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BLACK ORPHEUS, FANON, AND THE NÉGRITUDE MOVEMENT

In *Rethinking Existentialism* (Webber 2018), Jonathan Webber sets out to articulate a new understanding of the tradition, tracing what he takes to be its basic commitments through the work of various existentialist thinkers. One of the figures Webber examines is Frantz Fanon – one of, if not *the* most, important anti-colonial theorists of the twentieth century. Fanon's inclusion is a welcome addition to the volume, since his contributions to existentialism have often been overlooked. A large part of Webber's discussion focuses on Fanon's engagement with the Négritude Movement – a mid-twentieth century black consciousness movement developed in Paris by thinkers from across the French colonial world. A portion of Fanon's text discusses an interpretation of the movement advanced by Sartre in his essay 'Black Orpheus' (1988). These strands of thought will be my focus here. I will begin by presenting, by way of introduction, some key facts about colonial thinking and the relation of the Négritude Movement to these. After this, I will outline what I call Webber's 'black agency' reading, before presenting some objections to it. In the final section, I will present an alternative reading of Fanon, which – in contrast to Webber's interpretation – sees Fanon as accepting certain important négritude ideas, particularly Césaire's conception of a therapeutic method called the *nekyia,* which I take to be crucial to understanding Fanon's response to Sartre.

'Masks' and the Négritude Movement

One of the central insights from Fanon's work is that colonialism is not just a physical system of oppression. It is also an ideology. There are many different understandings of ideology, but a basic definition takes it to be a conceptual framework that categorizes people and situates them in social space. Colonialism orders people according to a racial binary: black versus white – where the terms are defined in opposition to one another. Whiteness is superior, civilized, educated, more intelligent, and so on; it is the normative state for human beings. Blackness is inferior, uncivilized, uneducated, less intelligent; to be black is to deviate from what it is to be human. It is to be subhuman. Fanon shows how these ideas are not just grasped on an intellectual level. They shape the bodies and lived world of those living in the colonial system. Webber (2018) takes the masks in the title of Fanon's famous text, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008), to refer to these colonial conceptions of the kinds of people who exist. Within this system, black people face a dilemma. Either they can 'wear the masks' designed for black people and so accept categorisation of themselves as inferior. Or they can attempt to 'wear the masks' designed for white people. The latter option involves trying to show that one is rational, civilized, evolved, and so on. Initially, this

might seem a good option – after all, colonial conceptions of black people as inferior are false, so perhaps the way forward is to demonstrate this. However, Fanon argues that this will not work. As Webber puts it, 'at best, [the black person's] behaviour can be mere impersonation of the white person' (Webber 2018, p. 135).

The Négritude Movement tries to offer a way out of this predicament through rewriting the meaning of blackness. It advocates pride in being black. There are many different strands to the movement. For example, it offers various positive images of blackness, suggests a unified identity in Africa, and seeks to recover African history as a source of black self-esteem. Whilst these ideas may now seem commonplace, they were radical at the time. Fanon tells us that when Aimé Césaire, one of the founders of the Négritude Movement who was also from Martinique, went round telling people it was a good thing to be black, this was initially scandalous. To be black was to be inferior, yet here was a man who not only admitted that he was black, but also denied that this was a bad thing. Moreover, he was a lycée teacher – an educated, middle-class man. People thought he had lost his mind. 'Two centuries of white truth proved this man to be wrong. He must be mad, for it was unthinkable that he could be right' (Fanon 2022, p. 22).

One might suppose that Fanon, with his aim of liberating black (and white) people from colonialism would endorse the Négritude Movement. But Webber reads Fanon as rejecting it - 'by the time of writing *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon had come to see the Négritude Movement as a response to the dilemma of white masks that ultimately cannot succeed in overcoming the problem' (Webber 2018, p. 137). The question, of course, is why?

