Fanon's Ship's Journals: The Logbook of Decolonisation

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Abstract: This essay adopts the image of the ship's logbook ("journal de bord") to reinterpret anti-colonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's writings from a blue humanities perspective. This image was important to Fanon, as he wrote a form of logbook in the summer of 1960 during a trip to Mali. In 1953, the image of the ship's logbook was adopted by Fanon for his weekly ward journal during his work at the Blida-Joinville hospital in Algeria. The logbook can be seen as an important formal and stylistic choice that resonates across Fanon's *œuvre*. Fanon redefines the "journal de bord" as a decolonising genre, countering the central role of these textual forms in the economics of colonialism and the slave trade. This essay hence reimagines and resituates Fanon's work in the tradition of logbook writing while at the same time reconsidering the logbook within the history of a colonial and capitalist modernity.

Keywords: Frantz Fanon, logbooks, decolonisation, slave trade, modernity

1. Introduction

This essay reconsiders two important texts that Frantz Fanon produced in the late phases of his life. The first one is a "journal de bord," or logbook, to use the English equivalent, that Fanon created in his role at the psychiatric hospital of Blida-Joinville from 1953 to 1956, when he resigned from the post and joined the Algerian revolution.[1] The second is another logbook that he wrote on the move during his reconnaissance trip to Mali in the summer of 1960, in his role as diplomat for Algeria. The purpose of this text was practical and strategic, as it documented Fanon's attempt to establish a new line of supplies and communication between Algeria and Mali during the Algerian War. Both texts adopt the mode of the "journal de bord" – a standard, modern form of administrative record-keeping stemming from the ship's logbook – as a decolonising genre.[2] While these texts do not specifically report travels by sea, the distinctive form of the ship's journal allows Fanon to express fundamental aspects of his political thought. Indeed, in both instances, the "journal de bord" was understood by Fanon as a key intellectual resource. This kind of writing could reconnect the predicaments of the individual living under the oppression of racism and colonialism to the wider social struggles that were taking place during the 1950s across the Global South. The "journal de bord" is a vital literary and narrative form to challenge the sense of isolation and solitude – of the Algerian nation combating for its freedom as well as the inmates of a psychiatric hospital – and to keep the sense of an international anticolonial solidarity alive.

By remaking the logbook as a revolutionary, decolonising genre, Fanon also, somehow beyond his own intentions, made a crucial intervention in the history of the ship's journal as narrative, writerly form. This form, indeed, is an extensive archive in maritime history, as it documents ecological, social, and historical aspects of European sea travel since the early voyages of discovery, when these accounts started to appear. Beyond the maritime context, scholarship in the Blue Humanities has shown how the versatile form of the logbook is embedded throughout European and

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transatlantic literary development (Cohen; Blum) and the history of self-writing and "writing from below" (Liebich and Publicover; Cuming). The genre of the ship journal is also irremediably entangled in the history of slavery, colonialist expansion and capitalist accumulation. It was the form wherein the record of acquisition of enslaved humans, their deaths and punishments and horrific life conditions aboard were documented. The ship's logbook, however, also contains traces of slave revolts, resistances and refusals to be subjected to the logic of commodification and social death that slavery entailed. This essay, for this reason, is organised in two sections. In the first one, we will position the logbook as a genre within the broader frame of a history of travel marked by the violence of colonialism, capitalism, and slavery. In the second section, we will analyse Fanon's appropriation of the genre in a decolonising way, as a marker of the hopes of freedom, peace, and solidarity that animated the anticolonial struggles of which Fanon was an active participant.

