the present student generation" and their glorification of violence (14).

product of an active rebellion against the “dominant world of the psychiatrist”; “alienation” becomes the psychological condition of an entire people.<sup>16</sup>

How does Jervis, then, bring Fanon’s insights about the psycho-pathology of the colonized, “closer to home”? He likens it to the pathologies suffered by the European working class, and recognizes that mental asylums today are “class ghettos”. Franco Basaglia and Franca Ongaro Basaglia, in a 1969 photographic essay entitled *Morire di classe* [Dying of Class] juxtaposed stark and shocking images of patients in mental asylums, with shaved heads, vacant stares, institutional and sack-like clothing designed to “protect” them, with quotes from Foucault, Adorno, Primo Levi—such rhetorical and representational strategies related the condition of the asylum patient to the prisoner of the concentration camp. The volume ended with an excerpt from Fanon’s letter of resignation from Blida, mentioned above. Radical psychiatrists of the time felt that the stigma of mental illness deprived patients of their humanity in a way that likened them to the colonized and the victims of fascist violence. In a Foucauldian sense, but especially in a Fanonian sense, insanity was the “impossibility of becoming a political subject” (Jervis 1971: 13). The psychological malaise of the European factory worker translated into an internalized violence that western psychiatry sought to repress through institutionalization; much like colonial psychiatry, by using the repressive system of the state. “Once again this confirms how the deceptive presentation of class inferiority as psycho-biological inferiority, denounced by Fanon, extends beyond the traditional racist model, to act as a ‘scientific’ explanation for the articulation of individual destinies, which serves specific capitalist interests” (Jervis 1971:15).

Jervis’s essay, quoted here, was the Preface to Pirelli’s 1971 edition of Fanon’s *Opere Scelte* [Selected Works], a collection of Fanon’s essays which was timed to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Fanon’s death; but it was also the culmination of a tortured editorial history relating to the publication of Fanon’s writing with the renowned Turinese publisher Giulio Einaudi. Pirelli was already a successful published author with Einaudi when he first proposed to them the idea of publishing Fanon. Einaudi in Italy has a special intellectual cachet, now perhaps

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<sup>16</sup> Jervis was an ex-partisan fighter who subsequently specialized in psychiatry (much like Fanon himself) and who worked with the renowned Italian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia in developing a less repressive approach to curing mental illness. Jervis was instrumental, together with Basaglia, in supporting the closure of insane asylums in Italy, a move which passed into Italian law in 1978.

somewhat diminished, but which in the 1950s and 1960s made it one of the most outstanding progressive and left-wing publishers in Europe. Fanon was but one of the many Third-Worldist thinkers that they published (including Che Guevara, Mariatégui and Mao), and they also published a series of books about the Algerian Revolution. It certainly had the right militant credentials for publishing Fanon. In what follows, I examine the varying fortunes of Fanon's writing once Einaudi had decided on its publication.

### **Editing Fanon: unearthing a forgotten history**

Two textual histories co-exist around the publication of Fanon's work in Italian. The more well known history is marked by his books: we have the publication first of *I dannati della terra* [*Les Damnés de la Terre*] in 1962, followed by *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina* [*L'An V*] in 1963, and finally *Il negro e l'altro* [*Peau Noire, Masques Blancs (Black Skin, White Masks)*] in 1965; effectively, in reverse order to their original dates of publication in French. *Pour la Révolution Africaine* only appeared much later, in 2007, though letters from the archives of the publisher Giulio Einaudi show that a translation of this text had been commissioned as early as 1964, though it was never published by them. However, there is also a more hidden, and practically forgotten history of publication of his work that did *not* follow this format, as is exemplified by Pirelli's edition of the *Opere scelte* in 1971. This two-volume edition consisted of different essays culled from the existing Italian translations of the books, as well as a few that had been translated for the first time, presenting the Italian public with a radically new configuration of Fanon's writing that departed from his previous publishing history.

The project of presenting Fanon's work in anthology form, rather than as separate books, had already been conceived during Fanon's lifetime. In the summer of 1961 (though evidence suggests this may have been earlier), together Pirelli and Fanon came up with an editorial project that would consist of a single volume grouping together essays from both of the books already published, with the Italian title of *Saggi sulla rivoluzione algerina e sulla decolonizzazione* [*Essays on the Algerian Revolution and Decolonization*] (Pirelli 1963:6). This was before *The Wretched of the Earth* was published by Maspéro and before Fanon's death in December of that year. A letter from the editor Giulio Einaudi to Fanon's French



publisher, François Maspéro, dated July 24, 1961, outlined the planned structure to the volume: “As you probably know, M. Giovanni Pirelli and M. Fanon have recently agreed on the publication in Italy of a book containing a selection of writings by M. Fanon, and precisely: the first four chapters of *L’An V*, the essay “On Violence” (published in *Temps Modernes*), and a certain number of chapters excerpted from the book by Fanon which will soon appear with you” (File 224/1, Folder 42, Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore).

