

Fanon Revisited: Exploring the Relationship Between African-Centered Psychology and Fanonian Psychology

by

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Abstract: The main argument being advanced is that within the psychological literature about people of African descent, the relationship between African-centered psychology and Fanonian psychology has gone unnoticed and often misunderstood when it is studied. I attempt to demonstrate when and where the various articulations of Africana mental health expressed by contemporary Black psychologists and Frantz Fanon enter into similar discourses. I am also interested in exploring and examining how these theoretical interpretations can be synthesized to produce an optimal and functional theory of Africana mental health. I contend that there is a very interesting and informative exchange of ideas to be found in the discourse between African-centered theories of Black mental health and the theories of Frantz Fanon.

This study is an archeological attempt to uncover the hidden discourse that exists in the space between African-centered theories of mental health and the concepts, issues and themes concerning mental health articulated by Frantz Fanon. The main argument being advanced is that within the psychological literature about people of African descent, the relationship between African-centered psychology and Fanonian psychology has gone unnoticed and often misunderstood when it is studied. I attempt to demonstrate when and where the various articulations of Africana mental health expressed by contemporary Black psychologists and Frantz Fanon enter into similar discourses. I am also interested in exploring and examining how these theoretical interpretations can be synthesized to produce an optimal and functional theory of Africana mental health. I contend that there is a very interesting and informative exchange of ideas to be found in the discourse between African-centered theories of Black mental health and the theories of Frantz Fanon.

Adherents of both schools of thought have either marginalized or dealt with each other's ideas in a cursory manner. According to Gordon et. al., (1996) there are five stages and/or schools of thought that emerge from what is considered Fanonian studies. Four of the five main stages are: (1) various applications of and reactions to Fanon's work; (2) biographical writings of Fanon's work; (3) intensive research on Fanon's significance in political theory; and (4) the ascent of postmodern cultural and postcolonial studies of Fanon. Reflecting on the various approaches to studying Fanon, Bulhan (1985) argues:

There is a marked paucity of systematic review in one crucial area: Fanon's psychological and psychiatric contributions. Such paucity is curious indeed. For Fanon was first and foremost a psychiatrist by training and profession...His translated and better-known books either had psychology as their major point of departure or they incorporated psychological dimensions to complement, illustrate, and concretize the macro-social experiences he sought to unveil and transform (p. 6).

According to Bulhan, the three reasons for the neglect of Fanon's psychological contribution are: (1) his contributions came out of the turbulent 50s and 60s when many of the former colonies were in the throes of national liberation; (2) his views on political violence, the colonized bourgeoisie, and the revolutionary character of the peasantry were perceived as more political than psychological and (3) his adherents were often political scientists, historians, or sociologists that approached his works according to the priorities, orientations, and concepts of their disciplines and often deliberately de-emphasized his psychological contributions (Bulhan, 1985).

Unlike other analyses of Fanon (Gordan et al., 1996), Bulhan discusses the role and function of Black psychologists in the emerging discourse of Fanonian studies. He comments that Black psychologists "continue to show a great deal of interest in Fanon and the problems he studied... his work strike(s) a resonant chord in Black psychologists" (Bulhan, 1985, p.8). Yet, as poignant as Bulhan's points are about the mis-interpretations of Fanon within the various schools of thought, he implies that Black psychologist's interest, relationship and understanding of Fanon is somewhat naive. According to Bulhan (1985), Black psychologists "feel compelled to search for a more resonant and responsive 'black psychology', sometimes elaborating their own reactive theories to show how whites are genetically inferior to blacks" (p. 8). Thus, while Bulhan acknowledges Black psychologists search for an alternative paradigm as a progressive effort to deconstruct the hegemony of Eurocentric psychology, he also marginalizes Black psychology as a collective field of study that does not offer an in-depth understanding of the nuances and complexity of the relationship between Frantz Fanon and the psychology of oppression.

