



On Psycho-Sexual Racism & Pan-African Revolt **Fanon & Chester Himes**

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Abstract: This article underscores the almost uncanny textual connections that can be plotted in the work of Frantz Fanon and Chester Himes, across differences in time, location, genre, etc. A writer of fiction, Himes was generally preoccupied with psyches, riots and revolutions in his representation of the Black condition often symbolized geopolitically by Harlem. A psychiatrist and practicing revolutionary, Fanon would often invoke Himes in his own thinking, writing and teaching, which would advance the Algerian Revolution as an African Revolution in due course. If the violences of racism and colonialism as well as anti-racism and anti-colonialism are a central concern of these two figures of Black radical tradition, I argue that the specifically psycho-sexual aspects of Western empire are confronted, theorized and countered by them in a parallel discourse of Black liberation that is absolutely a discourse of human liberation in the corpora or oeuvres of Frantz Fanon and Chester Himes.

The “expatriate” Chester Himes once boasted in an interview with John A. Williams that Frantz Fanon had written a long, unpublished essay concerning the use of violence in his novels (Himes 1995, 78). This interest in Himes should not surprise close readers of Fanon. His first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), makes repeated and significant references to Himes’s first book, or novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945). The psycho-social assault of racism is battering if not crippling in both. What’s more, when one reads Himes’s final novel, *Plan B* (1983), one can remark a striking kinship between it and Fanon’s own final offering, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The

response to Western empire in both is an emancipatory explosion of violence. U.S. Blacks rise up in the final Himes and struggle to overthrow white “America,” quite like Fanon predicted on his death-bed, just outside Washington, D.C. Their texts frequently and profoundly converge in the most identical of terms. This all gives great substance to the idea or praxis of Pan-Africanism, what C.L.R. James champions in *The History of Pan-African Revolt* (1938/1969). Fanon’s struggles would take him from Martinique or the Caribbean to France, Algeria and Africa at large; Himes’s struggles would take him from various states in North America to Paris and Spain

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or Europe at large. Fanon was a practicing psychiatrist who wrote social criticism ultimately as a politico or militant; Himes was an ex-prisoner who came to produce literature as social protest, narrating the psychology of repression and riot, oppression and revolution, calling for revolutionary change all along. Their textual ties may be seen to zig-zag across genres, places, back and forth across time, and certainly with regard to specific themes or thematics. Some of their most salient themes pivot around matters of psycho-sexual racism and Pan-African revolt. This erotic or sexual thematic is explored alike and apace up to *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Plan B*, not to mention Fanon's *Toward the African Revolution* (1964), with their embodiment of rebellion; their exposé of colonial sadism, and fascism; and their emphasis on the ecstasy of anti-colonial uprising against the West and its "humanism" of white-supremacy.

If this connection has gone largely unrecognized by scholars, a couple of biographers of Fanon have attested to his abiding critical focus on Himes, the depicter of Black life among the masses of Black folk in a white-dominated world. Evidently, Fanon carried his Himes books with him to Africa. In the middle of the Algerian revolution, Fanon was invited to teach at the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tunis from 1959 to 1960, after his expulsion from Algeria by France on January 1, 1957. He offered a course entitled "The Social Psychology of the Black World" as he continued his participation in the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Tunisia. This is according to Irene L. Gendzier's *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (1973): "He would come carrying books by Chester Himes in the French *Série Noire* edition, and his citations suggested that he knew the material well" (99).

La Série noire was a division of Gallimard publishers founded by Marcel Duhamel, who had translated *If He Hollers Let Him Go* into French in 1949. It was at Du-

hamel's invitation that Himes began work in Paris on those *romans policiers* or hard-boiled thrillers which he always dubbed his "domestic novels," a nine-part series set in Harlem and starring Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson. Often published in French translation before he was published in the U.S. and Britain, Himes became the first non-French speaking winner of the prestigious *Grand prix de la littérature policière*. Several of these books would be available by the time Fanon taught "The Social Psychology of the Black World" in Tunis, such as *Il pleut des coups durs* in 1958 (*The Real Cool Killers*, 1959); *Couché dans le pain* in 1959 (*The Crazy Kill*, 1959); and *Tout pour plaire* in 1959 (*The Big Gold Dream*, 1960). Alice Cherki adds in *Frantz Fanon: Portrait* (2000) that he was invited to teach this course by a sociology professor and that its lectures were "mainly about Chester Himes" (Cherki 2006, 125), whom she identifies as an "African American author of detective fiction" (238, n44). Of course, Himes wrote other genres of literature as well, a fact of which Fanon was very much aware. This is why he could captivate students in Africa with his study of Himes, speaking without notes and spilling class out into hallways, reportedly, until this teaching stint cancelled thanks to political pressure from France.