But after Fanon’s death, Pirelli thought it best to reprise Fanon’s publication trajectory, and publish *Les Damnés* and *L’An V* separately. He felt it advisable to publish the former first, so that the Italian reader could first tackle Fanon’s more mature theoretical reflections on anti-colonial revolution and in a later moment, read the analysis of the “directly and intensely lived experience” of *L’An V*, which became in the Italian edition, *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina* [*Sociology of the Algerian Revolution*] (Pirelli 1963: 7). In a footnote, Pirelli commented that “the changed title represented, obviously, a changed perspective” on the Algerian revolution (7); a perspective that Fanon had not been granted, because he had died before the attainment of independence. Moreover, the change in title also reflected the fact that Fanon’s earlier book was being presented *later* to the Italian public, after *The Wretched of the Earth*. Pirelli’s changed title was used by Maspéro in a subsequent edition of the book, which was called in French *Sociologie d’une révolution: L’An V de la révolution algérienne* (1966).<sup>17</sup> As mentioned earlier, letters between Laura Gonsalez (one of Fanon’s Italian translators) and Einaudi show that Gonsalez had completed a translation of *Pour la révolution africaine*, though for some reason it was never published—presumably because Pirelli wanted to publish his anthology instead. Moreover, *Pour la révolution africaine* was a posthumous collection of works put together by Maspéro; so Pirelli felt his anthology would be equally, if not more legitimate.<sup>18</sup>

It was in a letter to Einaudi in January 1960 that Pirelli made his first mention of Fanon. Pirelli was preparing a book of testimony on the Algerian revolution, which

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<sup>17</sup> In her biography of Fanon, Alice Cherki claims that Fanon was not happy with the change of title (2006: 133). This is impossible, as Maspéro re-issued the title *Sociologie d’une révolution* only in 1966, five years after Fanon’s death. Fanon had originally planned to call his book *Réalité d’une nation* (Macey 2000: 398).

<sup>18</sup> See letter from Pirelli to Solmi, dated May 5, 1964 (File 2429/2, Folder 160, Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore).

would come out in 1963, with Einaudi and Maspéro simultaneously, entitled *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* [*Letters from the Algerian Revolution*]. In this letter, he stated his intention of going to Tunis and making contact with the leaders of the Algerian revolution, with their French supporters, and “through them with Fanon in Accra” (File 2429/1, Folder 160, Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore).<sup>19</sup> Pirelli’s interest in Fanon’s work, as he recounts in the Preface to *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina*, was motivated by his realization that unlike other non-Algerian sympathizers, Fanon was not interested in adopting a “liberal, pacifist, humanitarian” stance against the “racist and criminal” France. He was only interested in the condition of “his people” (namely, the Algerians, thus highlighting Fanon’s anti-colonial transnationalism), and in analyzing the formation of a “revolutionary behaviour” amongst them (Pirelli 1963: 5). Already in 1960, Pirelli had wholeheartedly adopted Fanon’s “methodological approach” in making the condition of the Algerian revolutionaries known to the world at large: that is, by letting the Algerians themselves speak. This was the angle with which he presented his testimony project to Einaudi in this letter dated January 5, 1960: “Shall we then precisely characterize our work, more advanced and conscious and original compared to the great number of publications already in existence, by staying *within* the Algerian struggle? Operating the way an FLN scholar would operate, if they had our opportunities? I would say, as a plan of work: yes. With this fundamental consequence: that we work exclusively with Algerian testimonies...” (File 2429/1, Folder 160, Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore). Pirelli is interested in presenting the reader with a subalternist history of the Algerian struggle, recuperating the voices from “within”, the voices of the Algerian freedom fighters, anti-French protesters, activists, imprisoned, tortured and condemned to death by the French. Pirelli’s enthusiastic sponsorship of Fanon’s work with Einaudi is thus inextricably intertwined with his own editorial projects around the documenting of the Algerian war.

1962 proved to be the key year for the explosion of Fanon’s mass popularity with the Italian public, when *The Wretched of the Earth* came out as *I dannati della terra*.<sup>20</sup> It was also the year Algeria became independent. It’s fair to say that the book

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<sup>19</sup> In 1960 Fanon was travelling to Accra quite often.