However, Gordon discusses a fifth stage that is fundamentally different from the previous stages in that it includes "engagements with the thought of Fanon for the development of original work across the entire sphere of human studies. Its purpose is neither to glorify nor denigrate Fanon but instead to explore the ways in which he is a useful thinker" (Gordan et. al., 1996, pp. 6-7). It is within the framework of this fifth stage of Fanonian studies that this excursive examination of the relationship between African-centered psychology and Fanonian psychology is situated.

Although he was a psychiatrist of African descent that studied the science of the African mind, I contend that Fanonian psychology has also been taken out of African-centered discourse. It is as if Black psychologists and African-centered psychologists in particular, have handed Fanon over to the political, social, post-colonial, third world and sub-altern theorists. The convergence and divergence of ideas between African-centered theorists and Fanon can be examined within the framework of their major ideological themes. The themes that will be examined in this analysis are: (1) manichean psychology, (2) deconstructing Eurocentric psychology, and (3) applied cultural psychology.

Manichean Psychology

Both Fanon and African-centered psychologists attempt to come to terms with the Manichean thinking that has emerged as a result of cultural imposition (Fanon, 1967) and cultural misorientation (Kambon, 1993, 2003). Wyrick (1998) explains that “just as the Manichean religion divided the world into forces of light and forces of darkness, Euro-American culture arranges concepts and values into binary opposites” (p.51). Bulhan (1985) further elucidates on the importance of Manichean thinking to Fanonian psychology:

Pivotal to Fanon’s theory is the notion that a Manichean psychology underlies human violence and oppression...This division is based not on reciprocal affirmations, but rather on irreconcilable opposites that cast into good versus evil, beautiful versus ugly, intelligent versus stupid, white versus black, human versus subhuman modes...Each is defined in terms of its opposite and each derives its identity in opposition to the other. Yet in such a perspective, it is necessary to keep the line of demarcation quite clear or else the Manichean psychology collapses (p. 140).

In Manichean fashion, African-centered psychologists attempt to reconstruct an African worldview based on “traditional” African principles in contrast to a European worldview. Using the worldview paradigm appropriated from Diop (1978) as a theoretical point of departure, Kambon (1992) employs the comparative worldviews schematic. According to the comparative worldviews schematic, the African worldview consists of the following: (1) Oneness/Harmony with nature, (2) survival of the group, (3) collective responsibility, and (4) spiritualism/understanding. On the other hand, the African-centered paradigm states that the European worldview consists of: (1) control/mastery over nature, (2) survival of the fittest, (3) individual rights and (4) materialism/ aggression (Kambon, 1998). Hence, in the paradigm advocated by African-centered psychologists, the dichotomous nature of Manichean thinking remains intact with only the nature of the attributes associated with each cultural group being changed.

However, according to Wyrick, “Throughout his life, Fanon would continue to interrogate Manichean thinking, extending analysis of its consequences into the realms of history and political practice” (1994, p. 51). Thus, in Fanonian psychology, Manichean thinking is viewed as being a central component of psychology that impacts both the oppressed and the oppressor. In fact, Fanonian psychology argues that Manichean thinking must be perpetuated if the prevailing social hierarchy that supports white domination and control is to be maintained. While Fanon seeks to deconstruct both sides of the Manichean equation (since for him Africans and Europeans suffer from cultural misorientation) and eventually eliminate any predetermined notions of race, African-centered psychologists attempt to deconstruct notions of African cultural inferiority and replace the negative values and ideas with positive cultural values grounded in African philosophical principles.