<u>Webber's Black Agency Reading</u>

Webber's response to this question is what I will call the 'black agency' reading. He is puzzled by Fanon's claim that when the black person attempts to wear the mask intended for a white person – i.e., to demonstrate that one is equally as intelligent, educated, civilized as the coloniser – this can only be impersonation. As Webber notes, this cannot be because Fanon thinks the colonized and the colonizers are *essentially* different, so that the black person is just unable to behave and think like the white. Nor, Webber argues, is it because colonised people have been *socialised* into a distinctly black culture, which has made them different from white people. In fact, the opposite is true: Fanon tells us that Martinicans have been socialised into identifying with the colonisers.

The Tarzan stories, the sagas of twelve-year-old explorers, the adventures of Mickey Mouse, and all those "comic books"… The magazines are put together by white men for little white men. This is the heart of the problem… In

the magazines, the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, an adventurer, a missionary "who faces the danger of being eaten by wicked Negroes" (Fanon 2008, p. 112–3).

Martinicans thought of themselves as European and not-black. Instead, 'the Negro [...] was a man who inhabited Africa' (Fanon 2022, p. 20).[1]

Instead, Webber argues that the black person's attempt to wear one of the masks designated for white people can only be impersonation because the black person *has no agency* over the design of the masks. Colonial ideology is the creation of white people. The norms of behaviour for both white and black people are constructed by them. It is white people who have attributed the differing traits and characteristics to white and black people. It is because black persons have had no hand in this creation that an attempt to live up to the ideals of whiteness can only ever be impersonation.

Webber extends this analysis through a consideration of Fanon's engagement with Sartre's essay 'Black Orpheus' (Sartre 1988). Sartre originally wrote this essay as the preface to a collection of Négritude poetry edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senghor 1948), and it sets out his critical interpretation of the movement. Fanon discusses this essay as part of his response to the Négritude writers in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008). Sartre understands the Négritude Movement from the perspective of classical Marxism (Diagne 2018). As such, he sees it as an inevitable moment in the progression of history towards a just and equal society.

Fanon argues that Sartre's interpretation of the Négritude Movement undermines it. Webber understands how it does so in the following way. For the Négritude Movement to be successful, it would have to wrest control of the masks designed for black people from the colonizers. In other words, it would have to offer an alternative, positive conception of blackness, and have that conception accepted by both black and white people. It would have to change the colonizers' view of black people as inferior. Webber then argues that for this to happen, the colonizer would have to see black people *as exercising agency* to rewrite the meaning of their own existence. If black people can *choose* and subsequently *act*, to develop a new conception of what it is to be black, then in doing so, they *demonstrate* that they are not inferior, uncivilized, etc. Thus it is not merely (or not even particularly) the content of the new conception that changes minds, but

1 Fanon tells us that this identification with the colonisers led to an identity crisis when Martinicans were confronted with the fact that white Europeans thought of them as black.

the act of creating that content. The problem is that if the Négritude Movement is an inevitable part of a historical process, as Sartre maintains, then it is *not* the result of black agency.

Objections

The first problem is not exactly an objection so much as a note of caution. Webber takes Fanon to be a critic of the Négritude Movement. But as commentators such as Bernasconi (2002) and Rabaka (2015) point out, Fanon's relationship to the movement is actually more nuanced than this. He certainly criticised some aspects of it, but he also took up and reworked others. Moreover, Rabaka (2015) notes that Fanon was just as ambivalent about Sartrean existentialism as he was about the Négritude Movement, however, there is a tendency in the literature to paint him as a critic of the latter, but an adherent of the former. This matters because, whilst the Négritude Movement was forged in Europe, it emerged out of a tradition of black thought, taking in influences such as the Harlem Renaissance, the Haitian Renaissance, the thought of W. E. B. Du Bois, and so on, whilst Sartrean existentialism was straightforwardly European. In seeking to understand Fanon's work, we should do justice to the ways it was informed by *black* intellectual traditions, as well as those of Europe.

