

FRANTZ FANON
&
THE DIALECTIC OF
SOLIDARITY

Richard Pithouse

it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come
- Frantz Fanon

the thing becomes man [sic] during the same process by which it frees itself
- Frantz Fanon

It is force that counts, and chiefly the organised force of the masses...
It is **what they think that matters**
- C. L. R. James

one should not lose sight of the real
- Frantz Fanon

Start Something!
- Aimé Césaire

Declaration

This study is an original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

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19 December 2005

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Acknowledgements

A tremendous debt is owed to Mabogo Percy More, supervisor of this thesis, for his lonely example as a philosopher worthy of emulation in South Africa, for the rigour of his engagement with the various drafts of this thesis, and for his patience over many missed deadlines over many years.

A debt is also owed to the various people in the communities of struggle in which I have been able to continually try to think philosophy as a practical engagement with resistance. In and around *Abahlali base Mjondolo* key people have been Richard Ballard, System Cele, Lungisani Jama, Fazel Khan, M'du Mgqulunga, Nonhlanhla Mzobe, Mnikelo Ndabankulu, Raj Patel, Helen Poonen, Shanta Reddy and S'bu Zikode. In the broader community of struggle the most important people have been Zackie Achmat, Mark Butler, Ashraf Cassiem, Anthony Collins, Peter Dwyer, Shereen Essof, Peter van Heusden, Nigel Gibson, Naomi Klein, Martin Legassick, Avi Lewis, Mandisi Majavu, Andile Mngxitama, Andrew Nash, Max Ntanyana, Pravasan Pillay, Arundhati Roy, Leonard Shang-Quarterly, Xolani Shange, Xolani Tsalong and Salim Vally.

I am also indebted to the people who, in a range of different ways, encouraged me to believe that I could do philosophy. First amongst these, because his example matters so much, because he has never tolerated poor thinking from me (or sloppy presentation) and because, therefore, when he has given praise it has really mattered is Mabogo More. Others are Sharad Chari, Grant Farred, Nigel Gibson, David Goldberg, Lewis Gordon, Jeff Guy, Paget Henry, Yvette Koch, Brinda

Acknowledgements

Mehta, Andrew Nash, Maya Nayak, Sanya Osha, Vishnu Padayachee, Ben Parker, Raj Patel and Ato Sekyi-Otu.

Raj Patel also requires a special note of thanks for friendship, his equally committed and scrupulous engagement with the practical and theoretical aspects of struggle and help with commas.

And then, of course, there is my family. Frances and Kathleen Pithouse have always been with me and have been with me in difficult times.

And then, finally, there is Vashna Jagarnath. She found me in a mess and just demanded that I get out of it. This thesis is dedicated to her strength and tenderness.

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Introduction

Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act.

- Fanon (1967a:226)

This thesis does not begin from within the crisis that gives birth to a struggle. This thesis is an attempt to step back and develop a philosophical analysis of Fanon's thinking from within struggle. It begins with a question that is fundamental to Fanon's humanism – the question of ontology. The argument developed here is that Fanon, writing against attempts to legitimate oppression in the language of ontological claims advanced against the dominated by their dominators, proposes an ontology that is fundamentally open. Drawing heavily on existential philosophy I argue that for Fanon every consciousness confronts a particular situation freely. The arguments developed here are the philosophical foundation of all the arguments that follow.

The second chapter addresses the question of Fanon's radical humanism. I argue that Fanon is what he says he is – a radical humanist. The primary thrust of the argument developed here is that, following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, a key definitional distinction needs to be drawn between reactionary humanism and revolutionary humanism. The former is described as ideas that seek to fix one concept of humanity – usually an idea that a ruling class has of itself or its loyal subordinates – as ideal or universal. The latter is described as ideas that seek to open the idea of humanity to perpetual and multiple becoming. But because Hardt and Negri remain trapped in Manicheanism and cannot think dialectically something needs to be added to their description of revolutionary humanism – that is that the unfolding transformations produced by the fight to realise universal becoming as a reality in the world are accorded particular value in revolutionary humanism.

The third chapter seeks to develop an understanding of Fanon's commitment to dialectical praxis. I begin with some general remarks about the concept of the dialectic in philosophy and seek to show that dialectical thinking is not necessarily teleological or dogmatic. I then move on to look at Fanon's contributions to thinking about dialectical movement, and argue that Fanon's dialectical philosophy is a commitment to adopt a particular mode of thinking – characterised by fidelity to experience – within struggles that seek movement towards a true humanity. This means that struggle is the habitation of radical thought and not its object. It also means that ultimate values can only emerge and be fought for within the evolving situations constituted by particular struggles.

The fourth chapter, the longest, takes up the question of solidarity. This chapter makes an argument for the value, indeed the necessity, of organising from within particular communities of resistance. It begins by looking at Fanon's thinking of the relationship between the universal and the particular. This section draws on and returns to Fanon's conception of human ontology and argues that for Fanon the particular is necessarily the door to the universal. It then moves on to consider in more detail Fanon's commitment to taking seriously the lived reality of particular experience. Using race as the central example I argue that while race has no extra-historical validity, it is lived as a reality. Any denial of this would constitute bad faith. I then argue that radical social change requires collective action and that this collective action should come from communities constituted by oppression and reimagined in resistance. The chapter concludes by arguing that, for Fanon, the chief way to avoid communities of struggle ossifying into objectifying identities that

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can be misused to justify new relations of domination is to work for a critical intellectual praxis within struggle.

The idea of dialectical praxis runs through out this project. E. P. Thompson writes that “dialectics was rudely snatched out of our grasp and made into the plaything of scholasticism” (2001:451). The aim here is snatch it back and to assert dialectical philosophy as the living logic of revolt. For this reason the fifth and final chapter seeks to develop an argument about what it might mean to take Fanon seriously in contemporary South Africa. The arguments developed here owe much to the activist and Africanist readings of Fanon by Ato Sekyi-Otu and Nigel Gibson and argue for an intellectual praxis of transformative dialogical engagement within nodes of militant resistance. The arguments made in this chapter often restate, in brief, the points developed at length in the previous chapters and in some ways this chapter functions as a conclusion drawing the various stands in the thesis together.

Nevertheless there is, also, a formal conclusion which aims to evaluate the work done and to pull it together into one final restatement of the central argument. Here I suggest that any value in this thesis probably lies in its attempts to synthesise the existential, activist and African situationist readings of Fanon.

Chapter I

A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY

no attempt must be made to encase man

- Fanon (1967a:230)

I.I Introduction

It makes a certain kind of sense to begin, explicitly or implicitly, a philosophical exploration of a human problem, including the problematic at stake here – resistance to racism in colonial and post-colonial contexts – with an idea of human being. After all, there is a strong sense in which thinking about ontological questions, questions about the nature of human being, is logically prior, in the sense of being fundamental, to ethical and political questions. We need a theory of what it is to be human before we can have a rigorous theory of what constitutes oppression and how it can be resisted. But the logical ordering of philosophical questioning for the purposes of theoretical projects is not necessarily replicated in the lived experience of suffering, action and reflection that constitutes praxis. On the contrary, as Fanon's dialectical explorations show, for an open consciousness, fundamental questions are endlessly rethought in the vortex of experience. For this reason philosophical progress, when conceptualised as reflection on the experience of being-in-the-world, takes a form more analogous to the multiple complexities of an unfolding flower in which each expansion changes everything, than to a linear trajectory which constructs fixed and solid realisations on top of each other like a ladder. But here, in this theoretical project, I can begin with the question of being.

Fanon was famously sceptical about ontology and I will begin this chapter with the questions raised by Fanon's scepticism. I will argue that Fanon has good grounds for his scepticism because ontological claims about the dominated by various avatars of the metropolitan

missionary (from Placide Temple on to Octave Mannoni and their contemporaries in the World Bank¹) and national elites, in struggle and in power, have functioned, via objectification that naturalises a subjugation that should be historicised, to legitimate domination. But I will also argue that Fanon found that the experience of suffering and struggle required him to confront the question of ontology and that he answers that challenge with a critical, existential ontology that refuses reification.

This chapter begins with Fanon's assertion that ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man. I agree with Fanon that ontology has no credibility as a mode of investigation into oppression when it takes the being of the oppressed as the problem, because the problem lies within the structures of oppression, and complicity with them, and not the being of the oppressed. I then argue that this fact does not invalidate the need for a theory of ontology in order to be able to theorise oppression and resistance. The second part of the chapter argues that Fanon's ontology is largely Sartrean and I provide some evidence to support this claim as well as an outline of Sartrean thinking on ontology. This chapter does not offer much of an explanation or analysis of Fanon's theorisation of the ethical consequences of his ontology. But the work done here provides the foundation for the arguments in this regard, which are developed in the following chapters.

¹ A detailed argument about the continuities with colonial thought and that of the World Bank is laid out in Richard Pithouse 'Producing the Poor: The World Bank's new discourse of domination' *African Sociological Review* Vol. 7, No. 2, 2003

I.2 'Ontology... does not permit us to understand the being of the black man'

Fanon's critique of ontologies that seek to impose a fixed order on existence – on “the sheer unrest of life” (Hegel, 1977:27) - emerges from his investigation of the lived experience of anti-black racism. In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon wrote that:

As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others...but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society²... In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology – once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside – does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man (1967a: 109-110).

Fanon goes on to explain that the situation in which the black man must be black in relation to the white man has an historical and not an ontological genesis. And that history is a political history consequent to conquest and domination:

The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man...[because]... His metaphysics or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him (1967a:110).

In *Towards the African Revolution* he explains the ideological function of the attack on ontological grounds for resistance:

The object of lumping all Negroes together under the designation of 'Negro people' is to deprive them of any possibility of individual expression. What is

² In Sekyi-Otu's better translation “every ontology is made unattainable in a society that has been subjected to colonialism and its civilization” (1996:19).

attempted is to put them under the obligation of matching the idea one has of them (1967b:17).³

Here it emerges that the black capacity for ontological resistance has, in Fanon's view, not only been weakened as an accidental outcome of domination, but is actively weakened in order to sustain and legitimate that domination. Indeed, Fanon argues that "what is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact" (1967a:14). In other words oppressors create what they claim to be the 'soul' of the oppressed. Fanon is clear that he is not reducing oppression or resistance to a question of ontological domination – on the contrary he argues that:

If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

- primarily economic;
- subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization of this inferiority...

The black man must wage his war on both levels: Since historically they influence each other, any unilateral liberation is incomplete, and the gravest mistake would be to believe in their automatic independence (1967a:11).

He is very clear that opposing the imposition of pejorative ontological ideas is not a project that requires a return to some pristine past. He argues that "the black man's disalienation is not an individual question" (1967a:11) but he sees collective situations and not collective essences. And so he asks "What use are reflections on Bantu ontology when striking black miners in South Africa are being shot down?" (1967a:85) and insists that

It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe. When one remembers the stories with which, in 1938, old regular sergeants described the land of piastres and rickshaws, of cut-rate boys and women, one understands only too well the rage with which the men of the Viet-Minh go into battle... There are those who talk of the a so-called

³ Edward Said makes a similar point in *Orientalism* where he writes that 'we note immediately that "the Arab" or "Arabs" have an aura of apartness, definiteness, and collective self-consistency such as to wipe out any traces of individual Arabs with narratable life histories' (1995:129).

Asiatic attitude toward death. But these basement philosophers cannot convince anyone. This Asiatic serenity, not so long ago, was a quality to be seen in the 'bandits' of Vencors and the 'terrorists' of the Resistance. The Vietnamese who die before the firing squads are not hoping that their sacrifice will bring about the reappearance of a past. It is for the sake of the present and the future that they are willing to die (1967a:226-227).

It is not surprising that Fanon refused to have *Black Skin, White Masks* published by *Présence africaine*, a publishing house linked to the famous journal of the same name, because *Présence africaine* had recently published Placide Tempel's *La Philosophie bantoue* – a book which claimed to elucidate 'Bantu ontology' in a move against the racist idea that Africans had no philosophy. But Tempel also argued that "our civilizing mission alone can justify our occupation of the lands of uncivilized people" (cited in Serequeberhan, 1998:237). Unsurprisingly, Fanon was unconvinced of the value of this reply to racism. He replied that it was pointless to discover "Being in Bantu thought, when Bantu existence subsists on the level of nonbeing...There is nothing ontological about segregation. Enough of this rubbish"⁴ (Fanon 1967a:185-186). But this rubbish, 'scandal' in David Macey's translation (2000:157), was repeated in Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of Colonisation* which argued that the Malagasy "unconsciously expected – even desired" colonial subjugation and that "Not all peoples can be colonized: only those who experience *this need*" (Cited in Gibson, 2003:53). This is, Fanon replied, the equivalent of a doctor reporting that:

The appearance of varicose veins in a patient does not arise out of his being compelled to spend ten hours a day on his feet, but rather out of the constitutional weakness of his vein walls, his working conditions are only a complicating factor. And the insurance compensation expert to whom the case is submitted will find the responsibility of the employer extremely limited (1967:85).

⁴ For Césaire there was a great danger that too much talk of ontology will allow colonialism to claim that "the Bantu only ask for satisfaction of an ontological nature (instead of) decent wages...comfortable housing...food." (1972: 38-39) Postmodern and/or multi-culturalist identity politics often make precisely this claim.

1.3 The need for a critical ontology

Lewis Gordon makes two good arguments in favour of Fanon's critique of the value of ontological explanations of black being. The first is that ontologies tend to be theories about the nature of well-adjusted being. But any person, black or white, who is 'well adjusted' to life in a racist society is, in terms of the radical humanist view that will be explored in the following chapter, an obscenity. The other side of this normalisation of what will in the next chapter be called misanthropy is that a commitment to humanism is pathologised. Frederick Douglass and John Brown were both thought to incarnate such deviance in their bodies (because of the ideas that they acted on) that they were both hunted, literally, by constituted white power. So it goes. What good is a normalising ideology of conformity in a world that is perverse? Gordon also notes that in a racist society ideas like 'Man' or 'Person' have "peculiar racialized residues of 'White Man', 'White Person'...Their 'glow' permeates praxis" (1995:II). Gordon is, of course, correct. Hegel, Hume, Kant, Locke and Mill all really meant 'white man' when they said 'man'. This is not just a problem of a particularism masquerading as a universalism and thus denying or pathologising difference. It is also a problem where one ontology is, often explicitly, constructed and defined in opposition to the pejoratively defined Other. So the ontology of someone like Hegel or Mill who contrasts white man as reason with black man as unreason is not only fallacious but also predatory. White identity feeds, vampirically, off the black body via its material exploitation, which results in the unequal distribution of wealth. This, in turn, produces the professionalised (via elite patronage or the academy) philosophy that seeks to naturalise material inequalities with historical origins as a consequence of, and therefore as evidence of, black inferiority. But this vampiric predation also operates in a symbolic sphere, at times quite separate from the sphere of material accumulation. The mere designation of some people as an inferior Other makes the

designators superior in their own minds and, when their symbolic order is imposed on the other, in the minds of some of the othered too.⁵ Later we will see that existential thought will characterise this as bad faith.

The lived experience of blackness thus renders orthodox European thinking about ontology (or any speculative ontology that, following Hegel, leaves human existence 'by the wayside') to be the enemy of any black person who seeks self-creation and authentic reciprocal recognition.⁶ Similarly any ontology, be it European or African in origin, that seeks to fix a positive concept of black being rather than to provide an account of the lived experience of blackness is, in Fanon's terms, objectifying in that attempts to fix what is fluid. In the world there are "two camps: the white and the black" (1967a:8) - the city has a settlers' quarter and a native quarter, the film has a white hero and a pidgin speaking negro. "The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness" (1967a:9). Nevertheless it remains the case that when, "stubbornly...we investigate both metaphysics...we shall find that they are often quite fluid" (1967a:8). We will return shortly to this idea that while society might be Manichean in both its material and symbolic aspects, consciousness is fluid and I will return to consider this with regard to Fanon's conception of dialectical praxis.

For Fanon, no reifying ontology will do, no matter where it fixes black consciousness, because consciousness is free and should be recognised as such: "I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else... He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me" (1967a:218). But, as Gordon observes:

⁵ Said argues that "the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing" (p.235).

⁶ The lived experience of whiteness in a racist world similarly renders racist ontologies the enemy of any white person seeking self-creation and authentic reciprocal recognition.

Fanon faces a peculiar problem. If ontology offers nothing for the understanding of the black man, then a scientific study of blacks would require a science that has no ontology. Ontology must thus be “suspended.”...Yet, ironically, existence pulls him back into the problem of not being able to “bracket” ontology (1995:14).

Gordon goes on to argue that “Fanon rejects ontology but he does not reject the existential phenomenological impact of what he ‘sees’.” This is because he is fundamentally a radical, critical, revolutionary, existential humanist” (1995:11). Later Gordon remarks that “as a radical humanist” Fanon “stands in a critical relation to ontology” and rejects “all ontology that puts existence to the wayside” in favour of an existential philosophy that is “rigorous, critical, self-reflective praxis” (1995:35). In other words Fanon thinks about ontology from within a critical reflection on existence – he begins with lived experience. Hence his remark on method in the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*:

It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves. I should like to start from there (1967:12).

Later he describes himself as derelict again – this time when he catches himself talking down to an old rural woman with dementia: “the fact that I condescend to her in my quest for a diagnosis, are the stigmata of a dereliction in my relations with other people” (1967a:33). His willingness to be derelict in the first case and his refusal to be derelict in the second case indicates that his commitment to take existence as foundational is an ethical as well as an epistemological commitment. I will explore his ethics – a commitment to radical humanism – in the next chapter. But with regard to the epistemological nature of this commitment we need to note that, as Mabogo More (2000) reminds us, the dominant voices in Western philosophy – Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and so on – have assumed a contemplative and disengaged voice deliberately distant from the object of its concern. This assumption is predicated on a

deeper assumption which is that the philosopher contemplates the phenomenal world from a position of pure consciousness abstracted from body, place and time - hence the subject - object distinction. But there was a movement against this within Western philosophy. The phenomenological movement sought to return to the life world because: "Returning to the life-world is to return to experience before ... objectifications and idealisations" (Moran, 2000:12). Fanon worked, explicitly, within the phenomenological tradition that sought to "revive our living contact with reality" with the aim of a radical

renewal of philosophy not bound to any historical tradition ... dogmatisms ... (or) a priori metaphysical systems... Phenomenology was seen as reviving our living contact with reality... (and)... sought to *reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject*" (Moran 2000:5, my emphasis).

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty this mode of apprehension is "primordial" not in the sense that "everything derives from it by transformations and evolution" but rather in the sense "that it reveals to us the permanent data of the problem which culture attempts to resolve" (1964:25).

As More observes:

Sartre, in line with the tenets of existentialism, held that contemplation impoverishes the world and deprives it of its human richness and meaning. Philosophy, Sartre insists, is engagement, participation, involvement and commitment to, in, with and through the world. Hence, according to him in the essay *Intentionality: A fundamental idea of Husserl's phenomenology* 'it is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the city, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men' (More, 2000: 24).

Sartre follows Martin Heidegger in seeing the human being as being-in-the-world. And a major part of Sartre's project in *Being and Nothingness* is to show that intentionality means, *pace* Descartes, that the world has ontological priority over consciousness. Moreover, much of *Being and Nothingness* is, as More notes, concerned with overcoming the "artificial traditional

distinction between philosophy and action (2000:26). Indeed as More shows (2000:26) the mode of being Sartre describes as authenticity requires ontic fulfilment in that it can only be realised by concrete action in the world. Fanon's philosophy is located firmly within the phenomenological movement against Plato's legacy.

Fanon's restless intelligence refuses to subordinate lived human experience to ideas about non-human historical forces. He insists that "Man is motion toward the world" (1967a:41), prescribes a "voracious taste for the concrete" (1976:74) and undoes the distance between the sacred and the profane that is created when 'real' meaning, beauty, agency or import is projected on to an inaccessible realm or force with a consequent devaluation of life as it is experienced in the here and now. He begins *Black Skin, White Masks* by telling his readers that: "I do not come with timeless truths. My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances" (1967a:7). He ends *The Wretched of the Earth* by insisting that "If we wish to live up to our people's expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe" (1976:254). Throughout the whole corpus of his work he never once waivers from his commitment to the immediate - to the phenomena that can be discerned in the here and the now from a particular, embodied, position in the here and now. Fanon never turns theory into an end-in-itself or seeks to subordinate lived experience to theory. One should not, Fanon cautions, "lose sight of the real" (1967a:83). This is a demand for philosophical fidelity to lived experience and so he insists that "the unemployed man, the starving native do not lay a claim to the truth; they do not *say* that they represent the truth, for they *are* the truth" (1976:38). His trenchant attack on the narcissism of theorists for whom their work is an end in-itself abstracted from and dominant over the lived experience of reality is memorably harsh: "intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living man, working and creating himself, but rather words, different combinations of words" (1976:253).

Fanon's work is an exemplary example of an intellect employing philosophy as a tool to understand, engage with and change the world. He recommends, with Aimé Césaire, that the solution to the problem of an anti-black world lies not in changing the consciousness of people inhabiting black bodies in order to better accommodate them to the place that racism has created for them in the world, but, rather, in changes in consciousness that can generate action to end that world. For Fanon the value of theory is as a tool in the service of action:

To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him, who having taken thought, prepares to act (1967a:222).⁷

Fanon did have access to a way of thinking about ontology that didn't leave existence by the wayside – Sartrean existentialism which Gordon considers to be a “critical ontology” (1995:46). As Gordon points out “Problems of existence address the human confrontation with freedom and degradation” (2000:7) and so while existentialism is a European phenomenon the philosophy of existence, a philosophical confrontation with issues of “freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality and liberation” (2000:10) from the perspective of situated lived existence, is a universal human project predicated on the view that human beings universally confront existence without essence. And while Fanon was very clear that particularisms should be exposed when they masquerade as universalisms he did not collapse into a disabling relativism and, on the contrary, insisted that “The urgent thing is to rediscover what is important beneath what is contingent” (1967b:18) and that “I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by others (1967a:80). But it must

⁷ Many postmodernists and postcolonialists prefer the uncertainty of the explorations of identity and hybridity by the Martiniquean novelists of Fanon's generation to Fanon's certainty that inhumanity must be opposed with militant resistances. So it is interesting that Edouard Glissant has written that “It is difficult for a French Caribbean individual to be the brother, the friend, or simply the associate or fellow countryman of Fanon. Because of all French Caribbean intellectuals, he is the only one to have acted on his ideas” (Macey 2000:197).

immediately be noted that this reaching towards the universal does not lead Fanon to deny the particularity of the situation. In his debate with Sartre on the question of how to understand negritude dialectically Fanon laments that "Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man" (1967a:138).

Ato Sekyi-Otu also finds himself pulled back into ontology. He writes that in his early work on Fanon he took Fanon's rejection of ontology at face value, concluded that a universal human ontology could only emerge after the end of colonial history, and found support for the rejection of ontology in Theodor Adorno's argument that "The question of man...is ideological because its pure form dictates the invariant of the possible answer" (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:19). But, he explains, he later concluded that there were two reasons to revisit this conclusion. The first is

what now seems to me to constitute a signal feature of Fanon's discourse...I am speaking of the irrepressible presence in Fanon's critical vision of an openness to the universal: its demand for the resumption by the colonized subject of the "universality inherent in the human condition" (1996:16).

His second reason for returning to ontology is that his reading has been "educated by the postcolonial experience" which has been characterised by national elites using the language of nationalism and particularism to justify their authoritarian defence of "the collusive compact of transnational capitalist dictatorship and local privilege" (1996:20). This crisis leads him to conclude that what is required to be able to critique the self-serving and ideological claims to both the particular, made by national elites, and to the universal, made by global capital,⁸ and to affirm opposition to domination that is legitimated through both claims to the particular

⁸ Although we need to be mindful that national elites often speak the global language of global capital when seeking external legitimation and global capital often speaks the particular language of national elites when seeking local legitimation.

and universal is an “axiological yardstick” (1996:21). Sekyi-Otu concludes that Fanon gives us this ‘axiological yardstick’ – his revolutionary humanism. Humanism requires a theory of what it is to be human at the level of being and hence an ontology. But that ontology must be a critical ontology that refuses reification.

1.4 The philosophy of existence

Fanon’s critical ontology makes extensive use of Sartrean concepts. However, it needs to be noted that, as Lewis Gordon says at the beginning of *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, the explication of Sartre’s ontology with the aim of engaging more productively with Fanon’s application of it is not to suggest that Fanon’s thought is derivative of Sartre’s. The two philosophers do share a set of concerns though, and were both part of a movement in thought that, amongst many other things, sought to return to lived experience, to assert the freedom of the individual consciousness and to undo the assumption that European Man is Man.⁹

⁹ Of course we should add that the assumption that humanity is Man should be contested with equal vigour.

1.4.1 Consciousness

Sartre's philosophy is premised on the idea of contingency which is to say that "Being just is" (Moran 2000:356) and carries no inherent meaning. Sartre's view that choice is possible has its roots in his view that there are "two radically separated regions of being" (1992:30). He calls these two modes of being: being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*) and being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*). He explains that

Being-in-itself has no *within* which is opposed to a *without* and which is analogous to a judgement, a law, a consciousness of itself. The in-itself has nothing secret; it is solid (*massif*) (1992:28).

"It is", Sartre adds, "itself indefinitely and it exhausts itself in being" (1992:29). So, being-in-itself has no capacity to become what it is not. It is identical to itself. Being-for-itself describes consciousness which, unlike the being of inert objects, is not undifferentiated. It is, Sartre writes, "impossible to define it as coincidence with itself (Sartre, 1992:121). Sartre describes it as "being what it is not and not being what it is" (1992:28). The logic of this apparently contradictory phrase inheres in the fact that the being of the for-itself exists as being in time and while its past is fixed its future is not. Hence in the past its being must be what it is but in the future its being does not have to be what it is. This is so because being-for-itself is not identical to itself.¹⁰ So "Consciousness can always pass beyond the existent, not towards its being, but towards the *meaning of this being*" (1992:25). Sartre concludes that "Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question" (1992:120).

Sartre declares that the self has a way of :

¹⁰ Later we will see that for John Holloway dialectical thought is well characterised as, in a phrase he takes from Adorno, "the consistent sense of non-identity" (2002:121).

not being his own coincidence, of escaping identity while positing it as a unity – in short of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity. This is what we shall call presence to itself (1992:124).

And he goes on to argue that:

Presence to self...supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself. Presence is an immediate deterioration of coincidence, for it supposes separation (1992:124).

Sartre argues that it is 'nothing' which separates the subject from himself (sic) by allowing consciousness to exist at a remove from consciousness and so "This fissure then is the pure negative" (1992:125). For Sartre it is the nothingness, the pure negative, at the heart of being that makes freedom not only possible but an ever present fact.

Sartre follows Edmund Husserl's theory of intentionality and so holds that consciousness must always be directed at something. For Sartre "It is in the very nature of consciousness to be intentional and a consciousness that ceased to be consciousness *of* something would thereby cease to exist" (2004:183). Intentionality implies that consciousness has no specific content itself and is, in a memorable Sartrean phrase, as "clear as a strong wind, there is nothing in it" (Cited in More, 2000:27). So "Consciousness for Sartre is complete translucidity facing the opacity of the objective" (Desan 1966:6). For Sartre objects constitute consciousness. This also applies to imagination which, for Sartre, is

not an empirical power added to consciousness...The unreal is produced outside the world by a consciousness that remains in the world and it is because we are transcendently free that we can imagine (2004b:186).

Being, therefore, does not inhere in consciousness. On the contrary, Sartre insists that “consciousness does not have by itself any sufficiency of being as an absolute subjectivity; from the start it refers to a thing” (1992:786). He notes that the phenomenological method of observation does not reveal an ego inside consciousness and so he rejects the idea that consciousness is inhabited by an ego serving as an organising force. On the contrary Sartre is convinced that the ego is outside of consciousness and so consciousness is, indeed, a nothingness and, therefore, fully spontaneous and, consequently, free. Existence thus precedes essence. Being is a relation between consciousness and the world. Consciousness is prereflective when it is consciousness of the world but it is reflective when it is consciousness of consciousness of the world. The ego is observed and created when consciousness is reflective.

A key aspect of Sartre’s thinking about being-for-itself is that consciousness is in Stephen Priest’s phrase, being “constantly projected towards the future in my free self-definition” (2001:107). Consciousness therefore implies both freedom and project. Freedom is the obligation to choose and project is the permanent, so long as life endures, process of choice.

As Thomas Martin notes:

While “being-in-itself *is* what it is,” being-for-itself “*has to be* what it is.” Another way of putting this is to say that being-for-itself must *become* what it is. The reason for this is that being-for-itself is a perpetual flight from presence into the future. That toward which being-for-itself directs itself is its project of becoming, in the light of which the world is interpreted, but there is no final resting place. As a perpetual flight into the future, a continual striving, being-for-itself, once having reached a point, is already beyond it. Whatever being-for-itself is at any particular time is a manifestation of its free spontaneity. Being-for-itself is continually creating itself, continually moving toward endless possibilities (2002:17-18).

The significance of 'the perpetual flight into the future' of being-for-itself for the broader argument elaborated here will become evident in my reflections on the dialectical character of Fanon's thought.

Fanon doesn't ever set out his views on the nature of consciousness in a systematic way but it is quite clear, in all of his work, and most obviously in *Black Skin, White Masks* where he uses language that resonates most directly with existential philosophy, that he assumes the freedom of each consciousness. Indeed he concludes his first book by asserting that "No attempt must be made to encase man" (1967a:230) and that: "At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognise, with me, the open door of every consciousness" (1967a:232).

The political importance of this is clear: any ontology that does not recognise the freedom of every consciousness – whether it be a legitimisation of overt oppression, paternalism or a vanguardist approach to resistance – functions to mask the truth about the nature of human being.

1.4.2 Facticity and freedom

If our consciousness is pure spontaneity then we have no essence, are free, and must via our choices make our selves. Hence Sartre's famous rejection of the idea of human nature and his even more famous assertion that existence precedes essence. But although consciousness is empty and spontaneous, and therefore free, it is always situated in a particular body, at a particular time, in a particular place and confronted by particular ideas, objects and beings whose mode of being is being-in-itself as well as consciousnesses whose mode of being is being-for-itself. Thus Gordon notes that "the question of existence, in itself is empty.

Philosophy of existence is therefore always a conjunctive affair; it must, in other words, be situated" (Gordon, 2000:II). And there are situations within situations – to infinity. For Herman Hesse "every man (sic) is not only himself; he is also the unique, particular, always significant and remarkable point where the phenomena of the world intersect once and for all and never again" (1969:7).