Fanon (1967) states that “the collective unconscious is not dependent on cerebral heredity; it is the result of what I shall call the unreflected imposition of culture” (p. 191). For Fanon, cultural imposition can be defined as the acceptance of and subservience to European cultural standards of what it means to exist as a human, while ignoring, rejecting and/or being antagonistic towards that which is associated with being a person of African descent. Fanon’s historical significance to understanding the dynamics of the psychology of the Black experience under conditions of white supremacy, domination, and control lies in his articulating the manner in which systems of racial and cultural oppression have defined how humans view themselves and the world around them. In stating, “The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man is sealed in his blackness” (Fanon, 1967, p.9), Fanon is arguing that the social constructions of race that define what it means to be white or black have limited and restricted whiteness and blackness to presubscribed and often pejorative definitions of self. Similar to the proclamations made by artists and intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance who suggested a New Negro, the African-centered psychologist Daudi Azibo (1996) argues for a New African that re-conceptualizes the pejorative definitions of what it means to be Black and re-defines themselves among cultural and political gathering notions that work to advance the best interest of people of African descent. Fanon has a different understanding of this new consciousness. According to Fanon, the only way to change this Manichean thought is to deconstruct these operational definitions and construct not only a New African, but construct a new universal human that does not limit the possibilities and potential of racial/cultural groups on the basis of their color and/or perceived historicity (Fanon, 1967). Through examining both of these discourses, we observe Fanon and African-centered psychologists giving attention to the importance of deconstructing and reconstructing how people of African descent view themselves, but differing in their articulation of how that process should take place.

Deconstructing Eurocentric Psychology

In their efforts to address issues pertaining to African American mental health, African-centered psychologists sought to re-define and re-conceptualize what constituted optimal psychological functioning among people of African descent (Myers, 1992). Early attempts to reconstruct traditional European therapeutic theories and techniques eventually led to more cultural specific theories and techniques that utilized the history, culture and lived experiences of people of African descent as the basis of their analysis (Jamison, 2009). African-centered psychologists argued that the definition of mental health and mental illness for African Americans differed significantly from that proposed for whites. Thus, African-centered psychologists began to offer alternative conceptualizations, characteristics and definitions of positive and negative mental health (Akbar, 1981; Azibo, 1985; Kambon, 1998).

Kambon posits that positive mental health among African Americans consists of: (1) an African-centered worldview that demonstrates congruent racial-cultural survival ideas and behavior, (2) an active practice of Africentric values of spiritualism, (3) a collective self-consciousness and collective responsibility, (4) a pursuit of racial-cultural self-knowledge, (5) an involvement in the perpetuation of Africentric institutions, (6) a value system that prioritizes interconnectedness and interdependence of African life, and (7) an oppositional posture toward all anti-self (racial-cultural) forces. In contrast, it is argued by African-centered psychologists that negative mental health among African Americans consists of: (1) a European centered worldview that demonstrates contradictory or incongruent racial-cultural survival ideas and behavior, (2) an active practice of Eurocentric values of materialism, (3) a self-consciousness comprised of individualism and competitiveness, (4) a low priority placed on racial-cultural self-knowledge, (5) an involvement in the perpetuation of Eurocentric institutions, (6) a value system that emphasizes independence, isolationism, detachment, fragmented relationships, and reprioritizes African survival and (7) a non-defensive posture toward anti-self (racial-cultural) forces (Kambon, 1998). In other words, under conditions of white supremacy, people with low African self-consciousness are more prone to mental illness than people with high African self-consciousness.

For African-centered psychologists, cultural misorientation is the over identification with European culture among people of African descent (Kambon, 2003). The construct of cultural misorientation is a schema of basic Africana personality disorder (Kambon, 2003). The cultural misorientation process is generally categorized as cultural oppression (Baldwin, 1980), and in the specific case of European (White supremacy domination) cultural oppression of Africans in America, it produces the collective psychological disorder of European cultural “misidentification” among Africans (Kambon, 2003). Kambon (2003) asserts that cultural misorientation is the basic Africana mental disorder because it predisposes all other forms of Africana mental disorders associated with the European social condition of cultural domination. For Kambon and African-centered psychologists, every mental disorder that occurs within the African psyche is related in some shape, form, or fashion to cultural misorientation or at least has a cultural component at its root.

