

**Fanon in Furs:  
Traveling Theorist  
for North Africa's  
National Liberation  
in Russian  
Translation**

**Dr. Elizabeth Bishop  
Fulbright Scholar, USA**

**Abstract**

*The present article explores one of the quite unknown aspects about Frantz Fanon—the novelist, the theorist, and the humanist, which is the translation of his texts into Russian. It particularly focuses on the contribution of such translation to the discussion of, and commentary on, Fanon in Russian. This is especially with regard to postcolonial literature and its link to national culture, “new humanism,” psychoanalysis, and civic subjectivity.*

In one sense, Frantz Fanon—clinician, cultural critic—is hardly to be considered a ‘traveling theorist,’ since his most visible observations are fixed in *maghrebian* built environments’ solidity. Empire, the *cit * enjoyed the full protections of modern law; the *medina* was outside modern courts’ jurisdiction. For Fanon, bifurcation of imperialism’s cities indicates the ‘pathological geography’ of international and local power: such a divided town represents populations of men, divided from

**ملخص**

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن أحد الجوانب الغير معروفة عن فرانس فانون Frantz Fanon الروائي، والمنظر، والإنساني، ألا وهو ترجمة نصوصه إلى الروسية. تركز أساساً على مساهمة تلك الترجمة في مناقشة التعليق على فانون بالروسية، خاصة من جانب الأدب والفلسفة ما بعد الكولونيالية وعلاقته بالثقافة الوطنية، ‘الإنسانية الجديدة’، التحليل النفسي وكذا الذاتية المدنية.

one another by their position in colonialism's legal orders that fix individuals' relations to property.<sup>2</sup> Others use his descriptions of colonial Algiers to discuss Tel Aviv, Jaffa, or Haifa.<sup>3</sup> In another sense, Fanon was the quintessential 'traveling theorist.' He outlined a critique of colonial hierarchies restricting 'assimilation' and 'integration;' setting inclusivity and universalism as goals for postcolonial political communities.<sup>4</sup> Born in Martinique, taking a degree at Lyons, Fanon was subsequently posted as director of French North Africa's largest psychiatric clinic at Blida/Joinville in Algeria. Professionally active, his affiliation with the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) led him to his subsequent resignation from his job, expulsion from Algeria, and eventual relocation to Paris<sup>5</sup> In *L'an V de la révolution* (first edition 1959)/*Sociologie de la révolution algérienne* (second edition 1966), Fanon defined himself as a member of the Algerian community ("any individual living in Algeria could decide to be a citizen of the nation in the future"). Those days he lived in Tunis, he made Algeria's revolution his full-time vocation.<sup>6</sup>

Fanon's name changed in his travels, reflecting his shifting place in the world. *Chef de service* at the state hospital at Manouba in Tunis, he was Dr. Fares. The Tunisian consulate in Libya issued passport number 018728 to 'Omar Ibrahim Fanon,' 165 cm tall, black eyes and black hair. The London *Times* identified "Dr. F. Omar" as leader of the Algerian Liberation Front delegation at the All-African People's Congress in Accra (8-12 December 1958).<sup>7</sup>

Fanon didn't only travel, himself; his books also slipped loose of a Martinique-Algiers-Tunis axis. *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* was published in Francophonie's capital (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952). His *L'an V de la révolution* (Paris: François Maspero) and *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero) which came off the presses only few years later, came out in a very different political climate: these were two of the twenty-three titles censored during the last five years of the war in Algeria.<sup>8</sup> After his death, his texts continued to travel through republication and translation. *Présence Africaine* brought out a second edition of *Les damnés de la terre* after Fanon's death; his last work was translated into English with Grove's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *A Dying Colonialism* came off Grove's NY presses two years later.

His influence may have been even greater forty years after publication, than when these books were first off the presses. Henry

Louis Gates referred to him as a ‘global theorist.’<sup>9</sup> References to Fanon’s work and its influence remain evenly scattered through Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Difflin’s *The Empire Writes Back: theory and practice in postcolonial literatures* (1989), itself eight-times reprinted. The entry referring to Fanon in the index of Edward Said’s *Cultural and Imperialism* (reprinted five times during 1993 alone) takes up centimeter-and-a-half of type.