Sartre uses the term facticity to describe the given facts that apply in the world. Facticity includes the past of every individual and of humanity, the brute 'thereness' of objects, the laws of nature and the embodied, located, temporal and social nature of existence. These facts provide the context for the exercise of our freedom. Indeed, just as it is impossible to meaningfully separate the idea of consciousness from the world of facts to which it is directed, and from which it thus arises, so too the idea of freedom cannot be meaningfully separated from the world of facts. In a vacuum, direction is meaningless. It is the objects in space that make the decision to move North or South meaningful. For Sartre "by its very projection towards an end, freedom constitutes as a being in the midst of the world a particular *datum* which it has to be" (1992:626). Sartre declares that:

We shall use the term *situation* for the contingency of freedom in the *plenum* of being of the world inasmuch as this *datum*, which is there only in order *not to constrain freedom*, is revealed to this freedom only as *already illuminated* by the end which freedom chooses...The for-itself discovers itself as engaged in being, hemmed in by being, threatened by being; it discovers the state of things which surrounds it is the cause for a reaction of defence or attack. But it can make this discovery only because it freely posits the end in relation to which the state of things is threatening or favourable (1992:626-627).

This quote implicitly alludes to the fact that, for Sartre, we do not confront the world alone. Our situations are, in part, compromised by other consciousnesses. Hegel refutes solipsism by arguing that self-consciousness requires an encounter with another consciousness, but solipsism

assumes self-consciousness and is thus inherently contradictory. For Wittgenstein solipsism is impossible because if it were true it would have to be theorised in a purely private language and this is impossible. Sartre's refutation of solipsism is based on lived experience - on the emotion of shame. He uses the famous example of the man caught looking through a keyhole to show that under the gaze of the other we feel shame. In a moment like this solipsism is simply not a psychologically tenable position. This leads Sartre to assert that we are always already in the world with others and that we must undertake our philosophy in the world with others.

We must all choose but we must all choose independently. This is why, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre argues that we inhabit a universal human condition without a universal human nature: "What is common to them [human beings] is not a 'nature' but a condition, in other words a set of limits and compulsions: the necessity of dying, of working for a living, of existing in a world already inhabited by other men" (1976:60). This means that human beings are both facticity and transcendence. We are facticity in so far as the world, other people, our bodies and the past mean that we must exercise our freedom within objective constraints but we are transcendence in so far as our spontaneous consciousness means that we must choose, with complete freedom, how we will respond to facticity. Because there is no human nature, and in Sartrean philosophy no God, value is a choice and not an objective quality in the world.

In other words, situation emerges in the relationship between freedom and facticity. For Sartre a man (sic) "cannot be distinguished from his situation, for it forms him and gives him his possibilities; but, inversely, it is he who gives it meaning by making his choices within it" (1976:60). Sartre gives many examples to indicate the degree to which we are thrown into

situations. Two that are particularly important for thinking through Fanon's philosophical project are the focus on embodiment and the idea of the Us-object and the We-subject.

Taking the fact of embodiment seriously is at the heart of Sartre's project. It is very important for Sartre because embodiment shows, against Cartesianism, that we are fundamentally engaged as actors within the world before we contemplate the world. This phenomenological insight leads us to conclude that the physical world is not usually apprehended by us as meaninglessness. Roquentin, Sartre's character in his early novel *Nausea*, finds that he is unable to see meaning in the physical world but, ordinarily, the sheer fact of our embodied being in the world generates meaning, beginning with an apprehension of space and time appropriate to the requirements of our embodiment. Fanon picks up on this phenomenological insight in *Black Skin, White Masks* where he discusses the phenomenology of reaching for a cigarette and argues that these kinds of bodily movements, result in:

A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definite structuring of the self and of the world – definite because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (1976a:III).

The body, in this situation, exists, in Heidegger's phrase, as ready-to-hand – as part of our being. However, equipment that is ready-to-hand can become, when we step back and reflect on it critically, detached from our being and, instead, an object to our consciousness. Heidegger calls this less immediate relationship "being present-to-hand". He explains this shift, with regard to an item of equipment, as follows:

We discover its unusability, however, not by looking at it and establishing its properties, but rather by the circumspection of the dealings in which we use it. When unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous. This

conspicuousness presents the ready-to-hand equipment as in a certain un-readiness-to-hand (1980:102-103).

Fanon shows that when a consciousness inhabits a black body in an anti-black social environment the body becomes hyper conspicuous to the white gaze and, then, to the black consciousness:

"Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I thought I had lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart (1967a:109).

He discovers that he exists embodied, as an object to the individual white gaze¹¹ and as an object constituted by the historicity of anti-black racism from which the individual racist gaze draws its power:

the corporeal scheme crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal scheme...it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in the triple person...I was given not one but two, three places...I moved toward the other...and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea (1967a:112).

N.C. Manganyi, writing in a Fanonian existential vein, argues that in the context of racism "There can be no bickering about the existential significance of the body. It is precisely for this reason that black consciousness has no choice but to start from the existential fact of the

black body" (1973:18). Manganyi also notes that, under apartheid, "We have been compelled to recognise that unlike the white man we live with the originators of our absurdity. The source of our suffering may be identified in the streets of Pretoria and Johannesburg" (1973:47). In an anti-black world consciousness in a black body confronts a particular, and overtly hostile force, white power, rather than the general absurdity diagnosed by an existential thinker like Albert Camus. Hence the prayer with which Fanon ends *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Oh my body, make of me a man who always questions" (1967a:232).

Something similar happens to a consciousness speaking a language coded as black in an anti-black social space. In fact, Fanon begins his account of the limits of value of previously mainstream philosophical thinking about ontology with the question of language. He moves from the position that "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" and that, furthermore, "To speak...means above all to assume a culture" (1967a:17). The problem is that some ways of speaking are understood to assume a white culture which is coded as fully human while others are understood to assume a black culture which is coded as less than human. When whiteness is exclusively associated with a fully human status the possibilities for authentic human interaction via discursive interaction from within black language are radically constrained.

The claim to a unique access to reason may well be the central pivot on which the ideological legitimisation for European dominance turns. Because racism assumes that the black subject and the reasoning subject are fundamentally separate categories Fanon discovered that reason "played cat and mouse...when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer"

¹¹ Here Fanon's philosophy resonates strongly with W.E.B. Du Bois's theorisation of double consciousness which he describes as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (1989:3).

(1967a:119-120). No matter how well the black subject has mastered what is assumed to be the language and culture of whiteness, her body remains black. There is no prospect for escape. So, Fanon reports: "I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged" (1967a:114-115). It is this experience, a collective experience, that leads Fanon to conclude that "In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation" (1967a:110).

Sartre argues that we are thrown into social situations – "I am thrown into a worker's world, a French world...which offers me its meanings without my having done anything to disclose them (Sartre, cited in Levy 2002:17). While these situations will have a particular material basis they are, in Sartre's view, also constituted by the fact that an oppressed class "is experienced as an *Us*-object in the face of an undifferentiated "They" which is the Third or the oppressing class" (1992:554). But Sartre doesn't see a collective social identity as necessarily objectifying. He also argues that when "I am engaged with others in a common rhythm which I contribute to creating...(I am likely to)...apprehend myself as engaged as a *We*-subject" (1992:549). This possibility for individuals in oppressed classes to exist as non-self objectifying *We*-subjects is crucial to the argument about solidarity advanced in chapter five.

Sartre uses the example of a large rock alongside a road to concretise his claim that we are required to give meaning to situations. For a "simple traveller who passes over this road and whose free project is a pure aesthetic ordering of the landscape" the rock is merely beautiful or ugly. But for someone whose project is to climb the rock it appears "in the light of a projected scaling" (1992:627). The political importance of this for a philosopher of struggle like Fanon

is clear and I would like to make two points in this regard. The first is that if consciousness must constitute itself in a situation then for the political militant, the material structures of oppression must be considered in the light of a projected overcoming. A genuinely liberatory philosophy must occur, precisely, in the relationship between free thought and brute facticity. Hence, as Stathis Kouvelakis reminds us, a crucial aspect of Marx's break with Hegelianism is that "criticism's ultimate objective, the becoming-philosophical of the world, is simultaneously a becoming worldly of philosophy" (2003:239).

The second is that, contrary to the dogmatism of so much Stalinist and Trotskyist thought, there can be no formulae for praxis. The dynamism of the political situation is well captured in Fanon's accounts of the changing roles of the veil, medicine and the radio in the Algerian revolution. A key consequence of this dynamism is that, as Alain Badiou observes:

A political situation is always singular; it is never repeated. Therefore political writings – directives or commands – are justified inasmuch as they inscribe not a repetition but, on the contrary, the unrepeatable. When the content of a political statement is a repetition the statement is rhetorical and empty. It does not form part of thinking. On this basis one can distinguish between *true political activists* and *politicians*. . . *True political activists* think a singular situation; politicians do not think (2003:82 emphasis original).

Later I will argue that dialectical praxis requires the courage to be permanently attentive to the singularity of the situation and thus demands that its thinkers take on the responsibility of living on the edge of time, between the situation and the void.

The entire corpus of Fanon's work is a sustained engagement with freedom and facticity in explicitly existential terms. This could be demonstrated on most pages of his four books. But his acknowledgement of facticity and his commitment to freedom is stated with particular poetic power at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom. The disaster of the man of color lies in the fact that he was enslaved. The disaster and the inhumanity of the white man lie in the fact that somewhere he has killed man....The Negro is not. Any more than the white man (1967:231).

Fanon's commitment to freedom means that he always works within the spirit of Frederic Jameson's more recent injunction to always historicise and never naturalise humanity.¹² But Fanon's commitment to freedom also put him at direct odds with the forms of orthodox Marxism¹³, dominant in his day, which assumed that History had a nature and an inevitable direction to which individual freedom was, to varying degrees, subordinated.¹⁴ It also puts him in equal opposition to anti-humanisms that assume that humanity is passively produced by discourses and/or material structures.

I.4.3 Anguish and bad faith

¹² To historicise means to always show how people came to be in the condition that they are in and not to assume that it is their inherent nature to be in that condition. For example it would be important to show that the racialised nature of material inequality in South African is a consequence of conquest, domination and exploitation and not because of white or black 'essences' or the essential nature of the poor.

¹³ David Renton usefully describes dissident Marxism as a term "used to refer to people who did not treat their socialism as an inherited canon of knowledge, but at each moment were willing to think their politics anew. The acid test of dissidence was a willingness to criticise the conduct of the Soviet state" (2004:7). Although Renton correctly includes Fanon in this tradition he, unfortunately and in a manner not untypical of sections of the white metropolitan left (neither Michael Hardt and Antonion Negri nor Slavoj Zizek even bother to spell Fanon's first name correctly) he has clearly not read Fanon and assumes that this is no impediment to opining on Fanon's work.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that while Sartre is widely regarded as the pre-eminent philosophical theorist of freedom a number of commentators have noted that, in practice, Sartre affiliated himself (closely although not directly), for much of his life, to a distinctly historicist and therefore mechanistic form of Marxism and "advocated unquestioned obedience on the part of the workers to a party [the Communist Party] which was their only guarantee of freedom *in the future*" (McLellan, 1998: 313 my emphasis). Fanon condemned both Western capitalism (and political systems through which they were articulated - colonialism and imperialism) and Soviet communism as well as the forms of Marxism that implied that the Soviet Union carried History's sanction. And, as Sekyi-Otu shows particularly well Fanon's thinking about the liberatory and authoritarian possibilities inherent in political parties and movements is extraordinarily nuanced and illuminating. In this sense Fanon was a far better Sartrean, in practice, than Sartre.

Of course it is true that facts can set objective constraints to our material power to act. Imprisonment may confine us in ways that we are powerless to overcome. But no facts negate the necessity for us to choose the manner of our response to facticity. Material freedom can be limited from without but ontological freedom can not. Sartre insists that "the slave in chains is as free as his master" (cited in Martin, 2002: 23). And so a woman in prison must choose how to respond to the fact of her imprisonment. In South Africa, and large parts of the broader black world, Steve Biko has become a symbol of the realisation that rebellion is *always* possible. Thus while the material exercise of power can be limited, ontological freedom is never limited.

Sartre points out that our freedom implies that we are responsible for our choices. In Fanon's words "Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man" (1967a: 88- 89). For Sartre the consequent challenge of taking full responsibility for each of our choices leads to anguish.

Martin usefully describes anguish as follows:

The for-itself's reflection on its freedom is anguished because through such reflection the for-itself realizes that there is nothing to compel it to act in a particular way. Thus the for-itself bears responsibility for what it will do. The future is open and no past act or state of affairs can fully determine a future act (2002:15).

Fanon's powerful and poetic account of his own encounter with anguish is amongst the best known passages in his work. It speaks for itself.

awakening to the world, I saw the sky turn upon itself utterly and wholly. I wanted to rise but the disembowelled silence fell back upon me, its wings paralysed. Without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep (1967:140).

Sartre argues that in order to escape anguish people deny their responsibility by denying their freedom. Freedom can be denied both by denying that one has freedom to choose and by denying facticity. The latter is the identification of the self as pure transcendence, the fantasy of being a for-itself in a factless vacuum, and it makes freedom just as impossible as the self-objectifying identification of oneself as an in-itself. In each instance, Sartre terms the flight from freedom, and thus self-creativity, as bad faith, which he contrasts with authenticity – an acceptance of freedom and therefore responsibility. In the case of the apprehension of other humans Sartre identifies two forms of bad faith - sadism and masochism. Ontologies that objectify the Other in a relation of dominance are described as sadistic which means that they are an attempt to ossify the Other into complete objectivity in order to evade the sight of others. As Gordon observes the sadist:

fancies himself a pure, disembodied anonymous subject – pure mastery, absolute negation of specificity. He fancies himself God. But since the human being is neither thing nor God, his fancy manifests an oblique reference to an eliminated humanity. The sadist is fundamentally misanthropic (1995:19-20).

And fancying oneself to be God is to objectify oneself, so sadism ultimately objectifies the sadist and those he objectifies. A response to sadism that seeks to replace the pejorative ontology imposed on the other with a more positive alternative is, in existential terms, masochism which is, as Gordon explains, the equally misanthropic attempt to fix a gaze on oneself. And, again, this attempt to fix oneself also has the consequence of fixing those who look at oneself. Sadism and masochism are both incompatible with sociality – the mutual

recognition of changing agency. And, again following Gordon, this does not just lead to problems at the level of identity and recognition. On the contrary when

human being is bounded, kept at bay, and held secure as a stabilized entity that supports self-delusion...Institutions take their place in a superstructural ontology that marks the irrelevance of human being" with the result that "history loses its significance to the governing fiction of security (1995:23).

The human choices and actions that made and make the world are disguised to the extent that current relations of domination appear to be natural and perhaps even inevitable.

Fanon explores these ideas (but without making use of the Sartrean terminology) in considerable depth in the two chapters in *Black Skin, White Masks* on inauthentic sexual relationships between black and white people. In his analysis the parties are attracted to the qualities projected on to whiteness or blackness rather than the actual qualities of the actual individuals with whom they are involved.

A key dimension of Sartre's thinking about responsibility is his view that in choosing for ourselves, we implicitly choose for others. "Man", Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*, "being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being" (2001a:194).

The Marxist philosopher and Zapatista intellectual John Holloway puts fetishism, a philosophical concept which functions very much like that of bad faith, at the centre of his project. For Holloway

Our scream-against is a scream-against-oppression, and in that sense it is shaped by oppression; but there is more than that, for the scream-against-oppression is a

scream against the negation of ourselves, of our humanity, of our power-to create. Non-identity is the core of our scream, but to say 'We are not' is not just a dark void. To negate Is-ness is to assert becoming, movement, creation, the emancipation of power-to. We *are* not, we do not be, we become.

'We are not' becomes, therefore, 'We are not yet', but only if 'not yet' is understood not as a certain future, secure homecoming, but as a possibility, as a becoming with not guarantees, no security. If we are not yet, then our not-yet-ness already exists as project, as overflowing, as pushing beyond (2002:152).

Although Holloway never cites Sartre or Fanon in his book, the existential nature of his key conceptual categories is clear. Sartre's most famous examples of bad faith – the woman on a date who pretends that her hand is an inert object in the hands of her would-be seducer, and the waiter who plays at *being* a waiter – are not overtly political (although, of course, they can both be read politically e.g. through the lenses of sexism and proletarian alienation respectively). But Sartre makes much political use of the concept of bad faith – perhaps most famously in *Anti-Semite and Jew* where he develops a theory of racism as bad faith.¹⁵ For Sartre anti-Semitism is a passion and the "anti-Semite has chosen to live on the plane of passion" (1976:18). Sartre declares that the "anti-Semite has chosen hate because hate is a faith" (1976:19) and argues that the fundamental attraction of this faith is

a longing for impenetrability. The rational man groans as he gropes for the truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it. He never sees very clearly where he is going; he is "open"; he may even appear to be hesitant. But there are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where, indeed, would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth...It is as if their own existence were in continual suspension (1976:18-19).

¹⁵ Lewis Gordon (2000) points out that an important aspect of bad faith is not seeing. Certain people, places and facts about certain people and places can become invisible or overdetermined by linguistic or cultural conventions. Sartre himself succumbs to the form of bad faith which simply fails to see in his conclusion to *Anti-Semite and Jew* where he discusses Zionism without any reference to Palestinians.

Sartre identifies other reasons for this bad faith too.¹⁶ He describes anti-Semitism as “a poor man’s snobbery” (1976:26) and notes that:

By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite. The elite, in contrast to those of modern times which are based on merit or labor, closely resembles an aristocracy of birth. There is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a *thing* (1976:27).

Sartre also explores the idea of race through the lens of bad faith and concludes that while he believes in the idea of race as something abstracted from lived experience “no more than I believe in ouija boards” (1976:60) there is such a thing as race when we consider the Jew as “a being in a situation” (1976:60). “To be a Jew is to be thrown into – to be *abandoned* to – the situation of a Jew” (1976:89). How could Jewishness not be a lived reality in the face of the Shoa? Consequently, for Sartre, responses to the situation of the Jew, whether from Jews or non-Jewish ‘democrats’ (the kind of people Biko would later call ‘liberals’), that seek to deny Jewish particularity [“to deny their situation as Jews” (1976:110)] by asserting the universalism of humanity are in bad faith as they are seeking to become “blind to the reality of Jewishness” (1976:110). Similarly Fanon, writing about the position of inauthentic French democrats on the colonial war in Algeria, notes that “the French democrat is constantly resorting to abstractions as point of reference” (1967b:34).

But Sartre goes further than the mere assertion that the denial of the lived experience of race is bad faith. He historicises the situation of the Jew. It is, he argues, “the Christians who have

¹⁶ In his latter work Sartre is far more attentive to the economic basis of many forms of oppression. For example in an essay on the French use of torture in Algeria Sartre argues that:

For most of the Europeans of Algeria, there are two complementary and inseparable truths: the colonists are human beings by divine right, and the natives are subhumans. That is the mythical interpretation of a precise fact, since the wealth of the former depends on the extreme poverty of the latter (2001b:75).

created the Jew" (1976:68). This is not a denial of Jewish agency but merely opposition to the bad faith inherent in naturalising the present by avoiding an acknowledgement of how the present was made. This task remains urgent in contemporary South Africa where all kinds of discourses seek to naturalise a condition (pervasive black poverty) that should be historicised (via a consideration of a history of racialised conquest, domination, exploitation and marginalisation etc.).

For Sartre, the Jew "can choose to be authentic by asserting his place as a Jew" (1965:139) and French society must grant rights to people "as Jews, Negroes, or Arabs – that is, as concrete persons" (1965:146).

Fanon quotes Sartre's observation that Jews who are "poisoned by the fear of the stereotype that others have of them" often find themselves in a situation where "their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside" (1967a:115). But Fanon goes on to argue that

All the same the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness...He is a white man, and...can sometimes go unnoticed...The Jew is disliked from the moment that he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance...I am *fixed*" (1967a:115-116).

If there is no way out then good faith requires that the lived reality of race and racism be faced up to. And, indeed, Fanon reports that once he arrived at this recognition:

I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to assert myself as BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known (1967a:115).

I will return to this in the third and fourth chapters but for the moment I will just note that

Fanon sees this moment as the beginning of a dialectic that passes through the self-objectification of Négritude which is premised on the assumption that “it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me” (1967a:134). However, Fanon thinks that this bad faith must be embraced as an end in-itself when circumstances demand an absolute commitment to a movement of revolt against the greater bad faith of denying or accepting oppression: “This struggle...had to take on an aspect of completeness” (1967a:135). But, in a necessary paradox that will be explored in the chapters three and four, he nevertheless looks beyond this towards a black consciousness of freedom: “black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something. I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. ...It is” (1967a:135). Hence black consciousness emerges as the authentic identity of a We-subject.

I.5 Conclusion

This first chapter has been largely explanatory and foundational. It has outlined the reasons for Fanon’s scepticism towards ontology and his commitment to a critical ontology. Furthermore it has offered an explanation of the basic ideas in existential thinking about critical ontology, ideas which are central to Fanon’s thought, and has sought to show the connections between Fanon’s thinking and Sartrean ontology. The chapter has concluded with an explanation of Fanon’s arguments about what the lived experience of blackness means for thinking about black ontology. I will build on this in the work that follows, particularly in the next chapter where I explain Fanon’s radical humanism – an ethics which is congruent with the ontology elaborated here.

Lewis Gordon writes that: “Something is achieved through achieving what is deemed an impossibility, a feat against nature. All liberation struggles are to an extent that: a defiance of ‘nature’ as ontological closure” (2000:52). Because oppression always seeks to legitimise itself by appearing to be natural its ontological speculations, it will offer nothing to the oppressed. But an ontology that seeks to recognise, with Fanon, “the open door of every consciousness” (1967:232) renders every mode of oppression contingent and, therefore, offers every hope to the oppressed.

Chapter 2

Radical Humanism

Man is a yes. I will never stop reiterating that. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But man is also a no. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.

- Fanon (1967a:222)

2. I Introduction

John Holloway observes that:

Postgraduate theses typically begin with a definition or delimitation of the object of study. Definition is the description of an identity which is distinct from other identities...Definition aims to delimit identities in a non-contradictory manner: if I define x, it does not make any sense, from a definitional perspective, to say that x is both x and non-x. Definition fixes social relations in their static, fragmented, reified is-ness (2002:62).

There is an important point here. While a complete refusal to delimit identities would make theses and all meaningful thought and action impossible, the attempt to reify what is dynamic and multiple and uncertain for the sake of apparent rigour, whether motivated by the desire for the elegance of mathematical clarity or to appease an academic bureaucracy's need for clear outcomes, is a flight from the 'sheer unrest of life' amidst which lived experience occurs. It is a flight into bad faith. Statistics and graphs and tight definitions have their place, but sometimes more light is thrown on certain experiences by a suggestive metaphor or, as in the case of Sartre's definition of being-for-itself¹, an apparent paradox, than an attempt at social *science*. For reasons that will become clear, and which can be deduced from the ontological foundations elaborated in the last chapter, humanism as a sensibility and a project is not well

¹ As mentioned in the previous chapter Sartre describes being-for-itself as "being what it is not and not being what it is" (1992:28).

served by precise definitions. As Tony Davies notes “On the question of humanism, nothing is more suspect than clarity” (1997:130).

While this chapter does not offer a precise and fixed analysis of humanism, it does attempt to think around the open heart of Fanon’s humanism. I begin with some remarks on the historical trajectory of philosophical humanism within radical political projects. I argue that white humanism is often acknowledged to have animated much radical thought in the past it has now, generally, lost credibility amongst theorists. I then go on to look at different types of humanism and here, following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, I make a key definitional distinction which is between reactionary humanism and revolutionary humanism. The former is described as ideas that seek to fix one concept of humanity – usually an idea that a ruling class has of itself or its subordinates – as ideal or universal. The latter is described as ideas that seek to open the idea of humanity to perpetual and multiple becoming. I argue that Fanon’s humanism is a radical humanism. But I go on to argue that because Hardt and Negri remain trapped in a primitive Manicheanism and do not think dialectically something needs to be added to their description of revolutionary humanism. My primary claim here is that the unfolding transformations produced by the fight to realise universal becoming as a reality in the world are accorded particular value in revolutionary humanism. This is well captured by Sub-Commandante Insurgente Marcos:

A citizen of the world, El Che recalls what we have known since the times of Spartacus, and which we often forget: the fight against injustice is a step that elevates humanity, which makes it better, which makes it more human (2001:94).

I then move on to look at anti-humanisms and argue that Fanon’s radical humanism can survive anti-humanist attacks. I suggest that many anti-humanisms are, in fact, attacks on reactionary humanism and that many other anti-humanisms pose a transcendent power out of

the reach of human agency. The following section looks at Fanon's humanism and here I begin by noting that Fanon declared himself a humanist and that he was well aware that humanist claims are used to justify oppression, but that he proposed a new universalisable humanism. I argue that Fanon was careful to ensure that his new humanism could not be reified into ideological cover for domination, because its central ethical thrust is towards the valorisation of the free exercise of historical agency by the dominated rather than any particular policy or mode of organisation. The next section looks at the most common critique of Fanon's humanism – the claim that it is contradicted by his support for violent resistance to colonialism. I argue that this argument is deeply flawed and, indeed, pejoratively so. The final section of this chapter looks at the religious tone of much of Fanon's writing on humanism and I argue that this can be understood as a form of poeticism. I also argue that Fanon does not provide an argument as to why everyone should accept radical humanism but that he, rather, chooses it as an existential project.

2.2 Humanism

For a long time humanism was a broad movement in thought and action in which key radical thinkers explicitly located their work. In 1844 Marx wrote that ‘Communismis humanism’(1983:149).² Gramsci, writing in Mussolini’s prison in the early 1930s, argued that “The philosophy of praxis is absolute ‘historicism’, the absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history” (1971:465). And in 1945 Sartre gave his famous lecture *Existentialism is a humanism* (1987). In 1970’s South Africa Steven Biko and Richard Turner, the leading theorists of the two currents of insurgent democratic resistance to apartheid, Black Consciousness and the trade union movement, both took an explicitly humanist position.³ But, despite a spirited defence from Edward Said and Noam Chomsky, dominant theories in the contemporary academy usually consider humanism to be, at best, a naive anachronism, and, at worst, dangerously repressive. Indeed it is often casually assumed that the term is pejorative. Martin Heidegger’s 1947 *Letter on Humanism*, written against Sartre’s *Existentialism is a Humanism*, slowly developed into an influential critique of humanism. And, since Michel Foucault heralded the possibility of the death of Man (sic) in *The Order of Things* in 1966, post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers have increasingly tended to present humanism as a central pillar of the ideological structure of modernity and colonialism. In more orthodox Marxist circles Louis Althusser’s 1969 essay *Marxism and Humanism* won many intellectuals to his theoretical anti-humanism despite vigorous opposition from E.P. Thompson’s rejoinder in *The Poverty of Theory*. Given the academic

² Raya Dunayevskaya cites Marx’s statement that “Communism is humanism mediated by the transcendence of private property” and the distinction that he drew between “positive humanism” and “vulgar communism” (1988:58) and argues that for Marx the economic project of communism was a sub-project of a greater humanist project.

³For the best discussions of Biko’s philosophy see More (2000) and Gordon (2002), The best discussion of Turner’s philosophy is provided by Andrew Nash (1999). Nash also gives a good account

currency of anti-humanism, it is perhaps not surprisingly that many theorists sympathetic to Fanon have rushed through mumbled excuses for his humanism while others have just ignored it altogether. So we find, as just one example, that while David Macey takes Foucault's anti-humanism very seriously in his Foucault biography (1994) humanism is not even indexed in his 600 page Fanon biography (2000).

But although humanism, has become a deeply unfashionable idea in the academy, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), via Sub-Commandante Insurgente Marcos's explicitly humanist writings⁴ - 'For humanity and against neo-liberalism!' – made it a self-consciousness material force in Chiapas in 1994. And since the Battle of Seattle in November 1999 it has become a major animating thrust⁵ in the movement of movements that have constituted themselves into a force antagonistic to market fundamentalism and U.S. led imperialism. But while all this means that humanism has to, again, be taken with some degree of seriousness as a political force confronting theory, it does not mean that we are necessarily compelled to consider it with any degree of seriousness as a voice within theory. After all Althusser's conclusion was, precisely, that the popular resonance of humanism made it an effective although fictitious ideological tool for mobilization despite its theoretical poverty.⁶ This seems to be the *de facto* position of many contemporary radical intellectuals who despise theoretical humanism but embrace its strategic value as an effective mobilising tool. If we want to reject anti-democratic vanguardism we have two choices: take theoretical humanism

of how democratic leftism was sucked into the dogmatic and authoritarian practices of the South African Communist Party after the unbanning of the party in 1990.

⁴ See, especially *Our Word is Our Weapon* (2001)

⁵ See, for example, the implicit and explicit humanism of so much of the writing at key movement sites like Z-Net (<http://www.zmag.org>), Autonomedia (<http://slash.autonomedia.org>) and Indymedia (<http://www.indymedia.org>).

seriously or work to disabuse people of the superstition of ideological humanism. My argument is that we should move against dominant academic currents and take Fanon's theoretical humanism seriously.

2.2.1. Types of humanism

Tony Davies notes that: "It is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity" (1996:131). Yet, in full awareness of this, many philosophers of liberation, and in particular many anti-colonial philosophers, have continued to argue for humanism. This apparent tension is best understood by the fact that there are different types of humanism. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make an influential and useful argument in this regard. They argue that there have been two opposing types of humanism in modernity - one revolutionary and one reactionary. For them revolutionary humanism is a movement in which "the powers of creation that had previously been consigned exclusively to the heavens are now brought down to earth. This is the discovery of the fullness of the plane of immanence" (2000:73).⁷ Hardt and Negri are committed to immanence because it takes lived experience as the zone of the real and thus makes possible a democratic praxis as "the continuous constituent project to create and re-create ourselves and our world" (Hardt and Negri, 2000:92). Fanon gives a particularly powerful statement of his commitment to immanence in his remarks on political education:

⁶ He argued that "it [humanism] can serve as a practical, ideological slogan in so far as it is exactly adequate to its function and not confused with a quite different function; that there is no way in which it can abrogate the attributes of a theoretical concept" (Althusser, 1969: 246).

⁷ Hardt and Negri use the terms 'immanence' and 'transcendence' in completely different ways to Sartre. Their meanings for these terms are explained in the text that follows.

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the magic hands of the people (1976:159).

Hardt and Negri argue that reactionary humanism poses a transcendent constituted power against an immanent constituent power, order against desire” (2000:74). They describe transcendence as the postulation of a realm or agency outside the grasp - in time, space or capacity - of ordinary people. They describe a group operating on the plane of immanence as a self organising ‘multitude’ and a group operating under a transcendent power as ‘a people’ subject to external authority.