2. The Ship's Logbook: Travel, Capitalism, and Slavery

Ship's logbooks offer a vast repository of knowledge about maritime history. The genre dates to the early modern period, as ship's logbooks started to appear due to various reasons, including the availability of paper and the increase in transoceanic travels. Columbus produced a logbook of his travels, setting a famous example of a genre that would stir the imagination of European readers for centuries. Margaret Schotte observes that, as a genre of writing, the ship's log has a rich history and went through different phases. Schotte writes that, on a basic level, "logbooks are a daily record of direction and distance sailed, the vessel's estimated current position, weather, and other noteworthy events inscribed in some combination of narrative and numerals" (287). Interestingly, ship's logbooks developed from earlier forms of navigational handbooks or "rutters," which, as Schotte remarks, "provided sailing directions for specific routes, and the captain's notebook" (287). These accounts, starting from Columbus's logbooks, started to attract wider audiences because of the non-navigational, ethnographic or even narrative elements they included. The ship's logbook, for this reason, shifted from being a simple tool to record navigational details, and became a more diverse form of writing that interested different kinds of readerships, from sailors to authorities and general readers. In the three centuries that followed Columbus's voyage, Schotte notes, "conceptions of logbooks and their authors evolved noticeably . . . by the close of the eighteenth century the logbook had ceased to offer assurance about the competence of its creator or the trustworthiness of its content" (304). As official documents that reported data, events, and items on board of a ship, logbooks still provide information that can help understand centuries of travel, commerce, and the human experiences of people on the move across the seas. Dennis Wheeler notes that from their "haphazard beginnings," official ship's logbooks "became more regularised as the years went by and the size of navies became larger and voyages more frequent. By the late seventeenth century logbooks assumed a form that has endured with only minor changes until the present-day" (Wheeler 134). The logbook is hence a tradition of writing that provides an important record of maritime life across many centuries of travel. These records are being utilised today for many reasons, including the extraction of data to document climate change and other oceanographic, meteorological knowledge in deep historical perspective.

However, the ship's logbook is also a genre of writing that needs to be discussed from the point of view of the representational technique, including the stylistic and discursive elements that characterise it and mark its history since the early modern period. As Byron Ellsworth Hamann notes, logbooks are a slow, everyday form of writing, manifesting the "boredom and monotony involved in sailing for weeks on end" through their "telegraphic entries, recording over and over again the direction of the wind, estimates of distance traveled, and calculations of latitude by sun or stars" (Hamann 104). Ship's logbooks, in their telegraphic and monotonous style, testify to the harshness, solitude, and boredom of maritime travel, but also provide an unparalleled source for understanding the production of what Hamann calls "a bureaucracy of fantasy directed against the inevitable disorientations

of open-water sailing, an indispensable but inadequate technical paperwork whose droning rhythms are punctuated by irruptions of wonder, terror, and repair" (127). The logbook's rhythms and monotony are a sort of defence mechanism against the potentially ungraspable sublimity of the ocean and the dangerous unpredictability of sea travel, an attempt to master the perils and the immensity of the watery element. Today, ship's logbooks are an important archive, a repository of details about the lived experience of sailors, but also other subjects of maritime life, particularly the traffic in slaves, as the form is deeply entangled in the history of the Middle Passage and the transportation of humans across the Atlantic. From this perspective, as Anne Farrow comments in her moving book on Connecticut's slave ships, ship's logbooks "are an emissary from the past, proof of a past that really happened, that had material substance. The logbooks are not just an idea but a powerful form of evidence" (Farrow 3). Accordingly, the logbook is a troubling testimony of the exploitation and objectification of human beings across the Atlantic; the monotony of diary entries also involves the repetitive act of counting bodies and calculating values. In his review of two important collections of slave ship logbooks, David Eltis notes that we can assume that all 37,000 transatlantic voyages that occurred between 1519 and 1867 had kept a record of the journey through a variety of logbook forms, which include diaries and personal records as well as the official log of the ship (Eltis 161).

In his milestone study of the 1781 Zong massacre, when more than 100 slaves were thrown overboard from a slave ship to claim insurance money, Ian Baucom notes that the ship's log of the *Zong* disappeared. Indeed, the ship's logbook proved a significant source of uncomfortable, potentially damning information about the massacre that the owners of the ship made sure never reached the public and the jury at the subsequent trials. While the *Zong*'s logbook is lost, Baucom reflects on the significance of the slave ship's logbook by looking at another slave ship, the *Ranger.* Baucom writes that the slave trade involved, among other forms of physical violence, the "violence of becoming a 'type'; a type of person, or, terribly, not even that, a type of nonperson, a type of property, a type of commodity, a type of money" (Baucom 11). This typification is key to the social death of the slave, the insertion of the slave in the capitalist economy as commodity to be exchanged.[3] The logbook of the *Ranger*, another Liverpool-owned slave ship, shows this typification through its formal qualities, as a "a long and a repetitive list, one whose reiterative predictability both requests the eye not so much to read as to skim and one whose flattened pathos solicits the reader's indulgence for horror banalized, horror catalogued" (Baucom 11). Ship's logbooks open the question of how these documents should be read: while not strictly literary, the tragedies they document require an attentive, responsive reading. The logbooks must still be *read*, not merely skimmed, precisely because of this element of banality, of typicality, whereby entries record the acquisition of human beings as property and the violence inflicted on them.