Ideas travel beyond comment on the texts that contain them: Fanon and feminism represent a case in point. Fanon’s early and late texts vest authority in the male body and the masculine pronoun, “in the colonies, it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression;” for Fanon, the female body (denied agency under imperialism and its successors) was prize in the struggle for national self-determination.<sup>10</sup> His gestures toward acknowledging women’s participation in national liberation struggles have been called into question on empirical grounds.<sup>11</sup> Some note the terms he uses to describe Arab women derive from colonialism’s eroticized Orientalism;<sup>12</sup> others characterize Fanon as unresponsive to feminist concerns for women’s coming-into-being.<sup>13</sup> Even still, Fanon’s description of built environments split by colonialism ‘traveled’ to serve as preferred metaphor for gender and sexuality. Feminist scholars have turned the metaphor of territoriality that he used to discuss imperialism, to their discussions of gender.<sup>14</sup> For Anne McClintock, Fanon recognizes how centralized states and militarized violence derive authority from domestic units’ patriarchal powers; for Nadjé al Ali, Fanon maps directions toward a politics of solidarity. The territorial division of urban areas between *cité* and *medina* expresses the tension of a subjectivity caught between the oppositions of Aristotelian logic and the subversive negation of Hegelian analysis.<sup>15</sup>

“On National Culture” has served those Anglophone critics who call for a historicization of Fanon’s ideas. Fanon discusses questions of ontology in existential and historicist terms, addressing Eurocentricism in his theory of selves and collectivities under colonialism.<sup>16</sup> For Fanon, ‘liberation’ was the removal of socioeconomic, cultural, and political restrictions on the colonized individual; a continuous process, a universalizing process, which would result in creation of a new man<sup>17</sup> Fanon’s radical

decolonization calls capitalism into question; national bourgeoisies threaten postcolonial communities with neo-imperialism; the colonized can only liberate himself [sic] thorough violence<sup>18</sup>

Neil Lazarus describes this as Fanon's 'alternative nationalist standpoint', and—in addressing Homi Bhabha's dismissal of such concepts of freedom as 'naively liberatory'—reminds readers that, as Abdel-Malek states, such a form of consciousness is not 'nationalism' in the narrow sense. Lou Turner and John Alan emphasize the danger of national bourgeoisies' facilitation of neo-imperialism;<sup>19</sup> Michael Azar defines the goal of such national liberation a 'real humanism,' which he specifically locates in North Africa, so that "Algeria becomes the name of the historical subject, the spirit, that Fanon invokes to transcend the antinomies that have marked the history of mankind."<sup>20</sup>

Earlier, "On National Culture" served as point of contention between Fanon and those who published in *Présence Africaine*, and disagreement between Fanon and francophone African writers threatened to split postcoloniality's vision at *Présence Africaine*'s conference in Paris (1956). Later, in Rome (1959), Fanon was the Francophone *maghreb*'s sole representative; at both, he came into conflict with others' valorization of *négritude* as the unity of African cultures in the United States, Francophone Africa, the Caribbean, and Madagascar. In Rome, faced with Alioune Diop's call for a 'negro genius' that conserves the gifts of the West and Cheikh Anta Diop's affirmation of African origins for classical Greek humanism, Fanon stated his idea of national liberation as a cultural struggle, returning to the rejection of *négritude* as a 'great black mirage' that he reiterated in *Les damnés de la terre*. While Fanon later reconsidered panafricanism (as Algeria's diplomatic representative in Ghana, Fanon came to argue for an African unity that would precede a continent-wide political union and bypass individual national liberation movements and their national chauvinisms' bourgeois phase), he remained consistent in his rejection of *négritude*.<sup>21</sup>

Fanon's biography draws attention to his travels between the north/south binaries of France and her overseas colonies in the Caribbean and Africa; to such, this project adds east/west trajectories. In order to address the question, "how does literary theory travel across cultural, linguistic, and discursive borders?" this project specifically addresses translations of Fanon's texts into Russian. Not

all of Fanon's works were translated at the same time. An individual as well-traveled as Fanon doesn't always arrive on the same plane as his baggage, including 1) the process by which the individual comes into being under colonialism; 2) colonial culture and national culture; 3) gender and race. His later works (emphasizing national communities and collective political action) were available to Soviet readers, while earlier texts (regarding individual subjectivity under colonialism, drawing on his contribution as Freudian-trained clinician) awaited translation until the end of state socialism.

Soviet readers would come to know Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* through a one-chapter extract, "O natsional'noi kul'ture" published in 1966.<sup>22</sup> Included in an edited volume on the literatures of Africa; "On National Culture" discussed bourgeois anticolonial nationalism, taking the point of view that national liberation struggles must also provide for a cultural resurgence, in order to rescue the culture of the colonized from 'folklore' and 'abstract populism.'<sup>23</sup> E. Halperin (specialist in Caribbean and African literature) further developed her discussion of Fanon's call for a radical national liberation. On the pages of the USSR's specialist journals for comparative literature, she introduced readers to Fanon's ideas regarding the transfer and transformation of colonial legacies to native hands.<sup>24</sup> Other Soviet-era scholars contributed to Fanon as theorist of revolution and national liberation. Jack Woddis' *'Novye' teorii revoliutsii; kriticheskii analiz veglidov F. Fanona, R. Debre, G. Markuze* (1975), Gordon's *Problemy natsional'no-osvoboitel'noi bor'by v tvorchestve Frantsa Fanona* (1977), and Alekseeva's *Ideino-teoreticheskie vzgliady Frantsa Fanona* (1979) presented Fanon as correction to the October revolution's universality and its model of cultural transformation.