BLACK BODIES & CONSCIOUSNESS: PEAU NOIRE, MASQUES BLANCS & IF HE HOLLERS LET HIM GO

Fanon begins his first book by citing Aimé Césaire, in epigraph, on fear, trepidation and inferiority complexes, for example, before offering a socio-diagnostic analysis of the sickness of Western empire. A "new humanism" (Fanon 1967, 7) is necessary because European humanism has presented humanism as a monopoly of white "civilization" in a mythology of white supremacy that conveniently and

narcissistically pictures Blacks and (other non-whites) as “primitives” and “savages.” The “noirs” of this text are mostly those of the intellectual elite, a fact which makes it extraordinarily different in this respect from Fanon’s other, African revolutionary texts. The *assimilé* or “*évolué*” under study in *Peau noire, masques blancs* suffers from a terrible alienation or “a massive psychoexistential complex” by virtue of his or her “contact with white civilization” (12), or *colonization*—hence the original, non-commercial title for this work: “*Essai pour la désaliénation du Noir*” or “An Essay for the Disalienation of Blacks.” To accomplish this disalienation, to destroy the system that ensures alienation and excludes Black people from the hegemonic conception of humanity, there must be a recognition of “social and economic realities” (Fanon 1967, 11). This is the context in which Himes will condemn humanism in *The End of a Primitive* (1955) and in which Fanon proposes “sociogeny” as an alternative to the “phylogeny” of biological determinism and the “ontogenic” individualism of Freud or conventional psychoanalysis in the West (Fanon 1967, 11).

Several times, *Black Skin, White Masks* cites Himes’s *If He Hollers Let Him Go* explicitly in its classic reflections on consciousness, the consequences of the mind/body split of Western humanism and sexual ideologies of colonial racism or white-supremacy. “The Negro and Psychopathology” attacks the myth of the Black rapist, the mythology of Blacks as a race of rapists. Of the Negrophobic woman who represses her desire in a manner which leads to lynchings, Fanon writes: “In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Chester Himes describes this type very well. The big blonde trembles whenever the Negro goes near her. Yet she has nothing to fear, since the factory is full of white men. In the end, she and the Negro go to bed together” (156). When Fanon discusses white masochism (176), Himes’s novel is cited via Bernard Wolfe. Lastly, at

the end of “The Fact of Blackness” (or “*L’Expérience vécue du Noir*”), Fanon comes back to Himes in order to illustrate how “the Negro suffers in his body” (138): “So it is with the character in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*—who does precisely what he did not want to do” (140).

If He Hollers Let Him Go opens with a dream, one of many dreams throughout this text that will reveal the subconscious or semiconscious fears and desires of Bob Jones. These dreams torture him almost as much as being awake. When he comes to consciousness, he is terrified and filled with trepidation: “I began to feel scared in spite of hiding from the day. It came along with consciousness. It came into my head first, somewhere back of my closed eyes, moved slowly underneath my skull to the base of my brain, cold and hollow.” His consciousness is an embodied consciousness assaulted, continually, by the subjugation of segregation, *de jure* or *de facto*. Himes’s protagonist suffers this assault in his body so badly that he experiences it as not just any kind of torture: “It seeped down my spine, into my arms, spread through my groin with an almost sexual torture.” For him, consciousness means feeling like having to get up and die” (Himes 1986, 2). He works in a factory shipyard during World War II, and he has been waking up with this reaction “ever since the war began” (3). The war that terrorizes him is less this war than the war waged by white racist domination on him and every body in Black skin, for ages, although he also fears that the one war will draft him for the other: Bob Jones is distraught and despondent enough to draw a conclusion that has him foreshadow Fanon in a million and one ways: “I was even scared to tell anybody. If I’d gone to a psychiatrist, he’d have had to put me away” (4).