As a result, African-centered theorists have been criticized for what appears to be an over emphasis on the role that culture plays in the etiology and treatment of mental illness. However, when we examine Fanon's work, we find Fanon making similar arguments about the relationship between culture and mental illness. Similar to Kambon's cultural misorientation (2003), Fanon (1967) argues that "with the exception of a few misfits within the closed environment, we can say that every neurosis, every abnormal manifestation, every affective erethism...is the product of his cultural situation" (p. 152). In addition, Fanon (1967) states, "A normal Negro child having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (p. 143). He further comments on the cultural/socialization process when he states that, "In other words, there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly with the help of books, newspapers, schools, and their texts, advertisements, films, and radio work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world of the group to which one belongs" (Fanon, 1967, p. 152). Here Fanon is not only recognizing what he called cultural imposition but is also describing the venues through which cultural and psychological misorientation occurs. Finally, Fanon (1967) asserts, "When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place...the Black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behavior will be the other (in the guise of the white man), for the other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level, self-esteem" (p. 154).

While some African-centered psychologists (Kambon, 1998) have criticized Fanon's reliance on and commitment to European derived theories such as psychoanalysis and existentialism, a close reading of his work indicates that he is very clear on the applicability or non-applicability of the presumed universality of theories and techniques developed by European theorists. As if anticipating the critiques that would come from African-centered psychologists, Fanon cautions that cultural reality prevents traditional European psychology from being used wholesale in the treatment of people of African descent. Fanon calls into question the extent to which psychological theories and techniques standardized on and developed for Europeans can be appropriated for use with people of African descent. Fanon comments that "Whenever I have read a psychoanalytic work, discussed with my professors, or talked with European patients, I have been struck by the disparity between the corresponding schemas and the reality that the Negro presents. It has led me to the conclusion that there is a dialectical substitution when one goes from the psychology of the white man to that of the black" (Fanon, 1967, pp.150-151). According to Bulhan (1985), Fanon's utilization of European thinkers differs depending on the context. When Fanon is analyzing colonization he utilized and made several references to Eurocentric psychology, however, when discussing the process of decolonization "the style and tone of writing also changed. Fanon here did not quote European scholars...He developed his own formulation" (Bulhan, 1985, p.140). The European references were needed when analyzing colonization since attention was on critically understanding European thought and action, yet, these references to European thinkers were not needed when the focus turned to Africans being active agents in the decolonization of their own land and mind. For Fanon, African resistance required African voices that spoke truth to power about African experiences. Thus, a unique Fanonian formulation developed that was independent of reliance on European thought and was grounded in the lived experiences of the oppressed.

African-centered psychologists and Fanon have both made conscious and concerted efforts to deconstruct the Eurocentric hegemony on psychological thought and theory. Part and parcel of this deconstruction has been the critique of psychoanalysis as articulated by Freud and Jung. For example, Akbar (2004) argues that “the body language is not of the Freudian symbolic... such sexual interpretations are far-fetched in appreciating the vast range of communication in black body language” (p. 110), while Nobles (1986) notes that “Freud’s star pupil, Carl Gustav Jung, believed that certain psychological maladies found amongst Americans were due to the presence of Black people in America” (p. 6). Fanon (1967) understood that when it was time to understand the psychology of a people in direct contact with cultural imposition that “the discoveries of Freud are of no use here” (1967, p. 104). He further elucidates:

There has been much talk of psychoanalysis in connection with the Negro. Distrusting the ways in which it might be applied, I have preferred to call this chapter ‘The Negro and Psychopathology’, well aware that Freud and Adler and even the cosmic Jung did not think of the Negro in all their investigations. And they were quite right not to have. It is often forgotten that neurosis is not a basic element of human reality. Like it or not the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes (Fanon, 1967, p. 151).