In French as in English, "On National Culture" had served as point of contention between Fanon and those who published in *Présence Africaine*, and disagreement between Fanon and francophone African writers threatened to split postcoloniality's vision at *Présence Africaine*'s conference in Paris (1956). Later, in Rome (1959), Fanon was the Francophone *maghreb*'s sole representative; at both, he came into discussion with authors' valorization of *négritude* as the unity of African cultures in the United States, Francophone Africa, the Caribbean, and Madagascar. In Rome, faced with Alioune Diop's call for a 'negro genius' that conserves the gifts of the West and Cheikh Anta Diop's affirmation of African origins for classical Greek

humanism, Fanon stated his idea of national liberation as a cultural struggle, returning to the rejection of *négritude* as a ‘great black mirage’ that he reiterated in *Les damnés de la terre*. While Fanon later reconsidered panafricanism (Algeria’s diplomatic representative in Ghana, Fanon came to argue that African unity would precede a continent-wide political union that would bypass individual national liberation movements and their national chauvinisms’ bourgeois phase), he remained consistent in his rejection of *négritude*.<sup>25</sup>

Biographers mention Fanon’s journey to the Soviet Union for medical treatment.<sup>26</sup> Just as Fanon traveled, so to did his ideas journey to the USSR. In Russian translation, Fanon’s works became central to a discussion of postcolonial literature that bridged revolutionary approaches to national culture and *négritude* traditions; furthermore, comments on Fanon in Russian may have contributed to Freud’s reintegration into the Soviet academy. To return—by way of conclusion—to the metaphor of the city divided by colonialism which Fanon introduced in *Les damnés de la terre*, if Fanon’s new humanism can be conceptualized as ‘Algeria,’ than those who applied for entry visas at ‘Algeria’s’ consulate in the USSR were veterans of varied liberation struggles. In Russian, readers might well have filled in the blank space indicated ‘nationality’ on their internal passport with ‘Fanon’s liberation movement.’ As some Africans found common terms of affiliation in Fanon’s critical vocabulary and some feminists carry the ID of Fanon’s ‘new humanism;’ psychoanalysis and civic subjectivity may have entered the USSR on postcolonial literary criticism’s national liberation airlines.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Wretched of the Earth* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1963) p. 29, 30. See Janet Abu Lughod's "Tale of Two Cities: the origins of modern Cairo," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7:4 (1965); Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven" and Edward Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims," both in McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: gender, nation, and postcolonial perspectives* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For colonial cities' significance for urban modernism in the *metropole*, see Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997). The territoriality of state law in an urban environment provides key theme for two films: 'Pepe le Moko' (1936), and 'Battle of Algiers' (1969); see Michael G. Vann, "The Colonial Casbah on the Silver Screen: using 'Pepe Le Moko' and 'The Battle of Algiers' to teach colonialism, race, and globalization in French history," *Radical History Review* 83 (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Mark LeVine, "Conquest Through Town Planning: The Case of Tel Aviv, 1921-48," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27:4 (1998); Salim Tamari and Rema Hammami, "Virtual Returns to Jaffa," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 108 (1998). Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* (1969) collapses colonizer and colonized into the space of one home, distinguished by their claims over one son.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Azar, "In the Name of Algeria: Frantz Fanon and the Algerian Revolution," in Anthony Alessandrini, ed, *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (NY: Grove Press, 1973, 1985), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (NY: Picador US, 2001), pp. 358, 315-327, 331-332ff.

<sup>7</sup> Macey 2001, pp. 358, 368.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Geismar, *Fanon* (NY: Dial Press, 1971), p. 120-123; Macey 2001, pp. 347-357 on FLN and French control of the news media; pp. 399-400 on censorship of Fanon's texts.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. 'Critical Fanonism,' *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Spring 1991), 457; see also Cedric Robinson's 'Appropriation of Frantz Fanon,' *Race and Class* 35, no. 1 (1993). Note, also, Ato Sekyi-Out's *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1996), Stuart Hall, "After-Life of Frantz Fanon," Homi Bhabha, "Day by Day... With Frantz Fanon," both in Alan Reed, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Reproject* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (NY: Grove, 1961) p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Geismar 1971, pp. 113-115, takes its direction from his texts and vacillates in its discussion of Algerian women. Djamila Amrane (Danièle Minne), *Les femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1991); Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence. Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Macey 2001 compares Fanon on Algerian women with an undated French intelligence manual, *Connaissance de l'Algérie*, and its description of native gender roles, p. 408, note 185.