The consciousness on display in Himes is an alienated consciousness, a self-averse, auto-phobic consciousness for which Blackness is experienced as a curse. “I was

a man like any man," it cries (Himes 1986, 116), exactly as *Black Skin, White Masks* cries: "All I wanted was to be a man among men" (Fanon 1967, 112). Bob Jones fails to face the reality that whiteness is defining manhood, humanity and Blackness for him: "if I could be a man, defined by Webster as a male human being. That's all I'd ever wanted—just to be accepted as a man" (Himes 1986, 153). This sexed racial protest is doomed. "I wanted to be white—that was a joke," scoffs "The Fact of Blackness" (Fanon 1967, 63). The psychiatrist Fanon proceeds to analyze the dreams of his brothers who want to be white in a society that says, "*turn white or disappear*," and he decides that he must take two courses of action after his diagnosis of this inferiority complex: "I should help my patient to become *conscious* of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the social structure" (100). A new consciousness is in order. Bob Jones must stand up and act out in order to *live*—without fear or humiliation. He gets angry when he is blindsided in a factory crap game by a white man, Johnny Stoddart, and when he is humiliated by a southern white woman, Madge Perkins, who refuses to work with him and calls him a "nigger." He does not go to bed with the "big blonde." He wanted to get a lustful, racial revenge by having consensual sex with her; however, when she employs words like "rape" and "lynch" as a pillow talk, he bolts. In fiction, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* follows Fanon's non-fictional treatment of Negrophobia literally to the letter, in advance. Overwhelmed by an imperial whiteness, experiencing his Blackness as a curse, Bob Jones cannot fathom what Fanon will recognize in *A Dying Colonialism*: "It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates *negritude*" (Fanon 1965, 47).

**...AND *LES DAMNÉS DE LA TERRE*:
"FEELING GOOD, FEELING FINE,"
"CONCERNING VIOLENCE"**

The anti-colonial humanism of *The Wretched of the Earth* would supply the ultimate answer to the problems of alienation, humiliation and repression posed by above. "The Fact of Blackness" commences, famously: "'Dirty Nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (Fanon 1967, 109). The "Negro" is sealed into "crushing objecthood" by the gaze of white domination, "the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other" (109). The opening chapter of Fanon's third and final book, "Concerning Violence" revisits this subject and this scenario in its movement toward decolonization and revolutionary freedom. This is the struggle by which "the 'thing' which has been colonized" becomes a *bona fide* human being (Fanon 1963, 37), when the colonized decide to "embody history" in his or her person (40). The "native" or "Negro" is not unraveled by the look or gaze that prevailed in "The Fact of Blackness," not any more:

He finds out that the settler's skin is not of any more value than a native's [sic] skin; and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner. All the new, revolutionary assurance of the native [sic] stems from it. For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me to stone.... Not only does his presence no longer trouble me, but I am already preparing such efficient ambushes for him that soon there will be no way out but that of flight. (45)

"The Negro and Recognition" in *Black Skin, White Masks* seeks to grapple with one of G.W.F. Hegel's staple ideas: "It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained" (Hegel in Fanon 1967, 218). But since liberation from racial slavery has been in large part granted rather than taken by force, argues Fanon, there has been no real freedom obtained, no "collective catharsis" (145), no new life for enslaved Africans all over the globe. This Fanon had given up on the possibility of "collective catharsis," crucial as it is, except perhaps for Blacks in the U.S. who he hoped could achieve some spurious kind of "integration" across a battlefield whose four corners will no doubt be "marked by the scores of Negroes hanged by their testicles" (222). The Fanon of *Les Damnés de la terre* changes course. The final Fanon proclaims, also famously: "The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (Fanon 1963, 86); "For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler" (93); and, "At the level of the individual, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex" (94). This is the physical, psychological pathway to disalienation, toward a new humanism and revolutionary self-determination for Africa and worlds beyond.