The second problem – or set of problems – concerns Webber's interpretation of how Sartre undermines Négritude ideas. Recall that Sartre interprets the Négritude Movement as an inevitable stage in the movement of history towards a just and equal society. Webber takes this to undermine the movement because for it to be effective, its development must be the result of black persons' agency, but if its occurrence is inevitable then this cannot be so. However, it is not clear that historical inevitability *is* in conflict with human agency in the way that Webber claims. Just because some event *had* to happen does not mean that its occurrence was not the result of human actions. One could hold that historical forces bring people to the point that they *must* act – doing nothing is not an option – but that they exercise agency in deciding *what* to do. On this view, the claim that the Négritude Movement is inevitable is the claim that the pressure exerted on black people by colonialism inevitably brought them to the point that they needed to refuse the colonial 'masks' designed by them and forge their own positive self-conception. But these facts about the situation do not determine which person(s) will first come to realise that colonial ideas about blackness are false. Neither do they determine how people will develop a new self-conception – the resources they will draw on, the content of the new understanding they will bring about, and so on. This can be put in existentialist terms. The pressure exerted by the colonial system is part of the black person's facticity, which presents her with a range of options for action.

Nothing compels her to choose one rather than another. She has absolutely free choice from the range of options in front of her. But such is the pressure exerted by colonialism that just carrying on as before is no longer one of the options available.

One might reject an understanding of historical inevitability as compatible with human agency, and insist that if the Négritude Movement is inevitable, then black people did not actively create it. Nevertheless, even if it is true that black people were somehow passive instruments of the historical processes that forged Négritude, it's not clear that the movement would be undermined in the way that Webber contends. On his reading, the effectiveness of the Négritude Movement is supposed to rest on white colonizers seeing it as the exercise of black agency. The fact that it is an inevitable part of a historical process would only undermine the movement if the colonizers *understood* historical processes and the Négritude Movement in this way. But it is implausible to think this is so. This view of history and the Négritude Movement is the result of complex theorising. Even if it is accurate, there is little reason to think that it would be widespread amongst the colonizers.

There is yet a further problem with this reading. Webber holds that seeing black people exercising their agency to develop a new self-conception would help persuade the colonizers to give up their idea of them as inferior, uncivilized, irrational, and so on. Seeing black people *doing* something – in this case, engaging in scholarship, researching African history, discussing black identity, etc. - would be enough to dispel the colonial idea of blackness as inferior. This is an empirical claim about the sorts of things that people find persuasive, or that are apt to change their views of others, which means it cannot be fully settled one way or the other from the armchair. But it is worth noting that the colonisers have seen the colonized exercise their agency in many ways, for example in the many revolts staged by the colonized and the enslaved. None of which substantially affected the colonizers' views of the colonized. Thus it is unclear why seeing the Négritude Movement as the result of black action should make a difference.

More importantly, I do not think that Webber's interpretation is an accurate reading of Fanon's engagement with Sartre. I will present an alternative in the next section.

Fanon, Sartre, and 'Black Orpheus'

I will begin by taking a closer look at Sartre's argument in 'Black Orpheus'. Sartre uses the term 'négritude' to mean something like a black essence or the black soul. He offers reflections on various aspects of it. But two in particular concern us here.

The first of Sartre's reflections that are relevant to our purposes is his argument that négritude does not exist. He points out that the claims made about what négritude actually is are extremely varied, and in some cases, inconsistent, so it cannot really be a thing at all.

> And how can one say that [négritude] exists? Sometimes it is lost innocence which had its existence in some faraway past, and sometimes hope which can be realized only within the walls of the future City. Sometimes it contracts with Nature in a moment of pantheistic fusion and sometimes it spreads itself out to coincide with the whole history of Humanity; sometimes it is an existential attitude and sometimes the objective ensemble of Negro-African traditions. Is it being discovered? Is it being created?… Does the poet who would be the Prophet for his colored brothers invite them to *become* more Negro, or does he disclose to them what they *are*, by a sort of poetic psychoanalysis? Is négritude necessity or liberty?… [I]s it a matter of conduct deriving from essences, as consequences derive from a principle, or is one a Negro in the way that the religious faithful are believers… [?] Is it a given fact or value? The object of empirical intuition or a moral concept? Is it a conquest or meditation? Or does meditation poison it? Is it never authentic except when unmediated and in the immediate? Is it a systematic *explanation* of the black soul, or a Platonic Archetype which one can approach indefinitely without ever attaining? Is it, for black men, like an engineer's common sense, the most widely shared thing in the world? Or do some have it, like grace; and if so, does it have its chosen ones?' (Sartre 1988, pp. 325–6).