Along these same lines of critiquing psychoanalytic interpretations, Fanon (1967) also asserts that Jung “wanted to go back to the childhood of the world, but he made a remarkable mistake: He went only back to the childhood of Europe” (p. 190). Fanon further instructs:

European civilization is characterized by the presence, at the heart of what Jung calls the collective unconscious, of an archetype: an expression of the bad instinct, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumber in every white man... *Personally, I think that Jung has deceived himself.* Moreover, all the peoples he has known—whether the Pueblo Indians of Arizona or the Negroes of Kenya in British East Africa—have had more or less traumatic contacts with the white man (Fanon, 1967, p. 187).

Thus, Fanon was not enamored by or infatuated with European thinkers or with European culture and civilization. To the contrary, his analysis and critiques of psychoanalytic thinkers considered to be pioneers in traditional psychology offer an early intellectual assault on the assumed universality of psychological principles.

Implicit in the stance taken by Fanon and African-centered psychologists toward mental health is the idea that at the core of any clinical diagnosis is the concept of culture. This cultural component is in the tradition of Fanon who thought it was important to develop “a radical type of ethno psychology that considers the cultural bases of beliefs, fears, and desires. Just as racial attitudes are created by society, so are attitudes about—even definitions of—mental illnesses” (Wyrick, 1998, p. 42). Hence, cultural variables will and must play a part in psychological theory, research and practice.

Applied Cultural Psychology

While Fanon argues that ultimately it is important for people of African descent to eventually be mutually recognized as human beings by Europeans, African-centered psychologists posit that it is more important from a mental health perspective that people of African descent recognize their cultural selves first and place less emphasis on the need for European acceptance and/or recognition. Kambon (1998) interprets Fanon as saying that “Blacks must ultimately reject both the terms and limiting conditions of white and Black... as equally unacceptable and, thus, transcend to the level of ‘human beingness’ (p. 330). Wilson (1999) is even more to the point in acknowledging what he perceives as being the problematic nature of mutual recognition when he contends:

Much of the pathology of Afrikan people today is this vain hope that somehow the white man will become color blind and will not see us for whom and what we are, that somehow we will be looked upon as some kind of abstraction-not just a man, a human being only-without culture, without recognition, without identity. Too many...want to shed our Afikanity for this kind of bogus, abstract existence, which is not existence at all, and which is the ultimate acceptance of invisibility (p. 51).

Thus, for African-centered psychologists, it is important to be recognized as a human being that exists within a cultural context and not just as a universal human being void of cultural specificity.

The correlation between culture and mental disorder is critical. Based on a re-conceptualization of how mental illness is defined and understood, Black psychologists went about the task of creating new diagnostic systems that addressed mental illness from a cultural specific approach (Jamison, 2009). Kambon also argues that the origin of African American mental illness must be placed in a cultural context. Kambon (1998) states “Cultural Misorientation is [a] basic African personality disorder because it predisposes all other forms of African mental disorders associated with the European societal condition of cultural oppression” (p. 352). Similarly, Verges (1996) asserts that Fanon’s importance to the psychology of the oppressed was: (1) to insist on the importance of the cultural context in which symptoms appear and (2) to demonstrate that therapeutic institutions need to maintain a concrete link and a structural similarity to the local culture of the patients. Fanon’s articulation of the psychology of the oppressed openly “asked the vexed question about the relationship between culture and the psyche. Did culture determine the psyche, or were there universal human psychological mechanisms” (1996, p. 90). Thus, Fanon initiates a discourse centered on the relationship between culture and psychological diagnosis.