A contemporary poetic re-reading of one of such documents is a composition titled "Voyage of the Sable Venus," in which poet Robin Coste Lewis denounces the violence of the logbook as an impersonal presentation of human beings as objects to be stored on a ship. In her prologue to the poem, Lewis remarks that it "is [an excerpt of] a narrative poem comprised solely and entirely of the titles, catalog entries, or exhibit descriptions of Western art objects in which a black female figure is present."[4] The poem starts with a section titled "The Ship's Inventory," which, as in a ship's logbook, seemingly reproduces a list of items stored on the ship, mirroring the form by which human beings were inventoried. The poem itself is a response to an etching reproducing Thomas Stothard's "The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies," included in Bryan Edwards's 1801 painting *The history, civil and commercial, of the British colonies in the West Indies*. This image unquestionably celebrated the slave trade and the maritime travels that underpinned the European colonial expansion. In Robin Coste Lewis's poem, there is no meta-commentary but only a blunt reiteration, a repetition of the discursive violence of the logbook, wherein human beings are typified as entries and items to be stored and catalogued. The poem amplifies the violence of the ship's logbook by repeating, once more, the telegraphic form that constitutes its elements. This last round

of replication, however, as element of Robin Coste Lewis's own poem, subverts the violence through an act of appropriation by which a surreal collage of female typologies begins to emerge. The violence is exposed in its nakedness, banality, and apparent objectivity, but the readership it reaches has changed, the effect it produces completely subverted. Like institutional logbooks more generally, such as those that took account of the routines and infractions of prison and asylum inmates, the form of the ship's log is hence a record of oppression, but can also, paradoxically, become a record of resistance, critique, and opposition, beyond the intentions of the captains, authorities, and epochs that produced them. The genre can also preserve traces of rebellion and resistance, as the case of the logbook of the slave ship *Unity*, now on display at the Liverpool Slavery Museum, demonstrates. As the curators of the Museum indicate, the *Unity*'s logbook preserves a record of the travels of the ship, including a journey in 1770, when the ship left from West Africa carrying more than 400 slaves on board. The curators of the display, however, further note that the voyage "was eventful. The first revolt occurred on 6 June 1770 . . . On 22 June it is recorded that 'the slaves attempted another Insurrection after the death of a girl slave . . . Four days later on 26 June, we learn that 'a few of the slaves got off their Handcuffs but were detected in Time.'"[5] These horrific episodes, of violence but also rebellion, are now on display, visible, not simply as a monument but also as a trace, a living connection to a past that still influences our troubled century.[6] Curatorial projects such as the one about the *Unity*'s logbook show the continuing relevance of the logbook as document of life aboard a slave ship. These initiatives also demonstrate the centrality of the ship's logbook to the history of maritime travel, slavery and the resonance of these histories in the present.

3. Fanon's "Journal de Bord": Decolonising the Logbook

While documenting maritime travel and the slave trade, the "journal de bord" has also been reinvented and expanded as a representational resource in the struggle for decolonisation. Martinican psychiatrist and anticolonial intellectual Frantz Fanon adopted the genre to discuss key events and moments of his life. Fanon is one of the most influential figures in the history of decolonisation. Born in Martinique, Fanon moved to Algeria after his studies in France, where he took on his role as director of a psychiatric hospital. In 1956, Fanon resigned from his role and joined the Algerian revolution, moving to Tunisia and other African countries working as a diplomat for the Algerian revolutionary army, while he continued to practice psychiatry and to write. The last sections of his most well-known book, *The Wretched of the Earth,* list a horrific sequence of mental disorders caused by the violence of the Algerian war. Fanon's most striking insights draw on his clinical experience, as he theorised the violence of colonialism and racism starting from his everyday practice as a doctor, a project he had already started in his previous work *Black Skin, White Masks,* which documents his experience in France and the racism he had to endure as a highly-educated, highly-achieving medical practitioner. His clinical and political practices cannot be disentangled, as they constitute one of the most productive and unsettled legacies of his life (Menozzi).