Although Hardt and Negri’s philosophy is primarily based on a Deleuzian reading of Spinoza, the basic distinction between revolutionary and reactionary humanism can be well understood in terms of the existential ontology elaborated in the last chapter. Revolutionary humanism is a democratic humanism that recognises, in Fanon’s language the “open door of every consciousness” (1967a:232) while reactionary humanism is an objectifying ideological project in the service of domination. However Hardt and Negri’s basic distinction between revolutionary and reactionary humanism needs to be developed further if it is to enable us to effectively distinguish Fanon’s radical humanism from various reactionary humanisms. I make three arguments in this regard.

Firstly Hardt and Negri’s philosophy poses a static and anti-dialectical Manicheanism which doesn’t allow for a proper consideration of tendencies towards what Sartre terms ‘sclerosis’ (objectification) within the ‘multitude’. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce some

nuance here. They describe philosophical immanence as “a plane from which all idols have been cleared” (1994:43). But, unlike Hardt and Negri, Deleuze and Guattari also speak of the “vertigo of immanence from which so many philosophers try in vain to escape” (1994:48) and of “our not being able to tolerate infinite movements” (1994:49). This vertigo is very similar to the anguish that tempts people to escape into bad faith and the acknowledgement of this allows us to understand that the bad faith of postulating transcendent power is a constant temptation and, so, there must always be struggle within each struggle to remain on the plane of immanence.

Secondly, Hardt and Negri’s rejection of all transcendent value makes it impossible to make sense of the ethical aspect of their preference for radical humanism. The fact that every consciousness is an open door and that the postulation of transcendent power is bad faith does not mean that we ought to act as though these facts have ethical implications. After all, many kinds of actions can occur on the plane of immanence – this is where counter-power is constituted but it is also, often, where capital and imperialism hunt. While the refusal of a transcendent realm or agency does mean that latent power is here and now, and can be constituted into a counter power, it does not provide, in-itself, an ethics for the use of that power. Thinking can be on the plane of immanence without being egalitarian – Nietzsche’s contempt for the herd is a paradigmatic philosophical example of this. It is equally important to note that action on the plane of immanence does not necessarily acknowledge its location nor recommend it, nor indeed allow it, for the majority. Indeed, the global market operates purely on the plane of immanence – the drive for profit recognises no transcendent powers. Marx and Engels made this point 150 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*.⁸ However,

8

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’, and has left remaining no other nexus between man

capital, in alliance with other forces, uses all sorts of appeals to transcendence to discipline the multitude. The market even objectifies itself as a new transcendence which must, at all costs, be obeyed - i.e. the omnipotent and omniscient (and, bizarrely, simultaneously naturalised and theologised) Market which, despite the fact that it can't be pinned down anywhere, is everywhere - watching, judging, taking, breaking, making and sentencing. The attempt to discipline people in the name of the global market usually goes together with attempts to discipline in the name of more local transcendence. For example Arundhati Roy writes that in India "The two arms of the Indian Government have evolved the perfect pincer action. While one arm is busy selling India off in chunks, the other, to divert attention, is orchestrating a howling, baying chorus of Hindu nationalism and religious fascism" (2003b:7).

It is clear, therefore, that without some fundamental axiological commitment, an affirmation of the value of the plane of immanence can not, by itself, produce a democratic ethics. This problem can be avoided by opposing our alienation from transcendence rather than opposing transcendence in-itself. This is not a new idea in political philosophy. Kojève reads the conclusion of Hegel's *Phenomenology* to mean that "The *Phenomenology* ends with a radical denial of all transcendence...the infinite in question is *Man's* infinite" (Cited in Soper, 1986:42). Similarly for the young Sartre the point is not to abandon the idea of the Absolute but to concretise it in humanity. "It is", Sartre wrote in *Situations*, "unfortunate that a man (sic) can still write that the absolute is not a man (sic)" (Cited in Dunayevskaya, 1989:5). In other words an affirmation of immanence can only be radical, in the sense in which Marx uses

and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in the place of the numberless indefensible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom - Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation (Marx and Engels, 1985: 82).

the term, if immanence and transcendence are united by transcendent value being given to the recognition of the openness of each consciousness.

Thirdly there is the problem of Hardt and Negri's assumption that a radical commitment is an essential characteristic of a consciousness not subjected to transcendent authority. For example Negri, writing alone this time, states that "The poorer the body – that is the more it is exposed and open to the immeasurable – the more it concentrates the power of living labour and of love within itself" (Negri, 2003: 246) and hence there is a "triumph of love that surges up from the multitude of the poor" (Negri, 2003: 253). This tendency to essentialise the poor leads Negri (and Hardt) to dismiss dialectical thought as mystification and to conceptualise the praxis of radical humanism as a politics of pure unmediated Manichean antagonism – the multitude against Empire. Here their humanism parts company with Fanon's. The next chapter is dedicated to Fanon's conception of dialectic praxis but the point that needs to be made here is that Fanon's humanism does not simply reverse the Manicheanism that objectifies the dominated as sub-human and the dominators as fully human. While Hardt and Negri naturalise the poor through Franciscan tropes of ontological abundance, the reality is that, like everyone else, poor people make their lives within and against history. For Fanon "Consciousness is a process of transcendence" that requires enlightenment via reflection on action and "this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding" (1967:7). Moreover for Fanon the fight is not only consequent to the consciousness of the oppressed but is also constituent of it: "it is the essence of the fight which explodes old truths and reveals unexpected facets" (Cited in Gibson, 2001b:384).

2.3 Anti-humanisms

Just as there are humanisms there are anti-humanisms (and post-humanisms). When these are a critique of the presentation of particularisms as universalisms or a critique of the “pre-critical humanisms” (Fryer, 2003: 247) that fail to take into account Wollstonecraft, Marx, Nietzsche, Fanon and their relatives and descendents then they are often really attempts to enrich humanism. When they are a critique of reactionary humanisms that are normalising ideologies functioning to legitimate domination they are often attempts to assert Biko’s ‘true humanism’ – a humanism that can include all of humanity.

Perhaps the most influential strand of anti-humanism in contemporary theory runs from Nietzsche, through Heidegger and on to Foucault. For Nietzsche

All philosophers involuntarily think of ‘man’ as an *aeterna veritas* [eternal truth], as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things...many, without being aware of it, even take the most recent manifestations of man, such as has arisen under the impress of certain religions, even certain political events, as the fixed form from...but everything has become: there are no eternal facts or absolute truths (Cited in Davies, 1997:33).

Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* is also an attack on metaphysical abstraction from experience. As Dermot Moran explains “Humanisms remain metaphysical concepts whereas Heidegger wants a thinking which is a thinking of Being. Being appears through humankind, humankind is the ‘shepherd of Being’ and ‘language is the house of Being’” (2000:216). For Foucault “man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end” (1973: 386-387).

These critiques of metaphysical humanisms are a critique of a specific type of humanism - the type which Hardt and Negri identify as reactionary and explain as the replacement of the transcendence of God with the transcendence of Man. This line of critique is not, therefore, a

definitive refutation of the humanism Hardt and Negri define as revolutionary. Indeed they argue, with regard to the poststructuralist critique of humanism, that: "Michel Foucault's final works on the history of sexuality bring to life once again that same revolutionary impulse that animated Renaissance humanism. The ethical care of the self re-emerges as a constituent power of self creation" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 91). In their view there is only an apparent paradox between Foucault's assertion of an anti-humanism and the clearly humanist content of his later work. They argue that:

Antihumanism follows directly on Renaissance humanism's secularizing project, or more precisely, its discovery of the plane of immanence. Both projects are founded on an attack on transcendence. There is a strict continuity between the religious thought that accords a power above nature to God and the modern 'secular' thought that accords the same power above nature to Man. The transcendence of God is simply transformed to Man. Like God before it, this Man that stands separate from and above nature has no place in a philosophy of immanence. Like God, too, this transcendent figure of Man leads quickly to the imposition of social hierarchy and domination. Antihumanism, then, conceived as a refusal of any transcendence, should in no way be confused with a negation of the *vis viva*, the creative life force that animates the revolutionary stream of the modern tradition (2000:91-92).

We can see why Soper argues that most anti-humanisms "secrete a humanist rhetoric" (1986:182) that in, Davies' phrase, "betrays their hidden affinity with what they deny" (1997:35).

But there are at least three genuine forms of anti-humanism present in thought that claims to be progressive. One is expressed by the set of thinkers that reject humanism as "a remnant of a universalist project that they no longer consider valid in a fragmented world" (Moran, 2003: 248). This position is genuinely antithetical to revolutionary humanism which, although it demands a respect for particularity and becoming in its more sophisticated forms (such as in Fanon's philosophy) also accepts that there are commonalities in the human situation and real

possibilities for the development of solidarities that transcend particularities. Another set of anti-humanisms includes theories that see human consciousness as completely determined by economic structure or discourses. For example Althusser's faith that "Marx founded a new science. The science of history" (Althusser, 2001:4) was predicated on the idea that "Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man... This rupture with... humanism is no secondary detail; it is Marx's scientific discovery" (Althusser, 1969: 227). This is compatible with revolutionary humanism in so far as it is a break with the idea of a human essence (rather than situation) but when science is taken to mean an extra human dialectic out of the reach of human agency then there is a genuine anti-humanism. If science is taken to mean that, in Marx's phrase, the forces and relations of production operate "outside man and independent of his will" (cited in Davies, 1997:63) then there is only a genuine anti-humanism if it is held that the forces and relations of production determine human behaviour. A revolutionary humanist could go so far as to assert that:

The subject in capitalist society is not the capitalist... It is capital... the leading members of society are quite simply its most loyal servants, its most servile courtiers. This is true not only of capitalists themselves, but also of politicians, civil servants, professors and so on (Holloway, 2002: 34).

This is not an anti-humanist position as long as it accepted that this servility is a choice for which responsibility must be taken. As Sartre argues:

'the ruthless play of economic laws'... is a fundamental structure of liberal ideology. But it is not things which are ruthless, it is men. Thus alienation transfers the principal feature of oppression – which must be ruthless in order to exist – into the process itself and thereby betrays its human origin: it is only through the practico-inert (multiple actions deriving inertia from material, inorganic, mediation) that a necessity can be affected by the practical quality of ruthlessness (2004:748).

Fanon's position is absolutely clear: "It is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle for my freedom" (1967:230).

A third set of anti-humanisms can be grouped around the idea that the interests of actually existing humans should be subordinated to some higher goal. For example Heidegger railed against "this humanistic tendency to treat humans as the ultimate goal, rather than as a means to achieving the authentic goal" (cited in Davies, 1997:130). Various forms of Stalinist anti-humanism would share the view that actually existing humans are not the ultimate goal. This is not the same as confronting the reality that there are tragic situations where human well-being can only be served by serious attempts to stop barbarism that include liberatory violence. In the latter case, the project is still under-girded by a universalism that asserts that all human beings matter. This differs from what we could call the Nietzscheanism of the former position where, in both its left and right articulations, there is an active desire to elevate some kind of elect super human or group of humans at the expense of the rest, who are designated, implicitly or explicitly, as the herd. Conceptions of the militant that see militancy as an ontological project for the militant risk collapsing into a left Nietzscheanism by reducing struggle to a means for the achievement of the militant's personal ontological ends.⁹

⁹ For an argument that suggests that the philosophy of Hardt and Negri has contributed to this pathology in South African movements see Richard Pithouse *Towards a True Humanity: Critical questions about radical internationalist solidarities* (2005).

2.4 Fanon's humanism

Fanon tells his readers, on the first page of his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, that he writes "for a new humanism" (1967a:7). He ends his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, written after his immersion in the full barbarism of French colonialism and the FLN's violent resistance with these famous words: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man" (1976:255). His commitment to humanism is explicit, constant and resolute.

Fanon, like other anti-colonial thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi, and Steve Biko, was fully aware that humanism had been used as a legitimating ideology for racism and colonialism. However, unlike most postmodernists and postcolonialists – none of whom has offered a politically enabling alternative to the humanism that drove the anti-colonial project and which still has powerful and popular political resonance in various struggles against neo-colonialism and local domination – they did not see this as a reason for opposing humanism. Their view was that this was a perverted form of humanism as it objectified the bulk of humanity. Hence Sartre opened his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* by arguing that: "Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives" (In Fanon, 1976:8). The anti-colonial humanists thought that the solution was to retain the idea of humanism but to expand it to include all of humanity. Hence Biko's passionate commitment to a "true humanity" (1996:47) and Aimé Césaire's attachment to "a true humanism ... a humanism made to the measure of the world" (1972:56) as opposed to a humanism made to measure to some reifying idea of what humanity should be that serves the interests of some predatory elite. Like, for example, the 19th century humanitarian movement

in the Western Cape that opposed slavery but supported measures to force Africans off their land and in to wage labour in the name of humanism.¹⁰

But anti-colonial thinkers have not only sought to separate racist perversions of humanism (which would be reactionary humanisms in the terms elaborated above) from true humanism (which would be a radical humanism in the terms elaborated above) as part of a general project of ideological deracialisation that includes, say, separating eugenics from true biology. On the contrary, anti-colonial thinkers have consistently employed humanistic ideas and registers with particular vigour for the specific purpose of asserting the humanity of the dehumanised. In an important essay on African-American philosophy Lewis Gordon concludes that “I have perused the texts of African-American theoretical work from a multitude of ideological perspectives, and I have constantly found that all these texts culminate in a statement on humanism and the philosophic problematic of the human being” (1998:1). For Gordon the position on humanism is the key point of difference

between paths taken by European and dominant cultural thinkers in the New Worlds versus the conquered and colonized communities in the realm of ideas. Take, for instance, the recent declarations of the death of “man” and humanism in postmodern thought. It is not only African-American moderns, but also African-American postmoderns like Cornel West and Patricia Hill Collins, who find such declarations difficult to stomach. West and Collins consider themselves humanists for obvious reasons; dominant groups can “give up” humanism for the simple fact that their humanism is presumed, while other communities have struggled too long for the humanistic prize. To tell them that the human being is passé is to render them too late on the scene, much like, unfortunately, the 1980s and 1990s phenomenon of black mayors of cities whose capital has already taken flight (1998:1).

¹⁰ See Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652 – 2002* (2002:201 – 204).

Fanon's political project is centrally concerned with revolutionary opposition to situations – metropolitan racism, colonialism and neo-colonialism – in which the humanity of some is not recognised in symbolic and material terms. So, with regard to the former he, as noted in the previous chapter, looks forward to a world that will “recognize...the open door of every consciousness” (1967a:232). And with regard to the latter he looks forward to, from the very beginning of his first book, a world in which “things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places” (1967a:12). His positive vision is of a world in which everyone can be “a living man (sic), working and creating himself (sic)” (Fanon, 1976:253). “[A] prospect”, he writes, “is human because conscious and sovereign men (sic) dwell therein” (1976:165). His affirmation of an anti-ideological humanism is predicated on his existential ontology which is fundamentally open. In other words his humanism is theoretically serious and not just a mobilising tool to be deployed for the consumption of the masses.

Fanon's humanism does not, in the mode in which analytical philosophy often approaches ethics, seek to deduce a set of universal ethical principles that can then be applied to all situations. In the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks* he writes that “the moral law is not certain of itself” (1967a:227) and he is very clear that ethical projects, personal and collective, must be under permanent construction. Moreover, they need to begin from, and remain attentive to, the changing nature of a particular situation. A project must “start from living reality” (1976:167) and remain attentive to the fact that situations change living reality – “Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time” (1967a:13). And so, for example, while *négritude* or the nation may, at one point, be an essential vehicle for enabling the transformation of Us-objects into We-subjects these identities may also exhaust their progressive potential. They are neither ends-in-themselves nor means to another end.

They are, when they are functioning to enable mass dialogical participation in the praxis of resistance, the living expression of resistance as it exists at that moment. The fact that struggle has to start from a particular situation means that Fanon does not demand that resistance emerges fully formed. It is always becoming and it is always becoming in the context of a changing situation. Hence the critical importance in his thought of dialectical movement. This is discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Fanon is clear that collective strategies for moving towards humanism must not be reified as humanism. He makes three extremely important arguments in this regard. The first is that “a new humanism...is prefigured in the objectives and methods of the conflict” (1976:198). This does not mean that every mode of resistance must meet an ethics check list drawn up by some academic or struggle bureaucracy. It means that resistance begins where it finds itself and works, from the beginning, for mass reflective and dialogical engagement to produce We-subjects from Us-objects¹¹. Fanon argues that in order for this to be achieved the use of everyday language, the practice of dialogical political education, and commitments to decentralisation and democratisation are essential tools.

The second argument against the reification of attempts to move towards humanism is well summed up in a comment on national consciousness:

The bourgeois leaders of the under-developed countries imprison national consciousness in sterile formalism. It is only when men and women are included

¹¹ This is well explained in Paulo Freire’s Fanonian inspired insistence on struggle as the over coming of objectification (in other words understanding struggle as humanisation):

The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the subject as objects in order later to become human beings (1993:53).

on a vast scale in enlightened and fruitful work that form and body are given to that consciousness (Fanon, 1976:165).

In other words it is the lived experience of a collective project rather than what is claimed about that project that matters. Humanism, therefore, is about the experience of actually existing humans rather than, as is so often the case with human rights, the nature of claims made in this regard.

And then there is the famous argument about the bridge. For Fanon a developmental project is not humanist if it simply delivers development. And so he takes what seems to be a very strong position and goes so far as to argue that: "If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat" (1976:162). Fanon argues that instead of being "'parachuted down' from above"... (it should be)...taken up and conceived, and the responsibility for it assumed by the citizen" (1976:162). So humanism is about a particular quality of experience – the attainment of collective relations premised on individual and collective self creation through reflection on action and action on reflection. He makes a similar argument with regard to developmentalism at a global level in his conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* which, despite its polemical tone, makes his position clear:

No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man (sic), in the company of all men (sic). The caravan should not be stretched out, for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer recognise each other meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less...So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be an obscene caricature (1976:254).

This is not to deny the materiality of misanthropic relations of domination. It is an affirmation of the need to enable, as means and end, the conscious, reflective, dialogical and collective assumption of historical agency.

If one sees the capture of state or other power as the central goal of struggle, or if one sees the achievement of some particular social arrangement as the goal of post-colonial politics, then some sort of two-stage thinking ('obey now, critique can flourish after we have won') makes some sense. But if we are with Fanon then we must conclude that "leaders who deny praxis [the opportunity for reflection and action] to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis" (Freire, 1993:107). Ato Sekyi-Otu explains that for Fanon "the ultimate virtue of the revolution, the goal of historical action, is not the conquest of power but the resurrection of repressed questions and the disclosure of 'unexpressed values'" (2003:17). Nigel Gibson comes to a similar understanding when he concludes that for Fanon "the test of a successful decolonization lay in the degree of human self-determination" (2003:178). And for Lewis Gordon "the call is to fight, to struggle against the system of his oppression. But in that struggle, Fanon calls for a pedagogy to build a questioning humanity" (2000:35).

2.5 Fanon's humanism and the question of violence

It seems inevitable that, when writing or speaking about Fanon's humanism, one will be told that Fanon's claim to humanism is rendered unacceptable by his endorsement of violence. Indeed, Fanon is routinely reduced to an 'apostle of violence' on the basis of his theoretical and material support of armed resistance to the extraordinarily violent French suppression of the Algerian independence movement. Said calls this a "caricatural reduction more suited to the Cold War than to what Fanon actually says and to how he says it" (1999:209). But there

is also a significant degree to which this caricature is motivated by two common articulations of the racist double standard that predated, and has outlived, the Cold War and which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, led Fanon to conclude of white reason: “where I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer” (1967:119-120).

White reason¹² is, by definition, not present when black oppression or black resistances require acknowledgement. Mainstream Western thought, which remains materially dominant in many elite African publics, is well able to recognise that certain situations are an intolerable ethical scandal but unable to recognise others as such. This inconsistency is often highly racialised.

Lewis Gordon observes that, under colonialism

in the midst of thousands of colored deaths, it is the loss of an occasional white life that tips into the consciousness of the world – the world, in this case, usually coded as ‘free’ or ‘civilized’ which means, ultimately, European, Western, White (1995:76).

This remains the case in the contemporary world. Hence Raj Patel and Philip McMichael (2004) defend Paul Gilroy’s use of the term global fascism to describe colonial and neo-colonial reality on the grounds of empirical claims about the scale, nature and severity of colonial and neo-colonial modes of oppression, and arguments about how the language used to describe oppression as extreme is often reserved for certain groups of people. Gordon makes a second crucial point: “As long as the justice of the *status quo* is presumed, *any* response that portends real change will take the form of violence” (1995:77). Together these three points enable us to recognise the pervasive horror at the supposedly violent Fanon as, in significant

¹² White reason is reason mediated through the idea of Whiteness. It is not the case that the reason of all white people is always White. It is also not the case that the reason of all black people is necessarily immune from mediation through Whiteness.

part, a racist blindness to the extreme systemic oppression against which Fanon, and the movement of which he was part, was in rebellion.

The racist double standard is equally evident in the absence of any scandal about the fact that most of the political philosophers in the Western canon gave theoretical endorsement to the use of liberatory violence in certain circumstances - Sartre's support for the (violent) Resistance always counts in his favour and so on. It seems that many people are still not ready for a black man who does not carry his gun for the U.S. military.¹³

Actually reading Fanon shows that he was appalled by violence. The sceptical have Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography to make it clear that the author of *Concerning Violence*, the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, was always "horrified by it" (de Beauvoir, 1983:609). We have no similar evidence that, for example, John Locke was similarly appalled at the violence that sustained the slave trade that generated his prosperity. But Locke is not routinely placed on trial. His whiteness usually means that he does not require witnesses.

It is tempting to leave all that there. But the association of Fanon with violence is so strong that it is generally necessary to continue and to point out that, as Ato Sekyi-Otu shows, Fanon's comments on violence are routinely misinterpreted as 'a doctrinal prescription' when they are better understood as a "dramatic dialectical narrative" (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:4); that is Fanon is giving an account of what happens in certain situations and not an account of what he desires to happen. It is also worth pointing to Lewis Gordon's insightful argument that Fanon's comments on violence should be read through the prism of dramatic tragedy - "a

¹³ In an excellent (and in fact humanist) reading of *Othello* Ben Okri notes that "When a black man is portrayed as noble in the West it usually means he is neutralized. When white people speak so highly of a black man's nobility they are usually referring to his impotence" (1997:77). It is instructive to contrast

tragic text about a tragic world” (Gordon, 1995:83). Fanon did not create the colonial situation where ordinary white life is sustained by black oppression and placed at risk by black rebellion. Merleau-Ponty argued that “Marxism is the only humanism which dares to develop its consequences” (1964:215). This is a useful phrase and if we consider the context of a very violent French defence of a very brutal colonialism it is clear that a humanism seeking to take itself seriously as a project in that situation – rather than to function as an excuse for inaction – would have to face up to the tragic consequences the situation, constituted by colonial brutality, presents for liberatory praxis.

None of this should be misread as a claim that Fanon’s horror at violence, and his view that it is the regrettably inevitable outcome of colonial situations, means that he does not endorse liberatory violence – he clearly does. But this endorsement needs to be qualified in two important ways. Firstly Fanon does not, as the vast majority of commentators (sympathetic and hostile) assume, prescribe violence as some kind of general solution to the colonial condition. On the contrary he makes it very clear that his endorsement of the violence of the Algerian struggle was in response to a particular situation:

If we have taken the example of Algeria to illustrate our subject, it is not at all with the intention of glorifying our own people, but simply to show the important part played by the war in leading them towards consciousness of themselves. It is clear that other peoples have come to the same conclusion in different ways. We know for sure that in Algeria the test of force was inevitable; but other countries through political action and through the work of clarification undertaken by a party have led their people to the same results (1976:155).

This is hardly the statement of man who fetishised violence. Secondly, Fanon’s endorsement of violence in the Algerian liberation struggle is given within the context of an ethical

the white and Western reception of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela with Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X or, indeed, Frantz Fanon.

commitment to existential good faith that requires the person who has decided to resist armed domination with counter liberatory force to move, dialectically, towards a recognition of the full humanity of the enemy. Even here, where people are perhaps most tempted to collapse into bad faith – killing people is not easy, objectification is very attractive in this context – Fanon insists on a dialectical (experiential) development towards the utmost ethical responsibility. If we must grow, via reflection on experience, to reject the temptation to objectify the armed oppressor before attacking and possibly killing him – then our violence is hardly likely to become gratuitous and we are only likely to carry it out when to fail to do would result in more inhumanity.

For some it is specifically Fanon's claims that violence can liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor from self and other objectification that is objectionable. Sekyi-Otu and Gordon's observations apply to this claim but there is also an enormous amount of evidence from accounts of the lived experience of oppression to indicate that Fanon (and, indeed respectable white Hegel – whom Fanon uses to give philosophic content to his argument on the liberatory potential of liberatory violence¹⁴) is quite right. Consider just one: Frederick Douglass's account of the aftermath of his fight with notorious 'Negro Breaker' Covey:

I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before; I was a man now. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a *free* man...He only can understand the effect of this combat on my spirit, who has himself incurred something, hazarded something in repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant. Covey was a tyrant and a cowardly one withal. After resisting him, I felt as I never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward...but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of independence. I had reached the point at which

¹⁴ For Hegel "The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (1977: 114).

I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, though I remained a slave in *form*(1996:103).

I will not address the claim by the new right – people like Paul Johnson¹⁵ and Anthony Daniels¹⁶ - that Fanon's work is responsible for the fate of post-colonial Algeria except to say that, as with the ANC, there were struggles within a struggle. Indeed, the attacks on the bodies and ideas of FLN progressives by right wing nationalists began before independence was won. These attacks threatened Fanon and cost the lives of some of his closest comrades, including Abane Ramdane. It is a somewhat desperate irony that the poet, Kéita Fodéba, who Fanon quotes at length in the chapter *On National Culture* in *The Wretched of the Earth*, was later killed by the same Sékou Touré cited at the beginning of that chapter, after Touré became the tyrannical Leader of Guinea and engaged in a “manic hunt for conspirators” (Sekyi-Out, 1996:41). It is difficult to imagine that Fanon would not have risked a similar fate in Algeria after the 1988 clampdown that left 500 dead. Macey's account holds that Josie Fanon, Frantz's wife, committed suicide in direct response to the FLN's descent into murderous oppression:

From the balcony of her flat in the El Biar district, Josie Fanon watched the youths of Algiers setting police vehicles on fire, and the troops opening fire on them. Speaking on the telephone [to her friend Assia] Djebbar, she sighed: 'Oh Frantz, the wretched of the earth again' (Macey, 2000: 506-507).

¹⁵ See, especially, *Intellectuals* (1988) pp. 245 – 246 and *Modern Times* (1992) p. 697.

¹⁶ 'Frantz Fanon: the platonic form of resentment', *The New Criterion*, May 2001

2. 6 Fanon's prayer

As I have noted, and will note again, Fanon concludes *Black Skin, White Masks* with a prayer: "My final prayer: Oh my body, make of me a man who always questions" (1967:232). There are many moments when Fanon's passionate synthesis of logical analysis, polemic and poetry is beautiful in the way the writings of a religious mystic can be beautiful. Consider, as one example, the following remarks in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

We must join (the people)...in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light (1976:182-183).

Hardt and Negri present revolutionary humanism as a secular and, indeed, anti-religious philosophy. Yet they claim Spinoza, a pantheist who sought to remove the sacred from the distant heavens and rediscover it in the here and now, as an intellectual ancestor, and they end their book by celebrating Saint Francis of Assisi as an icon of immanent militancy. Like Buddhism, Pantheism is often characterised as a form of religious atheism but, as leading Spinoza scholar Anthony Quinton says: "We must admit that in the emotional economy of human life as a whole these attitudes are genuinely religious, even if they are directed towards objects which are not the familiar objects of religious attitudes in our culture" (Cited in Magee, 1988:107). This is not a new departure for radical thought. Thomas Paine is described as proposing a "religion of humanity" (Cited in Davies, 1996: 26) and Ludwig Feuerbach proposed that "man is God to man" (Cited in Davies, 1996: 28).

Marx was explicitly anti-religion. Indeed he argued that “the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism” (1992:244).¹⁷ But Erich Fromm argues that Marx was “deeply rooted in the spiritual, though non-theistic tradition, which stretches not only from Spinoza, and Goethe to Hegel, but which also goes back to Prophetic Messianism” (2004:59). For Fromm, Marxism

is the synthesis of the prophetic-Christian idea of society as the plane of spiritual realisation, and of the idea of individual freedom. For this reason, it is opposed to the Church because of its restriction of the mind, and to liberalism because of its separation of society and moral values...Socialism is the abolition of human self-alienation, the return of man as a real human being (2004:55).

Marx’s work shows no sign of the Nietzschean fear that atheism will necessarily lead to a destructive nihilism but he is careful to point out that atheism is, in and by itself, no guarantee of social progress. He saw no necessary connection between atheism and humanism and argued that “Communism begins where atheism begins...but, atheism is at the outset still far from being communism; indeed it is still for the most part an abstraction” (1983:151). So he does not assume, as Hardt and Negri do, that the mere refusal of the transcendent guarantees a radical ethic.

The religious aspect of Fanon’s way of writing could be dismissed as a mere question of style with no significance to the content of Fanon’s work. But I would argue that it is a fundamental part of his rebellion against objectification - material and symbolic. For a start, his style was deliberate. When Francis Jeanson, an editor on *Les Temps Modernes*, asked Fanon to clarify a phrase that he had used in an article he replied that: “I cannot explain that phrase more fully. I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader...That is to say, irrationally -

¹⁷ He also argues that “The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that for man the supreme being is man, and thus with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased,

almost sensually” (Cited in Ehlen, 2000:103). Fanon’s way of writing is not a unique idiosyncrasy. Paget Henry (2000) has argued, persuasively, that this aspect of Fanon’s work should be understood as part of a poeticist movement in Caribbean writing that sought to inspire new sensibilities.

And Fanon’s work does have an unusually transformative impact for many people. George Jackson’s prison diary, *Soledad Brother* provides classic testimony in this regard and the Third Worldist journal, *Partisans*, spoke for many when its editors noted that “anyone who has...read those pages that blaze with lucidity, inevitably finds born in them a new vision of men and a burning desire to take the dimensions of this vision into the future” (Cited in Macey, 2000:23). Sympathetic commentators, of the highest intellectual status, seem unable to resist metaphors of light when describing Fanon’s work and life. Words like ‘brilliant’, ‘radiant’ ‘incandescent’, and ‘luminescence’ abound. Of course a lot of people, amongst whom many make major contributions to the radical humanist project, are not inspired by this way of writing and some even find it overblown and melodramatic. I merely note that it inspires many, and do not claim, or even suggest, that everybody should write like this or be inspired by this kind of writing. Different approaches work differently for different people at different moments in their lives. We do not have to choose between jazz and dub and blues and punk and drum’n’bass....