According to Verges (1996), “Fanon.... concluded that the addition of day care centers created and developed in highly industrialized countries could be transplanted in a so-called under-developed country without losing any of its value. Day care centers represent the form of psychiatric service most suitable to treat mental illness” (p. 94). Fanon’s work with day-care clinics in Algeria included the use of culturally specific techniques that incorporated traditional cultural practices of the population he served. Unlike the European colonials that incorporated the indigenous culture in order to control and manipulate traditions, Fanon incorporated the indigenous cultural understandings in an attempt to blend pre-colonial understandings with the contemporary situation. This blending recognized the importance of understanding and implementing the cultural values, beliefs and practices of the people he was treating. Even with his Marxist leanings, Fanon was clear that the religion/spirituality of his patients was not the mere opiate of the masses, but a crucial component of understanding mental illnesses and how they emerged within a cultural context. Verges (1996) suggests Fanon understood “that medical practitioners must know the historical and societal conditions of formation of the society in which they exercise, as well as its cultural practices and beliefs... Such a practice would end up ignoring, denying the subjectivities of its patients” (p. 96). Thus, as a shrewd student of the relationship between culture and psychology, Fanon understood that the implementation of cultural specific techniques are linked to improving the mental health of marginalized groups that have been historically oppressed and denied access to mental health care.

Similar to Fanon, African-centered psychologists queried the notion that European psychological principles were universal. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) used by psychologists to classify and diagnose mental illnesses was also critiqued as Black psychologists asked questions about the reliability and validity of the classifications proposed within the traditional diagnostic system (Akbar, 1981; Azibo, 1989). The construction of culturally specific diagnostic systems was exemplified by African-centered psychologists when Akbar (1981) proposed that mental disorders among people of African descent manifested in four distinct ways. Akbar classified the four mental disorders exhibited among African Americans as: (1) the alien-self disorder that is characterized by a person unaware or salient as to issues concerning race and/or culture, (2) the anti-self disorder that manifests as a person being antagonistic toward their cultural selves and others that are representative of and/or reflect their cultural selves, (3) the self-destructive disorder that refers to behaviors such as drug abuse, alcoholism and forms of self-directed violence, and (4) the organic disorders which are classified as mental disorders that have chemical and/or biological origins.

A more elaborate development of an African-centered diagnostic system is seen in the work of Daudi Azibo. Azibo (1989) puts forth an alternative diagnostic system to classify the intricate cultural manifestations of mental illness. According to Azibo, the Azibo Nosology is based on the following assumptions: (1) the nature of the relationship between personality order and disorder, (2) the utter criticality of the self in personality or mental order and disorder, and (3) the reality that values are fundamentally inherent in the diagnostic process (p. 178). Azibo appropriates Kambon’s theory of cultural misorientation and applies it in his diagnostic system.

According to Azibo, cultural misorientation and correct cultural orientation are at the core of African American mental health. In the Azibo nosology, correct orientation is defined as genetic Blackness plus psychological blackness. The equation represents what Kambon refers to as the normal natural conditions experienced by people of African descent. Kambon (1998) argues that under normal natural conditions people of African descent, on the most part, manifest healthy psychological functioning. Yet when these conditions are not optimal and people of African descent are bombarded and internalize the European Worldview, they experience cultural oppression and thus cultural misorientation. This synopsis parallels the ideas expressed earlier by Fanon (1967) when he stated, “A normal Negro child will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (p. 143). In conjunction with Fanon’s analysis, the Azibo Nosology, addresses this contact with the white world as it is theoretically grounded in African-centered and Fanonian concepts of cultural misorientation and cultural imposition.

A similar path to a cultural specific approach to mental health also manifests among African-centered psychologists and their clients. Traditionally, African Americans have avoided therapeutic help in the formal sense and sought assistance from preachers, priests, grandparents and elders. Thus, many African-centered psychologists have approached therapy from a spiritual aspect and sought to examine how traditional African healing techniques can be applied to the therapeutic process (Jamison, 2009). As Black psychologists begin to study spirituality in the African traditions of Kemet and Ifa, they began to develop approaches to mental illness that were based in traditional African ways of treating mental illness. African-centered psychologists have combined the role of clinical psychologist/counselor with the role of the African healer.

A recent example is found in the work of Nobles et. al., (2009). In articulating the African-centered Behavioral Change Model, Nobles et. al., (2009) put forth a Fanonian proposal:

the praxis of psychology must lead to both the understanding and support of the people’s culturally consistent lived experiences. The critical task with which we are faced is one of knowledge construction to generate authentic data to inform intervention. The need for authenticity demands epistemological correction. Authenticity requires the placement of African American people in a cultural paradigm consistent with their cultural reality (p. 230).