As a mode of writing, the "journal de bord" occupies an important place in Fanon's work. As director of the psychiatric hospital of Blida-Joinville in colonised Algeria, Fanon initiated a form of logbook-keeping to record the everyday workings and occurrences of life in the institution. Titled "*Notre Journal*," and using the collective first-person plural pronoun in place of the more impersonal style of the conventional institutional log, Fanon composed weekly ward editorials from the hospital from December 1953 to December 1956 that were printed and then circulated within the hospital community (Egalité). Furthermore, one of his last writings, "The Africa to Come," as Amina Azza Bekkat notes (Bekkat 314), is a travel notebook that Fanon wrote during the summer of 1960, as he led a reconnaissance trip to Mali on behalf of the Algerian army of national liberation. Fanon did not travel by ship on that occasion; however, here too the mode of the ship's logbook is a prism through which Fanon's late work and politics can be reinterpreted.

In the first entry of his ward journal, Fanon outlines the rationale for using the logbook as a genre. He writes about the decision, with his colleagues, to publish a ward journal, based on the principle of the "journal de bord." Fanon explains the significance of this peculiar choice in the first entry of the journal, from 24 December 1953, where he writes:

> On a ship, it is commonplace to say that one is between sky and water; that one is cut off from the world; that one is alone. This journal, precisely, is to fight against the possibility of letting oneself go, against that solitude. Every day a news-sheet comes out, often poorly printed, without photos and bland. But every day, that news-sheet works to liven up the boat. In it, you are informed about the "on board" news: recreation, cinema, concerts, the next ports of call. You also learn, of course, about the news on land. The boat, though isolated, keeps contact with the outside, that is to say, with the world. (Fanon, *Alienation* 315)

This short extract captures some key aspects of Fanon's adoption and reappropriation of the ship's logbook as a genre of writing. His use of the ship as an analogy to highlight the particular situation of people admitted to the hospital – and by extension the "journal" as a ship's log – is significant here. Less than a decade later, in his classic work on asylums as "total institutions," Erving Goffman would similarly compare land-bound institutions such as mental asylums and prisons to sailing ships (with notably frequent references to Herman Melville's descriptions of a naval frigate in *White-Jacket: or, The World in a Man-of-War* (1850) (Goffman 21, 39–40). But while Goffman used the image of the "total institution" of the naval ship to emphasise asylum inmates' detachment from the wider world, in Fanon's model the institutional residents are more akin to passengers on board an ocean liner, simultaneously connected to and separated from their society, their land, their families. The vital function of the "journal de bord" was to keep this connection alive – to challenge the solitude of the ship, far away in the distant waters, and reconnect life at sea to the historical life of the community on land. Using the collective "we" to document the common social life of the hospital, this aspect of the ship's logbook is the key point of Fanon's use of the genre in relation to the history of decolonisation, but also an integral part of his practice as medical doctor. As Erica Burman notes, Fanon was deeply attentive, in his clinical practice, to the "normative cultural expectations of *narrative forms and relationships*" (Burman 176, italics in original). Fanon's ship journal testifies to the centrality of narrative to his unyielding contribution to the struggle against colonialism.

In further entries of the journal, especially the entry on 19 August 1954, Fanon reflects on the stylistic dimension of the journal. The purpose of this "journal de bord," within the context of the psychiatric institution, was to ensure a living connection between the inside and the outside, to help patients maintain a sense of identity and community. For this reason, the journal had to conform to some basic stylistic principles, as Fanon comments:

> The journal's mission is not to make public so-and-so's fictional or irrelevant fantasies. The weekly ward journal aims to make public the community's efforts and accomplishments . . . What we need is to speak a simple, direct, topical, true language. We need to think in a way that is reflective, not fragmented but instead pulled together. We need dialogues, precisely because dialogue renders us present to our comrades and to the committee. (Fanon, *Alienation* 325)

The journal, for Fanon, had a crucial role in the life of the hospital. The collective, direct and topical style of the journal, however, is far removed from the telegraphic lists of ship's logbooks. While the latter reduces human experience to accumulated items, the former is an attempt to rehumanise the patient, isolated from their family and community. For Fanon, the ship journal is a key tool to prevent patients from being "desocialized" (321), and it aligns very closely to Fanon's own concept of freedom as dis-alienation and participation to collective life. As he notes, the entries that patients contributed were not about "enclosing yourself in woolly dreams," but rather "the journal serves as a place of getting to know oneself" (325); it is a place where a patient can try to make themselves understood and to recover a sense of subjectivity and belonging.

