

THE TRUE CHRONICLE FROM THE LAST CENTURY  
AT THE BLIDA-JOINVILLE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL WHEN  
**DR FRANTZ FANON**  
WAS HEAD OF THE FIFTH WARD, BETWEEN 1953 AND 1956



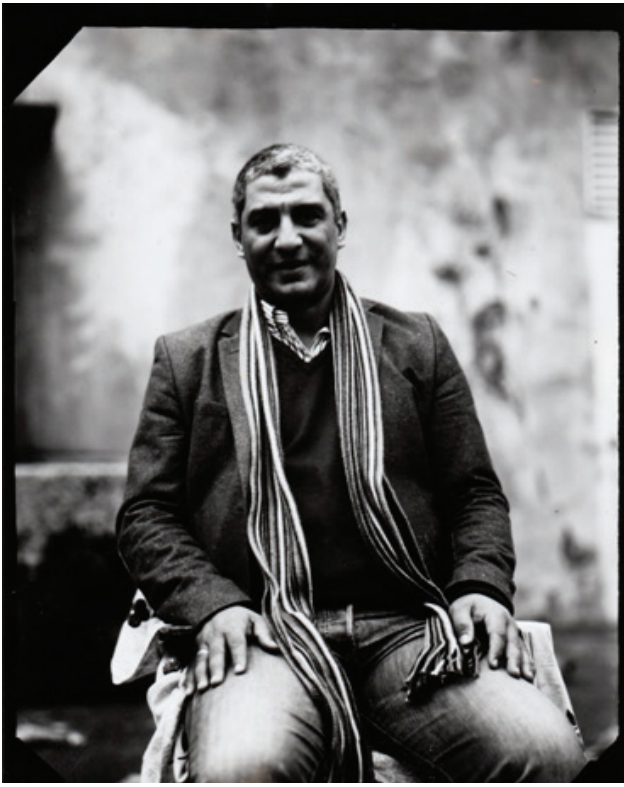
THE FIRST FEATURE FILM ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
OF « LES DAMNÉS DE LA TERRE »  
(THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH)

## SYNOPSIS

1953, colonized Algeria.

Fanon, a young black psychiatrist is appointed head doctor at the Blida-Joinville Hospital. He was putting his theories of 'Institutional Psychotherapy' into practice in opposition to the racist theories of the Algies School of Psychiatry, while a war broke out in his own wards.





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## INTERVIEW WITH ABDENOUR ZAHZAH

### How did the idea for this film come about?

A documentary film about Frantz Fanon was already shot back in 2002. It was the first film I have directed with D<sup>r</sup> Bachir Ridouh. Since then, I've been dreaming of directing Frantz Fanon in a feature film. Frantz Fanon died very young at the age of 36, and lived in hiding with the Algerian activists when he was 31 years old. However, very few photos and almost no film about Fanon exist. My film is first and foremost a representation of a 'living' memory, recalling the mythical author of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

### Why is the film title that long?

The title of the film presents the aspect I chose to depict, where Frantz Fanon held the position of chief psychiatrist at the HPB, a psychiatric hospital in Blida-Joinville between 1953 and 1956. Fanon has often been portrayed as an anti-colonialist activist, a politician, and a black man who experienced racism while he was studying in Lyon-France to become a doctor. He was also a soldier defending France-libre against Nazism. However, while working as a psychiatrist, he turned to a political thinker by joining the Algerian *Front de Libération nationale*. Fanon's advocacy for independence was the main theme of his famous letter of resignation from his post in Blida, sent to Robert Lacoste, then Governor General of French Algeria: *'If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man to no longer feel alienated from their environment, I must affirm that the Arab, permanently alienated in their country, live in a state of absolute depersonalization.'*

From then on, Fanon considered that there was absolutely no point in practicing hospital psychiatry, that is, to give back a sense of freedom to the patient inside the hospital if, once out of that hospital, this cured patient is back to being a colonized person.



### What about the screenplay and the dialogues writing?

From my documentary made between 1998 and 2002, I kept key material found in the archives of the hospital, including the diary that Frantz Fanon kept with his patients, in addition to the cases presented in chapter five of *The Wretched of the Earth*: «Colonial War and Mental Disorders», Fanon used to write his clinical notes while working in Blida. These documents shaped the screenplay cornerstone, which then had to be written with attention to the credibility and authenticity of the facts, since Fanon was well known. Therefore, there was no room for pure fiction.

In addition, watching several films, mostly documentaries pertaining to psychiatry helped me designing the film setting in a psychiatric hospital, and documenting its atmosphere as it was governed during the 50s in the last century.