A commitment to immanence can be rooted in, or opposed by, a religious sensibility. And it is equally clear that neither atheism nor secularism guarantee respect for humanity. On the contrary, secular ideologies, particularly those based on historicism (be they in the name of Communism, Development or The Market) and Herbert Spencer style perversions of

enslaved, neglected and contemptible being” (1992:251).

Darwinism, have legitimated the most appallingly anti-human actions. The critique of (secular) instrumental reason is well established.

The religious tone of Fanon's work allows him to retain a sense of the sacred via the religious mode of apprehension best described as awe or reverence. A sense of the sacred can be reactionary but when, as with Fanon, it is located, in a neo-pantheistic manner, in the creative powers of ordinary people rather than in any fetish, abstraction or transcendent realm, it is revolutionary. What this means is that in Fanon's work there is no extra-human transcendent realm. Rather, he chooses to accord transcendent value to the capacity of each human individual to create themselves in the world and to create liberatory events (events which enable a collective assumption of agency) in the immanent realm – hence the resonance of Hegel's concept of concrete universal. The fact that liberatory events such as, in the most obvious example, revolutionary violence, will at times do damage to individuals, does not indicate a contradiction. Not acting and therefore allowing oppression to continue also has costs and, so, Fanon asserts that:

[E]verybody will have to be compromised in the fight for the common good. No one has clean hands; there are no innocents and no onlookers. We all have dirty hands; we are all soiling them in the swamps of our country and in the terrifying emptiness of our brains. Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor (1976:161).

The value that Fanon gives to the recognition of freedom, and to events that enhance this in the symbolic and material spheres, provides an ethical reference point, a capacity for ethical assessment and a source of ethical inspiration. We are not left with the 'flat' or 'empty' secularism that so often sinks into nihilism or, when it claims to choose progressive principles, a sterile technicism. While orthodox religion has often been presented as the great enemy of

immanence many, and probably most of the popular, and therefore effective, prophets of humanistic immanence have, despite their hostility to orthodox religion, had a markedly religious tone to their thought – examples include William Blake, Walt Whitman, Woody Guthrie, John Steinbeck, Pablo Neruda, Bob Marley and Bruce Springsteen.

However it seems that, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) note, it is difficult for philosophers and schools of philosophy to sustain a commitment to immanence. The most historically significant example of this is Marxism. The *Theses on Feuerbach* is a clear attack on secular thought which “raises itself above itself and establishes for itself an independent realm in the clouds” and a defence of “revolutionary practice” as “practical, human-sensuous activity” (1983:156). But many of Marx’s followers, including the bureaucrats of the Soviet Union came to believe that, as Engels put it in his eulogy at Marx’s funeral: “Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history” (Engels in Marx, 1983:68).

Fanon never falls into this trap. He never abandons his commitment to immanence. He never seeks a justification for his revolutionary passions that is external to the lived realities that inspire and contain them. His work, despite its incandescent passion, is always characterised by a lightness - an openness. He does not turn his immanent existential humanism into a new transcendence beyond the creative powers of ordinary people. But his vision could be called spiritual in the sense that Viktor Frankl uses the term. Frankl, who identifies himself as an existential humanist, argues (1985) that the human being has a will-to-meaning and that this, together with the capacity to choose, gives the human being a spiritual dimension. This sense of spiritual - that is when ‘spiritual’ refers to a free being’s will-to-meaning rather than the possession of a non-material soul or a human connection with God - would allow us to

describe Fanon's work as spiritual and to speculate that some of its power to inspire radical humanist subjectivities may inhere in its spirituality. A spirituality that, unlike that of certain forms of orthodox religion, does not preclude human freedom. Indeed, Fanon's prayer, with its hope that the experience of oppression can make him a man who always questions, makes it clear that this is a spirituality *of* human freedom.

This sense that there is some sacred potential in humanity, a potential which can and is actualised from time to time, can lead to a sense of reverence and therefore of respect for human (self and world making) creativity. And this feeling, this subjectivity, has an extraordinarily persuasive power. Not simply in that it wins readers to Fanon's project but also in that it can create, in the reader, the subjectivities that generate an emotional or, in Frankl's terms, a spiritual identification with what is human. This can, in turn, inspire action aimed at realising a more human world - where 'human' describes the realisation of the positive potential for the assumption of agency that exists in every human being.

Bakunin realised that this mode of apprehension carries with it extraordinary power when he wrote that "we are the sons of the Revolution and we have inherited from it the Religion of Humanity which we have to found upon the ruins of the Religion of Divinity" (1953:142). If atheism or secularism is understood to necessarily lead to the abandonment of these modes of apprehending and being in the world, then secularism strips humanity of a mode of being that generates and focuses powerful energies. This could be likened to throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water. The listlessness and anomie that result may not be overtly reactionary but they are hardly able to fuel the energies required for real transformation.

There are at least three great dangers in shifting transcendent value from a transcendent realm and into the immanent realm inhabited by actually existing humanity. The first is the temptation, which has been such a problem for the left, to assume that there is a particular category of people that have a unique ontological priority that includes a particular capacity to act as *the* revolutionary agent that will redeem all of humanity. A universal ontological priority has been claimed for the proletariat, peasants, students, women, homosexuals, blacks and a variety of other groups. Fanon would agree that certain groups have an ontological priority in experiencing and resisting certain situations but he does not, *pace* the widespread Third Worldist misreading of his work in the 70s, see the Third World peasantry and urban poor as a universally revolutionary agent with a unique ontological priority across space and time. On the contrary he sees a 'new humanity' arising out of every genuine transcendence of the divisions and hierarchies that push us into unequal spaces and trap us in limited, reductive identities. So Fanon looks forward to "the Third World starting *a*" rather than "*the* new history of Man" (Fanon, 1976:245 my emphasis). A new history founded on "not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man" (Fanon, 1976:198) and thus logically and necessarily inhabited by a "new man" (Fanon, 1976:255). That does not mean that the overcoming of colonialism is the end of history. It just means that it is one step forward. Particular groups of people do have a particular stake in particular struggles but there is no particular group able to permanently redeem all of humanity across space and time.

The second danger risked with proposing transcendent value in humanity is the fetishisation of a particular liberatory project. Heidegger, writing about ontological striving in general, makes the point that:

striving can be an inauthentic comportment...Striving is then fixed in *one* direction. This self-consuming striving then leads to the destruction of the inauthentic self...What is striven for is not *had*, but on the contrary *has* the striver, in such a way that the latter is ensnared within his own striving and loses sight of his ownmost self. Such striving is all the more ensnaring for its appearance of activity, vitality and diversity (2002:154).

Individuals and groups can loose themselves in projects that began as a liberatory movement but become fetishized as *the* liberatory movement, either at the expense of other liberatory movements or after the movement in question is no longer liberatory. When bad faith re-emerges, new relations of domination are likely to be inscribed. For example Renate Zahar argues that *négritude* shifted from "a revolutionary movement to an ideology of the establishment" (1974:68) and cites Ezekiel Mphahlele's description of its latter incarnation as "the intellectual pastime of a governing elite" (Mphahlele cited by Zahar,1974:68). Fanon never collapses into this form of bad faith. His entire project is premised on engagement with the particular situation, but because he takes very seriously the fact that situations change he never collapses into the bad faith inherent in fixing a particular situation as a permanent reality. Moreover he proposes a dialectic that reaches towards the universal from the particular. This general characteristic of his work, a feature of his philosophy that is discussed in the following chapter, is concretised in his well known comment on internationalism: "Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of the history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows" 1976:199). The ethics that he proposes, although it moves from a militant and complete engagement with the particular, moves toward the universal. Consider the following two remarks in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

I cannot disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother. Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man (1967a:88-9).

Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act (1967a:226).

A third danger of postulating transcendent value in humanity is that militants risk appropriating this value for themselves by objectifying themselves as highly ethical agents that (must) stand outside of the messiness of the lived experience of actual struggle. But while Fanon's praxis of action and reflection within the FLN produces an acute awareness that there are struggles within struggles, and that the most noble struggles can produce new forms of domination or ossify into sclerosis, he provides no alibi for a fear of commitment to the real and insists that "one should not lose sight of the real" (Fanon, 1967a:83). Fanonian philosophy accords precisely with Hegel's famous criticism of the conscience for which "Anything that exists *an sich* is demoted to a mere moment" (1977:574) with the result that

Consciousness, the relation of mind to something objective, has vanished into empty self-consciousness, and what we have is really the untruth of the moral consciousness rather than its truth. What emerges out of this emptying of morality is the beautiful soul, which is too fine to commit itself to anything. It lacks force to externalize itself and endure existence. It does not want to stain the radiance of its pure conscience by deciding to do anything particular. It keeps its heart pure by fleeing from contact with actuality and preserving its impotence. Its activity consists in yearning, and it is like a shapeless vapour fading into nothingness (Hegel, 1977:575-576).

The commitment to action requires us to reject the attractions of a sentimentality abstracted from the sometimes difficult work of actually existing struggle. Fanon, in other words, demands a political praxis that is an engagement with the real rather than the bad faith of the development of a political identity for the militant that, while allowing her to appear committed (to herself and to others), actually functions to shield her from the challenges of the real.

Fanon's most fundamental and consistent political question is a direct challenge to every alibi that a radical humanist could employ to legitimate inaction:

[A]ll the problems which man faces on the subject of man can be reduced to this one question: 'Have I not, because of what I have done or failed to do, contributed to an impoverishment of human reality?' The question could also be formulated in this way: 'Have I at all times demanded and brought out the man that is in me?' (1967b:34).

But where does the fundamental ethical commitment to 'bring out the man' (sic) come from? Who is obligated to adhere to it and why? To answer these questions in a way that takes Fanon's critical ontology seriously it is useful to go back to Sartre. Sartre concludes *Being and Nothingness* by asserting that: "Ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts" (1992:795). Since David Hume philosophy has largely agreed that an empirical 'is' can not generate an ethical 'ought'. Sartre does not, however, leave the matter there. He goes on to argue that his work on ontology has shown that we must, to avoid bad faith:

repudiate the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness has two characteristics: it considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity and it transfers the quality of "desireable" from the ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution (1992:796).

Sartre explains that the spirit of seriousness puts us

on the moral plane but concurrently on that of bad faith, for it is an ethics which is ashamed of itself and does not dare speak its name. It has obscured all its goals in order to free itself from anguish. Man (sic) pursues being blindly by hiding from himself the free project which is this pursuit...he is nothing in himself but the passive obedience to these demands (1992:796).

So to accept an ethics that is assumed to exist as an objective fact outside of consciousness is a form of bad faith. Ethics becomes a question of subjection rather than choice. Gordon explains that "We regard the spirit of seriousness as a form of bad faith because it calls for the

elimination of the anguish of responsibility over values: objectified values negate the anguish of being responsible for those values by living them" (2000:122).

Fanon, as was shown in the last chapter, rejects all ontologies that blame the oppressed for their position in society. He historicises domination instead of naturalising it. Furthermore he understands human beings to be free and, therefore, to be able to develop into historical agents. This means that any attempt to, in his phrase, "encase man" (1967a:230) via any assumption of an objectifying ontology has to be predicated on a denial of truth. However, it is not the case that an acceptance of the truth of human existential freedom necessarily commits one to work to realise a recognition of that freedom. On the contrary, it is entirely possible to recognise that each consciousness is open but, in full awareness of this, to seek to dominate. This is, after all, precisely what Nietzsche recommends. Moreover even if we did allow 'is' to slip into 'ought', ethics would then collapse into the spirit of seriousness. How then are we to make sense of Fanon's comments that seek to imply a fixed ethics? Consider the fuller context of his comment about not encasing man (sic):

No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free. The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom (1967a:230).

How can he assert existential freedom so clearly in this rejection of historical determinism but at the same time argue that it is the destiny of man (sic) to be set free? If destiny is understood as something inevitable then Fanon has collapsed back into historical determinism and there appears to be a direct contradiction. However, if human freedom is Fanon's freely chosen project then, for him and others who choose this project, human reality must be considered from the point of view of this project. In this case Fanon is optimistic, perhaps with historical

hindsight too optimistic, but not contradictory. This seems to be the best way to read Fanon. Perhaps his most useful comment on the question of how his ethics is derived is as follows: "What an idealist people will say. Not at all: It is just that the others are scum" (1967a:33). The others are not ignorant or poorly informed. They are scum. This seems to indicate a commitment to a chosen project rather than an appeal to an ethics that inheres in the essence of the world, an appeal to authority or an attempt to arrive at a foundational ethical principle by logical deduction.

2. 5. Conclusion

It has been said that Fanon often functions more like a Rorschach test than a theorist. As Lewis Gordon notes the problem is not that Fanon is not clear – it is that many people have not felt that they need to read Fanon before opining on his work. Fanon is taken as a symptom rather than an historical actor engaged in action and reflection. As Gordon points out the convenience with which this fits with the racist assumption that blacks provide experience and whites provide ideas is not accidental. Much of the secondary literature on Fanon provides an instructive example of how profoundly theory can be disembowelled as it travels. Nigel Gibson gives a particularly good account of how Fanon's work has been misappropriated in cultural studies and post-colonialism in a way that "emphasizes uncertainty and fragmentation, almost replacing social analysis with psychoanalysis" (1999b:101). In view of the academic currency of the image of Fanon so sucked into endless spirals of speculation about the complexities and ambiguities of identity that he appears to be a Lacanian theorist with no meaningful concern outside of himself, it is necessary to conclude by repeating that Fanon was militantly opposed to any attempt to posit ontological claims as solutions to material problems. Fanon is what he says he is: a revolutionary humanist.

This chapter has explained the distinction between radical and revolutionary humanism, defended the value of the latter and argued that Fanon's humanism is well described as revolutionary. The previous chapter laid the foundations for the assertion that Fanon's humanism is theoretical serious. The next chapter will begin the discussion of how Fanon understands the movement towards humanising a misanthropic world.

Chapter 3

Dialectical Praxis

We African politicians must have very clear ideas on the situation of our people. But this clarity of ideas must be profoundly dialectical.

- Fanon (1976:156)

3.1 Introduction

Writing on Fanon's thinking of dialectical praxis often frames its project as an elaboration, defence or critique of 'Fanon's dialectic' – or, in other words, as an engagement with the particular story that Fanon tells about how a personal struggle against metropolitan racism, or a national struggle against colonialism and then neo-colonialism, unfolds. There is a much to be learned from an examination of these particular accounts of particular resistances but to read them as if they were universally authoritative scripts, rather than reflections on engagements with particular historical situations, would not be to read Fanon as a Fanonian. On the contrary, fidelity to Fanon's philosophical project requires us to consider his thinking of dialectical praxis primarily in terms of what can be learned about the rationality of revolt. The central claim of the argument elaborated here is that Fanon's dialectical philosophy is a mode of political engagement characterised by ongoing critical reflection on experience within movements of revolt against objectification.

Dialectical philosophy has suffered serious abuse at the hands of various forms of what Foucault described as "the terrorists of theory, those who would preserve the pure order of politics and political discourse. Bureaucrats of the revolution and civil servants of Truth" (1983:xii). Very many of those who have sought to subordinate the restlessness and untidiness of actual life and

actual struggle to abstracted theories of politics have done so in the name of *the* dialectic (often, although not inevitably, the definitive article is telling). Nevertheless I propose that, as with the idea of humanism (not to mention liberation, freedom, etc.) the idea of dialectical movement is too important to abandon to its debasers. Consequently this chapter begins with a general outline of the central aspects of dialectical philosophy as understood in the radical tradition that begins from Marx's appropriation of Hegelian philosophy. This section also looks at some common critiques of dialectical philosophy and argues that they do not apply to critical and non-dogmatic conceptions of dialectical praxis. This next section looks more specifically at Fanon's dialectical philosophy. I begin with an overview of how the secondary literature has understood the dialectical aspect of Fanon's work before moving onto a closer consideration of what Ato Sekyi-Otu calls Fanon's 'deviant Hegelianism.' Here a key argument is that Fanon, unlike Hegel, is willing to commit absolutely to the negative moment. The next section considers Fanon's arguments about the need to transcend the Manicheanism that gives birth to revolt. The most important argument here is that, for Fanon, reflection on the experience within the movement of revolt must develop that movement towards a more rational understanding of its project. This leads on to the final section which focuses on Fanon's idea that the experience of struggle produces truths that can guide the development of the movement of revolt. I conclude that Fanon's dialectical philosophy is the logic of the praxis that stems from his existential ontology and radical humanist ethics.

3.2 Dialectical philosophy

Martin Heidegger observed that "Discussions about the dialectic are like an attempt to explain a surging fountain in terms of the stagnant waters of the sewer" (Sekyi-Otu:101). Although there is

some truth to this, there are things that can be usefully said. Indeed, Fanon was sufficiently interested in the practical import of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* for the praxis of struggle to give lectures on the book to FLN troops in Tunisia (Macey, 2000:453).

There are a number of key concepts in the radical tradition of dialectical philosophy that begins from Marx's attempt to turn Hegel on his feet¹ and in which Fanon was an important innovator. The ideas central to this school of dialectical philosophy include a focus on both ways of seeing the world and acting in the world. Two central concepts with regard to the former are the importance given to movement and to totality. Dialectical philosophy recommends that society should not be analysed in a way that reifies the present by excluding a consideration of the past and potential futures. The liberatory consequence of this is that oppression is historicised rather than being naturalised, and is therefore not reified as an essential or fixed condition. The focus on totality serves a similar function. By attempting to understand as many of the forces that produce reality as is possible, the dialectical mode of analysis seeks to avoid the fetish of reductionism (e.g. culturalism, economism, a particular national drama, etc.) and to develop an accurate as possible understanding of the multi-casual production of reality. This does not mean that any final explanation is proposed. On the contrary, the development of a dialectical analysis of a social situation will be a continually self critical and expansive project that remains attentive to the ways in which things are changing. Dialectical philosophy also focuses on contradiction. Contradiction is considered as both a mode of analysis and action. As a mode of analysis it considers social

¹ "Hegel has merely discovered the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression of the movement of history. This movement of history is not yet the *real* history of man" (Marx 1992:382).... "the result is the dialectic of pure thought" (Marx 1992:384).

"In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men" (Marx 1983:169).

contradictions to be particularly important because they can enable the production of radical changes in social relations. As a mode of action contradictions are important because radical changes in social relations in favour of the dominated are desired. Dialectical philosophy is also characterised by a commitment to certain modes of praxis. Philosophers have taken a range of positions here but there is a general view that the dialectical mode of analysis (focussing on movement, totality and contradiction) needs to be linked to a political project aimed at actively pushing social contradictions towards a radical change in favour of the dominated. Humanist Marxist philosophy has sought to adhere to a praxis committed to the view that disalienation – the recognition of freedom and the assumption of historical agency – must be fought for within, as well as from struggles, and must be fought for endlessly. The ethical foundation inherent in the idea of dialectical movement as disalienating movement means that dialectical praxis is not a fetish of destruction. On the contrary, it is a commitment to the creative movement of disalienation that is willing to destroy to defend itself. This does not mean that it is proposed to, again, subordinate reality to fantasy by, this time, subordinating the actually existing enemies of some metaphysical hope to that hope. This is because creative negative movement is as real as what it opposes. This is a philosophy of reality – of immanence. In the words of Marx and Engels:

Communism is for us not a stable state which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence (Marx and Engels 1983:179)

Although thinkers like John Holloway² and Alain Badiou³ are reinvigorating dialectical philosophy, a general suspicion endures. Much of this can be ascribed to the fact that Marxism, especially in the hands of party and state bureaucrats, has consistently, and often effectively, misrepresented Marx's dialectical philosophy as the postulation of an extra-human historical determinism. A lot of textual exegesis, some of it very persuasive,⁴ has been developed to show that Marx did not propose a deterministic dialectic. One of the most important arguments in this regard is Raya Dunayevskaya's work on the negative dialectic. She argues that the division of Marx's work into an early youthful humanism and a later mature scientific economism is false and posits the *1844 Manuscripts* as the philosophical foundation to all of Marx's later work.⁵ Here Marx affirms "the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle" (1992:386). The significance of this is that, as in Marx's reading of Hegel, dialectical movement is driven by the "negation of the negation, not synthesis...not synthetic cognition, but the dialectic of self development through a double negation" (Dunayevskaya 1989:13). Dunayevskaya explains that, unlike with the triadic form (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) of Fichte and Schelling which assumes a uniting of opposites, negation (and then the negation of the negation) assumes a new beginning that is, crucially, produced from within the contemporary reality constructed by the past, but not scripted by it.

² See, especially, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002).

³ See, especially, "Democratic Materialism and Dialectic" (2005).

⁴ Examples include Dunayevskaya (1989), Ollman (2003) and Rees (1998).

⁵ So, for Dunayevskaya:

[T]he general principles of Historical Materialism – the material, objective conditions of human existence, the self-development of labor, of the labourer, as against any "objective" development of mind; the historic processes as against any "eternal truths"; dialectical development through contradiction as against any mechanical, or abstract, contemplative or merely empiric continuity of that which is – is as inseparable from the "mature" Marx as from the young. Indeed nowhere is Marx more "Hegelian" than in the strictly economic Notebooks written in 1857-58 after a full decade of concentration on economics (1989:60).

Furthermore there is no resolution of contradiction. Each negation must be negated in turn. This implies a praxis of permanent critique rather than subordination to some extra-human agency driving historical development in a particular direction. Hence Badiou's remark that by dialectic "we understand the deployment of a critique of all critique" (2005:24).⁶ But if the negation of the negation is still thought in terms of one trajectory of struggle - for example the struggle of the working class or, the Euro-American working class - then dialectical thought will remain open to the critique that, even when putatively radical, it is "the philosophical order's, and perhaps the political order's, way of colonizing...(the) bitter and partisan discourse of basic warfare" (Foucault, 2003:59). It can withstand this critique when it does not reify one struggle and remains open to multiple and contradictory expressions of negativity.

The critique of the dismissal of dialectical philosophy as necessarily teleological is not exhausted by discussion around Marx's arguments. Many philosophers have laboured to develop non-teleological and non-dogmatic conceptions of dialectical movement. However, Sartre's arguments in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* fit particularly well with Fanon's thinking given the existential concerns of both philosophers. Sartre defends a critical and experiential - "it is the very experience of living" (2004:39) - conception of the dialectic against the theoretical dogmatism of Stalin's dialectical materialism. He argues that "the dialectical movement is not some powerful unitary force revealing itself behind History like the will of God. It is first and foremost the resultant" (2004:37). Sartre speculates that the dogmatic understanding of the dialectic emerges when dialectical rationality discovered in situated practice is projected "as an unconditional law" (2004:33) and then reimposed on situated human relations. He is also careful to explain that

⁶ If we accept this then we must also affirm with Holloway that "if critical theory is understood as part of the movement of anti-fetishisation against fetishisation...then it is clear that we are all, in different ways, the subjects of critical theory in so far as we are a part of that movement" (1996:104).

there is no such thing as man; there are people, wholly defined by their society and by the historical movement which carries them along; if we do not wish the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate, it must proceed *from individuals* and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble (2000:32).⁷

This understanding of dialectical philosophy is not susceptible to Antonio Negri's argument that, because dialectical philosophy postulates a transcendent historical force, it diminishes the power of the immanent decision: "Dialectics, in as much as it forms transcendental thinking, denies the decision the power to generate *ex nihilo* (and to produce plenitude, the fullness of being in the void, against the void)" (2003:251). The first problem is that this argument assumes, incorrectly, that all dialectical thinking is transcendent. However there is a more fundamental disagreement because Negri's assumption that there can be generative action out of nothing is, in Sartrean terms, an instance of the bad faith that identifies purely with the freedom of the consciousness without acknowledging that it is situated in a world of facticity.⁸ Sartre also argues that although dialectical

⁷ Hence Sartre's dialectical philosophy would not fall foul of Hannah Arendt's warning against attempts to divine a key to history:

Caution in handling generally accepted opinions that claim to explain whole trends of history is especially important for the historian of modern times, because the last century has produced an abundance of ideologies that pretend to be keys to history but are actually nothing but desperate attempts to escape responsibility (Arendt, 1967:9).

⁸ Negri's position is also opposed to Gramsci's view that 'choice', analogous to Negri's 'decision' is made in a historical context. As Gramsci's biographer explains, for Gramsci: "The past is complex, an interwoven tapestry of the live and the dead, and the choice cannot be made arbitrarily or in an *a priori* fashion, by an individual or political movement" (Fiori, 1970:240). John Holloway's criticism of Negri's opposition to dialectical thought fits well with the Sartrean critique developed here. For Holloway Negri's

concern is to develop the concept of revolutionary power (the *potentia* of the multitude), as a positive, non-dialectical ontological concept. Autonomy is implicitly understood as the existing, positive drive of the potential of the multitude, pushing *potestas* (the power of rulers) onto ever new terrains. To treat the subject as positive is attractive but it is inevitably a fiction. In a world that dehumanizes us, the only way in which we can exist as humans is negatively, by struggling against our dehumanization. To understand the subject as positively autonomous (rather than as potentially autonomous) is rather like a prisoner in a cell imagining that she is already free: an attractive and stimulating idea, but a fiction, a fiction that easily leads onto other fictions, to the construction of a whole fictional world (2002:167).

movement proceeds from the lived experience of individuals in general, particular individuals have to confront it as necessity:

The dialectic as the living logic of action is invisible to a contemplative reason: it appears in the course of praxis as a necessary moment of it; in other words, it is created anew in each action (though actions arise only on the basis of a world entirely constituted by the dialectical praxis of the past) and becomes a theoretical and practical method when action in the course of development begins to give an explanation of itself. In the course of this action, the dialectic appears to the individual as rational transparency is so far as he produces it, and as absolute necessity is so far as it escapes him, that is to say, quite simply, in so far as it is produced by others (Sartre 2002:38).

This idea of necessity, especially given that totality appears as necessity in the sense that it exists as facticity, is very problematic for many postcolonial thinkers influenced by postmodernism⁹ and poststructuralism, who have taken up Nietzsche's affirmation of pluralism and rejection of dialectics. This line of critique often suggests that dialectical thinking has a "preference for the concrete totality over the separate, abstract parts" (Jameson, 1971:4-5) and is therefore inherently totalitarian and unable to recognise that there are multiple forms of life and desire as well as domination and resistance.¹⁰ This leads to an affirmation of plurality that "affirms difference apart

It may also be worth referring the anti-dialectical proponents of a Deleuzian and Negrian politics of free floating desire that will, it is alleged, produce a new order, by the mere fact of being unleashed, back to Hegel's critique of the "The arbitrary caprice of prophetic utterance" exercised without any recognition for the "the seriousness, the suffering, the patience and the labour of the negative" (Hegel, cited in Dunayevskaya, 1989:16).

⁹ It must, however, be noted that not all postmodern thinkers reject dialectical thought. Frederic Jameson, working in a Gramscian spirit, defends dialectical thinking, which he often describes as "stereoscopic thinking" (1992:28), as "reflexivity, self-consciousness" (1992:25).

¹⁰ For example Steven Best and Douglas Kellner explain that for Gilles Deleuze dialectical thought is

a theological outlook where differences are always subsumed to an underlying unity, contradictions always seek a higher synthesis, and movement ultimately results in stasis and death. Lost in scientific abstractions and mired in the logic of identity dialectical thought is "unaware of the real element from which forces, their qualities and their relations derive" and is blind to "the far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms" that constitute reality through the will to power" (1999:171).

from a relation to a 'higher' unity" (Best & Kellner, 1991:82) which in turn can lead to what Sekyi-Otu calls a "fetish of the micro-local" (1996:47). Sekyi-Otu is highly attentive to "challenges from poststructuralist notions of the complexity of ...social agents and the manner in which they configure into structures of meaning and historical action" (1996:20). Nevertheless he is equally aware that there are forces of domination with a global reach with which we would be complicit were we to deny the range and depth of their power:

It may well be that what is ideological in our present circumstances is not at all the question of human universals but rather the idea of absolute difference...What indeed could be more ideological in the postcolonial condition than such a simplistic and reactive relativism...After all, what is our situation? An omnivorous capital that requires repressive local political agencies to discipline their populace into acquiescing to its draconian measures; a free market of material and cultural commodities whose necessary condition of existence is the authoritarian state; the incoherent nationalism of dominant elites who are in reality transmitters and enforcers of capital's coercive universals: this is our historic situation (1996:20).

3.3 Fanon's dialectical philosophy

Fanon made some very direct and clear statements on his theorisation of dialectical praxis. He asserted that "there is no 'objective dialectic' possessing the character of an 'absolutely inevitable mechanism'" (1967b:170) and insisted that "It is rigorously false to pretend and to believe that this decolonization is the fruit of an objective dialectic" (1967b:170).¹¹ Nevertheless Fanon's thinking about dialectical praxis has often been conflated with Stalinist or orthodox Marxist thinking and thus demonstrably misinterpreted as dogmatic and mechanistic. For example Jock McCulloch argues that Fanon postulates a "relentless dialectic...[that]... appears to guarantee genuine independence for the colonial world" (1983:181). McCulloch concludes that the

¹¹ It is, he goes on to argue, "the direct product of the revolutionary action of the African masses" (1967b:171).

"numerous problems that the concept of the relentless dialectic poses...are ignored in Fanon's analysis" (1983: 181). For McCulloch the most central of these problems is that it cannot account for 'false decolonisation.' David Cauter does acknowledge that Fanon was "not...an orthodox Marxist (1970:61) but reads Fanon as "sympathetic to the dialectical method of Marxism" (1970:52) and so fails to consider Fanon's innovations with regard to thinking about dialectical praxis.

The idea of dialectical movement is only directly present in Renate Zahar's *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* via a citation from Sartre. Nevertheless it is implicitly present in both Zahar's sketches of Fanon's various account of the evolution of consciousness within struggle and, more interestingly, the fact that she understands Fanon's work as a theory of movement towards disalienation. Zahar argues that Fanon's thinking about alienation should not be understood in the economic terms of orthodox Marxism but rather, in the manner of the 'early' Marx [she accepts the standard division between the early and later Marx] as "the alienation of man from his own potentialities" (1974:13). Although she does not say much about how this situates Fanon's work in the broader philosophical tradition it is clear that her reading places Fanon as a radical innovator within the dialectical tradition. Fanon's innovations would, from Zahar's reading, centre on an understanding of alienation that - unlike Hegel's idealistic thinking of the dialectic of white recognition¹² or orthodox Marxism's materialistic conception of alienation as the appropriation of

¹² Hegel's racism extends beyond his notorious view that Africa has no history and is, in fact, a passion within his thought and a deliberate justification for flesh and blood (Western) European dominance of the colonised world. As one example of this consider the following comment "The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality-all that we call feeling-if we would rightly comprehend him" (Hegel 2002:17). Also see Gibson (2003:21-22) and Serequeberhan (1998:237) for accounts of Hegel's racist passions.

the products of white labour¹³ - move from a concern with the symbolic and material Manicheanism of metropolitan and colonial racism. By symbolic Manicheanism, I mean ideas and habits of thought and cultural production that produce people who, for example, believe that "The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (Fanon, 1967a:18). By material Manicheanism I mean the physical division of people into separate material situations: "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations" (Fanon, 1976:29). Together symbolic and material Manicheanism produce a situation in which "The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (1976:31).