One might conclude that since there is no such thing as négritude – a black essence – the Négritude Movement that is premised (according to some writers) on it must be rejected. But this is not Sartre's view. As we have seen above, Sartre sees the movement as one moment in the historical process that leads to a just and equal society devoid of divisions such as class and race.

The second part of Sartre's analysis that is important to understanding Fanon's view is his Marxist interpretation of the movement. The notion of class is essential to Marxist theory. Class is fundamentally, by definition, economic inequality. It is understood in terms of the structures that create and maintain such inequality, e.g., profit, the ownership of the means of production, and so on. A crucial aim of Marxist thought is to bring the workers – the proletariat – to class consciousness. In other words, to instil in them, an awareness of economic inequality and their own exploitation, the recognition of which should motivate them to fight for equality. Since class just *is* economic inequality, this means fighting for the destruction of class. Class consciousness therefore contains its own obliteration because when there is no class, there will no longer be any awareness of it because the object of that awareness has ceased to exist.

Sartre notes that black people were/are more economically exploited than other groups. The central forms of their oppression – slavery and colonialism – were ultimately about economic wealth. Slaves were the cheapest form of labour, used by slave owners primarily to maximize profit

from their plantations, as well as a means to living more comfortably by offloading domestic chores onto slaves. Colonialism was about taking resources – e.g., land, timber, gold, rubber, diamonds, cheap labour in the form of colonized people – to generate wealth for the colonisers. Sartre remarks that

> [t]he white worker benefits somewhat from colonization, in spite of himself: low as his standard of living may be, it would be even lower if there were no colonization. In any case, he is less cynically exploited than the day laborer in Dakar or Saint-Louis (Sartre 1988, p. 296).

Black people are thus an economic underclass; racial oppression at its heart is really economic exploitation, and so race is really a concrete form of class - 'the notion of race does not mix with the notion of class: the former is concrete and particular; the latter, universal and abstract' (Sartre 1988, p. 327). However, class consciousness of the sort that Marxism tries to instil in the white worker is not sufficient in the case of racial oppression. Whilst the upper classes no doubt look down upon white workers as inferior in various respects, the white proletariat is not conceived as a different type of being. Black people, in contrast are considered to be essentially different from white people. '[T]he scorn that white men display for black men – and that has no equivalent in the bourgoisie towards the working class – is aimed at the deepest recesses of the heart' (Sartre 1988, p. 297). Colonialism thinks of race as biological difference. Thus the black consciousness that is crucial in the fight for liberation has to be different from class consciousness. Unlike the latter, it cannot just be awareness of economic exploitation. It has first to counter notions of essential black inferiority. It thus employs the idea of a positively-valued black essence to reignite pride in black-skinned selves. Sartre describes it as 'antiracist racism' (Sartre 1988, p. 326). The idea of négritude serves to unite black people – both Africans and the diasporas. Once someone feels their worth as a black-skinned human being, they can fully appreciate the injustice of their oppression. One is not an inferior being who somehow deserves such treatment, as colonialism would have people believe, but a member of a group of people who have been horribly exploited. This realisation then motivates one to fight against one's oppression alongside other black people. Since one's oppression is fundamentally economic – the violence and suffering inflicted in the service of capitalist goals – the black person will come to see their struggle as coinciding with that of other exploited people, including the white workers of Europe. From this position, they will all work together towards a society with no class, and – as race is just a concrete form of class – no race.

The Négritude Movement thus carries the seeds of its own destruction. Black consciousness is just one step on the way to a world where there is no race. Just as class consciousness is a step on the way to a world where there is no class.