### By the way, the line between documentary and fiction is unsettling in this film...

With the exception of the acting, I would say that the film is essentially documentary. First of all, by its decorations. I wanted the film to be shot in the same place where Frantz Fanon lived. From the moment I chose to tell the story of Fanon the psychiatrist, and beyond the film characters, the subject focused on the profession of a psychiatrist in a hospital environment. From then on, shooting in a psychiatric hospital turned to be key despite the expected challenges. To me, I couldn't think of anything better than the psychiatric hospital where Frantz Fanon practiced and which now bears his name. Then, for part of the casting, I chose to offer roles to be performed by non-actors to interpret, if not their own characters. A couple of doctors and nurses agreed, as did Father Paul Desfarges, an admirer of Fanon, who agreed to animate the Christmas Mass, referring to the one organized by Dr. Fanon for his patients in 1953. Same with Frantz's son, Olivier Fanon, who has been so kind in sharing a scene with his character who was a baby at the time of the action. It was a delightful *mise en abyme* that we allowed ourselves based on an idea of Alexandre Desane.





### How did the rest of the cast go?

There have been several castings and several types of castings. Several castings because the film was supposed to be shot in March 2020, before the COVID pandemic hit and caused the closure of borders for more than a year. So the first casting fell by the wayside except for the lead actor, Alexandre Desane, who remained faithful to the project. Then the castings are different because of course we needed Algerian actors and the *Wojoooh Agency* helped us screening them. The French actors were spotted with the help of a peer of mine based in Marseille-France, Bania Medjbar. As mentioned above, the non-actors that we chose according to the scenes and the circumstances, and finally the extras who were very involved in the project and helped expediting the shooting within the hospital.

# BIOGRAPHY

Abdenour Zahzah is an Algerian screenwriter, director and producer. Further to his university graduation, Abdenour was director at the Blida (province in Algeria) cinémathèque from 1998 through 2003. His first film *Frantz Fanon, mémoire d'asile* was released in 2002. He traveled to France, where he made two documentary films, and spent a long time at the Moulin d'Andé in Normandy, where he made a film with the writer Maurice Pons: *Returning to Algeria* in 2007. He made several commissioned documentaries, but it was with his short fiction film *Garagouz*, a multi-award-winning film, that he made a name for himself. After a feature-length documentary, *L'Oued*, *L'Oued*, which won critical acclaim at festivals, he directed his first feature-length fiction film in 2024, about Dr. Frantz Fanon's Blida-Joinville years.

# FILMOGRAPHY

2024 – *The True Chronicle From the Last Century at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital When Dr. Frantz Fanon was Head of the Fifth Ward, Between 1953 and 1956.*

Feature. 90 min.

2023 – *Pierre Clément, Cinéma & Révolution.* Doc. 70 min.

2013 – *El Oued El Oued (The River).* Doc. 86 mn

2011 – *Andalucia.* Doc. 63 mn.

2010 – *Garagouz.* Short. 21 mn.

2009 – *The Long Road to the NEPAD.* Doc. 60 mn.

2007 – *Maurice Pons, L'écrivain de l'étrange.* Doc. 67 mn.

2006 – *Le Non-Faire.* Doc. 50 mn.

2005 – *Under the Sun the Lead.* Doc. 52 mn

2002 – *Frantz Fanon, Mémoire d'Asile.* Doc. 54 mn.



© Julia Mugnier

## INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDRE DESANE

**Have you heard about Frantz Fanon before? What does Frantz Fanon mean to you now that you performed their character?**

It was my first year of high school when I first heard about Frantz Fanon. A couple of rap artists I used to listen to in my MP3 Player mentioned Fanon, so I tried to find out more about this person quoted by rappers just like were Sankara, Césaire and Kateb Yacine. I bought and read *Black Skin, White Masks*, and now that I have the great opportunity to perform the character of Frantz Fanon, I am so humbled and delighted to do it for a true humanist, a defender of the oppressed.

This movie actually helped me digging deeper in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. I had the privilege of meeting two very inspiring people, his son Olivier Fanon, and one of his grandsons Cédric Fanon, who both have been on the shooting scene.

It was also a great opportunity for me to discover Algeria, such a beautiful country!, and working with a super demanding director. This was an overwhelming and emotional journey.

**What prompted you to star in this film?**

Director Damien Ounouri suggested his peer and friend, the film director Abdenour Zahzah to offer me the role of Frantz Fanon. At the end of 2019, Abdenour contacted me while he was in Paris spotting actors. When I read the script, I was immediately hooked. Abdenour, who had been interested in Fanon for many years, wanted above all to give credit to Fanon's work at the hospital, and to focus on who was Fanon the psychiatrist. In addition, Abdenour introduced me to his environment, and offered me the opportunity to watch his short film *Garagouz*, I very much liked this film poetry, the reason why I was very eager to work with Abdenour.





### **Finally, it's a film about Fanon's work. How did you get into the shoes of a psychiatrist working in an asylum?**

The film tells how taking up his post at the Blida-Joinville hospital shaped and triggered Frantz Fanon's political awareness. I was significantly inspired by lengthy discussions with the director, who kept me briefed on everything he knew about Frantz Fanon.

Among other things, I watched the documentary Abdenour Zahzah had directed about Frantz Fanon back in 2002. I've done my utmost to stick as closely as possible to the script, to endeavour each scene while keeping in mind that I am embodying the character of a person who sacrificed himself for being a psychiatrist, and who actually sacrificed for a cause.