Moving from the wards of the psychiatric hospital to the wider political arena of decolonisation, Fanon's logbook acquired the function of reconnecting the struggle for independence of a country to a global, continental, pan-African liberation. If a nation is like a ship, isolated in its path towards freedom, the "journal de bord" reconnects this path to the other nations struggling against colonialism. This is what emerges from another important "journal de bord" that Fanon wrote during his reconnaissance trip to Mali in 1960. This moment was, according to Albert Memmi, crucial in the life of Fanon, as "he experienced a decisive change of perspective: he discovered Africa . . . Fanon came to this new phase out of a total and absolute identification with the Algerians in their struggle for independence" (24). This text is important to recover what Neil Lazarus, in his illuminating, critical appraisal of David Macey's biography of Fanon, describes as Fanon's "'Third-Worldist' avatar" (Lazarus 246). Fanon's "journal de bord" is a vital document to retrieve the pan-Africanist, Third-Worldist essence of Fanon's thought, a vision that for many years has been obfuscated by the rise of a "postcolonial" and post-structuralist image of Fanon. Fanon's logbooks show how the struggle of the individual – both the subject and the individual nation – needs to be linked to a global struggle against capitalism and colonialism. Fanon's logbook is a glimmer of hope in an epoch when the world was still animated by a will to transformation, before the setbacks and restorations of imperialism that took place in the last decades of the twentieth century. As Lazarus notes, Fanon needs to be located within the "crescendo of revolutionary anticolonialism" of decades marked by "the defeat of the American forces in Vietnam and the overthrow of fascism in Portugal and of Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Angola" (Lazarus 247).

In his recent biography of Fanon, Adam Shatz dwells on the background that informs Fanon's 1960 "journal de bord" written during his trip to Mali. Fanon's text, titled "The Africa to Come," in fact, is the very starting point of Shatz's rewriting of Fanon's life.[7] This short piece illustrates Fanon's hope for the future of Africa, a continent that would have to overcome inner divisions and to fight, united and solidary, against capitalism and colonialism. Shatz expresses his encounter with the manuscript in a very moving way, as he writes about his encounter with the "blue Ghana School Teachers Book No. 3 that he had picked up in Accra . . . On the road in West Africa, he was open, thoughtful, and intrigued by the continent from which his ancestors had been carried on slave ships to the French colony of Martinique" (4). Fanon's other important "journal de bord," hence, is a complete inversion and reappropriation of the ship journal as a genre. Ship's logbooks documented the transportation of Fanon's ancestors from Africa to the Caribbean through the slave trade, while Fanon's ship journal moves across African countries to establish an international unity against imperialism. Fanon's travel to Mali testifies to a last moment of hope in the future before the last phase of his life, when he had to go to North America where he will die the following year of leukaemia. Fanon's writing testifies to the everyday occurrences and incidents of his journey to Mali, where he was directed on behalf of the ALN to open a route so that the Algerian revolutionaries could get weapons and soldiers from other African countries. In true logbook style, it focuses on practical details and events of the trip, even listing the resources needed. The text is incomplete and abrupt; it is occasional writing, very close to the actual experience it registers. In his important biography, David Macey notes that Fanon was, in fact, a sort of amateur strategist, as he missed out some elements that, from a military and logistical point of view, would have been crucial. Macey notes that Fanon's style is "rapid and breathless," as even if he travelled "from tropical forest to savannah and then desert, he never describes the landscapes he had seen, even though their physical geography would have been of strategic importance to any expeditionary force" (Macey 438). While patchy and erratic from the point of view of strategy, the text has unexpected qualities if linked to his previous psychiatric logbooks. In its intention and function, Fanon's "journal de bord" subverts the tropes and functions of the colonialist ship's logbooks.