Nobles states that ultimately “The African-centered behavioral change model specifically indicates that behavioral change occurs through a process of ‘culturalization’, wherein the person minimizes negative social conditions and maximizes conditions that are pro-social and life affirming” (Nobles, 2009, p. 230) . This approach mimics and mirrors Fanon’s conclusions about the role of culture and spirituality in working with patients in Algeria. While much work remains to be done in the realms of theory, research and practice concerning Africana diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, it appears that African-centered psychologists, similar to Fanon, are forging a path that seeks an understanding of mental health that is radically different from the therapeutic techniques bequeathed to them by the Western psychological tradition.

For Fanon and African centered psychologists, Africana mental health disorders emerge as a function of racism and the imposition of Eurocentric psychological theory, research and practice on people of African descent. Wilson (1993) argues:

In the context of a racist social system, psychological diagnosis, labeling and treatment of the behavior of politically oppressed persons are political acts performed to attain political ends. For oppression begins as a psychological fact and is in good part a psychological state. If oppression is to operate with a maximum efficiency, it must become and remain a psychological condition achieving self-perpetuating motion by its own internal dynamics... (p. 3).

Wilson (1993, 1999) seeks to highlight the significance of understanding psychology in its political context. Similarly, Semaj (1996) takes the position that “the social sciences deal with productive relations and the ideological superstructure built to maintain and justify them” (p. 196). He emphasizes that there should be no scientific colonization. Scientific colonization “is the process by which information (raw material) is extracted from the community for the benefit of the scientist and others located outside of the community” (p. 199). Thus, as a social science that seeks to counter, correct and change social issues, Africana psychology must be concerned with the social implications of the theories and research that emerge from the discipline.

For African-centered psychologists, the struggle is two-fold. Scholar activists must struggle against theoretical concepts and practical issues. The relationship between psychology and social justice is paramount. In regards to the role of psychology and the social and political implications of psychological diagnosis, Wilson (1993) argues that “when an individual is labeled (diagnosed) in an unjust and unequal society... then the very labels attached to the victims of that society are the very means by which repression is carried out in that system” (p. 88). Thus, those psychologists “getting obsessively involved with diagnostic procedures...deceive themselves into thinking they are doing great scientific work, and that they are politically neutral” (Semaj, 1996, p. 86). These statements echo Fanon:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab (African) permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. The function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man’s needs. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society; a society to be replaced (Verges, pp. 53-54).

Verges (1996) states that Fanon “radically questioned a medical practice which wants to believe in its intrinsic neutrality” (p. 96). Like Semaj, Fanon is recognizing the role and function of a new cultural and human science that is not only concerned with research but with the social and political implications of that research.

Central to this discussion is the relationship between cultural personality and social/political action. For Fanon, there is a certain degree of ambivalence about what role (if any) cultural retentions function to serve as a buffer to counter cultural imposition. At the same time Fanon puts forth the argument that negritude/culture may be a precondition for Africana psychological and political liberation (McCulloch, 2002). However, he warns that affirmative cultural identity is not the panacea “if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs” (Fanon, 1963, p. 204). He further asserts “if you really wish... to avoid regression ... a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness (cultural) to political and social consciousness” (Fanon, 1963, p. 203). Fanon’s focus on political and national consciousness is reminiscent of his teacher, Aime Cesaire, who also addressed issues concerning the oppression of the Black psyche when he wrote about Antilleans experiencing alienation from themselves as a people of African descent. He states that “our struggle was a struggle against alienation. That struggle gave birth to Negritude” (Cesaire, 2000, p. 89). Cesaire elaborates on this concept when he asserts:

...if someone asks me what my conception of Negritude is, I answer that above all it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness. We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that black people were searching for an identity. And it seemed to me that if we were to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of who we are... (Cesaire, 2000, p. 91).