> [T]his negative moment [the Négritude Movement] is not sufficient in itself, and these black men who use it know this perfectly well; they know that it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human being in a raceless society. Thus négritude is *for* destroying itself; it is a "crossing to" and not "an arrival at", a means and not an end (Sartre 1988, p. 327).

In this way, the Négritude Movement on Sartre's analysis adopts a position of what Spivak (1988) calls 'strategic essentialism'. Essentialist ideas about race are endorsed as tools in the fight for liberation, with the knowledge all along that they are mere fictions to be jettisoned at a later date when one's goals have been achieved.

Fanon's response to Sartre is captured in the following remark,

> When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance… Help had been sought from a friend of the coloured peoples, and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what we were doing. For once, that born Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain to consciousness of self (Fanon 2008, p. 102).

As Webber points out, Fanon's argument here is that Sartre's interpretation of the Négritude Movement undercuts it, rendering it useless. However, in contrast to Webber's black agency reading, I think Fanon's point here is more simple. For the idea of négritude – a positive black essence – to fulfil its function of reigniting black pride and lifting up black people, those people must believe it is true. To give an analogy, you cannot make me feel better about losing a piano competition by telling me that I am a great piano player if I know that you are lying. I must believe you are telling me the truth about my piano skills for your words to have their intended effect. Similarly, if the idea of négritude is a mere fiction, then it cannot do the work it is intended to. Of course, one could argue – as Sartre does – that the architects of the Négritude Movement understood this but used the idea of négritude to motivate the masses anyway. But this implies that they are consciously lying to their black audience. Furthermore, as black people themselves, they are also in need of a means to combat the psychological impact of colonialism and slavery on their sense of self. Unless they engage in a significant act of self-deception, they cannot both embrace the idea of négritude as a source of pride *and* accept that it does not exist. If négritude is

not real, and black consciousness is just a form of class consciousness that will eventually be superseded, then the Négritude Movement is a failure.

Webber reads Fanon as accepting Sartre's assessment of the Négritude Movement, and – for this and other reasons – rejecting it in favour of the universalism that Sartre espouses. It is true that Fanon sometimes seems to take this line. For example, he writes

> [e]ither I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is bad [but since neither of these options is possible or desirable] I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable… to reach out for the universal (Fanon 2008, p. 197).

However, matters are not so simple.

Fanon also writes that 'Sartre forgets the black man suffers in his body quite differently to the white man' (Fanon 2008, p. 106). Webber does note this point of disagreement, but reads it as incidental to the question of négritude. He takes it to be Fanon's corrective to Sartre's theory of the gaze. According to the latter, being looked at by another human being is an uncomfortable experience. It is the experience of feeling oneself to be an object for another subject, which is often felt as shame. In Sartre's theory, the dynamic can always be 'reversed', so that the one looked at (the object) can become the one looking (the subject). Fanon holds that the power imbalance between colonizer and colonized means that the black cannot 'look back' at the white. Webber takes this to be what Fanon is stating in the remark quoted above. Fanon does indeed think that the white gaze cannot be reversed, but there seems to be more to the remark quoted above than just this. Consider Fanon's remarks that occur later in the text:

> And someone came along to Hellenize him, to make an Orpheus of him… this Negro who is looking for the universal. He is looking for the universal! But in June, 1950, the hotels of Paris refused to rent rooms to Negro pilgrims (Fanon 2008, p. 143).

> The Negro is universalizing himself, but at the Lycée Saint-Louis in Paris, one was thrown out: He had had the impudence to read Engels (Fanon 2008, p. 144).

The phrase 'to make an Orpheus out of him' clearly refers to Sartre's essay, and the point that Fanon is making here is that a universal notion of the human, unmarked by socially created differences like race, is all well and good as an ideal. But the black person who tries to adopt it will keep running into all the ways that the surrounding world discriminates against them for the

colour of their skin. Thus part of what Fanon is pointing out is that a white man like Sartre can preach the universal, but in so doing, he has forgotten what it is like to be black, where one's difference is shoved down one's throat every single day.