Many of the thinkers who have read Fanon through the lens of postcolonialism or cultural studies (a lens largely shaped by post-structuralism and polished by post-modernism) have tended to simply abandon Fanon's thinking about the dialectical transformation of the material realm¹⁴

¹³ Orthodox Marxism privileges the experience of the (white) metropolitan working class at the expense of the rest of humanity. Frank Wilderson makes this argument and explores some of the key consequences of this ethnocentrism:

Capital was kick-started by the rape of the African continent. This phenomenon is central to neither Gramsci or Marx. The theoretical importance of emphasising this in the early twenty-first century is two-fold: first, the 'socio-political order of the New World' was kick-started by approaching a particular body (a black body) with direct relations of force, not by approaching a white body with variable capital. Thus, one could say that slavery – the 'accumulation' of black bodies regardless of their utility as labourers through an idiom of despotic power – is closer to capital's primal desire than is waged oppression – the 'exploitation' of unraced bodies (Marx, Lenin, Gramsci) that labour through an idiom of rational/symbolic (the wage) power: A relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony (Wilderson, 2003:229-230).

¹⁴ This is not surprising. Neil Lazarus notes that "dialectical theory is almost universally *discredited* in the various subfields of cultural studies today" (1999:184). As Nigel Gibson argues the Fanon in cultural studies "is a Fanon which emphasizes uncertainty and fragmentation, almost replacing social analysis with psychoanalysis" (1999:101). That, clearly, is not Fanon's Fanon - a man committed to "face the possibility of annihilation in order that two or three truths may cast their eternal brilliance over the world (1967a:227-

(money, space, political power etc.) and to focus purely on Fanon's dialectic of recognition¹⁵ and largely on *Black Skin, White Masks*. This in spite of Fanon's assertion in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* that "the black man's alienation is not an individual question...[and is]... primarily, economic" (1967a:11). Some have gone so far as to argue, against what Fanon says about his philosophical project, that the real strength of Fanon's thought is in his account of the "antidialectical movement of subaltern insistence" (Bhabha, 1990:198). And Christopher Miller, writing in the postmodern vein that Sekyi-Otu characterises as a fetish of micro-local, insists that Fanon subordinates "history...to History, particular to universal, local to global" (1990:50). Ato Sekyi-Otu (1996) and Neil Lazarus (1999) marshal decisive textual evidence against these claims. Lou Turner (1999) shifts through evidence adduced in support of the various accounts of the Algerian war to develop an account of how Fanon's theorising about the struggles to transform national consciousness into social consciousness were directly related to the struggles of, and, crucially, within the FLN. Turner concludes that:

Fanon's thinking on revolution and the party in *The Wretched of the Earth* lies not in an abstract belief in the spontaneity of the masses or in his supposed metaphysics of violence. Instead, the dialectic of a work like *The Wretched of the Earth* flows from the concrete and contradictory relations Fanon witnessed, and at many points participated in, between the organizational vicissitudes of the FLN, the theoretical perspectives of his revolutionary mentor Ramdane Abane, and the dialectics of the Algerian Revolution (1999:386).

Richard Onwuanibe does a lot better than McCulloch, Caute, Zahar, and the poststructuralists, and argues that Fanon stresses developments in the "socio-cultural milieu" in addition to Marx's

8). Gibson (1999b) provides ample textual evidence to decisively refute the cultural studies misreading of Fanon.

¹⁵ See for example Homi Bhabha's influential introduction to the Pluto edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*: 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition' (1999).

narrower focus on economics. He also quotes Fanon's various very clear statements of his rejection of mechanistic dialectics¹⁶ to argue that for Fanon "each person is responsible for shaping his destiny and is not entirely at the mercy of blind forces" (Onwunaibe, 1983:31) and that this position leads Fanon to stress "the human intervention in the dialectics of the historical process of decolonisation on the part of the colonized" (Onwuanibe, 1983:31). But Onwuanibe doesn't take his analysis any further.

The secondary literature on Fanon's thinking of dialectical movement improves markedly with Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. Like Zahar, Said does not focus on Fanon's theorisation of dialectical praxis. In fact he only alludes to the dialectical nature of Fanon's thought by referring to it as "quasi-Hegelian" (1994:323). But he does show how Fanon's analysis "forcibly deforms imperialist culture and its nationalist antagonist in the process of looking beyond both towards liberation" (1994:325). In so far as dialectical thought is predicated on self-transforming negative movement against misanthropic social relations, Said's analysis reveals Fanon's thought to be dialectical.

Lewis Gordon does not take up dialectical praxis as a particular theme of his work on Fanon. But Gordon does make some observations that are important for developing an understanding of the nature of Fanon's conception of dialectical praxis, amongst which is the carefully substantiated argument, referred to in the first chapter, that Fanon "rejects all ontology that puts existence to the

¹⁶ One of the clearest statements by Fanon in this regard is the following:

Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent...the Africans must remember that there is not an objective optimism that is more or less mechanically inevitable, but that optimism must be the sentiment that accompanies the revolutionary commitment and the combat (Cited in revised translation by Onwuanibe, 1983:32).

wayside...(and) demands a 'high-level', rigorous, critical, self-reflective praxis" (Gordon, 1995:35).] +

A philosophy cannot be dialectical, no matter the extent of its theoretical commitment to disalienation, if it is not an ongoing reflection on practice. Holloway makes this point well:

All struggle....involves identification....The difference is between an identification that stops there and an identification that negates itself in the process of identifying. The difference is between conceptualising on the basis of being and conceptualising on the basis of doing. To think on the basis of doing is to identify and, in the same breath, to negate that identification. This is to recognise the inadequacy of the concept to that which is conceptualised: 'The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy' (Adorno). Thinking on the basis of doing means, then, thinking against-and-beyond our own thought: 'We can think against our own thought', and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be definition worth suggesting (2002:102).

Zahar has shown that Fanon's philosophy is a philosophy of movement against racism and colonialism and towards disalienation. Said has shown that Fanon's thought is dialectical, and Onwuanibe and Gordon have shown that Fanon's thought is clearly opposed to all forms of mechanism and historicism that deny agency and is, on the contrary, a philosophy of self-reflective thinking and action, which is to say, self-movement.

The secondary literature on Fanon's conception of dialectical movement takes a major, indeed quantum, leap forward with the work of Ato Sekyi-Otu and Nigel Gibson – Fanon's two most attentive "African-situationist" (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:3) readers. Although Gibson (1999:15) does not accept Sekyi-Otu's (1996:34-36) characterisation of Fanon's writing about dialectical movement as dramaturgical, both philosophers would agree that Fanon's statements, often presented as simple declarations and then later re-evaluated in the light of new experience, must be read within the context of a dialectical movement. And that is a movement in which thinking develops in response

to experience, and never seeks to unshackle itself from its responsibility to confront the particularity of changing situations and, in the spirit of seriousness, set itself up as a new transcendence.

And while Gibson, who mostly writes to elucidate and defend Fanon's philosophy, generally tends to conceptualise experience as direct participation in struggle and Sekyi-Otu, who describes himself as "exercised first and foremost by the disasters of the postindependence experience in Africa" (1996:2), often considers experience as awareness of broader historical trajectories – the fate of movements, nations and regions – they are agreed that action in fidelity to ongoing reflection on the flow of experience is at the heart of Fanon's conception of dialectical movement. They would agree that for Fanon the engendering of this movement is a project within a project - that, as Gibson puts it, "Fanon's dialectic...attempts to create meaning for lived experience in the specific context of the anticolonial movement" (1999:119). For Sekyi-Otu, Fanon's dialectical work is an invitation to honour "consciousness pledged to experience" (Fanon, cited in revised translation by Sekyi-Otu 1996:54). Sekyi-Otu calls Fanon's philosophy of the movement of struggle dialectical because:

- I. "it narrates the generation of relations infinitely more complex than the 'mass relationship' or 'simplifying' logic of the colonizer-colonized opposition".
2. "it testifies to the dissolution of the "two metaphysics" of absolute difference to which colonizer and colonized alike subscribe".

3. "this movement of experience consists, according to Fanon, in a 'progressive enlightening of consciousness' occasioned by the appearance or resuscitation of realities hidden from the inaugural purview of the colonized subject'" (1996:26).

Sekyi-Otu is also concerned to show that Fanon's dialectic is a certain type of dialectic. He makes three key claims in this regard. The first is that:

Fanon repudiates an 'objective dialectic of history' but 'unlike the radical ethical voluntarism of a successor thinker like Ayi Kwei Armah, Fanon's dialectic, for all its openness, remains a dialectic – that is to say, a vision of historical possibilities as determinate prospects not entirely left to the unencumbered freedom and optional decision making of the moral subject (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:171).

In other words, we can make history via acts of will but not under circumstances of our choosing. The second key claim is that Fanon's discourse is radically political because it is dialogical and so "in consequence essentially contestable and inescapably open" (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:31). Sekyi-Otu is careful to make the point that this openness exists both within and between the development of understanding of, and resistance to, different forms of domination and so no ontological priority is given to particular forms of domination and there is, in consequence, an entangled multiplicity of movements towards disalienation. For Sekyi-Otu, Fanon is especially concerned to add class and gender to his concern with race. But in Sekyi-Otu's estimation the most original feature of Fanon's dialectical philosophy is that:

[T]his insurgent claim of the inessential to paramountcy, this veritable Foucauldian insurrection of subjugated knowledge, does not in Fanon ultimately lead to the radical refusal of the discourse of the universal now so fashionable in post-Foucauldian social thought (1996:16).

Fanon, as Sekyi-Otu stresses, sees struggle as an opening to the universal.

Colonialism reaches its perfection when the symbolic and material causes and consequences of the connection between whiteness and wealth become indistinguishable. To adequately philosophise against this objectification of social relations Fanon, as a radical humanist, requires a theoretical methodology that recognises social movement (historical, contemporary and potential); and seeks to grasp the plurality of channels through which power flows. Moreover the methodology must be committed to actual resistance and the actual project of pushing social contradictions towards radical breaks with oppressive social relations. His dialectical philosophy gives him the methodology that he needs. Having established that Fanon's method is dialectical and that it is a non-dogmatic form of dialectical philosophy they next two sections will seek to develop a more detailed account of Fanon's dialectical philosophy.

3.3. I Fanon's 'deviant Hegelianism'

Fanon actively and famously engages with Hegel's allegory of the master and slave in *Black Skin, White Masks* and a number of attentive readers have discerned clear resonances of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in *Towards a Dying Colonialism* – and, as Dunyevskya (1989:49) notes, it is telling that the first world of the *Brumaire* is 'Hegel'.

Although Hegel is often characterised as a philosopher of pure abstraction, the *Phenomenology* asserts the need for thought and experience to continually recreate each other. In the *Preface* he insists that "Philosophy...is not the abstract or non-actual, but the actual, that which posits itself

and is alive within itself, existence within its own Notion. It is the process which begets and traverses its own movements" (1977:27). He argues that it is necessary to "point out the limitations" of mathematical reason and to "show the necessity for a different kind of knowledge". For Hegel neither the "principle of *magnitude*, of difference" nor the "principle of *equality*, of abstract lifeless unity" can cope with the "sheer unrest of life and its absolute distinction" (1977:27). "Truth", he argues, "is its own self-movement, whereas...[mathematical reason] is the mode of cognition that remains external to its material" (1977:28). However, the assertion of this principal did not save Hegel from what Marx called a "logical, pantheistic mysticism" (1992:61). For Marx the *Phenomenology* is

concealed and mystifying criticism, criticism which has not attained self-clarity; but in so far as it grasps the *estrangement* of man – even though man appears only in the form of mind – all the elements of criticism are concealed within it (1992:385).

Hence Marx's need to 'turn Hegel on his feet', and to use his philosophy in the material, sensuous world of actually existing struggle. This is also, of course, the space from which Fanon thinks and seeks a 'process which begets and traverses its own movements'. His studies of the black consciousness confronting metropolitan racism in *Black Skin, White Masks*; the changing meaning of the radio and the veil in *A Dying Colonialism*, and the adventures and misadventures of national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth* all seek to examine the truths that emerge from self-movement. Fanon is concerned with reflection on action rather than idealist logic or rationalist empiricism.

When confronted with the Heraclitian dynamism and particularity of actual experience, the borders that fix conceptions of difference and sameness - both of which are essential to

mathematical reasoning - become porous. This begins to explain why so many anti-colonial and anti-racist thinkers, with is to say anti-Manichean thinkers, have been drawn to Hegelian philosophy. But there is a vast difference between Hegelian thinking of anti-Manicheanism and that of most postmodern or postcolonial thinkers.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that "Reality is not dialectical, colonialism is" (2000:128). They defend this proposition by arguing, with reference to the example of colonial Haiti, that lived reality was far more diverse than colonialism's absolute racial binary could admit¹⁷ – i.e. there were blacks who were enslaved, blacks who were free and rich, blacks who were free and poor, blacks who had escaped slavery, mulattoes, slave owning whites, poor whites etc. For Hardt and Negri "Reality and history, however, are not dialectical, and no idealist rhetorical gymnastics can make them conform to the dialect" (2000:131). But their opposition to dialectical thought is strategic as well as epistemological:

Once we recognize postmodernist discourses as an attack on the dialectical form of modern sovereignty, then we can see more clearly how they contest systems of domination such as racism and sexism by deconstructing the boundaries that maintain the hierarchies between black and white, masculine and feminine, and so forth (2000:140).

Hardt and Negri herald Homi Bhabha's vision of metropolitan cosmopolitanism (which offers nothing to the wretched of the earth¹⁸ but does offer a route – co-option of diasporic elites – for

¹⁷ As if slavery in Haiti was not a reality for the enslaved or, for that matter, for the bourgeoisie in Marseilles.... As if it were not the case, under settler colonialism in Africa, that "The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers" (Fanon 1976:30).

¹⁸ Very few of whom can make it to the metropole. Not to mention the fact that most of those that can will endure an existence far too precarious to partake in the pleasures of metropolitan cosmopolitanism.

the self-legitimation of various pseudo-radicalisms complicit with metropolitan domination) and state that “postcolonial theory...is, along with postmodernist theories, defined above all by its being nondialectical” (2000:144).¹⁹ Although much postmodern theory is well described as an intellectual accommodation with defeat, its reduction of human agency to, in Bhabha’s terms, “demand and desire” (cited in Gibson 1999b:102) is highly influential in contemporary metropolitan theory.

Against the postmodern commitment to seek to discursively dissolve, rather than to work (in the symbolic and material realms) through the categories of objectification, in order to move beyond their constraints, a broadly Hegelian thinker like Steven Biko argues that:

The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the antithesis to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance – a true humanity (1996:90).

This argument can be called Hegelian because for Hegel the conceptual structuring of objectification is not challenged by “the non-method of presentiment and inspiration, or by the arbitrariness of prophetic utterance” (1977:29). On the contrary “negativity is the differentiating and positing of existence; in this return into self, it is the becoming of the determinate simplicity” (1977:32).²⁰ So Eugene Gogol writes that “a liberating, negating power of Other emerges in the Hegelian dialectic” (2002:14) and explains that:

¹⁹ If we accept their description of postcolonial theory then is it not the case that postcolonial theory will have to be opposed in the name of anti-neocolonial or anti-imperialist theory?

²⁰ Although of course the transformative negativity advocated and lived by Biko is in the material realm as much as in the realm of consciousness whereas for Hegel “consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands” (1977:51). Biko’s *On Death* is not only a moment in the drama of consciousness.

The dialectic of negativity is not a flight into abstraction. It is saturated with experience, with the here and now. But it refuses to accept experience as a given, fixed state of affairs. Such experience has movement, has deep contradictions within. The dialectic of negativity seizes upon contradiction as its lifeblood. It is not only a critique of the status quo, but of any philosophic system which accepts that given state of affairs as reality. It is a critique that strives to break down the division between reality and thought (2002:15).

Hegelian philosophy recommends that, in thought and action, the negative should be asserted rather than denied, diluted or fled. Spirit (collective consciousness) is challenged and then changed via its encounter with Otherness as hostility which is escalated to crisis before giving way to mutuality. Hence C. L. R. James argues that the “complete secret of Hegelian dialectic” is that “The two, the actual and the potential, are always inseparably linked; one is always giving way to the other. At a certain stage a crisis takes place and a complete change is the result” (2000:27). But, as Dunayevskaya points out, this process, captured with characteristic elegance by James, has often been misread as a teleological development leading to an absolute conclusion. Dunayevskaya marshals persuasive evidence to show that Hegel postulates no final synthesis – no end of history²¹ – but rather a negation of each negation – “a ceaseless movement, a veritable continuous revolution” (1989:13). This doesn’t mean that the dialectic of action and reflection swings like a pendulum – moving, to use Biko’s example, from white racism to black solidarity and then back to white racism – but rather that new negations, e.g. the challenges of gender, class and so on – constitute themselves into new challenges. As Dunayevskaya explains the negation of negation is not a ‘nullity’ – “The positive is contained within the negative, which is the path to a *new beginning*” (1989:13). But no teleology is guaranteed. As Dunayevskaya shows:

Far from expressing a sequence of never-ending progression, the Hegelian dialectic lets retrogression appear as translucent as progression and indeed makes it very nearly inevitable if one ever tries to escape it by mere faith (Cited in Gibson 2004:4).

²¹ “When self-conscious individuality arises, the bond of trust which links it with the social unity is destroyed. The individual opposes himself to social laws and customs.” (Hegel 1977:541)

But although Hegel, contrary to most readings, proposes a perpetual dialectic, he closes off dialectical movement in so far as he does not propose an absolute commitment to the negative. His commitment to the negative is not absolute because the negative is constituted not in itself, but as a relation, as what is required to move from thesis to synthesis. The shadow of the synthesis to come falls heavily on the negative moment. I'll return to this point.

Sekyi-Otu and Gibson both read Fanon as a radical innovator in the Hegelian tradition. Sekyi-Otu explains that he discerns "resonances of the narrative structure of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" with *The Wretched of the Earth* which he reads "as coquetting with Hegel" (1996:24) and he describes Fanon as a "deviant Hegelian" (1996:34). Sekyi-Otu notes that while the Hegelian dialectic "is an operation which consciousness exercises on itself" and is thus able to achieve "narrative resolution" (1996:29),

[s]uch a narrative resolution is impossible in Fanon's universe of discourse. For the occasion of the journey of experience in that universe is compellingly political, all too implicated in the contingent textures of power relations and contestations to savor the consummation of absolute knowledge (Sekyi-Otu, 1996:29).

Gibson, citing Dunayevskaya, explains that "Hegel's absolutes end in synthesis, whereas, like Marx, Fanon's absolute ends in 'total diremptions – absolute, irreconcilable contradictions'" (Dunayevskaya cited in Gibson, 1999:340) and argues that "Fanon's dialectic is a movement through absolute, irreconcilable contradiction, and not simply an inversion of the static inert Manicheanism that characterizes colonialism" (Gibson, 2002:43).

Fanon's engagement with the idea of the dialectic as the rationality of revolt famously begins with his rewriting of Hegel's dialectic of recognition in his master and slave allegory. Hegel's allegory, although written at the time of the Haitian revolution, is abstracted from any particular or material context. Its founding premise is that "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (1977:111). Hegel argues that when one self-consciousness, existing in the mode of being-for-self, encounters another self-consciousness each is "certain of its own self, but not of the other and therefore its own self-certainty has no truth" (1977:113). This fact, he says, engenders a life and death struggle. For Hegel a consciousness must risk its life in order to recognise its independent self-consciousness. But this struggle has the effect of reifying its protagonists into two extremes:

the middle term collapses into lifeless unity which is split into lifeless, merely immediate, unopposed extremes; and the two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things (1977:114).

One consciousness is independent and one dependent "The former is lord, and the other is bondsman" (1977:115). The bondsman is reified as a thing and so although the Lord achieves recognition through the consciousness of the bondsman the bondsman exists only for the lord and so there "is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal" (1977:116). This is undone because "Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly he is" (1977:118) – a consciousness with a mind of his own. This recognition produces the resistance that eventually leads to mutual recognition of freedom.

Fanon's primary challenge to this canonical allegory is to argue that in the colonial context what the master "wants from the slave is not recognition but work" (Fanon, 1967a:220). It is clear that Fanon is wrong to assert this as a blanket rule - in the colonial context many settlers have a paranoid psychological dependency on a mutually objectifying recognition of their superiority from the native and, also, many settlers are psychologically dependent on the natives' function as collective scapegoat for white anxieties. These facts explain why many whites hold on to racism after resistance has rendered their racism a material liability. But Fanon's productive contrast of the materiality of colonial oppression with Hegelian idealism can be accommodated by a more nuanced view of the colonial project. This view would have to recognise both that exploitative relations of production - from massive projects of primitive accumulation to 'ordinary' capitalism and agricultural and domestic labour - have a material base which allows whites to seek work from natives, and that the popular white, creole in Benedict Anderson's terms (1991), nationalisms that often arise in opposition to metropolitan capital before striking a deal for a racialised incorporation (a deal which capital invariably remakes with native elites upon decolonisation), often seek both work and recognition.

But the mere fact that work is sought and is fundamental to racist society means that Fanon's basic critique of Hegel still stands. This is because when work is sought, and when an entire set of local and global social relations are predicated on this work, and when the people doing and profiting from this work are conceived as different species, then there is a problem for philosophical allegories based on stories of a master and a slave. What happens when there are many slaves and many masters, and the masters use the wealth generated by the slaves to seek recognition from each other? What happens when the slaves are not differentiated from the masters on the grounds of

where they are in the drama of the development of their consciousness but via a complete and totalising rupture introduced into society via alien invasion and conquest? Fanon's critique of Hegel turns on his argument that, in Nigel Gibson's words, "any chance for reciprocity is utterly ruptured when colour is introduced" (Gibson, 2002:35). Hegel's allegory suggests that there is a necessary teleology to the movement produced by the struggle between the lord and the bondsman and that that teleology is edifying. This can easily be read as a legitimisation of oppression as a necessary stage on the road to mutual recognition. However, Fanon shows that racism, metropolitan and colonial, produces a rupture that renders any development of consciousness towards mutuality impossible within its logic. Furthermore, Fanon proposes a complete and diremptive commitment to the negative moment – an absolute rebellion of the slave – against Hegel's commitment to the synthetic moment.

In his account of the black encounter with metropolitan racism Fanon shows that there is no way out. The problem is clear: When he arrived in France Fanon wanted to "come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together" (Fanon, 1967a:191). But he couldn't evade the nature of the fact that his blackness assumed in an anti-black society. "I am", he realised, "being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed.... I am laid bare. I feel, see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!" (Fanon, 1967a:191). Fanon argues that while Sartre had argued that the Jew was "overdetermined from the inside" (Fanon, 1967a:115) by anti-Semitic ideas he was "overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (Fanon, 1967a:116). The result of this is that, as discussed in the first chapter, "The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation.... I shouted a

greeting to the world and the world slashed away at my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged" (Fanon, 1967a:114-5). But it is not just he, Frantz, who has his humanity reduced to the point of objectification. It is not just black people in France. "Colonialism's condemnation is continental in scope. ...The efforts of the native to rehabilitate himself and to escape from the claws of colonialism are logically inscribed from the same point of view as colonialism" (1976:170). The irrationality of racism does not make it vulnerable to reason: "Reason was confident of victory on every level...[but]...when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer. (1967a:119-120). If the black is permanently identified as unreason, no drama in the realm of pure consciousness will be able to break reification and move towards mutual recognition of freedom.

Fanon's account of the colony illuminates another, more material, fixedness:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous. The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers....The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town....a well fed town, an easy going town; its belly is always full of good things....The town belonging to the colonized people....is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute....The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire (1976:30).

Sekyi-Otu describes this condition as "an anti-dialectic of absolute difference" (1996:25) and observes that in the colonial city consciousness encounters "history-lived-as-an-anti-dialectic" (1996:54). He warns that "this structure and the perverse intercourse of its protagonists invite a vengeful form of insurrectionary action cast in the mode of revolutionary catastrophism"

(1996:25). Fanon's proposal for a way to begin the end of this world is not to begin with a vision of synthetic overcoming. He does not seek to incite a struggle that moves from a commitment to a new humanism, internationalism or the resonance of the individual consciousness with cosmic harmonies.²² He proposes that resistance begin where revolution is necessary rather than risky - with the reality of the lived experience of reciprocal exclusivity: "There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (1967a:8). It is in this zone that Fanon thinks that it is possible to "Start something! Start what? The only thing in the world that's worth the effort of starting: The end of the world, by God!" (Césaire cited in Fanon 1967a:96). So, as noted in the first chapter, Fanon, confronting racism in France, concludes that the only way to assert his humanity against the pervasive denial of the humanity of black people is to assert that he is both black and human: "I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognise me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known" (1967a:115). And in the city in colonial Algeria Fanon observes that the native "deciding to embody history in his own person...surges into the forbidden quarters" (1976:31). The quarters are forbidden because he has been rendered a native. Therefore his insurgency can only be that of a native. No matter how he identifies himself and rationalises (or denies) his rebellion, his transgression will be seen, by all natives and settlers, whether sympathetic or opposed to his act, as

²² Consequently there is something of a simplification in Robert Bernasconi's claim that it is essential to recognise

the difference between the settler's logic and the apparently similar logic of the colonized...there is the Aristotelian logic of the colonizer and, on the other hand, the dialectical logic that responds to it. It is through the dialectic that the new humanism avoids reduplicating the logic of the old humanism (1996:118).

Revolt can become dialectical but it does not, in Fanon's estimation, have to labour under the weight of an obligation to achieve a sufficiently dialectical logic before it begins. On the contrary the important thing is that it begin. Once it has begun the important thing is that it develop. But there is no script for that development. A self-moving movement scripts itself via reflection on experience.

that of a native. The fact that he may desire to revolt against the Manichean division of humanity into the constructed categories of settler and native, doesn't change the fact that these categories are, at the time, lived realities and that this action must, therefore, be a racialised response to racism. Even as his revolt begins he remains fixed as a native. But, crucially, the potential meaning of that identity is expanded – explosively.

Fanon's willingness to begin the end of the world (as opposed to attempting to begin the synthesis of the parted) puts him at direct odds with Sartre's claim in *Black Orpheus* that the "concrete and particular" must pass into the "universal and abstract" with the result that the particular must immediately be diagnosed as a moment of negativity "insufficient by itself...[but]...intended to prepare the synthesis" (Sartre cited in Fanon, 1967a:133). Against Sartre's investment in hoped for larger outcomes of grand historical process Fanon insists that "it is only through losing itself absolutely that consciousness becomes a being-for-self, a self-consciousness for itself" (1967a:133-134).²³ Fanon does not shy away from the consequences of this. Clearly, this commitment to negativity, generative as it may be, will terrify anyone persuaded by Popperian arguments about the danger of change that is more than piecemeal. But the degree to which one is persuaded by such arguments is determined by the degree to which one sees the present order as misanthropic and

²³ In *Black Orpheus* Sartre argued that:

negritude appears like the upbeat [unaccented beat] of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis: the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and these black men who use it know this perfectly well; they know that it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human being in a raceless society. Thus, negritude is for destroying itself; it is a "crossing to" and not an "arrival at," a means and not an end (1988:327).

Fanon responded thus: "When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance.'... For once that born Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain to consciousness of self" (1967a: 133-134).

therefore as a situation well characterised as a crisis. It remains the case that very often this question remains a question about race and the value ascribed to black and African life.²⁴

Some will see an absolute commitment to an initial moment of negativity as nihilistic but Gibson stresses that this moment of counter-particularity is not some blindly mechanical response to metropolitan racism or colonialism but is, rather, a moment of self creation with a view to remaking the world. For example “The White creates the Black, but it is the Black who creates the counter-discourse – negritude. This self-discovery is ‘remarkable’ precisely because it is a dynamic movement” (2002:39).

Fanon’s endorsement of the value of absolute identification as a first step in a dialectical struggle that seeks to produce movement towards a true humanism does not, *pace* Homi Bhabha and other postmodern critics of Fanon, mean that Fanon can be legitimately accused of endorsing, as an ultimate value, what Paulin Hountondji calls “unanimism.” (1996) or of what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe refer to as the process whereby actual multiplicity is reduced to an abstract theoretical simplicity in the name of “essentialist apriorism, the conviction that the social is sutured at some point” (1985: 177). The postmodern refusal of both dialectic movement and the absolute together mean that, as with the position of liberals like Anthony Appiah, the victims of oppression are blamed for taking the first steps towards meaningful opposition. Fanon does not romanticise or offer any permanently ongoing sanction to racialised revolts, spontaneous or organised, against racialised oppression. On the contrary, he insisted that “you’ll never overthrow the terrible enemy

²⁴ If one subscribes to Fanon’s view that “The well-being and the progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races” (1976:76) then one’s anxieties will not be about the degree of damage that commitment to the negative will do to the world as it is.

machine, and you won't change human beings if you forget to raise the standard of consciousness of the rank-and-file" (Fanon, 1976:108). But when reality is misanthropic it is the failure to start something that should frighten us.

But although Fanon thinks of dialectical movement in diremptive rather than synthetic terms, his work remains broadly (albeit deviantly) Hegelian in so far as he still seeks self moving movement rather than, as in the vision of anti-dialectical philosopher like Negri, a simple clash between two static forces. This idea of self-moving movement is central to Fanon's dialectical philosophy and is taken up the next section.

3.3.2 The weary road

Fanon, the dialectician, seeks to inhabit a revolt that begins²⁵ its movement in a counter Manicheanism. Sekyi-Otu quotes Fanon's observation in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* that "Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete and absolute substitution" (Fanon cited in Sekyi-Otu, 1996:50) and notes that the "canonical vocabulary of the *dialectics of transition* is rudely set aside" (Sekyi-Out 1996:50 emphasis in the original). But Sekyi-Otu argues that Fanon's narrative

can give credence to the *apprehension* of a historical object in its immediate mode of appearance, and yet prepare us for a *comprehension* of this object – that is to say, a fuller knowledge of its appearance *and* its conditions of intelligibility (1996:53 emphasis in the original).