What may be most interesting about Himes in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is how he anticipates and validates Fanon in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Bob Jones experiences the ecstasy of these sentiments of rebellion quite vividly even though he does not pursue such politics in the end. He is tormented by the look, the eyes, the gaze of white characters almost on each and every page. He is momentarily liberated from his fear, and a stalking feeling of sickness, when he decides to kill Johnny Stoddart, a symbol of his wretchedness: "I wanted to kill him so he'd know I was killing him and in such a way that he'd know he didn't have a chance. I wanted him to feel as scared and

powerless and unprotected as I felt every goddamned morning I woke up. I wanted him to know how it felt to die without a chance" (Himes 1986, 35). For as long as he commits to risking his life like so, he experiences a newfound freedom. The "sick, scared, gone feeling" that was coextensive with consciousness is gone, as he promises to assassinate whiteness as a mode of domination. As long as he is unafraid to risk or lose his own life in the process, knowing that his life, breath, skin and heart are equal to those of any given man who has been enshrined as white, those feelings of a virtual sexual torture transform into feelings of virtual sexual ecstasy: "I wasn't at all nervous or apprehensive. I thought about it like you think about a date with a beautiful chick you've always wanted to make" (45). He is "feeling good, feeling fine, loose and free" (28), "rocking and scared of nobody in the world" (144), until he trades in these feelings for a sense of normalcy in the status-quo. His feelings of *sickness* then return and he is nailed to the colonizing image of "the biological-sexual-sensual-genital-nigger" (Fanon 1952, 202). Accused of rape and tormented on the spot, he loses his prized job as a "headman" and is drafted for World War II as *If He Hollers Let Him Go* concludes.

Hence, Himes gives a glimpse or preview of Fanon's "Concerning Violence," which would argue at length that colonialism keeps an "emotional sensitivity" on the surface of the skin of the colonized, "like an open sore," a "sensitive emotionalism" for which colonialism allows no acceptable outlet (Fanon 1963, 56). Once, critic Michel Fabre asked the revolution-minded novelist if he were "violent" or "sensitive," a misguided question to which he replied: "The more sensitive you are, the more easily wounded you can be, and the more likely you are to burst into violence" (Himes 1995, 140). When this violence explodes as revolutionary violence, the sensualist and the revolutionist turn out to be the very same

man or woman, person. Truly trailblazing in his thinking on human embodiment, Fanon appreciates the conversion of emotionalism and sensitivity into an eroticism of a different sort, a gender-transcendent eroticism “fulfilled” by *The Wretched of the Earth’s* African revolution. He speaks of a stifled aggression or “accumulated libido” that dissolves as in “a volcanic eruption” (57). In “Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses” (or “*Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité*”), he addresses the need to organize this explosive, erotic eruption of the masses in the struggle against colonialism—for a practice of liberation that is psycho-social and political-economic, of necessity.

FANON’S ANTI-FASCISM: SADISTIC TORTURE IN *EL MOUDJAHID* OR *POUR LA RÉVOLUTION AFRICAINE*

The psycho-sexual politics of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism are examined further by Fanon in the FLN or *El Moudjahid* polemics published posthumously in *Toward the African Revolution*. These articles are a vital component of the corpus of Fanon despite the widespread idea that his psycho-social thought is bound or best expressed by *Black Skin, White Masks*. *Pour la Révolution Africaine* brilliantly highlights the relationship between colonial or neo-colonial imperialism and fascism or Nazism. Black radical tradition makes this connection consistently, before and after Fanon. The classic example may be Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955). The most thorough example would be George L. Jackson’s *Blood in My Eye* (1972), a treatise on guerilla warfare greatly indebted to Fanon, who in this work is relentless in his blasting of the myth of Western “democracy” en route to its decoding as colonial oppression, repression, conquest and reconquest, fascism, Nazism and systematic *sadism*: *Toward the African Revolution*

is powerfully unified by Fanon’s under-explored anti-fascism.