But there is a second, more significant strand to Fanon's critique of Sartre. I suggested above that Fanon's response to the Négritude Movement is more nuanced than Webber allows. He rejects certain strands of it, but he *endorses* others. One idea from the movement that Fanon takes up and develops in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is key to his critique of Sartre. It is indicated in the following remark,

> What? I have barely opened eyes that had been blindfolded, and someone already wants to drown me in the universal? […] I need to lose myself in my negritude, to see the fires, the segregations, the repressions, the rapes, the discriminations, the boycotts. We need to put our fingers on every sore that mottles the black uniform (Fanon 2008, p. 144).

I take it that the reference to 'someone who wants to drown me in the universal' is to Sartre. The second part of the quote is thus a response to him, and what Fanon is referring to here is the idea of the *nekyia* that he takes from the Négritude writer, Aimé Césaire.

Central to Fanon's work, is the idea that colonialism creates unhealthy mental phenomena in the minds of black people, who must be healed in the service of liberation. *Black Skin, White Masks* is not just the intellectual endeavour of providing an account of colonialism's impacts on the psyche. It is also a work of *therapy.* It asks what sorts of therapeutic interventions might help heal the colonised. Fanon reads Césaire's poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (Césaire 1995), as dealing with just this issue. The poem enacts a therapeutic method for dealing with the wounds of colonialism. The method that Césaire adopts is what Jung (2009) calls a *nekyia*. It is an inner voyage into the depths of the unconscious to confront all that is most terrible there, in order to release oneself from it. The term *nekyia* is a classical Greek word referring to communication with the dead, usually for the purpose of seeking information from them. A second term – *katabasis* – refers to a journey into Hades. Jung's use of *nekyia* includes both. His choice of this Greek term indicates that, just as the journey into Hades is fraught with danger, so too is the descent into the unconscious. There is a risk of madness, since what one finds there may overcome the rational conscious mind. Césaire's poem is an inner voyage to confront what has been lodged in the unconscious by colonialism, especially all that is most terrible and

hard to face, so that he can overcome it and develop his identity as a black man, i.e., his négritude.[2]

Césaire encounters the dead – like all who travel to the Underworld. There are the ghosts of those who resisted,

a man alone who defies the white screams of a white death
(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE) (Césaire 1995, p. 91).

The suffering of nameless others,

From the hold I hear shackled curses rising, the gasps of the dying, the sound of one thrown overboard, the baying of a woman giving birth… the scraping of fingernails groping for throats… the sneer of the whip… the crawling of vermin among tired bodies... (Cesaire 1995, p. 107).

The poem is full of images of disease and decay:

[T]he West Indies pockpitted with smallpox (Césaire 1995, p. 73).

Swellings of the night at the four corners of this dawn
spasms of clotted death (Césaire 1995, p. 93).

Just as Jung warns that the inner voyage risks madness, so does Césaire talk of madness in *Cahier* (Césaire 1995).

Because we hate you, you and your reason, we invoke dementia
praecox flamboyant madness tenacious cannibalism

Treasure, let us count:
the madness that remembers
the madness that screams
the madness that sees
the madness that is unleashed (Césaire 1995, p. 93).

Césaire finds phantasmagoric images of Africa,

2 I discuss this at greater length in Romdenh-Romluc (2022).

I have looked and looked at trees and so I have become a tree and this long tree's feet have dug great venom sacs and tall cities of bone in the ground
I have thought and thought of the Congo and so, I have become a Congo rustling with forests and rivers (Césaire 1995, p. 95).

He also finds colonial ideas of black deficiency,

(niggers-they're-all-alike, I tell you every-vice-every-conceivable-vice, I'm telling-you-the-smell-of-niggers, it-helps-the-cane-grow
remember-the-old-saying:
beat-a-nigger, feed-a-nigger) (Césaire 1995, p. 103).