I was continually seeking what was meant to be a young black psychiatrist dispatched by France to treat Algerian patients in Algeria...A French colony.

### **Shootings took place in actual setting, where Frantz Fanon evolved. How did it go?**

The shootings took place in Blida, an immersion in the city daily life that made the work quite interesting, like a play that is performed in the open air. Abdenour made sure that the film could be shot in the hospital where Frantz Fanon was working, and which bears his name since Algeria's independence, as well as the official accommodation Fanon used to stay in, which currently is the Fanon Museum. It's a great opportunity for an actor to play behind walls that have a history. Sixty years later, I walked in the same hospital corridors, the same office, the same room as Frantz Fanon.



# BIOGRAPHY

Alexandre Desane, French of Haitian origin, is an actor, photographer and film director. He acted in several independent films since 2010, then he directed his debut short film *The Orange Child* dealing with racism from the point of view of a child.

In 2021, he is a supporting role in the french feature film *The Braves*, selected at the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes.

As a photographer, one of his photographs was selected by Martin Parr for an exhibition in the Parisian subway in 2018.

In 2022, he created his solo photo book *Crépus*, a celebration of Black hair in the streets of Paris.

He is the main character, <sup>Dr.</sup> Frantz Fanon, in a feature film directed by Abdenour Zahzah (Berlinale Forum 2024 World Premiere).

# FILMOGRAPHY

2024 – *The True Chronicle From the Last Century at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital When Dr. Frantz Fanon was Head of the Fifth Ward, Between 1953 and 1956.*  
Abdenour Zahzah.

2022 – *The Braves.* Anaïs Volpé.

2016 – *Heis (chroniques).* Anaïs Volpé.

2014 – *Run.* Philippe Lacôte.

# FULL CAST

D <sup>r</sup> Frantz Fanon	<b>Alexandre Desane</b>
D <sup>r</sup> Ramée	<b>Gérard Dubouche</b>
The Hospital Director	<b>Nicolas Dromard</b>
M <sup>r</sup> . Charef	<b>Omar Boulakirba</b>
The Head Nurse	<b>Catherine Boskowitz</b>
Juliette/Cléopâtre	<b>Amal Kateb</b>
Nouï	<b>Rachid Benallal</b>
Josie Fanon	<b>Chahrazed Kracheni</b>
The Police Commissioner	<b>Frédéric Restagno</b>
The Survivor	<b>Abdelkader Affak</b>
The Locked Up	<b>Tahar Benayachi</b>
The Patient in Crisis	<b>Houria Bahloul</b>
The FLN Activist Patient	<b>Nacereddine Djoudi</b>
M <sup>rs</sup> . Londres	<b>Brigitte Lucas</b>
The Child Amar	<b>Siradj Hachmi</b>
The Child Mahmoud	<b>Abderraouf Dzenekri</b>
D <sup>r</sup> Lacaton	<b>Matthieu Balvet</b>
D <sup>r</sup> Asselah	<b>Miloud Yibrir</b>
Abderrahmane Aziz	<b>Salim Dada</b>
Nefissa Hamoud	<b>Samah Belkhiri</b>
The « World War » Patient	<b>Halim Chanane</b>
The Workmen Patients	<b>Amine Guerrache</b>
	<b>Mohamed Bencherchali</b>
The Priest	<b>Paul Desfarges</b>
Chabane Mourad	<b>Idir Benaibouche</b>
Marcel Manville	<b>Olivier Fanon</b>



# CREW

Screenplay and Direction

Assistant Director

Coaching Actors

Director of photography

Assistant Camera

Gaffer

Edition

Production Designer

Pops Master

Costume Designers

Sound

Hair Dresser

Make-Up Artist

Music

Sound Mixing

Color Grading

Executive Producer

Production Manager

Casting

Line Producer

Coproducers

With support in Algeria

and the kind support of

With support in France

International Sales

**Abdenour Zahzah**

**Assia Benaissa**

**Catherine Boskowitz**

**Aurélien Py**

**Florian Rigal**

**Mohamed Amine Bendali**

**Abdenour Zahzah**

**Youcef Abba**

**Maya Mancier**

**Saleheddine Bouyousfi**

**Asma Ben Naoum**

**Julia Didier**

**Fred Salles**

**Toufik Bouterfa**

**Karima Laouir**

**Lynda Cherouati**

**Toti Basso**

**Fred Biele**

**Clément Allemand**

**Abdenour Zahzah**

**Smail Lif**

**Wojoo**

**Atlas Film Production**

**C.A.D.C. (Algeria)**

**Shellac Sud (France)**

**Ministry of Culture and Arts**

**Ministry of Health and Population**

**Institut français d'Algérie**

**The French Embassy in Algeria**

**Sonatrach**

**La Région Rhône-Alpes-Côte d'Azur**

**Atlas Film Production**

**[www.frantzfanonthemovie.com](http://www.frantzfanonthemovie.com)**