**FR329 Lecture Week 3**

Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1952 in the left-leaning monthly *Esprit* – decolonisation

From 18th C to WW2: racial argument behind colonial project and ‘mission civilisatrice’: France, the country of the Enlightenment vs. ‘less fortunate’ regions of the world

Racial hierarchy: ‘scientifically’ based – see Blumenbach’s craniology and Césaire refutation of this ideology: ‘homo sum’ and ‘je défie le craniomètre’ (p. 106) – see context of 19th C evolutionist thinking and Count Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853-55)

Fanon in *Peau noire* (Intro, Chapters I&V): past prejudices are still shaping the relationship between white and black people in the early 1950s. Aim: liberate people (white, black) from ‘l’arsenal complexuel qui a germé au sein de la situation coloniale’ (p. 24) + ‘désaliénation des Noirs’ (p. 30) whilst advocating a unified and universalist conception of humanity:

Nous travaillons à une lyse [=destruction] totale de cet univers morbide. Nous estimons qu’un individu doit tendre à assumer l’universalisme inhérent à la condition humaine. Et quand nous avançons ceci, nous pensons indifféremment à des hommes comme Gobineau ou à des femmes comme Mayotte Capécia (p. 8).

Fanon: identifies racial prejudices disseminated by thinkers such as Gobineau *and* explores how they were subsequently internalised (i.e. accepted as true) by the colonised in the French Caribbean (and, by analogy, beyond).

See Mayotte Capécia’s *Je suis Martiniquaise* (1949) : black/white couples and racism

Evolutionist racialism vs. decolonising process and the release of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations in 1948: ‘[…] the inherent dignity and […] the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world […]’ (Preamble)

*Peau noire*: racism and its consequences on Martinicans and white people from Martinique and mainland France: scientific and autobiographical approach

Focus on alienation: see Césaire and Damas – black people are alienated from their original cultures, see the inferiority complex generated by what Fanon calls the ‘mise au tombeau de l’originalité culturelle locale’ (p. 14).

**Alienation**: German word ‘Entfremdung’ (estrangement) - (Hegelian and) Marxist tradition: working class under the capitalist system = partly alienated from the fruit of their labour; do not own the means of production (factories, tools, and capitals); alienated (or estranged) from the production process which is determined by the rules of a profit-driven economy (=capitalist mode of production)

According to Marx: Strict class system: one is alienated from one’s humanity (‘Gattungswesen’) = dehumanisation is a source of unhappiness. Solution: classless society. For **Fanon:** colonial situation = cause of suffering and unhappiness (neuroses)

Other very significant influence: Jean-Paul Sartre and his focus on colonialism and alienation: ‘monsters’ and living lies of assimilation

Alienation (for Sartre and Fanon): process whereby colonial subjects have lost their *authentic* sense of selfhood and have been transformed beyond recognition – see Sartre’s *L’Être et le néant* (1943) in ‘Le Regard’ (translated as ‘The Look’) and *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946):

Encounter with the Other = alienating (see the ‘look’/’gaze’): objectification - ‘being-for-others’ (être-pour autrui; shortened as ‘pour-autrui’) – see Fanon’s ‘Le Noir et le langage’, on the ‘dimension *pour-autrui* de l’homme de couleur’ (p. 13). Reification/objectification/thingification: amplified by the colonial situation – locals maintained in a subservient position by the colonialist’s gaze and internalise these fabrications, these *inauthentic* representations, and are therefore reduced to wearing ‘white masks’.

Fanon: highlight the pathological and irrational behaviour of white supremacists and their victims in the Antilles (and by extension in all colonies): ‘[N]ous faisons ici le procès des mystifiés et des mystificateurs, des aliénés’ (p. 25). = **diagnosis** in the name of humanity (see Césaire’s ‘homo sum’)

**Cure**: Sartre’s philosophical system and return to *authenticity* (freedom, agency and the real selfhood which have been obliterated by colonial control and dictatorship) 🡪 revolutionary *praxis*

Négritude: not the preferred route (reclamation of pre-colonial black cultures and values –see Damas’s ‘poupées noires’) = too deterministic (no black ‘essence’ for Fanon)

Fanon’s reception of ‘Orphée noir’ (1948): black culture cannot be an end in itself but only a means to an end = ‘la réalisation de l’humain dans une société sans races’ (Sartre – but see Marx’s classless society):

La Négritude apparaît comme le temps faible d’une progression dialectique : l’affirmation théorique et pratique de la suprématie du blanc est la thèse ; la position de la négritude comme valeur antithétique est le moment de la négativité. Mais ce moment négatif n’a pas de suffisance par lui-même et les noirs qui en usent le savent fort bien ; ils savent qu’il vise à préparer la synthèse ou réalisation de l’humain dans une société sans races. Ainsi la Négritude est pour se détruire, elle est passage et non aboutissement, moyen et non fin dernière’. Sartre, ‘Orphée noir’, in Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, avant-propos de Ch.-André Julien (Paris: PUF, 1948), p.xli.