²⁵ For Lewis Gordon this beginning "is a humanizing moment, but not achieved humanization" (2000:54).

In other words Fanon's argument is that the colonial world is initially apprehended and resisted within the Manichean logic of colonialism but that it can also come to be comprehended and resisted dialectically. Sekyi-Otu persuasively reads Fanon as arguing that the struggles ensuing from this anti-dialectic will face, in Sekyi-Otu's translation of Fanon's words, an "arduous path towards rational knowledge" (1996:112). For Fanon, the key concrete challenge here is the arduous path towards recognition that, although there are times when nationalism can be a road towards humanism, it is not humanism.

Sekyi-Otu shows that for Fanon the initial counter Manicheanism, potentially dialectical in its unfolding impact but not in its original vision, has "malignant traits...a 'certain brutality of thought and mistrust of subtlety', a compulsive indifference to difference, all difference" (1996:37). "The names", he argues, "of the resurgent realities that will disturb the happy consciousness of the Unitarian nationalist are, of course, class, gender, ethnicity" (1996:37). He quotes Fanon's observation "the idyllic and unreal clarity of the beginning is followed by a semi-darkness that bewilders consciousness" but notes, with reference to Fanon, that the "multiple realities" which begin to emerge are "pregnant with 'new meanings'" (1996:26-27). Sekyi-Otu is also careful to note that for Fanon "all constituencies of meaning, because they are historical creations bearing the marks of domination and alienation need to be examined. Nothing commands unconditional allegiance" (1996:39)²⁶ but that, simultaneously, it is communities of meaning that nourish, sustain and organise the revolt against the world that has created them as nodes of resistances with particular modes and directions of movement.

²⁶ And just as nothing commands unconditional allegiance it is equally the case that, in Badiou's pithy phrase, "Every world is capable of producing, within itself, its own truth" (2005:24).

Sekyi-Otu goes on to read, with extraordinary closeness, Fanon's account of the movement from the "anti-dialectic of absolute difference" (1996:25) imposed by colonialism to the destruction of this difference and the achievement of, in Fanon's words "the warming light-giving centre where the human being and citizen develop and enrich their experience in wider and still wider fields" (1996:170). He stresses that for Fanon colonial Manicheanism produces a counter Manicheanism that can collapse into racism and authoritarianism, and that the challenge is to use its energy to oppose domination while seeking, in a manner analogous to Gramsci's affirmation of the apparent paradox of the partisan universal, to make the developing counter-power dialogical, multiple, self-critical and open.²⁷

Gibson observes that for Fanon there are discoveries that remake understandings of the world. For example when the native "finds out that the settler's skin is not of any more value than a native's skin" this is a discovery of a truth which "shakes the world" (Fanon cited in Gibson, 2002:42). And, of course, in Fanon's account there is more than one world shaking event: "the primary Manicheanism which governed colonial society is preserved intact during the period of decolonization; that is to say that the settler never ceases to be the enemy" (1976:39). Indeed, "To work means to work for the death of the settler" (1976:67). But then, experience of resistance produces new truths. It becomes apparent that:

The settler is not simply the man that must be killed. Many members of the mass of colonialists reveal themselves to be much, much nearer to the national struggle than

²⁷ Fanon's dialectic has strong parallels with Gramsci in so far as it asserts that there are multiple vectors of domination and therefore resistance; the value of will in inciting, sustaining and developing resistance; the value of dialogical engagement and the role of radical intellectuals in catalysing resistance. Ato Sekyi-Otu reads these connections particularly productively and goes so far as to call Gramsci a "precocious Fanonian" (1996:118).

certain sons of the nation. Consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited and unstable (1976:116-117).

This brings us to the matter of the truths that emerge from struggle.

3.3.3 Brilliant truths

It is a long time since the starry sky that took away Kant's breath revealed the last of its secrets to us. And the moral law is not certain of itself. As a man, I undertake to face the possibility of annihilation in order that two or three truths may cast their eternal brilliance over the world (Fanon, 1967a:227-8).

These two or three truths are not the numbered steps in Wittgenstein's logic or Descartes' clear and distinct deductions. Neither is this desire for truth anything like Hegel's implied assumption that a thought in his mind has cosmic consequences. And this investment of hope in the possibility of truth is certainly not a desire to subordinate praxis to the dogmatic abstractions of the 'Bureaucrats of the revolution and civil servants of truth' against whom Foucault rails. For Fanon, as with Gramsci, and, later, Badiou, the potential for the generation of eternal and brilliant truths lies in action²⁸ – hence the price of their possible generation is neither solitary hours at a desk nor instruction as an initiate of some political cult, but, rather, the risk of annihilation. Badiou argues that: "We must conceive of a truth both as the construction of a fidelity to an event, and as the

²⁸ This puts Fanon's philosophical project at odds with the bulk of modern philosophy:

Philosophers of the modern era...began to consider that the truth was the result of a process of elaboration, carried out by a reason grounded in itself. After an initial period of optimism, however, in which people believed it was possible for thought to postulate itself in an absolute way, philosophy began to become more and more aware...of its historical and especially linguistic conditioning...it could be that its result has been that philosophers have let themselves be hypnotized by philosophical discourse taken in and for itself. In the last analysis, philosophical discourse now tends to have as its object nothing but more philosophical discourse (Hardot, 1995:76).

generic potency of a transformation of a domain of knowledge" (2004:58). The idea of truth as consequent to event is essential to Badiou's thinking – "For the process of a truth to begin, something must happen...beyond what is. I call it an event" (2004:62) Like Fanon²⁹, Badiou, speaks, in his case via Heidegger, of the impact of a truth as a mutation. "The mutation occurs through the interpenetration of spirit as intellect, the latter being understood as the simple faculty to reason correctly in theoretical and practical considerations" (Heidegger cited in Badiou, 2004:59). For Badiou "the materialist dialectic...(is)...centred on the exception that truths inflict on what there is" (2005:22). Philosophy that assumes philosophical discourse as its object can achieve resolution and can be a solitary pursuit. But, as Pierre Hadot explains, "there is an abyss between philosophical theory and philosophizing as living action". The ancient conception of philosophy as a way of life, in which the project "is to transform ourselves" meant that "philosophizing was a continuous act, permanent and identical with itself that had to be renewed at each instance" (1995:268). The radical tradition running from Marx to Fanon and on to Badiou and Holloway seeks to take philosophy as continuous living action into the political realm. But while the radical tradition fights to realise philosophy in the world it does not work to subordinate the individual or the local to any authority sanctioned in the name of truth.

In *A Dying Colonialism* Fanon presents five case studies, including the famous examples of the changing role of the veil, the radio and medicine in Algerian society, each of which shows that there can be a shift from constraining Manicheanism to dialectical progress with, in Gibson's words, "its opportunity for radically new behaviour in both public and private life, a chance for cultural

²⁹ This is very well discussed in the sixth chapter of Nigel Gibson's *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination – Radical Mutations: Toward a Fighting Culture* (2003).

regeneration and creation where positive concepts of self-determination, not contingent upon the colonial status quo, are generated" (1999:419). For example, in the case of medicine, Fanon writes that: "Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude.... With medicine we come to one of the most tragic features of the colonial situation" (1965:121). Tragic because colonial oppression alienates the colonised from the technologies deployed in its project of oppression, even though they can also be employed in liberatory projects. For Fanon this disabling Manicheanism must be overcome dialectically:

The Algerian doctor, the native doctor who, as we have seen, was looked upon before the national combat as an ambassador of the occupier, was reintegrated into the group. Sleeping on the ground with the men and women of the *mechtas*, living the drama of the people, the Algerian doctor became a part of the Algerian body. There was no longer that reticence, so constant during the period of unchallenged oppression. He was no longer 'the' doctor, but 'our' doctor, 'our technician'. The people henceforth demanded and practiced a technique stripped of its foreign characteristics (1965:142).

I have chosen this example from Fanon's five case studies of dialectical movement towards the synthesis of an inclusive humanism because of its relevance to Mbeki's position on AIDS. Mandisa Mbali (2002) argues that Mbeki correctly identifies racist attitudes in some Western discourse around AIDS but then makes the mistake of rejecting the entire discourse as nothing but racism. There are two fallacies here. The first is the binary opposition between white/Western and African science. So-called Western medicine has always been a mode of knowledge that has been advanced by people from all over the world. The dynamics of money and power do mean that the biomedical project has, in recent history, had its most powerful locations in the West. But many of the leading scientists in these locations were and are neither white nor Western. Moreover

significant contributions to biomedical medicine, including new developments in knowledge on AIDS, have been made by African scientists working on African problems in Africa. Furthermore not all Western scientists work for elite Western interests and not all African scientists work for general African interests. The second fallacy is the assumption that if some people in the West make racist comments in the context of AIDS then all 'Western' knowledge about AIDS is either fatally infected with racism or is nothing but racism.

A Fanonian analysis would conclude that Mbeki has failed to transcend Manichean binaries. We can contrast Mbeki's failure with the women that make up the backbone of the Treatment Action Campaign's largest branch which is in Khayalitsha. Many of these women have migrated to Cape Town from the deep rural Transkei. They have taken on both the struggle for access to treatment that began in mostly wealthy and white gay communities in New York and San Francisco and some of the most up-to-date knowledge on anti-retoviral therapy and work closely with the progressive doctors, Western and African, of the *Medecins Sans Frontieres* clinic in Khayalitsha. Both the struggle and the medical knowledge needed to wage it are firmly rooted in their life-world. There are *isiXhosa* songs about people who have died, people who have been saved, and the struggles and technologies that have saved them. Fanon concludes his article on colonialism and medicine with the comment that "The people who take their destiny into their own hands assimilate the most modern forms of technology at an extraordinary rate" (1965:145). And here is the dialectical movement – the technologies claimed by a modernity that has generally objectified Africa are absorbed into an African life-world to serve the interests of people on whose land, labour and communities modernity has been so violently parasitic.

Gibson also takes seriously Fanon's insistence that "men change at the same time that they change the world" (Fanon, 1976b:30). His discussion of radio, the veil and medicine show that for Fanon struggles are social spaces in which things are called into question and in which agency can be assumed in new ways. Of course this process has no teleology and, as we know too well, new social relations forged in struggle have often been undone and relations of domination inscribed or reinscribed in the names of tradition, the nation or obedience to the market when '*the struggle*' can be claimed to be concluded. Nevertheless Fanon's point stands: against nativist versions of anti-colonialism, the fight for liberation "does not give back to the national culture its former shapes and values...[but]... aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men that cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture" (Fanon, 1976:245-246). Hence Sekyi-Otu argues that "the mission of Fanon's dialectical narrative is to stage the upsurge of richer modes of reasoning, judging, and acting from the limiting albeit legitimate constraints of 'immediate experience'" (1976:36). Gibson also stresses that "Fanon is not simply replacing one dialectic (the anti-colonial) for another (the class struggle) but, through a system of interpenetration, deepening each" (2003:189). He goes on to assert, very strongly and in a spirit that has clear resonance with Gramsci, that for Fanon the dialectic is driven by the progressive transformation of the once objectified native into "an active thinking historical subject" (2003:180) and that, therefore, Fanon's vision is deeply democratic. Gibson seeks to make it clear that, against the interpretations of people like Albert Memmi and various postmodern critics, Fanon's celebration of the forging of the 'new man' (sic) in the fires of struggle is not an ahistorical and dangerously totalising fantasy but "a product of constant movement and principled criticism" (Gibson, 1999:412).

For Fanon radical changes in consciousness, ‘mutations’, are not, as with Hegel, solely consequent to work which consciousness performs on itself, but are rather a response of consciousness to events in the world of lived experience. But this does not mean that Fanon proposes a mode of resistance that is just about posing material counter-power against extant power. Although Fanon is clear that colonial oppression is a brute bodily affair he nevertheless concludes that the “The settler has only broken the native when he admits the superiority of white values” (1976:33 – 34). In other words the system seeks to win its victims’ consent for their oppression. Hence Biko’s famous comment that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (1996: 68). Fanon takes the material needs of the body very seriously and he repeatedly argues that culture can only blossom once people have escaped necessity. But he does not reduce the human being to an object with material needs.

Truths are events that no longer allow us, in good faith, to see as we previously saw and to be as we previously were. So, for example, after the Haitian revolution, or after the Soweto uprising, or after Biko hit back, a new truth – ethical, epistemological and strategic - became present in the world. Consider, as an example from Fanon’s dialectical explorations, the assumption of new social roles by women in the Algerian war. Any denial of the universal facticity constituted by this invention of a new mode of being is a denial of a truth - what has been done can be done – and is thus bad faith. But any denial of the particularity from which this facticity must be confronted is also bad faith - each individual must choose from a particular moment and place and situation. To deny this facticity is also bad faith. Fanon’s language of truth is not a language of authoritarianism. On the contrary it is the language of permanent attentiveness to the experience of struggle.

Arrival at the universal via the particular is not just true for the dominated. The particular challenge to the dominator also introduces her to the humanity of the dominated and thus takes her one step closer toward the universal.

From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs, you have no other resource but to use all and every means to regain your importance as a man. You must therefore weigh as heavily as you can upon the body of your torturer in order that his soul, lost in some by-way, may finally find once more its universal dimension (Fanon 1976:238).

John Berger, writing on, and at the time of, the death of Che Guevara observed that:

Guevara found the condition of the world as it is intolerable. It had only recently become so. Previously, the conditions under which two thirds of the people of the world lived were approximately the same as now. The degree of exploitation and enslavement was as great. The suffering involved was as intense and as widespread. The waste was as colossal. But it was not intolerable because the full measure of the truth about those conditions was unknown – even by those who suffered it. Truths are not constantly evident in the circumstances to which they refer. They are born – sometimes late. This truth was born with the struggles and wars of national liberation. In the light of this new-born truth, the significance of imperialism changed (2001:11).

Fidelity to the truths that emerge in struggle renders dialectical engagement a mode of praxis, action and reflection within struggle, rather than just a mode of analysis. In the words of Marx:

Nothing prevents us...from starting our criticism with criticism of politics, with taking sides in politics, hence with actual struggles, and identifying ourselves with them. Then we do not face the world in doctrinaire fashion with a new principle, declaring, 'Here is the truth, kneel here! We develop new principles for the world out of the principles of the world (Cited in Turner, 1973:33).

Dialectical Praxis

It is this that makes dialectical movement a real possibility in the realm of lived experience. Events happen and situations change. Things come to pass.

3.4 Conclusion

Fanon's dialectical philosophy is a commitment to adopt a particular mode of thinking – characterised by fidelity to experience - within struggles that seek movement towards a true humanity. Dialectical praxis is a permanent commitment to see, be and act in fidelity to the truths generated by the lived experience of struggles (which are the ongoing negation of the negation – relentless movement against the material and symbolic objectification of human beings). *This means that struggle is the habitation of radical thought and not its object.* It also means that ultimate values can only emerge and be fought for within the evolving situations constituted by particular struggles. This does not mean that there cannot be conversation between struggles across time and space but it does mean that there is no universal theory of how to conduct resistance. The particular is the only door to the universal. Any attempt to begin from the universal will be to collapse into the spirit of seriousness and to subordinate lived experience to theory. The commitment to begin from within particular struggles is not merely strategic in that it is necessary to be with the masses in order to be able to have a chance of posing material force against material force to force liberation. It is also an end in-itself, as the popular assumption of historical agency is fundamental to the practice of freedom in and after struggles for liberation. Collective progress is possible but there is no final liberation. The defeat of colonialism can result in the ascendance of reactionary nationalism which can collapse into a docile accommodation with neo-liberal 'development'. So it goes. There is no alibi for postponing the popular practice of freedom.

CHAPTER 4

SOLIDARITY

to become a reverberating element of the vast network of meanings born of the liberating combat
- Fanon (1965:94)

4.1 Introduction

The praxis of struggle as action and reflection is largely something that happens in, and in the name of, groups of people. The political communities that feature most prominently in Fanon's work include, more or less in chronological order, Blacks, Algerians, Africans, African peasants and the African urban poor. The focus of this chapter is on Fanon's commitment to struggle from within particular political communities. This needs to be asserted against the false universalism of 'global civil society' (which is generally Northern NGOs) and those forms of socialism and autonomism that propose a single global Manicheanism.

The key questions that are addressed in this chapter centre around how it is that Fanon simultaneously holds onto the universalist vision of his radical humanism while advocating struggle by and for particular groups. The argument made is that for Fanon, at the level of being, the particular is always the door to the universal. I then argue, primarily using the example of race, that oppression creates the lived reality of the identities which it projects onto the dominated. The next section argues that collective action is necessary for effective resistance against domination and that struggle, which may begin within the identities directly created by oppression, can develop those identities into liberatory identities. The final section of the chapter is concerned with Fanon's commitment to what Nigel Gibson calls a fighting culture.

4.2 The particular as the door to the universal

As a radical humanist, Fanon is committed to a universal vision – everyone matters. But he is also committed to oppose the subordination of the reality of the lived experience of particularity to theoretical abstraction. This produces a problem: how are the universal and the particular to be connected?

Fanon's work is infused with a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the particular and the universal. He insists that his being floats on a particular moment. He begins his first book with three poetically staccato sentences that affirm the particular: "The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon... or too late. I do not come with timeless truths" (1967a:7). This is a very different enterprise to that of Descartes, Spinoza or Wittgenstein. "My consciousness is not" Fanon's fourth sentence continues "illuminated with ultimate radiance" (1967a:7). He is in, and aims to make some sense of, his time and place. He lives and speaks from the particular. The prayer with which he ends *Black Skin, White Masks* is a prayer for him to have the courage to always undo and disaffirm objectification of humanity from his precise position in the world - from within his body. He does not invest his hopes in a transcendent political philosophy that will relieve him of the burden to confront the void from within a particular location within facticity.

But shortly before that prayer he makes an oath that sings with the universal – an oath that is worth repeating:

It is a long time since the starry sky that took away Kant's breath revealed the last of its secrets to us. And the moral law is not certain of itself. As a man, I undertake to

face the possibility of annihilation in order that two or three truths may cast their eternal brilliance over the world (1967a:227-8).

This hope for eternally brilliant truths may seem to be in direct contradiction with his opening insistence that he does not 'come with timeless truths' and that his 'consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiance'. In fact there is no contradiction. Being the personal possessor of timeless truths and ultimate radiance, whether divined by idealist speculation in the manner of Hegel or discovered by empirical research in the manner of today's social scientists, is an entirely different thing to risking annihilation in order that truths may emerge from the praxis of struggle. In the first case truth is something that has been discerned by an enlightened individual who can then reveal it to others. In the second case truth emerges from a collective project. Fanon is not denying that individuals can produce important advances in knowledge while working in isolation. But he is concerned with the humanisation of the world and that is necessarily driven by collective projects constituted by the agency of the dominated. He is in search of wisdom that emerges from the experience of struggle and can then guide future struggle. A truth emerging from a particular reflection on action becomes an ethical revelation with broader, and perhaps even universal significance when it expands the space and tone in which human being, human existence, can be:

I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it. And, though a private problem, we see the outline of the problem of Action (1967a:229-30).¹

For Fanon there is a universal aspect to the human condition which is that each consciousness must choose. This means that action, even the action of an individual, can produce a new truth

¹ Ato Sekyi-Otu concludes his most recent intervention into the discussion on Fanon's legacy with the view that "Fanon is our pathfinder in that 'conversation of discovery' whose mission is to gather the voices of history and common dreams into the work of the critical imagination" (2003:14).

that must be collectively confronted. It also means that we must confront the choices of others as potential choices for ourselves when they have introduced an invention into existence. So Fanon insists that:

There are in every part men who search. I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence (1967a:229).

Again it may appear that there is a contradiction here. A philosopher who sees existence as the exercise of choice from within a particular embodied location in time and space is also a philosopher of universal being. A philosopher who is committed to the political struggles of particular groups of people seeks ethical inspiration everywhere. The apparent contradiction dissolves when this is understood dialectically. For Fanon we must all begin from the particular but movement from the particular can open into progressively wider circles of being. His understanding of the dialectical connection between individual and collective experience is concretised in his discussion of national consciousness. He argues that:

Individual experience, because it is national and because it is a link in the chain of national existence, ceases to be individual, limited and shrunken and is enabled to open out into the truth of the nation and the world...during the period of national construction each citizen ought to continue in his real, everyday activity to associate himself with the whole of the nation, to incarnate the continuous dialectical truth of the nation and to will the triumph of man in his completeness here and now (1976:161-162).

And in his 1959 statement *On National Culture* to the *Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers* in Rome he argues that:

Consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication. Philosophic thought teaches us, on the contrary, that it is guarantee. National consciousness,

which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension (1976:199).

For Fanon the particular is the door to the universal. This is because there can be no introduction of invention into universal being without particularity. Without particularity, individual or collective, there can only be repetition which, in the context of oppression, means the reinscription of domination. Originality is predicated on particularity. And invention, the production of originality, matters because in this context invention is another word for rupture with the dominant order.² This in turn is a *sine qua non* of the dialectic, and through its being a dialectic between the self and community, the moment of communication between the universal and the particular. Rupture, the negative moment, offers a constitutive moment, a chance for individuals to overcome passivity and become collective historical agents, the We-subjects discussed in Chapter 1.

Hence Fanon's connection between the individual and the nation and the nation and the world. By constituting themselves into a collective force, the wretched of the earth have some chance of overcoming structural marginality and entering progressively larger communities of meaning.³

A critic like Miller or Babbha would read Fanon's remarks on the nation as a door to the world as a highly authoritarian subordination of the local and the individual to the collective. But Fanon is

² And, as Randal Collins' vast work on the sociology of philosophies argues "Conflict is the energy source of intellectual life" (1998:1).

³ We should keep in mind Collins' caution against the assumption that ideas emerge in abstraction from embodied location of intellectual networks. All intellectual inventions are predicated on "intellectual networks capable of autonomous action" (1998:857). A philosophical tradition with something to offer the struggles of the wretched of the earth will not emerge by sheer acts of independent will. It will require a particular community of inquiry with its own networks and outlets to enable contestation and co-operation.

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clear that he is talking about the nation as collectivity in the moment in which nationalism is a social space for individual praxis to create new collectivities, and not when it is a disciplining tool of the state and capital producing collective subordination. Indeed, Fanon argues for a radically democratic vision of national movement in anti-colonial struggle and, importantly (because the end of the struggle is usually presented as the time for obedience) post-colonial development. With regard to the latter he goes so far as to insist that:

If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across... The bridge should not be 'parachuted down' from above... on the contrary it should come from the muscles and brains of the citizens... in this way only is everything possible (1976:162).

This is the precise reverse of authoritarianism.⁴ Fanon is suggesting that the collective political community is only liberatory when moulded by the agency of the various particularities that constitute it. This can be understood ontologically as well as politically. With regard to the former, the point of departure is the fact that the individual chooses and acts and thus creates herself within the context of a situation in a time and a place. When she moves beyond the orthodox responses, when she chooses new things and acts in new ways, the significance of her particular being and choices and actions ripples out from singularity and into collectivity. The apparent contradiction between the particular and the universal is overcome with the dialectical concepts of totality and movement. If we all inhabit particularity within a larger interconnected totality, and if struggle can move us towards a progressively larger awareness, then the particular can logically be the door to the universal.

⁴ And it is the precise opposite of what James Ferguson calls the 'anti-politics machine'. Ferguson writes that: "By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of "development" is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today" (1994:256).

Fanon clearly conceives of existence in terms of concentric rings of collective being. This is not 'woolly' mysticism. On the contrary it is very practical. His first expression of the practical interconnectedness of humanity is in the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* where he shows that "To speak....means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (1967a:17) because "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture." (1967a:18). That world, and that culture, are continually being changed by users of the language. But although we can innovate there can be no entirely original verbal intervention. We must make our interventions from within a particular collective accumulation of experience. And although languages can all be translated they remain unequal. There is no single transnational democratic public space or Kantian network of linked local democratic public spaces of equal stature to which all languages, people and ideas have the same degree of access. Relations of domination suppress and marginalize certain voices and elevate others within and between all forms of collectivity. Nevertheless the possibility of intelligible universal communication, even if mediated and highly unequal, does mean that there is a degree to which we all share some access to the cultural sea in which possession of any translatable language allows us to swim. So while someone living in a shack in Durban and speaking only Zulu is not hermetically and permanently shut off from all the ideas to which an academic living in Paris and speaking French and German is exposed, and vice versa, their immediate lifeworlds are quite different. For Durban shackdwellers to have anything like the reach of Parisian academics they would have to be constituted into a collective community of meaning able to produce interventions in wider circles of being.⁵

⁵ This is no fantasy. Shack dwellers in Durban were completely silenced when the particularity of their situation was occluded by the discourse of the nation. But, organised together as the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (shackdwellers) movement, they have been able to make numerous national and

Fanon also makes use of Jung's idea of the collective unconscious.⁶ He defines it as "purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths and collective attitudes of a given group" (1967a:188). It is, perhaps, necessary to point out that Fanon rejects the view that the collective unconsciousness is inherited (genetic) and insists that it is purely cultural and that it can and will continue to change and develop. It is also important to note that Fanon clearly thought that the contents of the collective unconscious should and could be made conscious. He also shows that the symbolic order which structures the collective unconsciousness extends far beyond the boundaries of language. He is, for example, able to speak of the collective unconscious of Europe as a whole. The 'cosmic harmonies' to which Fanon refers when he writes that 'man is a yes', are not explained. But Fanon does refer, further on in *Black Skin, White Masks* to the "cosmic Jung" (1967a:151) and it seems fair to guess that he uses the phrase 'cosmic harmonies' to refer to the universal archetypes through which we experience our particular desire. We grow from a collective consciousness, live in it and, if we have the courage and vision, challenge it and extend it. But we are always part of it.

There are also such things as particular political communities. While it is true that all large political communities are, in certain important ways, imagined it is also true that certain political identities are real, and often urgently so, in the realm of lived experience. Political identities are real when particular groups of people inhabit a shared web of meaning and face a symbolic order and a set of material circumstances together. Different struggles exist in different times and places, inhabit different webs of meaning, confront different material and symbolic realities and thus have

international interventions. See *The Promised Land and the University of Abahlali base Mjondolo* Pithouse (2006).

⁶ Although as Hussein Bulhan explains (1985:74-77) Fanon has his differences with Jung.

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some particular modes of articulation, concerns and aims. And it is abundantly logical that those who inhabit a shared web of meaning and face particular challenges in a particular context will and should work together towards highlighting and resolving their particular problems. It's no surprise that Aimé Césaire's famous letter of resignation to the French Communist Party stressed "The peculiarity of our place in the world....The peculiarities of our problems which aren't to be reduced to subordinate forms of any other problem (Biko 1996:67). Once the peculiarity of a set of problems has been apprehended it makes perfectly logical strategic sense for a struggle taking up those problems to seek some degree of autonomy – to "define its own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products" (Bourdieu 1993:115). Hence Nkrumah argues, in an insurgent challenge to the "monopoly of the power to consecrate producers and products" (Bourdieu 1993:42) that "Our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people" (1964:78). Once an autonomous project emerges from a particular community of struggle, it becomes intellectually and materially possible for that community to make an original contribution to being. Hence the ultimate universalism of the hopes that so many Black intellectuals invested in Pan-Africanism in the 20th Century.

Liberal critics such as Appiah (1992) argue that political communities such as those constituted and imaged by Pan-Africanism compromise individual freedom. Postmodern radicals often make similar arguments. So, for example, Appiah and Hardt and Negri agree that racism is best opposed by the deconstruction of its categories rather than racialised resistance. This line of argument requires careful thinking about whether or not it is necessarily to struggle with in the collective identities created by oppression. A key question that needs to be asked is whether or not such communities of struggle necessarily introduce a blockage between the individual and the universal.

Sartre's attempts to develop an existential Marxism in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* offer a rich exploration of the political implications of existential ontology for thinking about the question of solidarity and, in particular, the prospects for a democratic theory of individuals producing collectives. Perhaps the most famous innovation in the *Critique* is Sartre's idea of the practico-inert – a form of collective bad faith in which freely chosen actions are

replaced by monstrous forces which, in the inertia of the inorganic and of exteriority, retain some power of action and unification combined with a false interiority (2004b:320).⁷

The idea of the practico-inert enables Sartre to distinguish between two forms of social collectivity – the group and the series. This distinction is usefully summarized by Wilfred Desan as follows:

(1) the group, which aims at a definite purpose and in an organized way pushes toward the elimination of all inertia within itself, and (2) the series, or *sérialité*, which, on the contrary, is characterized by its passive, inert, inorganic quality (1966:109).

Sartre mediates the relationship between individuals and the collective via an anti-dogmatic and anti-essentialist theory of group formation. He argues that individuals are collected into groups because of events in the spheres of both consciousness and objects. With regard to the former Wilfred Desan writes that for Sartre:

The *us-object* emerges when the relation – any relation – between two people is observed by a third man. Both of *us* become object in the world of the third person. In this new relation I and the other suddenly become unified. The third man may sometimes be the enemy, or he may be God or somebody whom we ought to placate with a gift...In our society all these relations, whether between two or among three persons, are fluent and unstable, they come up and disappear and then come up again (1966:87).

⁷ Also defined by Sartre as “multiple actions deriving inertia from material, inorganic, mediation” (2004:248).

But unity can also have material origins. Sartre famously asserts the freedom of consciousness, but he acknowledges that consciousness is embodied and that bodies have needs. Therefore, there is a necessary interaction between consciousness and matter. And matter, Sartre argues, can, despite the absence of compulsion (we are always free) have a totalising effect. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre uses the example of a cluster of people waiting at the designated point for a bus. He distinguishes between two types of social formations: the group, which is organised together to pursue a collective project, and the series, which is constructed from without and has a passive, inert quality. The passengers waiting for the bus would be part of a series for as long as they are alone in the collective ('a collection of solitudes') and passively engaging with the material force that brought them together. Sartre writes that:

The practical conditions of this attitude of semi-unawareness are, first, his real membership of other group (it is morning, he has just got up and left his home; he is still thinking of his children who are ill, etc.; furthermore, he is going to his office....) and secondly, his being-in-the-inert (that is to say, his interest) (2001a:313).

But when bus passengers form a collective and engage in strike action against the bus company because of a fare increase, as happened in South Africa in 1950s, or because of racial segregation, as happened in Alabama in the 1960s, the series has been transformed into a group. So for Sartre, groups can develop dialectically from a series as a result of opposition – the group is born from negation. Sartre's work leads us to conclude that accepting the lived reality of the series does not compel us to accept its original inertia. On the contrary the point of a radical project is to transform the series into a group as Black Consciousness did for blacks, the trade union movement did for workers and *Abahlali baseMjondolo* is doing for shack dwellers.