Throughout, he marvelously pinpoints the West’s promotion of “the rights of man” over “the rights of peoples” (Fanon 1988, 74; 81; 90). He assails this egocentric, Eurocentric conception of democracy time and time again, condemning French communist and socialist complicity with Western empire. In “The Farce That Changes Sides,” Fanon reveals how the colonialist conception of “democracy” is coextensive with “genocide,” colonialist genocide (97). Consequently, “A Continued Crisis” maintains that French “aspirations” to democracy can only be “paradoxical,” at best (112). Colonialism and racism are “anti-democratic,” by definition, endemic as they are in the case of France and “the combined West” (110). The pretense of a democracy “unfaithful to its most elementary principles” (130) is blasted in “Sequels of a Plebiscite in Africa,” Fanon’s diatribe against Charles de Gaulle’s strategy of proposing “reform” to French colonies in Africa as a means of preserving colonial relations under the rubric of “decolonization” or “independence.” From the start, Fanon’s response literally screams “fascism” line after line (135-36). Rejected by Sékou Touré’s Guinea, de Gaulle’s offer was necessitated by FLN success in Algeria, its potential to spread across the continent of Africa; and it will corroborate *Blood in My Eye’s* claim that, if there is a single word which can adequately define fascism, this word is “reform” (Jackson 1990, 119). In “The Racist Fury in France,” Fanon comes back to *Discourse on Colonialism’s* discourse on Nazism, aptly (Fanon 1988, 166), making it plain that the texts of *Toward the African Revolution* have been focusing on this theme all along. Fanon proceeds to translate this passage anew in “Unity and Effective Solidarity Are the Conditions for African Liberation,” one of his final polemics ever in *El Moudjahid*:

The African peoples must likewise remember that they have had to face a form of Nazism, a form of exploitation of man, of physical and spiritual liquidation clearly imposed, that the French, English, and South African manifestations of that evil need to engage their attention, but they must be prepared also to face this evil as an evil extending over the whole of the African territory. (171)

To promote the “rights of peoples” in popular struggles against colonial humanism and its racist “rights of man” demands intellectual and political resistance to colonialism-as-Nazism, colonialism-as-fascism, beyond Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, of course.

There is a massive erotic investment in this empire exposed in the battle against colonialism. When faced with Algerian fervor for independence, France lives “under the domination of desire” (63). In his letter of resignation from the French civil service in 1956, Fanon would refer to Arab strikers terrorized in their flesh and that of their families (54). In “Algeria in Accra,” from 1958, he would refer to revolutionaries “expelling the fear, the trembling, the inferiority complex, from the flesh of the colonized” (151). The Africa of Pan-Africanism is pictured as “one great body refusing any mutilation.” Finally, a logbook from his reconnaissance mission to solicit the shipment of arms from Mali to Algeria, “This Africa to Come” upholds a “revolutionary spirit” of “muscle and bone” (180), in the person of Cameroonian comrade Felix Moumié, as a righteous model of personal and political subjectivity. His is a new, anti-fascist use of the erotic as power—to invoke the famous, insurgent formulation of Audre Lorde.

Sadistic torture is supposed to be the tell-tale sign of fascism. Fanon logically argues across a series of works that sadism

and torture are central features of colonialism, fascist as it is. Nearly every chapter of *A Dying Colonialism* addresses this subject, whether the tortured person is an Algerian civilian, a FLN militant or a European sympathizer. *The Wretched of the Earth* warns of the electrodes that will be placed on the genitals of the “native” by the colonizer (Fanon 1963, 58). In *Toward the African Revolution*, this line of thought is concentrated in “Algeria Face to Face with French Torturers,” where Fanon is absolutely unambiguous: “Torture is inherent in the whole colonialist configuration” (64). Torture is not merely a means of acquiring information according to Fanon, although Isaac Julien suggests the opposite in his woefully problematic film, *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1995). Torturers in the colonies come to torture for the sake of torturing in a long tradition of sadistic colonial relations: “Every Frenchman in Algeria must behave like a torturer.... The history of the French occupation is studded with such crimes” (Fanon 1988, 71). And yet no law is broken because colonialism is the law of the land under occupation. Colonized men, women and children are systematically tortured by a society that “rests on the necessity of torturing, raping and committing massacres” (72). Sadistic torture is the tell-tale sign of this fascist structure of colonialism in Fanon’s “Algeria Face to Face with French Tortures” and elsewhere: “Algeria Unveiled” (“*L’Algérie se dévoile*”) meshes well with his comments on Djamila Bouhired in “Concerning a Plea,” for example, and “Lumumba’s Death: Could We Do Otherwise?” excoriates U.N. imperialism: “The partitions, the controlled joint commissions, the trusteeship arrangements are international legal means of torturing, of crushing the will to independence of people, of cultivating anarchy, banditry, and wretchedness” (195).