Similar to the previous logbook that Fanon had initiated at the Blida hospital, this text has a precise function: it serves to reconnect Fanon's travels, and, more broadly, the journey of the Algerian

revolution, to the prospect of an independent, truly postcolonial Africa. This text can highlight the role of Fanon as a diplomat, a less known and discussed aspect of his life. As Robert Young notes, in those years "Fanon became committed to a Pan-African vision of the total liberation of the continent" (Young 33). The text, for this reason, alternates between field notes on practical needs and broader comments on the situation of Africa in 1960. Fanon writes:

> To put Africa in motion, to cooperate in its organization, in its regrouping, behind revolutionary principles. To participate in the ordered movement of a continent – this was really the work I had chosen. The first point of departure. the first base was represented by Guinea. Then Mali, ready for anything, fervent and brutal, coherent and singularly keen, extended the bridgehead and opened valuable prospects. To the East, Lumumba was marking time. (*Towards* 177-78)

From the outset, Fanon's journey is simultaneously literal and metaphorical: his travel to Mali is, at the same time, the travel of the struggle against colonialism. This journey is revealing for Fanon, because it is only by documenting the actual travel across African countries that Fanon can witness the "Africa of everyday, oh not the poets' Africa, the one that puts to sleep, but the one that prevents sleep, for the people is impatient to do, to play, to say. The people that says: I want to build myself as a people" (179). This is an important theme across Fanon's own work, echoing the famous ending of his previous masterpiece, *Black Skin, White Masks,* which concludes with Fanon exhorting himself to build himself anew, to become, from his own body, his own foundation.

In the later text, this desire to create, to produce, acquires a collective, pan-Africanist scope. The "journal de bord" becomes the trace of this social ferment, the register of a living Africa, of communities striving to free themselves from colonialism, the "Africa to come" (179) that Fanon starts to envisage during the trip. Fanon's logbook starts from this vision, this image of a future Africa, and then narrows down, as a proper ship's logbook, on the details of the travel, which at this point maintain at the same time a literal and a metaphorical value. Fanon continues:

> We are off. Our mission: to open the southern front. To transport arms and munitions from Bamako. Stir up the Saharan population, infiltrate to the Algerian high plateaus. After carrying Algeria to the four corners of Africa, move up with all Africa toward African Algeria, toward the North, toward Algiers, the continental city. What I should like: great lines, great navigation channels through the desert. Subdue the desert, deny it, assemble Africa, create the continent. That Malians, Senegalese, Guineans, Ghanaians should descend from Mali onto our territory. And those of the Ivory Coast, of Nigeria, of Togoland. That they should all climb the slopes of the desert and pour over the colonialist bastion. (180-81)

In this passage, the image of "navigation" is prominent as marker of a double movement, which was the strategic aim of the operation Fanon was involved in. Fanon was meant to open "great navigation channels through the desert" (181), so that people from neighbouring countries could move to Algeria, while Algerians would stay in their cities and villages to promote their cause among the local population. This line of exchange, this circulation of people across the colonial borders was pivotal to create a new continent. Fanon's vision is pan-Africanist, socialist, internationalist: the independence of Algeria can only be meaningful as vanguard for the liberation of Africa and then, humankind, from the oppression of colonialism and capitalism. The national question is important, but only within this internationalist and socialist, Third-Worldist frame. These bustling, vibrant channels of navigation of the desert are the polar opposite of the world of the coloniser, wherein the circulation of commodities, including slaves, do not foster change but only an oppressive stillness, as Fanon writes in a moving passage of *The Wretched of the Earth,* where he mobilises the image of the sea:

> The oppressor, in his own sphere, starts the process, a process of domination, of exploitation and of pillage, and in the other sphere the coiled, plundered creature which is the native provides fodder for the process as best he can, the process which moves uninterruptedly from the banks of the colonial territory to the palaces and the docks of the mother country. In this becalmed zone the sea has a smooth surface, the palm tree stirs gently in the breeze, the waves lap against the pebbles, and raw materials are

> ceaselessly transported, justifying the presence of the settler: and all the while the native, bent double, more dead than alive, exists interminably in an unchanging dream. (*Wretched* 51)