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struck a chord with many of those on the left who were dissatisfied with parliamentary Communist politics, excessively enslaved to Moscow directives and with little attention or interest for the new directions that culture and progressive politics were taking. The renowned anthropologist Ernesto De Martino remarked on its “antidogmatic” approach in liberating marxism from its “originally Eurocentric [europeocentrico] conditioning”; he hailed it as an attempt to “extend the problem of national pathways to socialism to the vast area covered by the Third World and according to indications that come from the direct experience of the struggles of the protagonists and leaders of the process of decolonization” (De Martino 1962). It is startling to find the word “europeocentrico” (possibly a new coinage) in relationship to marxism as early as 1962; but in the postwar period, European intellectuals were beginning to awaken to the fact that decolonization and anti-colonial struggle had contributed in determining ways to provincialize Marxism, and that these theoretical and practical reflections had been underway since the early twentieth century among African and Asian left activists. One of the most interesting essays published shortly after the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in 1962, by the China expert Enrica Collotti Pischel, compared Maoism with “Fanonism”, and included an extended reflection on the ways in which the “colonial question” had impacted on the development of Communism in the twentieth century. The book also resonated profoundly with those who sympathized with the Algerians and anti-colonial struggle more generally, because they still vividly remembered their own role as partisans in helping to liberate Italy from fascism; and *The Wretched of the Earth* was awarded the Omega Literary Prize for the Resistance in 1962, by a jury that included Italo Calvino (Comunicato Stampa Einaudi 1962). As with Pirelli, the prize highlighted the clear continuities between anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle; according to one journalist, after the awards ceremony, the audience and the jury all stood up and sang the renowned partisan song “Bella Ciao” (Papi 1962).

In 1971, Pirelli finally prevailed on Einaudi to come out with a two-volume edition of Fanon’s selected works. The book was the fruit of an extended and torturous editorial battle over the publication of Fanon’s works. It is clear that Pirelli considered himself the “curator” of Fanon in Italy, and he was furious with Einaudi’s delay in getting the selected works published. Pirelli accused Einaudi of deciding to abandon the original project of a Fanon anthology once his text had been adopted by Italy’s new left and by the student movement, “as one of the authors who opened new

pathways and contributed to giving new dimensions to the theoretical-political discourse” (letter by Pirelli to Luca Baranelli, 1970, Archivio Giulio Einaudi). Instead of going ahead with the anthology, Einaudi had simply decided to re-issue 4-5 thousand copies of *The Wretched* as it had originally appeared, because it had been such a hit with the generation of 1968. This was a clear example of how the changing political contexts between 1962 and 1968 had determined editorial policy in how the work was to be presented to the Italian public.

When Pirelli finally managed to get *Opere Scelte* published, it included selected essays from *Les Damnés*, *L’An V*, and *Pour la révolution africaine*. But Pirelli radically recombined the order of the essays as they appeared in the individual volumes. A look at the Table of Contents for the *Opere scelte* can offer us some interesting food for thought in terms of how Italian contemporaries may have come to see this text, and also about Pirelli’s criteria of ordering. He adopted a strictly chronological approach to the essays, and gave a great importance to Fanon’s writings on psychiatry, which are given a whole separate section, entitled “Medicine, colonialism, war of liberation”.

#### Table of Contents, *Opere scelte*

- First Section – Acculturation and National Culture
- Second Section – Medicine, Colonialism, War of Liberation
- Third Section – Sociology of a Revolution
- Fourth Section: Decolonization and Independence
- Fifth section: Violence, Spontaneity, National Consciousness

What we immediately note, in this dismembering of Fanon’s individual books into thematic groupings of essays, is firstly, the chronological order, perhaps aiming to emphasize Fanon’s gradual evolution as a political thinker in the context and development of the Algerian revolution; and secondly, the lack of Sartre’s accompanying preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, thus perhaps offering a more “Italian” reading of the thinker.<sup>21</sup> The criterion of selection that Pirelli avowedly

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<sup>21</sup> Several contemporary reviewers of the *Opere scelte* greatly appreciated Jervis’s Preface in lieu of Sartre’s preface (see for example, Laura Gonzalez’s glowing review of the book in the *Monthly Review* in 1971).

adopted was stated in his Editor's Note to the volume: "the works by Frantz Fanon most directly connected to the debate around the character, the lines of development, and the contents of the liberation or revolutionary process in the areas of old or neo-colonialism, in which we should include areas within highly developed industrialized countries, where situations of a colonial type have been replicated. It is well known that the black militants of the United States consider Fanon's work, together with that of Malcolm X, the theoretical foundation of their revolutionary activity" (Pirelli 1971: 39). The immediate applicability of Fanon's theories about anti-colonial revolution to the "internal colonies" of African American ghettos in US cities had already been noticed by many commentators including Pirelli.