***THE REAL COOL KILLERS & PLAN B:
HIMES ON FASCISM, SADISM &
REVOLUTION—À LA FANON***

Like many a Black artist and intellectual working in the middle of the twentieth century, Himes was no less preoccupied with fascism and Nazism. His *Black on Black: Baby Sister and Selected Writings* (1973) includes a special section of essays written during World War II, before *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. "Now Is the Time! Here Is the Place!" makes reference to "native American fascists" (213). In it, Himes is certainly not talking about indigenous peoples. As would Fanon, he demystifies a discourse of "democracy," a rhetoric of war emanating from empire. Thus, "our powerful native fascists" (216) are "our fascists who would exclude us from everything but dying" (215), under the United States. Here, too, Nazism, fascism and imperialism operate as a continuous, critical refrain. There is no democracy to be found unless it simply means the ruling government's power to twist the form and content of "democratic freedom," in propaganda, for anti-democratic domination (214). This is why Himes speaks out in a collective voice from the outset of "Now Is the Time! Here Is the Place!" in a manner that evokes Fanon's "This Is the Voice of Algeria" (from *A Dying Colonialism*): "This is the voice of Negro heroes, dead on American fronts throughout all American history..." (Himes 1973, 213). Himes implies that his literary voice is a community voice comparable to a radio or telegraphic transmission—a live wire in the war against fascism in this time, in this place.

When he issues *The Real Cool Killers* in 1958 as *Il pleut des coups durs* in *La Série noire*, Fanon is able to read Himes on race, sex and violence in the Maghreb. Himes has said that he began work on *Une Affaire de viol* (1963) or *A Case of Rape* (1980) to showcase racism in France during the Alge-

rian war (Himes 1995, 138). The novella communicates well with "The Racist Fury in France," Fanon's account of fascist attacks on Black men in public with white women and a South American "riddled with bullets" because he "looked like a North African" (Fanon 1988, 163). Black and living on or near a predominantly Arab street in Paris, Himes knew this fury intimately. What's more, an implicit Algerian identification is writ large in *The Real Cool Killers*, which centers around a Black teenage gang in Harlem, "The Real Cool Moslems," who face racist state violence as fantasy militants battling late-1950's North America.

The mystery of the novel concerns the murder of a white man, Ulysses Galen, a salesman (of "King Cola") and a sadist who enjoys bullwhipping little Black schoolgirls. In hot pursuit, white police and media slur Harlem as a "jungle" of "Zulus" (Himes 1996, 198-99). The Moslems are dubbed "Mau Maus" (215), derisively. They are mistaken for actual Arabs by cops who cannot see through their costumes (green turbans, white robes, dark glasses and false beards) or their comic disdain for cops and everything white, "American" and Western. Although they are not accused of any killing at first, their leader Sheik is eventually fingered and killed even though he is innocent. One of two teenage girls in this gang, Sissie shoots the "all-American" salesman to protect her girlfriend and other Black girls from the white sadist and (racist-sexist) pedophile. Calling to mind *A Dying Colonialism's* female militants chronicled in "Algeria Unveiled," her defiance of gender expectations is vital to her violence and her sly evasion of arrest and detention at the end of the novel.

A signifier extraordinaire, Himes is in rare form writing in Europe on Harlem via Algeria in the midst of Fanon's African revolution, addressing French racism as well as U.S. racism and sadism in a single, anti-fascist narrative voice. As in *The Real Cool*

Killers, young Black militants in New York identify with Muslims in revolt in the Maghreb to express their adolescent desire for freedom by any and every means. Validating their violence, their violent dreams and the female Moslem's violent action, Himes at the same time validates the revolutionary violence in Algeria or Africa, and *vice versa*, in spite of the very real, racist fury of France, whose policy was to deport foreigners who weighed in on domestic affairs on the wrong side of empire. He is strikingly similar to Fanon in his inscription of violently anti-sexist politics in later, political writings, interestingly enough. U.S. colonialism is not dealt a successful death blow in *The Real Cool Killers*. But the anti-fascist Himes will scheme on just such an outcome in subsequent writings. His series of "domestic fiction" on "domestic colonialism" will climax in *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) and *Plan B* (1983), his narrative thoughts on what he posited in "Negro Martyrs Are Needed" as the difference between "riot" and "revolution" (Himes 1973, 233).