The "smooth surface" of this "becalmed" sea, where the palm tree "stirs gently in the breeze," is the opposite of the "great navigation channels" of the anti-colonial struggle.[8] The image of navigation can acquire contrasting valences: the transportation of raw materials from the colony to the metropole is the image of a calm sea, an unchanging waterway which damns the colonised to stasis and subjugation within the circuits of colonial domination and capitalist accumulation.[9] The operation to Mali provides Fanon with a powerful counter-discourse, an alternative, embattled remaking of this metaphor of circulation. Opening a new navigation channel, then, is symbolic of how national liberation is, for Fanon, entangled in this wider process of emancipation. The logbook amplifies here its function of reconnecting peoples who have been artificially separated, already seen from the 1953-56 entries of his ward editorials. The "journal de bord" is here an epitome and an illustration of Fanon's key idea of dis-alienation, shifting it from the phenomenological tones the idea had in works like *Black Skin, White Masks*, and turning it into a directly political motif. This important concept indicates the overcoming of fictitious, imposed divisions and bodily images, and the production of a new human being. Dis-alienation is a propulsion, a revolutionary energy, as Fanon notes, we "need only march, and charge. It is not even a question of strategy. We have mobilized furious cohorts, loving our combat, eager to work. We have Africa with us. A continent is getting into motion and Europe is languorously asleep" (*Towards* 181). This energy is the underlying force driving both Fanon's trip and the liberation of Africa.

The trip, hence, starts from Accra, where Fanon had been appointed since March 1960 in a diplomatic role. But, from the very beginning, there are impediments. Their flight is full and the team (eight people, all involved in the Algerian revolutionary Army) must be embarked on a different flight, operated by Air France. The risk of being caught is too big, so the team opts for a different route: "We decided to leave Monrovia by road . . . The French Intelligence had indeed taken the matter in hand. Instead of heading for Freetown on leaving Robertsfield, the plane turned back and landed at Abidjan where it was searched by French forces" (182). Fanon's travel is perilous, as the French are aware of the operation. The group, however, manages to reach Bamako, in recently independent Mali. Fanon and his team are "lodged at the rest center of the Bamako barracks" (183). The journey is complicated by the fact that the Bamako-Timbuktu road is not passable, so they have to take a different route, via Ségou, San, and Mopti, where they encounter a police barrier. Fanon's heated discussion with the gendarmes ends well, as the police let the group go. The journey continues, in very difficult and adventurous conditions, as Fanon describes:

> The road from Mopti to Douentza is a joke. In the middle of a forest one follows by guess-work the tracks of a car that must have passed there six months before. Such feeling one's way in the middle of the night is very painful and more than once we lost our way. At last, at two in the morning, we arrived. There was no one in the village. The commandant was absent and his wife sent us to the encampment which was closed. We somehow managed, with some in the car, others outside, to get a little rest. (184)

Eventually, they reach Gao, where the group successfully establishes a "working and transit cell" for the Algerian front. The trip continues in the Sahara, "across 100 km of dirt road" (184). The journal continues to detail the trip to other strategic locations, such as Tamanrasset and Kidal. The "journal de bord" concludes by discussing "technical problems," which Fanon lists and discusses from the concrete point of view of the mission's objectives. These include the passages by truck, filling stations, supplies, creating a series of lines of attack in the desert, the equipment that would be needed and how to use it: "bring the maximum of equipment up to the frontier. In the two months to come: 10,000 rifles, 4,000 P.M., 1,500 F.M., 600 machine-guns, 3 to 4 rocket-throwers" (188). The list of resources is then followed by notes on personnel and recruitment, as well as tactical comments on the need to politicise the new recruits before carrying out military operations. Fanon also includes a

diagram detailing the patterns of liaison channels, military bases and contacts. The journal concludes in this way, abruptly, with a list of technical needs and indications of material needs for the war of liberation. In the manner of the traditional nautical logbook, the text offers an ending inscribed by material circumstances rather than any form of narrative closure – albeit one that offers the possibility that the journey (and journal) will be re-continued.

4. Conclusion

Fanon's ship journals reveal important aspects of his life and thought. Most importantly, the genre of the "journal de bord" helped Fanon formulate an ideal of unity and reconnection, almost a utopian vision of an independent and solidary Africa after the end of colonialism. The ship's journal serves this important function precisely because of the metaphor of the ship on which it is based. For Fanon, the ship's voyage proved an important idiom to figure the anticolonial struggle, both in its macroscopic dimension, on the plane of international relations, and in its individual, everyday aspect of reconnecting the subject to community. In this way, Fanon remade and reappropriated the idea of the ship's logbook as a decolonising form, helpful to track the progress of the struggle against imperialism, rather than telegraphic list of stored commodities.