Pirelli was by no means uncritical of Fanon; his historical judgement was that Fanon was too much of an idealist and did not sufficiently grasp the hold that neo-colonialism already had on Africa, and that he had also failed to see the counter-revolutionary tendencies at work within the FLN. Moreover, Pirelli thought that Fanon did not sufficiently consider the forms of colonialism and oppression that were at work in Europe itself (Pirelli 1994: 166).

### **On National Culture**

At least one of the essays that Pirelli included in the *Opere scelte* had been initially delivered as a speech in Rome in 1959. At the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1959 at the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente in Rome, "Docteur Frantz Fanon" was presented as having given a speech entitled "'Fondement réciproque de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération" ["Mutual Foundations for National Culture and Liberation Struggles"]. All the talks at the Congress were in French, not Italian.

Fanon's speech (the original one he gave in Rome) was printed and translated in the April 1959 issue of *Rinascita*, under the title "Nazione, cultura e lotta di liberazione" [Nation, Culture and Struggle for Liberation]. This would then be re-translated first for the 1962 translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*, and then for Pirelli's *Opere scelte*. The title given in this volume is "Fondamenti reciproci della cultura nazionale e delle lotte di liberazione", and is placed *before* "Sulla cultura nazionale" ["On National Culture"]; whereas *all* editions of Fanon in French and English (both *Les Damnés* and *The Wretched*) tend to have a single essay entitled "On

National Culture”, with the 1959 speech from the Second Congress placed at the end.<sup>22</sup> This is a seminal essay as it outlines Fanon’s most clear rejection of Négritude and emphasizes the importance of *national* culture, rather than one based on ethnicity. But when we invert the order of the two parts of the essay, what appears first is Fanon’s emphasis on the construction of a national culture in the struggle against colonialism, and the duty of the “African intellectual” in helping to construct that culture for his people. His attack on Négritude and on a spurious “cultural unity” of black societies that was being supported by several African states at the time such as Senegal and Madagascar was more much explicit in his later piece for *The Wretched of the Earth*. As David Macey remarks, “On National Culture”, written in 1961, “is much harsher and says things that could scarcely be said on a public platform by someone whose main concern was to rally support for the GPRA and the Algerian cause” (Macey 2000: 375). My sense is that Pirelli was attempting to restore a philological faithfulness to the evolution of Fanon’s thought by placing the 1959 reflection on national culture and its connection to anti-colonial revolution, before the more mature, developed and possibly disillusioned one of 1961.

### **Pirelli’s “Biographical Note” of Fanon**

In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to the inclusion in this special issue of Pirelli’s now completely forgotten “Biographical Note” of Fanon, originally published in *Opere scelte*, and beautifully translated by Rachel Love. This “Biographical Note” is important because it acts as both a supplement and as a source for many of the biographies of Fanon in existence. Alice Cherki almost certainly drew on it, as did one of Fanon’s earliest biographers, Peter Geismar, who published his book on Fanon in 1970 (Pirelli mentions in several places that he and Geismar exchanged much information and knowledge about Fanon’s life). Though David Macey’s biography remains the most definitive, authoritative and informative of all these works, Pirelli’s Biographical Note is valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it mentions Fanon’s book project that preceded *The Wretched of the Earth*, which he intended to be a work on Africa. It was entitled *Algiers-Cape Town* and presented a

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<sup>22</sup> The reason for Pirelli’s different ordering may have been because he had adopted a strictly chronological order to the essays by Fanon in his anthology.

chapter structure that highlighted many of the salient themes he would later focus on in his last book, such as “Violence in Africa” and “Negritude and Negro-African Civilization: A Mystification.”<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Pirelli relied on first-hand accounts from Fanon himself, his close family and his friends to put together the biography. The Note also contains an excerpt from the last letter Fanon ever wrote, while in hospital in Washington, and addressed to his friends in Tunis, in which he said that thinking about Algeria and the Third World had helped him through some of the most difficult stages of his disease. And finally, one could add that it is worth reading this Note on Fanon because in the words of Pirelli, “a biography of Fanon is above all a guide to the reading of Fanon” (Pirelli 1994: 130).

It is to be hoped that the wide-ranging and erudite essays that follow will lead to greater recognition and understanding of Fanon’s rich and multi-faceted relationship with Italy. The pieces explore in more depth Fanon and Italian cinema (Colleoni); the figure of Giovanni Pirelli (Love); Fanon and Italian psychiatry (Menozzi); and finally, Fanon and Italian feminism (Bohrer).

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<sup>23</sup> This book project is mentioned by Alice Cherki in her biography of Fanon (2006: 149-150); could her source have been Pirelli’s “Biographical Note”?

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