4.3 The lived reality of particular experience

Fanon's work engages with three central instances of resistance, the negative, articulating itself through particular identities which are race, then nationalism, gender and, finally, class. In this section of this chapter I aim to explore his analysis of the lived reality of race in order to demonstrate, concretely, the one aspect of the lived reality of the particular. Space precludes similarly detailed examinations of the lived realities of nationalism, gender and class all of which confront their particularity differently.

Conquest, plunder, domination and enslavement stretch back through all of known human history. But in the modern era racism has been a key ideology organising and legitimating inequality and domination within and between communities, countries and regions. It has resulted in exploitation, slavery and genocide on a staggering scale and continues to result in alienation, indignity, hunger, disease, neglect, poisoned air and water, denial of opportunity, imprisonment, rape and premature death. Yet it is clear that the concept of race has no extra-historical validity. For a start, the study of genetics has revealed, with certainty, that race is a biologically meaningless concept. Appiah summarises the evidence from genetics in two key points. The first is that:

the difference between people in language, moral affections, aesthetic attitudes, or political ideology – those differences that affect us most deeply in our dealings with each other – are not to any significant degree biologically determined (1992:35).⁸

His second point is that “human genetic variability between the populations of Africa or Europe or Asia is not much greater than that within those populations” (1992:35).⁸

⁸ David Goldberg reports that “the percentage of our genes that determines our purportedly racial or primarily morphological difference – is 0.5 percent. Stated more generally, intraracial differences are often

So all the racial 'science' of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries was wrong to claim a connection between biology and race. Ideas of race are in fact produced by culture. But this casual relationship has often been inverted. Since the post Nazi decline of racial science⁹ racist and racist ideas have increasingly taken their legitimacy from claims about culture.¹⁰ David Goldberg notes that:

As the biological conception [of race] has been increasingly attacked, the cultural is a sense (or a small set of senses) that has come to enjoy considerable commitment...Generally, the cultural conception includes identifying race with language group, religion, group habits, norms, or customs: a typical style of behavior, dress, cuisine, music, literature, and art. Primarily at issue in such cultural differentiations are values and perceived behaviour circumscribed by group membership (1993:70).

So instead of saying 'all people of race X are Y' post eugenics racism says 'to the degree that a range of historical, circumstantial or cultural attributes, behaviours or modes of being can be discerned in a person that person is Y.' The social barriers of the new racism are a little more porous and a lot less blatant but the new racism continues to organise and legitimate racialised domination and marginalization. Assimilationist racism gives an assimilated elite the opportunity to join the quest for green and gold cards. Their wealth is used to legitimate the system and thus blame its victims - in its prisons and shanty towns - for their suffering. In some ways, this new racism is more insidious than the old, more 'honest' racism - 'honest' in the sense in which people

much smaller than those between members of different races, interracial similarities often much greater than the similarities between those taken to be members of the same race" (1994:67).

⁹ Of course it hasn't disappeared entirely - witness the infamous 'Bell-curve' argument.

¹⁰ For Fanon "racism that aspires to be rational, individual, genotypically and phenotypically determined, becomes transformed into cultural racism" (1967b:32).

like Biko and du Bois argue that the racism of the Afrikaners or white Southerners is more honest than the unacknowledged racism of English or Northern white liberals.

There has been a lot of good work to show that many claims about racialised cultural purity or distinctness are fallacious and that there is, and has been since ancient times, much hybridity in the realm of culture and that this has often been deliberately suppressed to serve the interests of racist and nationalist projects. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1991) is a recent classic in regard to arguments about hybridity, but there is a huge amount of work in linguistics, archaeology, history and so on that reaches similar conclusions.

Moreover there is much work to show that, in Africa as in Europe, tradition can often be shown to have been invented for political purposes; Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* makes a very strong case for the invention of the - relatively recent - idea of the nation and Paulin Houtondji has convincingly argued against unanimism and for the view that "cultural traditions are always a complex heritage, contradictory and heterogeneous, an open set of options, some of which will be actualized by any given generation, which by adopting one choice sacrifices all the others" (1996:161).

This is not to suggest that culture is not a meaningful or indeed constituent reality in people's lives. It is clear that while there are a wide range of positions and choices within cultures – rich, poor, aristocratic, common, conformist, rebel, bandit, priest/diviner, conservative, radical, fully accepted, partially accepted etc, etc. – the ability to speak languages¹¹, understand particular

¹¹ And, as argued above, language is not a mere technical capacity. Language is, in Ngugi's famous phrase, "a carrier of culture" (1986:13).

articulations of ethical norms, know certain histories etc., create a series of interlinked spaces in which we can engage others with objectively differing degrees of ease. Nevertheless, there are also forms of shared understanding that are accessible to people from different continents but inaccessible to people from the same family.

Given the certain fallaciousness of the biological claims for the existence of races and the evident tendency for human cultures to mix and change, why not abandon the idea of race along with other errors of 18th century science like phlogiston? Why not begin a radical humanist project from the assertion of universal humanity?

Fanon was well aware that race is a social construct with no biological reality; the myth of African unanimity and the extent to which both Africa and Africans are inventions of European colonialism. He argues that:

It is the racist who creates his inferior. This conclusion brings us back to Sartre: 'The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew; that is the simple truth from which we must start....It is the anti-semite who makes the Jew' (1967a:93 emphasis in the original).

Fanon was acutely aware that the lived experience of racism is as real as Agent Orange on a child's cheek in a Vietnamese field or electrodes on the genitals of a young man who refused to look down in apartheid's holding cells. For that reason, Fanon asserted the urgent, at times murderous, social reality of a concept that has a reality in the world of lived experience that is not diminished by the fact that it is a changing social construction. In Auschwitz, Jewishness is as real as steel and fire and death. Sartre points to the materiality of this reality.

The Jew or the colonist, or the professional soldier, etc., are not ideas, any more than the militant or, as we shall see the petty bourgeois, or the manual worker. The theoretical error (it is not a practical one, because praxis really does constitute them in alterity) was to conceive of these beings as concepts, whereas – as the fundamental basis of extremely complex relations – they are primarily serial unities (2001:322).

Although he makes his opposition to all racisms¹² very clear, Fanon's primary focus is on anti-black racism in the metropole and the colony. He argues that in both cases there is a Manichean division between black and white in the mutually reinforcing spheres of the symbolic order and lived experience. In the symbolic sphere, whiteness is associated with beauty, reason, civilisation, goodness, truth etc while blackness is associated with ugliness, emotion, savagery, evil, error etc. This racial Manicheanism infects all forms of discourse - from curricula to entertainment, art, politics, science and religion. It is present everywhere from the structure of the unconscious where it can be discerned in dreams to the material structure of cities. And, as Fanon notes in a crucial observation, "The racist in a culture with racism is....normal" (1976:108). The lived experience of racism cannot be anything other than viscerally real in the ordinary:

lived experience of the black where there is a struggle to instantiate a self a mundane self, as ordinary self concerned with everyday things in the face of constant impositions of semiotic, gestural, political-economic, incarcerating limitations (Gordon 2000:53).

¹² For example he asks: "Is there any difference between one racism and another? Do not all of them show the same collapse, the same bankruptcy of man?" (1967a:86). His answer is that:

All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied against the same "object": man. When one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one's back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place. Colonial racism is no different from any other racism. Anti-Semitism hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white by an appalling battle, I am deprived of the possibility of being a man. I cannot disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother (1967a: 88-89).

Racism is a collective social pathology.

When racial Manicheanism is dominant, lived (embodied) experience will be over-determined, in many instances even fixed, by this reduction of human complexity into a binary opposition. Both the way in which people are perceived, and hence, in Fanon's neo-Hegelianism¹³, the way in which they see themselves, as well as the practical possibilities open for them to meet their needs and actualise their potential will be profoundly affected by this pejorative racialisation of humanity.

Of course there are moments and places, even in the most severely racialised forms of oppression, where race is transcended, or at least bracketed, but the force of Fanon's critique of racism lies in the near totality of the racism he encountered in both France and her colonies. Fanon's description of this totality has been discussed in previous chapters.

An entrenched racist system can only be fought from the inside. There may be moments outside of its logic – in authentic love, friendship and shared projects that reach across – but they are moments that, while they may be central to the lives of the people experiencing them, can only escape race for as long as they are private and removed from the reach of the power that must be confronted.¹⁴ This is also true of resistance. For example because the colonial city is divided into racial zones when the native, “deciding to embody history in his own person...surges into the forbidden quarters” (1976:31) he can only do so as a native in the sense that, no matter how he identifies himself and rationalises (or denies) his rebellion, his transgression will be seen, by all

¹³ Fanon worked within the Hegelian view that: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (Hegel 1977: 111).

¹⁴ In a song called *Woza Moya* on the 1983 Juluka album *Work for All* Johnny Clegg observes that “Behind the barrel of a gun love and friendship can become just another point of view.” Indeed.

natives and settlers, whether sympathetic or opposed to his act, *as* that of a native because the import of his action lies solely in the fact that it is fundamentally transgressive. And it is only transgressive *because* it is an act of a native. The fact that it may be an act aimed at denying or destroying the Manichean division of humanity into the constructed categories of settler and native doesn't change the fact that these categories are, at the time, facts and that this action must, therefore, be a racialised response to racism.

The idea of Africa and African and black identities may have been a European idea. But they now exist as lived realities and the people who inhabit them must struggle against both a collective European gaze, their internalisation of that gaze and a set of material forces. For Sartre groups are formed by both the gaze of a third party that creates an 'us' out of those whom it objectifies, and particular material conditions that create a common situation, and thus an 'us', for a group of people. The ontological reality of blackness and Africaness is thus perfectly comprehensible in terms of Fanon's existential ontology.

There is nothing unusual about an oppressive power creating a common identity amongst its victims. This also happens where oppression is not racialised. Mahmood Mamdani offers convincing empirical evidence to support his claim that in neo-colonial Africa: "*Every* movement of resistance was shaped by the very structure of power against which it rebelled (1996:24). Existential ontology does not create the idea that domination can create a common identity amongst the dominated – it explains it.

The assertion of the lived reality of the social categories that organise and legitimate domination does not deny the reality of individual experience. On the contrary we should remember that

Fanon's philosophy is founded on an insistence that "I am my own foundation" (1967a:230). Moreover, Fanon's acknowledgement of the lived reality of social identities like Blackness, Arabness, Africaness does not mean that he sees these identities as outside of history or undifferentiated. For example he shows that in Algeria the colonial identities of 'Arab' and 'Muslim' gave way, through reflection on struggle, to the fighting identity of 'Algerian'. And this identity came to include people of Jewish and French descent who chose to be anti-colonial.¹⁵ He is quite clear that the support for the Algerian revolution by anti-colonial militants of French descent,¹⁶ detailed in the chapter on *Algeria's European Minority* in *A Dying Colonialism*, means that they have chosen to become Algerian – not Muslim or Arab but Algerian and thus, by implication, Africans. This makes sense within existential ontology. A settler who chooses to become Algerian chooses to step from behind the colonial gaze and into it.¹⁷ She also chooses the same material circumstances, including the risk of torture and death, as natives who have chosen to become Algerian¹⁸. Of course a person of European descent who had, like Charles Geromini,¹⁹ chosen to be Algerian would not be objectified when anonymously walking into a room full of

¹⁵ Similarly the black consciousness movement in South Africa rejected apartheid categorisation and developed blackness as a fighting identity that included people classified as Africans, coloureds and Indian by apartheid.

¹⁶ i. "The tortured European has behaved like an authentic militant in the national fight for independence" (1965:151).

ii. "Others have paid for their devotion to the Algerian national cause with their lives" (1965:162).

iii. Gendzier notes that by spring 1960, 3000 men had deserted from the French army in Algeria. Their choice was warmly welcomed by the FLN (1985:163).

¹⁷ Of course she is still a white French woman who has chosen and the white gaze to which she is subject will be one that objectifies her as a traitor which is different to the gaze objectifying Arabs as Arabs. The fascist mobs that chanted 'Death to Camus' in Algiers and 'Death to Sartre in Paris' hardly felt that Camus and Sartre had been included in the general condemnation of Arabs – so general it didn't need to be chanted. That condemnation was lived prosaically and practically.

¹⁸ Fanon reports that while some Europeans offered limited support for the FLN, such as financial contributions or *allowing* them to use *their* farms, others gave up their material privilege and joined FLN cells thus choosing to embrace the Algerian situation completely.

¹⁹ Geromini worked as an intern for Fanon at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria and followed him into exile with the FLN in Tunisia.

white students at the University at Lyon. He is still white. Identities are multiple and they constantly shift according to the gaze and conditions that must be confronted. Geromini is white, and therefore a person when entering, as a stranger, a room in Lyon. Similarly if while walking, anonymously, through Algiers he encounters an anti-colonial Arab riot, the colonial police will act to protect him if his desire to join the riot has not been made unambiguously clear. If arrested by the French army while on an FLN operation he will be instantly objectified as a traitor and condemned to the same fate as an Arab militant. To his comrades in the FLN cell, especially at a moment of high danger when all that matters is knowing who is on your side and who is not, he will be, and at that moment just be, a comrade. When encountering Arabs as a stranger outside of the context of his political commitment he will, initially, be a settler. So it goes, in the real world. Examples of how the identities of Geromini, or Fanon, or anyone in a racist society will shift according to circumstance can be multiplied indefinitely. We are not objects, and even our objectification at the hands and gazes of others is something that we confront in different degrees, from a range of consciousnesses and systems within systems, all of which are changing and possessed of particular attributes and positions. But this does not change the fact that particular subject positions are lived as realities. The reality of fluidity and multiplicity must not, in the manner of some postmodern theorising, blind us to the reality that people are often locked into specific subject positions.

Fanon, a great prophet of humanist universalism edited a black magazine in Lyon called *Tam-Tam* precisely because there was no space for the black voice and, for the development of black sociality, in the allegedly raceless but practically white 'general' media in Lyon. This brings us to the point that particularity is often obscured when what is thought to be normal, average, typical,

widespread, or even universal, is often thought to be so simply because it applies to, or is believed to apply to the dominant. As Lewis Gordon, writing about the example of race, puts it:

Put bluntly the appeal of many so-called racially neutral terms – *man*, *woman*, *person*, *child* – is that they often signify whites²⁰, except where stated otherwise. They have a prereflective parenthetical adjective: *(white) man*, *(white) woman*, *(white) person*, *(white) child*. It is not the case that these terms must signify these subtextual markers; if that were so, then our position would exemplify the spirit of seriousness. It is that our life world, so to speak, is such that these are their significations (2000:87).

Similar arguments need to be made, and made with equal urgency, about class, gender and other modes of oppression. The assumption of prereflective parenthetical adjectives – i.e. the assumption of the universal normativity of certain particular subject positions – is often a result of the physical exclusion of certain people from the spheres in which meaning is mass produced and legitimated (the media, academy, popular culture etc.) and the simultaneous objectification of the same people by a dominating gaze. Objectification can mean a form of stigmatisation that inflates presence ('they' are taking over; the white LAPD police officer sees only the black drivers in his scan for suspicious behaviour etc.) or an objectification that diminishes presence to the point of invisibility²¹ by reducing some people from human to object and thus removing them from the realm of sociality and only perceiving them in instrumental contexts.²² In the former case the

²⁰ Fanon made similar comments about how universality is collapsed into whiteness in a white dominated racist society. In some contexts (like much of contemporary Eastern Europe) it would be necessary to add that 'man' means 'white American' or 'Western man'. In the Appalachian villages where the American costs of the Vietnam war were disproportionately borne, and children's bellies are still swollen by want rather than excess, 'man' is likely to mean something more precise than just 'white American man'. So it goes. On and on. But the point stands.

²¹ In the mid 1990's the *Daily News* would regular report that the Durban CBD was 'empty' or 'dead' when what was actually happening was that it was becoming more crowded but less white and Indian and more African (Pithouse:1996).

²² So a writer of the prodigious talent of Ralph Ellison begins his first novel thus: "I am an invisible man" 1965:7.

racialised other is often explicitly removed from the apparently neutral categories – they are Black students not just students; she is a Black driver not just a driver – but in the latter case the racialised other is hidden by the false claim of the apparently race neutral category to include her. She is removed from the symbolic sphere. In the first case the solution is to point to the hidden generality – she is a driver and should be treated as all other drivers are treated. But in the second case it is necessary to assert particularity. As Lewis Gordon argues “To advance the claim, then, that we should abandon the other designations in favour of so-called racially neutral ones in no way threatens the unholy alliance between the racially favored group and normativity” (2000:87).

Hence there is value in a school of Black philosophy in America, a Kurdish newspaper in Turkey, a gypsy radio station in Europe, a shack dwellers’ movement in Durban etc. But it needs to be made clear that the demands of particular struggle do not imply the philosophical acceptance of eternal (and therefore ahistorical) and singular essentialisms. Just as Fanon sees a need for racial, national and continental identities to be taken on where appropriate, he sees an equal need for these identities to be challenged when they obscure the particular within the particular. For example, he argues that the events of the American civil rights struggle “have very little in common in their principles and objectives with the heroic fight of the Angolan people against a detestable Portuguese colonialism” (1976:174). And, of course, he famously argues that nationalism becomes pathological if it is not deepened into social consciousness.

It is important to issue a qualification at this point which is that particular political identities are not merely a defensive response consequent to collective suffering. They can also nurture collective hopes and become a matrix for the production and appreciation of creativity and joy.

Think of the Harlem Renaissance,²³ the extraordinary cultural flowering in Sophiatown, Rastafari or the music of the Asian underground in contemporary Britain and so on. People are often best able to express themselves and, to best understand others in an environment in which they feel most at home. It must be made clear that recognition of the political importance of this is not, at all, to imply an injunction to only or preferably cultivate sociality within webs of inherited meaning. It is an argument for the value of sociality and a recognition that any injunction to begin from the putatively 'universal' or to conform to dominant ideas of what constitutes good music, or journalism or philosophy, or respectable forums for these activities, will, in the example of an anti-black racist context, amount to an attack on black sociality. This does not mean that there are any limits to the spaces that can be created for sociality in a dehumanising world.

In *Imagined Communities*, a book that is often misread as the definitive proof of the irrationality and therefore pathology of nationalism, Benedict Anderson is careful to point out that nationalism often inspires self-sacrificing love:

In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles (1991:141-142).²⁴

²³ As Adam Lively explains:

Harlem became a Mecca for black musicians, dancers, actors, writers. Trumpeter Cootie Williams, born in Alabama, recalled: 'When I used to say my prayers at night, I used to say "Dear Lord, please hurry up and let me grow up so that I can go to New York."' For Edward 'Duke' Ellington, who moved to New York permanently in 1923, the city was 'a dream of a song, a feeling of aliveness, a rush and flow of vitality that pulses like the giant heartbeat of humanity. The world revolves around New York...' The result of this cultural ferment was the Harlem Renaissance, the first self-consciously 'black' artistic movement (1998:6).

From a Fanonian perspective it is necessary to incite and sustain as well as to endorse all revolts that put human 'yes!' against an objectifying 'no!' We all inhabit a particular conglomeration of languages, ideas, memories and circumstances. And particular cultures and people with shared socio-historical experiences inhabit, imprecisely but meaningfully, a common life-world with common norms and modes of expression. This is what Fanon meant when he said that we are not angels. This means that modes of identification and articulation of rebellion that may resonate in one place and time may not resonate in another. This is not to deny cross-pollination²⁵ and hybridity but it is the case that Zapata will have a particular power as an icon in rural Mexico; that the songs that Cetshwayo's soldiers sang as they marched away from Isandlawana will have a particular resonance in KwaZulu-Natal; that the language of general class struggle may be an effective mobilising tool in a COSATU union, but that the language of the specific story of the national conquest and domination of the amaXhosa by the English will have a particular mobilising capacity around issues of land in the Eastern Cape; or that language of decency and proper behaviour will be more effective in mobilising women facing water cut-offs in South African townships than the language of class struggle or human rights, etc. In many instances a revolt is more likely to ignite and be sustained if it is rooted in a particular life world with resonant and accessible resources to inspire resistance.

²⁴ Michael Ignatieff (1994) would differ. He sees the aesthetic of nationalism as sentimental ethnic kitsch that's all about a heroic and tragic 'us' and a dastardly 'them', usually mixed with testosterone and alcohol in the minds of alienated, underemployed young men. This may well be the case in Belfast or Kosovo but where, in this story, is there room for the Yugoslav Partisans; the boy who, in Czeslaw Milosz's account of the Warsaw Uprising, died under Nazi torture rather than betray his comrades; or Biko's forthright assertion of his humanity and that of his people; or Bambatha; or General de Wet; or Russian peasants against the Nazi tanks; or the EZLN against NAFTA?

²⁵ For example consider the attraction of socialist modes of identification, articulation and action to workers in South Africa and in Kerala, India or the attraction of Zapatista ideas and modes of expression and action to the Italian Ya Basta! movement.

The Mau Mau revolt was deeply rooted in values and myths of Kikuyu culture. To oppose this actually existing revolt, on the grounds that it didn't conform to the values and myths of some theory, say a Marxist²⁶ theory, of what a revolt should be like would be to put theory before life and thus to collapse into bad faith. The Fanonian position is to stand within the rebellion and to seek to contribute to its development into a national and then social project. In *A Dying Colonialism* Fanon's influential case studies of the role of the veil, the radio and medicine in the Algerian struggle led him to conclude that while tradition can be a suffocating and repressive force culture is as dynamic as it is potent, and can be transformed by struggles in which people step into history by assuming responsibility for their destiny. For Fanon it is fine to begin with tradition, even if it is ossified, and then dialectically transform it along the way – and in so doing transform ourselves from a series governed by a tradition to a group - moving, self-creating and alive in world in which inherited or imagined tradition is just one more fact that we must determine our relation to. And the achievement of collective sociality needs to be actively sustained. Particular political or cultural spaces often ossify and simply become nodes of political control or even niche markets for an often racialising and objectifying “corporate multiculturalism” (Gilroy 2000:269). In both cases participative sociality is subordinated to spectacle (Debord 1995).²⁷ The group can always collapse back into the series.

²⁶ Of course Marx did observe that he wasn't a Marxist and while some of his followers have insisted on a mechanistic and, ironically, ahistorical 'scientific socialism' Marx himself agreed that we are constituted by our past and must reimagine it in order to fuel our progress:

the awakening of the dead in these revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of the revolution, not of making its ghost walk about again (Cited in Eagleton, 1990:213).

²⁷ Debord explains that:

4.4 The necessity for collective action

In this section of this chapter I aim to develop an account of the necessity for resistance to take the form of collective action. I continue to make primary use of the example of race but do make some comments with regard to other particular subject positions that Fanon's philosophy engages with seriously – nationalism, gender and class. It would be a serious mistake to impose a neat separation on these subject positions when they are linked in various complex and changing ways. It must also be noted that each of these modes of domination finds material and symbolic expression and, when they become modes of resistance, must confront material and symbolic oppression. In the case of race, Fanon makes the point that racism has infected and structured the symbolic²⁸ and material²⁹ spheres of human existence so deeply that, in so far as it is noticed, it appears to be 'normal'. This is also true of relations of subordination structured through nationality, gender and class. The 'international community' is not 'normally' assumed to include Haiti, women's issues are not normally assumed to be general issues, shack dwellers in Durban are not 'normally' assumed to be able to think and act for themselves. So it goes.

The self-movement of the spectacle consists in this: it arrogates to itself everything that in human activity exists in a fluid state so as to possess it in a congealed form – as things that, being the negative expression of living value, have become exclusively abstract value. In these signs we recognise our old enemy the commodity, which appears at first sight a very trivial thing, and easily understood, yet which is in reality a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties (1995:35).

²⁸ i "For the native objectivity is always directed against him" (1976:61).

ii "Confronted with a world ruled by the settler, the native is always presumed guilty" (1976:41).

²⁹ "The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (1976:31).

Neither the objectification nor material inequality consequent to domination preclude individuals from making the existential choice to assert their humanity. This individual heroism can lead, as in the case of Steve Biko, to death or, as in the case of Frederick Douglass, to a radical improvement in one's circumstances. Despite the different outcomes in Biko's fight with Nieuwoudt and Douglass's fight with Covey, both men refused to be objects and, due in part to the heroic nature of that refusal, became inspiring icons of collective struggles against racism. And then there are the choices made by people like John Brown and Charles Geromini. In Sartrean terms Douglass and Biko refused masochism, and Brown and Geromini refused sadism, but they all chose to act authentically and for humanity and sociality.

Radical and challenging individual choices pose a general challenge, and thus extend being. Biko's example thus became a challenge that millions of people have confronted (and still do as the story is told and retold in New York, Kingston, Johannesburg, Ginsberg....) But Biko and John Brown are martyrs. Douglass lived because he escaped. Of course he escaped to fight, but escape is not always possible. Moreover it is hardly desirable to suggest escape as an ordinary solution. It risks leaving oppressive systems unopposed and requires that the dominated must all take on the burden of flight and re-inventing lives and communities elsewhere. We should remember that Zionism's fantasy is precisely the disappearance of Palestinians from the occupied territories and the apartheid fantasy of black 'homelands' and Indian 'repatriation' is of the same order. The enormous popular appeal of neo-Zionist fantasies to Marcus Garvey and the Rastafari movement does not mean that black flight is the answer to white racism – it is an indication of the severity of the crisis confronted by blacks in the new world. For whites the new world felt like Zion – hence the resonance of the Biblical story of entry, on the back of conquest, into the Promised Land. For

blacks it felt like Babylon – hence the resonance of the Biblical story of the exodus from slavery in Egypt. Although martyrdom and exile can both be powerful forms of testimony against the inhumanity of racism, and therefore be key moments in the struggle against racism, black martyrdom or flight cannot be a collective or final answer to the problem of racism. The same would be true for any proposal that escape be proposed as a general solution for national or class oppression.

It is also impossible for a black person to accept racial Manicheanism but to escape its condemnation by identifying with whiteness. After all, if an individual accepts the system of hierarchical racial classification but denies that she is a member of the denigrated race her denial will simply not be accepted if her particular mode of embodiment places her in that race. Moreover, her desire to deny the fact of her embodiment will function to confirm the very racial Manicheanism she wishes to escape. Indeed, nothing gives more support to racism than evidence that its victims endorse its verdict.

It is also impossible for an individual to escape racist objectification by accepting her particular embodiment and asserting, on what ever grounds, her personal subjectivity. The most immediate flaw in this approach is that her subjectivity would have to be asserted and fought for in each new encounter with the Other. At best there would be moments of hard-won respite from chronic racism. But this approach would also provide implicit acceptance, and therefore support, for both the system of categorization and the judgments attached to it. It would thus function to make the racist system she wished to escape more acute.

Similarly a white person who has scorned the material and psychological privilege into which she was born and committed herself to the struggle against racism is likely to find that, although race can be transcended in personal relationships, she has continually to prove herself in new encounters with both black and white people and that stereotypes persist. Moreover, in a system of entrenched racism she may well encounter direct resistance to attempts to realise sociality on her own.³⁰

It is possible for individuals to escape certain forms of national and class oppression via identification with the values of domination. National and class based modes of oppression can, in so far as they are delinked from race, allow for individual mobility via identification with domination. Examples would include the African who legally and culturally turns herself into a loyal American or the worker who transforms into a manager. No doubt there would be a certain psychological cost but individual mobility across symbolic and material Manichean divides is not impossible. Indeed, in many instances a carefully limited degree of such mobility is necessary to legitimate domination. But when domination depends on structural inequality within and/or between societies then it is structurally impossible to for this kind of mobility to provide any kind of general solution.

It is clear that genuine individual escape from any racialised oppression requires the destruction of racism. It is also clear that collective liberation from collective oppression requires a fundamental

³⁰ Angela Davis reminds us that Myrtilla Miner “fought evictions, arson attempts, and the other misdeeds of racist stone-throwing mobs” (Essed & Goldberg 2002: 72). Similar situations are all too easy to imagine in contemporary Israel, Saudi Arabia and Dubai (where South Asian migrant workers live segregated lives with no rights) and, when race is compounded by ‘illegal’ status, contemporary California, Russia and Australia.

break with the Manichean structures of oppression rather than identification with dominance. And this requires radical, collective and sustained³¹ resistance in both the symbolic³² and material spheres. Racism is such a pervasive part of reality that to escape or deny racism would require one to escape or deny reality. Fanon testifies, brilliantly, to the truth of this conclusion in the biographical chapter, *The Fact of Blackness*, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The permanent escape of a pervasive racialised social reality is impossible outside of suicide, madness, isolation or exile. It is possible to live in denial of that reality but bad faith is a crippling coping mechanism rather than a genuine transcendence of that reality.

Moreover, because racialised oppression operates by undermining the self-respect of the oppressed, there is a significant degree to which real progress requires that respect to be won back in a collective struggle *by* the oppressed. In his discussion of Hegel in *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon argues (without reference to C.L.R. James's account of the Haitian revolution and, consequently, to the ire of Ato Sekyi-Otu) that "Historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom" (1967:219) with the consequence that:

The upheaval reached the Negroes from without. The black was acted upon. Values that had not been created by his actions, values that had not been created by his actions, values that had not been born of the systolic tide of his blood, danced in a hued whirl around him. The upheaval did not make a difference. He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another...The former slave, who can

³¹ "It needed more than one native to say 'We've had enough'; more than one peasant rising crushed, more than one demonstration put down before we could today hold our own" (Fanon 1976:166).

³² Fanon is clear that while repression is a brute bodily affair "The settler has only broken the native when he admits the superiority of white values" (1976:33 – 34). In other words the system seeks to win its victim's consent for their oppression. Hence Biko's famous comment that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (1996:68).

find in his memory no trace of the struggle for liberty or of that anguish of liberty of which Kierkegaard speaks, sits unmoved before the young white man singing and dancing on the tightrope of existence (1967:220-221).

For Fanon, like Hegel, self consciousness is achieved when life is risked. This is not necessarily a literal requirement for each individual. But a collective fight, which includes a collective assumption of risk, provides the immediate experience of constituent power that can transform a consciousness "haunted by a galaxy of erosive stereotypes" (1967a:129).

Fanon's biographical account of the dialectic of his own 'disalienation' from racism begins with his recognition of the social reality of white racism and, therefore, his blackness. In a racist society neither blackness nor whiteness can be evaded in any sustained way. Reason doesn't help because racism, despite its claim to the contrary, is fundamentally irrational. "I was up against something unreasoned....for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason" (1967:118).

Reason was confident of victory on every level. I put all the parts back together. But I had to change my tune. That victory played cat and mouse; it made a fool of me. As the other put it, when I was present, it was not; when it was there, I was no longer. In the abstract there was agreement: The Negro is a human being....But on certain points the white man remained intractable (1967:119-120).