There are his own failings - 'I must tell how far I carried cowardice' (Césaire 1995, p. 107), as he tells of siding with white women on a tram who are ridiculing a pitifully old black man, ground down by poverty 'I exhibited a wide smile of connivance' (Césaire 1995, p. 109). Césaire also confronts his ancestors and their pitiful status,

we have never been amazons of the King of Dahomey, nor princes of Ghana with eight hundred camels […] we have always been quite pathetic dishwashers, shoeshiners with no ambition (Césaire 1995, p. 105).

Facing these difficult facts allows Césaire to undergo self-transformation.

I accept, I accept all this […]
And suddenly, strength and life charge me like a bull (Césaire 1995, p. 125).

Césaire's voyage into the unconscious is successful.

Fanon adopts this idea in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Like Césaire, he enacts the journey in the text, rather than simply describing the method. He hints at the beginning of what he is about to do, 'In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell' (Fanon 2008, p. 2). Much of Chapter 5 is written in poetic form, echoing the Négritude poets Fanon is discussing. Images of past African splendour first fill him with hope. But if Fanon stops with these, he will not reach rock bottom and self-transformation will not occur. So he voyages on, through colonial ideas of blackness, which fill him with anguish:

Every hand was a losing hand for me' (Fanon 2008, p. 101). 'I took up my négritude, and with tears in my eyes I put its machinery together again (Fanon 2008, p. 106).

The cripped veteran of the Pacific war says to my brother "Resign yourself to your colour the way I got used to my stump; we're both victims". Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation […] (Fanon 208, pp. 107–108).

Fanon tries to rise, but he cannot because he has not yet reached rock bottom - 'I wanted to rise, but the disembowelled silence fell back on me, its wings paralyzed […] I began to weep' (Fanon 2008, p. 108).

It is in this context that we should understand Fanon's remark,

I need to lose myself in my negritude, to see the fires, the segregations, the repressions, the rapes, the discriminations, the boycotts. We need to put our fingers on every sore that mottles the black uniform (Fanon 2008, p. 144).

Fanon is here stating that he cannot rest with the universal notion of the human that Sartre advocates because before he reaches the point of being able to properly embrace it, he must first continue his descent into the unconscious, to confront the psychic residue deposited there by colonialism and slavery. This brings us to the heart of Fanon's disagreement with Sartre. He – and other black people – cannot simply adopt Sartre's vision of a universal notion of the human, because whilst there are rational grounds for accepting this idea, a merely intellectual argument in favour of the universal will not suffice. The black person 'suffers differently in his body', and as such, must first undergo therapy to heal the wounds of colonialism, which Sartre has not properly appreciated. The Négritude Movement offers ways to do this, and so it is not a failure.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed Webber's interpretation of Fanon, particularly his response to Sartre's engagement with the Négritude Movement. Fanon takes Sartre's Marxist interpretation of the Négritude Movement to undermine it. According to Webber's black agency reading, this is because if the movement is an inevitable part of a historical process, then its development cannot be the result of black agency, and so cannot demonstrate to the colonisers that black persons are equal. I have offered several objections to this reading, and offered an alternative. Fanon takes Sartre's reading to undermine the Négritude Movement because for him, négritude is merely a fiction, and black consciousness, just like class consciousness, contains its own ending. Since the idea of négritude is a fiction, it cannot do its intended work of lifting up black people. Webber

takes Fanon to accept Sartre's assessment of the Négritude Movement and so to reject it. However, I have argued that Fanon's position is more nuanced. He rejects certain strands of the movement, but accepts others. One négritude idea that Fanon adopts is Césaire's idea of a *nekyia* to heal the psychic wounds of colonialism. This is a dangerous voyage into the unconscious to confront what is most terrible there, in the service of self-transformation. It is one therapeutic method that the black person may employ to heal from colonial ideas. Processes such as these are not fully rational because they deal with the unconscious. Fanon accuses Sartre of overlooking the need for such therapy when he advocates a universal notion of the human. This is the crux of Fanon's disagreement with Sartre over his understanding of the Négritude Movement.[3]

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