This distinction is undeniably Fanonian. The thesis of *Blind Man with a Pistol* is that "all unorganized violence is like a blind man with a pistol" (Himes 1989, 5). *The Wretched of the Earth's* discussion of spontaneous outbursts of violence is analogous in outlook. In *Plan B*, Himes imagines how violence could be organized by Black people, theoretically, for cataclysmic revolution in the settler-colony/super-empire of the United States. He assembles an underground movement of "effective guerilla units" to force the issue, an ultimatum, which is phrased: "grant us equality or kill us as a race" (Himes 1993, 200). This is what Himes frequently deemed in and out of fiction "a calculated risk" (201), a risk that had to be taken for any modicum of freedom to be obtained. *Plan B* begins with a female sex worker and her boyfriend/pimp who receive by courier a mysterious note, and a M14 rifle, like countless Black others:

"WARNING!! DO NOT INFORM POLICE!!! LEARN YOUR WEAPON AND WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS!!! REPEAT!!! WARNING!! LEARN YOUR WEAPON AND WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS!!! DO NOT INFORM POLICE!!! FREEDOM IS NEAR!!!" (Himes 1993, 8). T-Bone is scared; Tang is gung-ho. He kills her, terrified by the consequences of her Black militant embrace. Detectives Grave Digger and Coffin Ed arrive to investigate and Grave Digger kills T-Bone, thinking of his mother or every "a poor black woman wanting freedom. And I'd kill any black mother on earth that was low enough to waste her for that" (20). The organization of violence gains momentum under the leadership of Tomsson Black. A white racist sadism pervades this novel, as usual. The historically terrorizing society is terrorized by the mere thought of Black potency, real or imagined: "Many whites became ill and haggard from emotional insecurity. Others retained their sanity through the therapeutic remedy of nightmares, for during this terrible period, whites experienced a variety of assorted nightmares, all of which featured the enlarged sexual organs of black males" (139).

Himes continues to craft a text that could have so easily been crafted by Fanon. The Black guerillas of *Plan B* are "ready to die," risk life for freedom and, in so doing, "experience an intensity of feeling akin to sexual ecstasy" (180). Their deeds bring down the dollar and the stock market as confidence in the citadel of Western capital plummets: "All over the world, millions of capitalists sought means to invest their wealth in the communist east" (182). Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are brought to meet Tomsson Black by a female militant in the final chapter. They learn of the plan, "Plan B" for "Black" (199). Grave Digger is hopeful; Coffin Ed is scared. Shockingly, Grave Digger shoots and kills his partner, too, terminating Himes's "Harlem cycle" and a remarkable corpus of Black revolutionary literature: Tomsson Black shoots Grave

Digger, in turn, certain that he would crack when subject to torture, “nerve by nerve” (203), in this fight to topple “our native American fascism.”

CONCLUSION

Wilhelm Reich confronts colossal psycho-sexual politics in his classic European study, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933). He analyzes the ethos of the authoritarian state and its roots in the authoritarian, patriarchal family and, accordingly, its modern morality of repression. He grounds political repression in Oedipal, erotic repression inasmuch as early sexual prohibitions provide a model and matrix for the moral training of docile social subjects who are morbidly afraid of freedom, erotic and political. He is critical of fascism’s imperialism when it is intra-European imperialism. He is not critical of Occidentalism’s imperialism in his universalization of Western “Man,” Oedipal sexuality and Oedipal capitalism. Otherwise, his classic study of the interconnectedness of the state-political and psycho-sexual features of fascism is incisive. So that the Austrian Reich was of interest to Fanon comes as no surprise; and Alice Cherki’s *Frantz Fanon* quotes him in a fashion that would surely interest Chester Himes: “what could have befallen that man in the United States [after he had to immigrate in 1939] to make him come up with the theory of Orgone? A biological product of the libido that manifests itself as a form of vital energy in the cosmos?” “What did the United States do to that man?” (Cherki 2006, 35).