Although Leopold Senghor is often credited with being the most political of the Negritude theorists, Fanon’s intellectual advisor Cesaire also expressed sentiments pertaining to the social and political relevance of Negritude. A key factor in Cesaire’s discourse is his statement that people of African descent need “a concrete rather than abstract consciousness” (Cesaire, 2000, p. 91), not just philosophical, glorified, romantic notions of self but a consciousness and/or psychology that can be manifested in concrete, measurable observable behavior. According to Cesaire, even before the formal articulation of negritude, events in Haiti manifested the principles of negritude without using the actual term. He argues that Haiti was “Negritude in action. Haiti is the country where Negro people stood up for the first time time, affirming their determination to shape a new world, a free world” (Cesaire, 2000, p. 91). Thus, Fanon is elaborating on the lessons learned from his teacher when he attempts to construct a psychology grounded in lived experiences.

Conclusion

To the extent that the African-centered psychologist Wade Nobles is correct in his assertion that power involves the ability to define ones reality (Nobles, 1986), then African-centered psychologists are continuing the Fanonian tradition that focuses on social and political issues that influence and impact the powerful cultural lens through which social and political realities are viewed. The Fanonian tradition is grounded in the assumption that taking pride in the past achievements of African people is vital, but only a precondition to liberation (McCulloch, 2002). Thus, for Fanon, knowledge of historical and cultural self only goes so far and is limited in the role it plays in the liberation process.

However, African-centered psychologists like Wilson assume a similar Fanonian position. For example, Wilson (1999) asserts that “the true nationalist is not obsessed with the past to the exclusion of the present” (p. 66). Relative to this concern, Wilson (1999) posits: (1) the true nationalist is forward looking and futuristic; (2) the true nationalist does not escape and hide through the glorification of the past what must be done in the present and in the future; (3) the true nationalist is entrepreneurial and constructing something; (4) the true nationalist not only respects their ethnic heritage and the glories of his ancestors, but is also concerned with the legacy inherited to children; (5) the true nationalist not only motivates through language, rhetoric and oratory, but trains; (6) the true nationalist grounds their social and political philosophy and practice on a realistic analysis of the situation; and (7) the true nationalist is not afraid to overthrow tradition when tradition is unproductive. Therefore, the African-centered psychologist, Amos Wilson, is aligned with Frantz Fanon in arguing that the cultural aspect of the Africana personality is irrelevant unless there is a political and social component that addresses the current lived experiences and reality of people of African descent. What becomes evident is that cultural identity, as advanced by African-centered psychologists and Fanon, does not by itself advance the improvement of social and political issues. Fanon and Wilson both argue that culture is dynamic and thus subject to change depending on material conditions. Although not stated in explicit Fanonian terms, Wilson’s perspective enhances the Fanonian understanding of a functional and relevant cultural psychology. Wilson (1999) states:

Culture is not static...Culture itself must reconstruct itself if the system in which it exists is reconstructed and rearranged. Some of us (African-centered psychologists) get in trouble because we want to find an Afrikan culture stuck somewhere back in the thirteenth century and want to apply it to ourselves at this point in a different context...Afrikan culture is constantly changing and evolving because the context in which Afrikan people live changes and evolves. What makes it Afrikan culture is that it operates in the interests of Afrikan people, is designed to advance Afrikan people (p. 118)

Wilson’s analysis advises and advocates for other African-centered psychologists to become actively involved in the struggle for psychological and *political* liberation. According to Wilson, African-centered psychologists must assume a Fanonian position that acknowledges the intimate connection between critical cultural consciousness and social change. In following the flow of the theoretical and pragmatic currents of this radical intellectual tradition, African-centered psychologists must continue to expand and extend the legacy of the Fanonian tradition of socially and politically focused intellectual discourse that engages and encourages culturally based direct political action.

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