<sup>13</sup> Gwen Bergner, "Who is That Masked Woman? Or the role of gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*," *PMLA* 110:1 (1995); Diana Fuss, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification," *Diacritics* 24:2/3 (1994); François Vergès, "Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal," *Critical Inquiry* 23:3 (1997).

<sup>14</sup> Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East; The Egyptian women's movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), pp. 34-35, 51; see also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial context* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 3-5, 353-354, 360-367.

<sup>15</sup> Azar 1999, p. 25; Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (NY: Plenum Press, 1985), pp. 113-117; see also Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (NY: Routledge, 1995), chapter 3 on the opposition between Aristotelian categories and Husserlian constituted essences.

<sup>16</sup> Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: introducing Afro-Caribbean philosophy* (NY: Routledge, 2000), chapter 3

<sup>17</sup> L.Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: in search of the African revolution* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, nationalism, and the question of representation in postcolonial theory," in Anthony Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 162-163. References are to Homi Bhabha, "A Question of Survival: Nations and Psychic States," in J. Donald, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), p. 102 and Anwar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: military society; the army regime, the left, and social change under Nasser* (NY: Random House, 1968), p. 247-8.

<sup>19</sup> Lou Turner and John Alan, *Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought* (Chicago: News and Letters, 1986), p. 46ff.

<sup>20</sup> Azar 1999, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> On Marxists' critiques of 'ethnicity', see Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), chapter 2.



<sup>22</sup> Фанон, Франц. “О национальной культуре. [Глава из книги алжирского писателя «Проклятьем заклейменные»].” Пер. с франц. *Литература стран Африки*, сб. 2, 1966, с. 19—48.

<sup>23</sup> See also See also Victor Ramzes, “African Literature in Russia,” *Transition* 25 (1966).

<sup>24</sup> Halperin’s works include “Величие и трудности деколонизации. Франц Фанон. Человек. Идеи. Влияние. [О положит. взглядах идеолога революц. демократии Африки]/Grandeur and difficulty of decolonization. Frantz Fanon: man, idea, influence” *Иностр. Литература* 10 (1970), 194—205. A well-established scholar on postcolonial literatures, she had previously published on “Африка гнева и надежды. (Заметки о современной африк. поэзии)/Africa: wrath and hopea (remarks on contemporary African poetry)” *Новый мир* 6 (1958), 241-252; “Проблемы реализма и модернизма в современной литературе Африки/The problem of realism and modernism in Africa’s contemporary literature” *Вопросы литературы* 12 (1959), 67-96; “Поэты Антильских островов. [О творчестве поэтов Гаити и англ. Вест-Индии]/Poets of the Antilles [on Haiti and the English West Indies’ poets’ creativity]” *Вопр. Литературы* 1 (1961), 39-62; “Путь Яна Керью. [О творчестве писателя Британ. Гвианы]/The Way to Iana Kerio [on British Guiana’s writers’ creativity]” *Иностр. Литература* 2 (1963), 207-215; “Взорванное молчание. [Заметки о стихах молодых гаитян. поэтов]/Infuriated silence [remarks on young Haitians’ poetry],” *Иностр. Литература* 3 (1963), 179-180; “Бури и штили Карибского моря. (О вест-индском романе 1950—1962 гг.)/Hurricanes and calm in the Caribbees (on the West Indies novel 1950-1962)” *Вопр. Литературы* 10 (1963), 80-108; “Жак Румэн. [К 25-летию со дня смерти гаитян. поэта]/ Jacques Roumain [25 years since the Haitain poet’s death]” *Иностр. Литература* 5 (1964), 189—199; “Цена свободы. [О романах южноафрик. писателя П. Абрахамса «Венок Майклу Удомо» и «Наш остров сегодня»]/’The Price of Freedom [regarding South African writer Peter Abrahams’ novels *Wreath of Michael Udomo* and *This Island Now*]” *Иностр. Литература* 6 (1968), 211—220. Halperin also contributed toward translations from Senegalese poet Leopold Sedar

Senghor from French, “Возвращение блудного сына. (Отрывки из поэмы)/Return of the Prodigal Son (extracts from the poem)— Ты долго в ладонях сжимала.../And we shall be steeped” [Пер. с франц: М. Ваксмахер; Е. Гальперина],” *Новый мир* 5 (1958), 16-19.

<sup>25</sup> On Marxists’ critiques of ‘ethnicity’, see Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> Macey 2001, pp. 445-446; Geismar 1971.