Bizarre indeed, then, is David Macey in his *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (2000). It mentions Fanon’s “The Social Psychology of the Black World” course in Tunisia, if not by name. Perusing incomplete lecture notes published in 1984 by Lilia Bensalem, Macey is nonetheless decisive in his false contention:

In the final discussion of racism in colonial societies and in the United States Fanon returns to familiar themes as he discusses how black aggressivity is turned against blacks as they introject white society’s condemnation of them. When it comes to Himes, he misreads him badly. In *Peau noire*, Fanon refers to *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, but in his lectures he refers to *A Jealous Man Can’t Win*, which was translated as *La Reine des pommes* in 1948. Written purely for money, this is the first of Himes’s ‘Harlem thrillers’ and it introduces those very hard-boiled detectives Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson. Fanon reads it as a realistic portrayal of Harlem life, but Himes always insisted that the Harlem of his books was never real (327).

Opining now as if these notes were accurate and complete, Macey misreads Fanon and Himes—badly: *La Reine des pommes* appears in 1958 as the French version of *For Love of Imabelle*. “A Jealous Man Can’t Win” was the English-language working title of *Couché dans le pain*, which was translated as *The Crazy Kill* in the same year, 1959. If Himes could be humble about his depiction of Harlem as locale, he “always” made much larger claims about the accuracy of his depiction of Black life. He insisted, “my books are as authentic as the autobiography of Malcolm X. But I don’t strain after authenticity when I’m writing them. I sit there laughing at the people, I believe in them so completely” (Himes 1995, 18). The alleged line between reality and absurdity is erased in Himes, as he believes this line to be erased by racism, which makes reality absurd for Black people and white racists, an approach to absurdity also visible in Fanon. This is why the second volume of Himes’s two-volume autobiography is *My Life of Absurdity* (1976). Wel-

coming the informed reading of this “domestic fiction” as offering “a bolder kind of racial protest than the explicit protest novels” he wrote before it (26), Himes insisted that he carried Harlem with him all around Europe without ever finding a place more to his suiting, except for the “shattering” injustice of Black ghetto life (102). For this reason, Peter Geismar’s *Fanon: A Biography* (1971) could observe:

Black Power theorists in the United States have found Fanon’s writings particularly useful in helping to explain the high homicide and suicide rates in Harlem, Watts, and the other ghettos.... He found that this internal violence decreases during a revolution when the energies of the colonized are directed toward political goals. Third World revolutions are the cathartic vengeance for decades of quieter colonial murders. (191)

Unafraid of vengeance, to be sure, Fanon’s African revolution is a revolution for justice, self-determination and humanity, beyond vengeance itself.

Resisting the psycho-social and psycho-sexual politics of empire must be a crucial part of this Pan-African revolt. The colonizer cuts into the flesh of the colonized “with unheard of violence,” the revolutionary psychiatrist could recognize (Fanon 1965, 116). The wounds inflicted by colonialism are wounds of embodiment and wounds of consciousness (118). The writings of Fanon and Himes amount to a twin testimony to this violence and the necessity of violence as an anti-racist, anti-colonial remedy to violence. As political intellectuals, separated by land (“soil”) and genre, they come together to denounce the absurdity and historical blindness of the white West; they chart the tension of oppression in the muscles and the nerves of the oppressed; they dissect the role of riots and re-

bellions in the absence of organized rage; they discard the complex of Oedipus to diagnose the psycho-pathologies of Europe and North America; and they unmask the regime of torture that is endemic to the sadistic regime of racism and fascism, worldwide. Speaking to intellectuals in particular in “On National Culture” or *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon urged the colonized to strip naked and study the history of his or her body in the struggle for national liberation which is a struggle for international liberation and the liberation of humanity from the murderous, white-supremacist “humanism” of the bourgeois West (Fanon 1963, 211).

Pioneering paradigms that revolutionize all manner of traditions, Fanon and Himes help us resist imperialism at the level of the erotic, the psycho-social/psycho-sexual and the political economic, perhaps like no other figures in the Pan-African revolutionary tradition, at home and abroad.

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