In an important passage of his journal during the 1960 trip to Mali, indeed, Fanon wrote his famous comment on the problem of Africa being the "absence of ideology" (186). This much-discussed insight refers to a very specific, Marxist, concept of history. As Nigel Gibson perceptively notes, "ideology should enlighten the social experiences and bring out their meaning. Liberatory ideology, therefore, is constructed in a social relationship, between the militant intellectual and the mass movement. Such a relationship is crucial to Fanon's conception of 'radical mutation' and represents for him a 'new form of political activity' which he claims is history in the making" (Gibson 339). Fanon analyses the fact that the emergence of independent nation-states in Africa did not follow the blueprint of European history, where nations emerged after centuries of struggles and social transformations. In Africa, there is no "ideology," in the sense that the rulers of the new nation-states would have been the African bourgeoisie who, "no longer feeling the threat of the traditional colonial power, suddenly develop great appetites. And as they do not yet have any political experience they think they can conduct political affairs like their business. Perquisites, threats, even despoiling of the victims" (186). This situation gives rise to a profound discontent, violence, and inequality. Fanon's ideal of an African unity, for this reason, is the utopia of a "United States of Africa without passing through the middle-class chauvinistic national phase with its procession of wars and death-tolls" (187). These passages are crucial, today, to revise a mistaken portrayal of Fanon as advocate of violence and nationalism as end in itself. Fanon was inspired by socialism and internationalism, and his support of anticolonial national liberation needs to be situated within his ideal of an international working-class emancipation. The occasional, intimate, everyday context of the ship's logbook is interspersed with these profound insights on the historical process of anticolonial liberation in Africa, where Fanon clearly writes that we must "once again come back to the Marxist formula. The triumphant middle classes are the most impetuous, the most enterprising, the most annexationist in the world" (187). Ultimately, the ship journal allowed Fanon to begin to construct a theory of decolonisation from the grassroots, from the everyday occurrences of military operations during the Algerian war, rather than from abstract or individualistic speculations. In this sense, Fanon's examples could be just the beginning of a tradition of documenting decolonisation from below, through genres of writing close to the concrete exigencies of communities involved in their fight against oppression.

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Notes

[1] *Le Grand Robert* (vol. 4) defines this term, in its maritime usage, as the "cahier de rapport de mer" [maritime report book] and, in aviation, as "compte rendu chronologique des données relatives à la navigation en vol et à la mission" [chronological report of flight navigation and mission data].

[2] The *OED* shows how the English term 'logbook' acquired a broad and diverse set of meanings from the nineteenth century onwards; but its earliest recorded usage is as a seventeenth-century nautical term to denote 'a book in which the particulars of a ship's voyage … are entered daily from the log-board.'

[3] The concept of "social death" was formulated by sociologist Orlando Patterson (Patterson 2018).

[4] https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/25221_voyage_of_the_sable_venus

[5] https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/log-of-unity-slaving-voyage

[6] The Zeeland Archive in the Netherlands has digitised the logbook, producing an online, interactive map and blog based on the logbook of the *Unity,* where ordinary life on board a slave ship can be followed through daily entries. https://eenigheid.slavenhandelmcc.nl/category/days/1-october-1761/?lang=en

[7] The text was published by François Maspero in 1964 in Fanon's collection of essays *Pour la Révolution Africaine*, as part of the last section, "African Unity," along with Fanon's piece on Lumumba's death.

[8] The image of the calmed sea and the palm tree stirred by the breeze resonates with Fodéba Keïta's poem "Aube africaine," mentioned by Fanon in *Wretched,* where the image is a very sad one, as mourning of an African soldier killed during the 1944 Thiaroye massacre.

[9] As Timothy Brennan notes in a recent essay, the imagery of water and the sea recurs in one of Fanon's rediscovered plays, L'Oeil se noie, where "incessant rain yields to an imagery of the sea as though the characters themselves were liquid, or speaking underwater . . . and thus could easily slip away from the solidity of anything that one might pin down, available to surveillance by being intractably, physically there" (Brennan 10).

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