This intractability produces, in the Black, "a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence" (1967:60). And so Fanon realised that he had to *be* black and to assert his presence, individually and with others, *as* black. How does a man of reason be black in a racist culture that cannot imagine blackness and reason together? A solution seems to present itself:

From the opposite end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me... I began to flush with pride. Was this our salvation?...I had rationalized the world and the world has rejected me on the basis on color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back towards unreason (1967:123).

The Negro raining his poetic power on the world, 'opens to all the breaths of the world.' I embrace the world! I am the world! The white man has never understood this magic substitution... (he) wants the world; he wants it for himself alone.... He enslaves it. An acquisitive relation is established between the world and him....I had discovered the primeval One...The white man had the anguished feeling that I was escaping from him and that I was taking something with me...that I had a secret...I made myself the poet of the world...The soul of the white man was corrupted, and, as I was told by a friend...'The presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become to mechanised, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little sustenance.' At last I had been recognised, I was no longer a zero (1967:128-129).

Fanon had arrived at *négritude* - "this attitude, so heroically absolute, renounces the present and the future in the name of a mystical past" (1967:14). Fanon seeks an absolute commitment. This has led to much criticism beginning with Sartre's introduction to *Black Orpheus* where he argued that:

négritude appears like the upbeat [unaccented beat] of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis: the position of *négritude* as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and these black men who use it know this perfectly well; they know that it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human being in a raceless society. Thus, *négritude* is for destroying itself; it is a "crossing to" and not an "arrival at," a means and not an end (1988:327).

Fanon, in the moment of negativity had to resist Sartre's insistence on a synthetic dialectic. He reported that:

When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance.'... For once that born Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain to consciousness of self (1967:133-134).

This is not to say that Negritude is not flawed. Wole Soyinka gives a good enough account of its flaws:

négritude trapped itself in what was primarily a defensive role, even though its accents were strident, its syntax hyperbolic and its strategies aggressive...*Négritude* stayed within pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis of both man and his society, and tried to re-define the African and his society in those externalised terms (Cited in Said, 2000:302).

However there is an importance difference between the experience of running into the limits of Negritude as a movement of revolt from within this movement and a position that seeks, from outside, to prescribe an eventual dialectical synthesis and so render the moment of absolute negativity impossible.

Edward Said is, in an explicitly Fanonian sense, a dialectical thinker and so while he points to the weaknesses of *négritude*³³ he also notes that "it is impossible to avoid the combative, assertive early stages in the nativist identity - they always occur" (2000:302). Fanon, as the writer of the whole dialectical narrative from the beginning of *Black Skin, White Masks* to the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, and not as the man who, at one point, "needed to lose myself completely in negritude.... I needed not to know" (1967:135), does not recommend or demand nativism. He is also not against it in the sense that he feels that it is always to be opposed. His narrative of the dialectical transition from colonial racism to a true humanity assumes, in both *Black Skin, White*

³³ "To leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam or Catholicism is to abandon history for essentializations" (2000:302).

Masks and *The Wretched of the Earth* that nativism is something to be worked and passed through. But it is crucial that Fanon does not start with this view – he arrives at it via reflection on experience. His experience of struggle leads him to conclude that nativism is to be welcomed in so far as it is the beginning of the movement away from a racialised humanity and towards a true humanity but it is the beginning of that movement and not the achievement of a true humanity. In Lewis Gordon's words: "A dialectical resolve takes over here, a resolve that Fanon reluctantly conceded through Sartre, that the semiotic upsurge prepares one for struggle; it is a humanizing moment, but not achieved humanization" (2000:54). Fanon would, however, oppose those who would seek to stigmatise the first movement in this direction, within in the world of lived experience, where absolute goals are journeyed towards, not merely decided upon like theories. This endorsement of the value of absolute identification as a first step in a dialectical journey towards a true humanism does not, contrary to Homi Bhabha and other postmodern critics of Fanon, mean that Fanon can be legitimately accused of endorsing, as an ultimate value, what Paulin Hountondji calls "unanimisim" (1996). On the contrary his position is that the negative moment, the moment of rebellion against oppression, must be endorsed fully. This does not entail a necessary endorsement of an ideology that emerges from struggle but legitimates domination when it becomes the language of constituted power.³⁴ It is an endorsement of a movement of revolt.

It may well be argued that while the series is a consequence of facticity (in an anti-Black world anti-Black racism is a fact that each Black person must confront in a way that is objectively different to the way that other people must confront it) the group is a consequence of choice. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre develops, at some length, an account of the events

³⁴ On the contrary, he rails against "these men who have sung the praises of their race...proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey, to go on obeying and to be obedient until the end of time" (1976:135).

leading up to the storming of the Bastille. His purpose is to show that while the Parisian poor become a series through a set of objective facts – like their common suffering from hunger and their encirclement by the army – the group does not arise in a mechanistic fashion.

Sartre is careful to explain that the unity of the group “lies only in the common praxis and the common purpose, as interiorised by each of the members...Its freedom lies in the freedom of its free members, and it keeps alive through their continual internal inventiveness” (Desan 1966:158). The group has no mystical or permanent identity. On the contrary Sartre gives two examples of historical instances where sections of the military, previously ranged against revolutionaries, have gone over to, and been welcomed into, revolutionary groups.

Moreover, and crucially, it also needs to be noted that for Sartre it is quite possible for the group to slip back into seriality if it does not struggle against “the practical inertia” (2001:328) that confronts every group at some point. The practice of freedom is, just as much in the collective as the individual context, a mode of being and not an event. And there is also the possibility that the group can solidify in to what he calls ‘institutional monolithism’ where individuals submit mechanically and unreflectively to some form of sovereign.

Négritude may develop into the fighting culture of black consciousness which does not necessarily, as *négritude* does, accept and then affirm as positive the pejorative stereotypes of white racism (so, for example, the stereotype of the Black as irrational is accepted but given a positive value) but seeks to value, affirm and nurture the humanity of Black people. For Biko

black consciousness seeks to show the black people the value of their own standards

and outlook. It urges black people to judge themselves according to these standards and not to be fooled by white society who have.....made white standards the yardstick by which even black people judge each other (1996: 30).

Biko looked forward to a “non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference” (1996: 139) and thus rejected the idea, central to negritude, that there were inherent racial essentialisms. But, like W.E.B. Du Bois (1989) 74 years earlier, he argued that a post-racial society could only be achieved at the conclusion of a dialectical process in the (overlapping) spheres of politics and consciousness. In the sphere of consciousness he celebrated the development of:

black groups (which) are becoming more and more conscious of the self. They are beginning to rid their minds of imprisoning notions which are the legacy of the control of their attitudes by whites. Slowly, they have cast aside the ‘morality argument’ which prevented them from going it alone and are now learning that a lot of good can be derived from specific exclusion of whites from black institutions (1996:68).

In a racist society, where white judgements are everywhere, the project of urging ‘black people to judge themselves’ requires the development, the collective development, of Black autonomy in the sense in which Bourdieu (1993) defines autonomy as the power to produce and consecrate cultural products. The political necessity for this autonomy will endure for as long as white racism is a mode of domination.

But Fanon does not only value solidarity amongst the dominated because it can enable collective autonomy. In the case of national oppression, Fanon argued that there was a specific danger in avoiding the nationalist phase:

What can be dangerous is when they reach the stage of social consciousness before the stage of nationalism. If this happens, we find in under-developed countries fierce demands for social justice which paradoxically are allied with often primitive tribalism (1976:164).

If we put aside the unfortunate connotations of the phrase 'primitive tribalism' we can see that there is a point here. If the colonial insertion of Africa into the capitalist economy meant that it was impossible to go back to pre-colonial economic models, and necessary to take over and transform the colonial economy then the need to create larger forms of identification and community than those that existed in the pre-colonial era is clear. But it is equally clear that in most states the sense of shared unity that did develop during the nationalist struggle did not endure. This does not mean that Fanon's hopes for the viability of new nations were fundamentally misconceived and that Fanon must take some responsibility for their quick collapse into authoritarianism. Ethnic tensions did often exacerbate this but as Mamdani shows (1996 & 2001) all post-colonial regimes, with the exception of Nyerere's Tanzania, chose what Mamdani refers to as a conservative nationalism that attacked racialised privilege but continued the colonial practice of ethnicised decentralised despotism. Nyerere on the other hand chose a "radical nationalism" that

was determined to reform citizenship consistently, both to deracialise and to deethnicise it. From this point of view, it was not enough to do away with the settler's prerogative; all prerogatives, racial as well as ethnic, would need to be abolished (Mamdani 2001:274).

Fanon's sympathies are indisputably with radical nationalism and against conservative nationalism, and so the Tanzanian avoidance of the ethnic tensions that have propelled so many other countries

into authoritarianism stands as a vindication of Fanon's commitment for citizenship and against subjecthood.

But although Fanon begins from a position of absolute endorsement of national sentiment but he is acutely aware that nationalism can become counter-productive or even pathological. Hence his insistence on the need "to raise the standard of consciousness of the rank-and-file" (1976:108) and his famous warning that:

[N]ationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed....If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness (Fanon,1976:163).

He cautions that

Without out that struggle...there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of trumpets. There's nothing save a minimum of readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving; and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the Middle Ages, endlessly marking time (1976:118).

The work of democratising and intellectualising revolt, of developing the series into the group, is fundamentally important. And this work is intellectual work.

4.5 Intellectuals in a fighting culture

A central concept in Nigel Gibson's activist reading of Fanon is the idea of a fighting culture. This begins with Fanon's commitment to action – to sanctioning and being present in the movement of actually existing subaltern revolt. In this, as in much of his thinking on the role of radical intellectuals, Fanon's philosophy, as both Sekyi-Otu and Gibson note, resonates with much of the

thought of Gramsci.³⁵ Gramsci rails against intellectuals who wait for the perfect struggle to emerge before committing themselves:

There exists a scholastic and academic historico-political outlook which sees as real and worthwhile only such movements of revolt as are one hundred per cent conscious, i.e. movements that are governed by plans worked out in advance to the last detail or in line with abstract theory (which comes to the same thing). *But reality produces a wealth of the most bizarre combinations...* It is not reality which should be expected to conform to abstract schema. This will never happen, and hence this conception is nothing but an expression of passivity (my emphasis 1971:200).

In Gibson's estimation an important aspect of Fanon's commitment to taking the lived experience of struggle as the terrain of dialectical praxis meant that:

Unlike other nationalist leaders who developed or are identified with ideologies, like Senghor (*négritude*), Nasser (Pan-Arabism), Nkrumah (African Personality), Fanon grounded his new humanism in a dialogue with the social movements (1999:356).

In other words Fanon theorises a mode of open ended critical engagement within the process of constituting counter-power, rather than a model that scripts a route and destination for struggle. This orientation towards popular struggle rather than ideologies (that carry theories about ordinary people) is the only way to avoid objectification within struggle. And so Fanon demands that his readers, African intellectuals, give up the opportunities for parasitic enrichment that come the way of the national bourgeoisie and, instead, become transformative agents in the "zone of occult instability" (1976:182) that is created when radical intellectuals join the people in "that

³⁵Gramsci's very Fanonian starting point is that the "real philosopher is, and cannot be other than, the politician, the active man who modifies the environment, understanding by environment the ensemble of relations which each of us enters to take part in" (1971:352).

fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question" (1976:183).

Gibson goes on to show, with reference to Fanon's theorisation of the lived experience of resistance in the Algerian revolution, that for Fanon military strategies and vanguardist strategies must be subordinated to the political task of bringing into being a "whole universe of resistances" (2003:148). Fanon refuses to restrict politics to the elite activities of parties, leaders, soldiers, technocrats and so on and instead seeks to generate opportunities for the "subaltern" to become

[A] protagonist not only entering history but becoming its author. Everyone could participate in the reconstruction and invention of the nation creating a social collective, where truth becomes subjectivity and subjectivity acquires a dimension of objectivity...Fanon saw it as the 'practice of freedom' taking place in 'the structure of the people' (Gibson, 2003:151).

Fanon's philosophy is predicated on the assumption, directly stated by Gramsci, that "All men are intellectuals" (1971:9). For Fanon the cultivation of popular intellectuality is both a means to an end and an end in-itself. It is a means to an end in so far as this popular reflection on the experience of struggle is necessary to equip struggle to move effectively forward and to avoid having the group collapse into a series which can be repressive or unfit for the challenges of contesting domination. But Fanon also sees popular intellectuality as end in itself, in so far as his humanist ethics aspires, precisely, to the general assumption of agency. Hence, Fanon's insistence in the Algerian War of Liberation that military and other elite strategies must be subordinated to the political task of creating popular spaces for bringing multiple dialogical communities of resistances into being. This unites a key end of struggle with a key means of struggle. Communities in which "subjectivity, is reinvigorated as it becomes a *fighting culture* where the struggle for the new way of

life and the native's daily 'ways of life' become one and the same" (Gibson, 2003:129 italics in the original). Hence his insistence that "We must not voodoo the people" (1976:161).

Fanon's commitment to popular intellectuality is not some kind of post-modern fetish of plurality. On the contrary Fanon proposes a prescriptive politics. Prescriptive not in the sense of rendering obedience to some vanguard or theory but, rather, in the sense of a serious confrontation with facticity – especially in the form of reflection on the experience of struggle. Hence part of the intellectual work that needs to be done in communities of resistance is to produce new truths via reflection on experience. This is not, at all, the authoritarianism that comes with every proposal that a group of intellectuals, a party or some other vanguard legislate for a movement. On the contrary Gibson stresses that for Fanon it is "the essence of the fight which explodes the old colonial truths and reveals unexpected facets, which brings out new meanings and pinpoints the contradictions camouflaged by the facts". The fight is where "Liberatory ideology...is constructed in a social relationship between the militant intellectual and the mass movement" (Fanon, cited in Gibson, 2002:339). In other words reflection on experience is a collective and democratic process. Gibson notes that this process requires that "like Gramsci's 'organic intellectual', the militant posits himself as an 'element of the contradiction', and continually raises it to knowledge and action" (2002:339). Hence there must be a continuously self critical awareness about power relations within the movement.

The intellectual's role in the production of new truths from dialogical reflection on experience within a movement would include the communication of these truths – including the kind of work that Fanon did for *El Moudjahid*. Gramsci makes this point well:

To create a new culture does not mean only to make individually some "original" discoveries; it means also and especially to communicate critically some truths already discovered, to "socialize" them, so to speak, and thus to make them become the basis of vital actions and an element of coordination and of intellectual and moral order. That a mass of men is led to think coherently and in a unified reality, is a "philosophical" fact of much greater importance and "originality" than the discovery by a philosophical "genius" of a new truth that remains the property of small intellectual groups (Cited in Finochiaro, 1988:157).

Gibson devotes particular attention to Fanon's views on the important role of radical intellectuals in the development of democratic and non-vanguardist political education that seeks to develop critical capacities, encourage the assumption of responsibility in developing a fighting culture and develop revolutionary ideas that can provide an alternative to both "the hollow rhetoric of the nationalist middle class and the romanticizing, and potentially retrograde, nativist ideology, which appeals to belief systems such as religion" (Gibson, 1999:436). Gibson goes on to show that for Fanon this process requires a constant defence of imagination and creation of the spaces and attitudes necessary for self-creating cultural regeneration. He also explores, in illuminating depth, how Fanon sees the openness, fluidity and instability of this kind of social movement as the key to transcending the Manichean binaries of both colonialism and many responses to it. In Gibson's words "lived experience...liberates and transgresses the restrictive physical and mental boundaries of the colonial...order" (Gibson, 2003:133). So communities of identification can become, as they develop a fighting culture, public spaces for dialogical engagement that grow and change as they develop and express their antagonism to domination. Of course no teleology is being proposed here. There always have to be struggles within struggles to produce a group from a series, to keep it from ossifying back into a series and to forge progressively wider connections between groups.

The failure of the anti-colonial movements in Africa is often used to condemn Fanon. This is a fundamental misreading of Fanon – after all he diagnosed the reality and possibility of catastrophic failure before anyone else and was a partisan in a bitter struggle within the FLN. Nevertheless the optimism of the will in Fanon's commitment to return to struggle, against the national bourgeoisie's accommodation with imperial power, has appeared naïvely optimistic and therefore passé to some commentators. However it is precisely Fanon's commitment to the intellectuality of radical praxis, and the rigours that this imposes on dissident intellectuals, which gives his philosophy its enduring, and therefore contemporary power.

Gramsci argued that it was only in rare and particular circumstances that a war of movement or manoeuvre could be waged with the aim of a seizure of power. When capital is strong, well defended by a "sturdy structure of civil society" (1971:238), then any faith in quick victories is "out and out historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination" (1971:233) and it becomes necessary to wage a war of position "which is concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness" (1971:239). The war of position is, in part, an intellectual project to change the 'common sense' of society. In Gramsci's view the proletariat's organic intellectuals, intellectuals directly connected to the working class, should play a key role in this battle of ideas. As David McLellan explains:

The task of these organic intellectuals...was to draw out and make coherent the latent aspirations and potentialities already inherent in working-class activity. The relationship of organic intellectuals and their class was thus a dialectical one: they drew material from working-class experience as the same time as imparting to it a theoretical consciousness (1979:200).

Most of Fanon's work was written while he was engaged in a war of manoeuvre. But the fact that we are now in a war of position only makes his insistence on the patient and careful work of cultivating popular intellectuality all the more important. This is because major breakthroughs are possible in a war of manoeuvre with the sheer materiality of mass support. But in a war of position it is usually hegemony rather than the armed might of the state that is contested. And contestation for hegemony is, precisely, a battle of ideas.

4.6 Conclusion

Much of post-colonial Africa has suffered from forms of authoritarianism that do not allow dissent.³⁶ There is no doubt that Fanon was and, in so far as his urgent voice is still with us, would be radically opposed to this. Was Fanon naïve when he thought that national consciousness could be turned into social consciousness during revolution and, if this failed, be fought for after the revolution? Is it the case that there is an implicit authoritarianism, of organic sameness, in nationalism and an explicit authoritarianism in all calls to fight the authority of the colonial state under the banner of the authority of tradition (rather than with a commitment to oppose all authoritarianism)? Is Fanon's commitment to mobilise national consciousness and then turn it, dialectically, into social consciousness a dangerous fantasy because, in reality, opening the Pandora's box of nationalism is much easier than shutting it? To answer yes to this implies that nationalist rebellions against colonialism should have been opposed until 'properly' social

³⁶ It is a somewhat desperate irony that the poet, Kéita Fodéba, who Fanon quotes at length in the chapter *On National Culture* in *The Wretched of the Earth*, was killed by the same Sékou Touré cited at the beginning of that chapter when Touré was tyrannical Leader of Guinea and engaged in a "manic hunt for conspirators" (Sekyi-Otu 1996:41). It is difficult to imagine that Fanon would not have run the risk of a similar fate in Algeria after the 1988 clampdown that left 500 dead. Indeed some accounts hold that Josie Fanon, Frantz's wife, committed suicide when the FLN became murderously oppressive (Macey 2000:502). "From the balcony of her flat in the El Biar district, Josie Fanon watched the youths of Algiers setting police vehicles on fire, and the troops opening fire on them. Speaking on the telephone [to her friend Assia] Djebbar, she sighed: 'On Frantz, the wretched of the earth again' " (Macey: 506-507).

rebellions could be developed. No one knows how long this would have taken or if it would even have been possible under colonialism's racialised and nationalised oppression. Right now it is very difficult to take seriously the claims to genuine solidarity of those who oppose the Palestinian Intifada because of the nationalist articulation of its rebellion, and who suggest that we wait for a rebellion with a secular, universalist, socialist consciousness. Sharon is not waiting for anything. Fanon didn't choose the (often attractive) position of condemning oppression and resistance and thus (falsely) assuaging one's guilt without taking any risks. (Falsely because in Fanon's philosophy of action this is self-deception. Action and inaction are both choices with costs.³⁷) Fanon chose to join the resistance and advocate for a movement within the movement.

The other answer is that Fanon was right to endorse and join nationalist rebellions against colonialism and that he was also correct to be part of a movement (or struggle within a struggle) within these rebellions pushing them in a progressive direction, even if, in the end, he and his comrades failed. If this is the case, the fact of their defeat does not mean that, as with the rebellion at Harper's Ferry or in Soweto in 1976, their cause was not just and will be taken up by others in ways not yet imagined. Struggles always leave a social sediment. Ato Sekyi-Otu explores these questions in some detail and makes a compelling argument for his claim that Fanon's description of the descent into the (nationalist) absolute in the struggle against colonialism is never a prescription but rather an account of what has to happen for the events put in motion by colonialism to be worked through. In Sekyi-Otu's view Fanon is always aware of the ways in which

³⁷Fanon argues that

everybody will have to be compromised in the fight for the common good. No one has clean hands, there are no innocents and no onlookers. We all have dirty hands; we are all soiling them in the swamps of our country and in the terrifying emptiness of our brains. Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor (1976:161).

this mutilates being but seeks to work for the maximum degree of sociality in the struggle and the quickest possible shift to a social consciousness. When there is regression and when long wars of position have to be fought, the cultivation of popular intellectuality that can keep groups from collapsing back into a series is more important than ever. When decisive victories are not possible, the quality of engagement has to be everything.

CHAPTER 5

FANON AND US, HERE AND NOW

Our mistake, the mistake we Africans made, was to have forgotten that the enemy never withdraws sincerely. He never understands. He capitulates, but he does not become converted.

- Fanon (1967b:196)

5.1 Introduction

In his classic account of the Haitian revolution, C.L.R. James railed against “The waste, the waste of all this bravery, devotion and noble feeling on the corrupt and rapacious bourgeoisie” (1989:225). Two hundred years after that revolution, South Africa confronts a similar waste. From Toussaint to Mandela, subaltern nationalisms have carried elites into the repressive management of economies “still locked into a subordinate position within the world market” (Green, 2002:39) as the collective resistance that defeated colonialism “is individuated as rival class projects, among them the project of transforming the colony into the neo-colony through the judicious rearrangement of economic, political, and symbolic relations” (Sekyi-Otu 1996:106)¹ “The people”, Fanon wrote “stagnate deplorably in unbearable misery” (1976:144). This is such an enduring story that it sometimes seems as if we have to respect its limits, and make our lives and

¹ Sekyi-Otu asks “what is our political situation?” and answers “An omnivorous capital that requires repressive local political agencies to discipline their populace into acquiescing to its draconian measures; a free market of material and cultural commodities whose necessary condition of existence is the authoritarian state; the incoherent nationalism of dominant elites who are in reality transmitters and enforcers of capital’s coercive universals: this is our historic situation. Under the circumstances, we are faced not with a choice between universalism and particularism but rather with the task of wresting *both* an authentic democratic universalism and an equally authentic democratic nativism from the collusion of transnational capitalist dictatorship and local privilege” (1996:20-21).

resistances within their constraints. Indeed, millennial capitalism² has deviated so far from the teleological assumptions at the heart of one of its key legitimating ideologies, 'development', that Ato Sekyi-Otu can write that "structural adjustment programs and a new world economic 'order' came to free the people for depths of immiseration not even he [Fanon] could have imagined...."(Sekyi-Otu 1996:144) The staggering scale of the tyranny of The Market, and the return to direct colonial rule in Haiti and Iraq has not incited a generation of intellectual militants to continue the work of Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James. On the contrary, much contemporary putatively radical theorising by intellectuals from the dominated world and now working in the metropolitan academy is well described as "intellectuals drowning in the incestuous dreams of psychoanalysis" (James 1978:3), fundamentally unwilling to connect philosophical ideas to popular resistances. In the language of C.L.R. James' reading of *Moby Dick* "As Ahab is enclosed in the mason-walled town of the exclusiveness of his authority, so Ishmael is enclosed in the solitude of his social and intellectual speculation" (1978:40).

Aimé Césaire's injunction to - in the face of "this attitude, this behaviour, this shackled life caught in the noose of shame and disaster" - "Start something! Start...The only thing in the world that's worth the effort of starting: The end of the world, by God!"(cited in Fanon, 1967a:96) is now routinely presented as dangerous or as a quaint relic of an expired age by intellectuals for whom radical injustice has been normalised as the circumstance within which historical agency must be exercised. But popular militancy continues to be exerted against injustice. And the people, the

² Jean and John Comaroff explain their use of the phrase millennial capitalism as follows: "By this we mean not just capitalism at the millennium, but capitalism invested with salvific force; with intense faith in its capacity, if rightly harnessed, wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (2004: 785).

ordinary people without grand aspirations to 'activism', smashing water meters in Johannesburg³, fighting private security companies to prevent evictions in Cape Town⁴, fighting forced removals to rural ghettos in Durban⁵, resisting the exclusion of poor students from universities across South Africa⁶, opposing white power blocs and fighting for land in rural areas⁷, and waging similar struggles around the world,⁸ have forged new weapons from which much contemporary anti-colonial philosophy remains as alienated as Ishmael is alienated from the crew on the Pequod.

Along with its transformative poeticism, Frantz Fanon's writing provides some important analytic tools to better equip us to understand what has gone wrong and what is required of a praxis of engendering and developing resistances to contemporary neo-colonialism. This chapter, which owes much to the activist and Africanist readings of Fanon by Ato Sekyi-Otu and Nigel Gibson, outlines an argument for an intellectual praxis of transformative dialogical engagement within nodes of militant resistance, which is to say within constituent power, which is to say within nodes of the assertion of counter sovereignties.⁹ This is not the same as the liberal idea of the intellectual

³ See Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) & others 'Nothing for Mahala' *The forced installation of prepaid water meters in Stretford, Extension 4, Orange Farm, Johannesburg – South Africa* (2004)

⁴ See Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse "What Stank in the Past is the Present's Perfume" *Dispossession, Resistance and Repression in Mandela Park* (2004)

⁵ See Richard Pithouse *The Left in the Slum* (forthcoming 2006)

⁶ See Richard Pithouse *Asinamali: University struggles in post-apartheid South Africa* (forthcoming 2005)

⁷ See Stephen Greenberg *Post-Apartheid Development, Landlessness and the Reproduction of Exclusion in South Africa* (2004)

⁸ See Notes from Nowhere Collective *We Are Everywhere*

⁹ Anthony Bogues makes a substantively similar point in his account of the political black intellectuals:

any observation of black radical intellectual production would illustrate that the central figures of this tradition were explicitly *political*, seeking to organise, having the courage to stand by or break with organisations and programs while developing an intellectual praxis that made politics not a god but a practice for human good. Theirs was not just a practice of

as an expert within civil society. The idea of civil society, in its official form as the 'third sector' after and ultimately subordinate to the state and the market, functions to contain resistances and to confirm the authority of constituted power by reducing resistance to the making of appeals to constituted power in its language and within its political limits.¹⁰ On the contrary it is, in its most common practice, about attacking constituted power by refusing to accept the ongoing commodification – a process often articulated to a racialised history of primitive accumulation, of even the most basic means to bare life – land, seed, water, housing, transport, education, medicine etc. Theorising the prospects for the growth and development of these refusals requires some sense of the dialectical mode of analysis that allows Fanon to talk of the "consciousness of the people" as "elementary and cloudy" (1976:156) and to assert a few pages later that "the magic hands are finally only the magic hands of the people" (1976:159). This chapter, against both the defeatism of thinkers for whom the task is to accommodate ourselves to reality, and the ahistorical and anti-dialectical Negrian radicalism that builds its entirely perverse optimism on a denial of reality, seeks to take seriously Fanon's commitment to the dialectical overcoming of the reality of systemic dehumanisation.

5.2 Whites were intelligent. ...

social criticism but oftentimes of organized efforts to intervene in social and political life" (2003:7).

¹⁰ Again Bogue provides, this time by way of Pierre Bourdieu, a useful formation: "the ideational formation of any social formation has limits. Within these limits, systems of classifications reproduce their own logic, and the nature of the social world appears as both logical and natural. Nothing is possible outside this constructed natural order. Therefore, underpinning social orders are theories of knowledge that in their symbolic power 'impose the principles of the construction of reality – in particular social reality'. For Bourdieu, heresy occurs when the questioning of the *doxa* creates a new critical discourse." (2003:13)

Fanon tells us that "The Colonial world is a world divided into compartments." His description of what this means is prefaced with the observation that "we need not recall Apartheid in South Africa." For Fanon apartheid is an exemplary incarnation of the colonial situation. What needs to be revealed, he argues, are the "lines of force" (1976:29) that constitute that situation. He has a clear idea of what needs to be done: "To break up the colonial world does not mean that after the frontiers have been abolished lines of communication will be set up between the two zones. The destruction of the colonial world is no more or less than the abolition of one zone" (1976:41).

Writing shortly after Nelson Mandela assumed the Presidency of South Africa Ato Sekyi-Otu asked of what he called "the second signal event in contemporary African history":

Is this event, for all its particularities, the iridescent light that truly relieves the oppressive monotony of the encircling African gloom? Or is it but another cruel prelude to what Armah, threnodist of the postcolonial condition, saw as the ineluctable miscarriage of "the beauty of the first days"? (1976:12)

For Sekyi-Otu, the first among the signal facts of contemporary Africa is "the economic, political, and utter moral bankruptcy of postcolonial regimes, with their unending train of rapacious and murderous tyrants, chieftans, and cliques" (1976:12). But, crucially, the condition which Sekyi-Otu hoped the end of apartheid might challenge was not limited to brutal authoritarianism:

Under internal and external pressure, these leaders are now busy refashioning their despotic regimes into simulacra of democracy. And confessing despair and impotence before the enormity of the accumulated morass, they have entrusted the work of repair to international overlords bent on administering plans that, at least in the foreseeable future, will spell even more devastation for the vast majority of citizens (1976:12).

In 1996, the same year in which Sekyi-Otu posed his question, the African National Congress (ANC) became the first African government to voluntarily impose a structural adjustment programme on its people.¹¹ It has had the some consequences as every other structural adjustment programme. Capital and the rich have flourished as never before while the poor, the majority, confront 'even more devastation.' In the context of South Africa's highly racialised economy this has meant that, although the white poor have become poorer and there is a steady deracialisation of the elite, in general terms whites have become richer and blacks have become poorer.¹² The United Nations reports that South Africa's human development index has steadily declined since 1995 and is now at 1975 levels, leaving South Africa ranked below occupied Palestine and Equatorial Guinea.¹³ Moreover the South African government, functioning as the local agent of global capital, is now determinedly seeking to impose similar policies on the rest of the continent by presenting them, in the language of Pan-Africanism, as an African inspired initiative for Renaissance.¹⁴

We need to ask Fanon's question: What lines of force need to be revealed here? And we need to ask it within the context of a neo-colonial situation in which "wars of repression are no longer waged against rebel sultans; everything is more elegant, less bloodthirsty....higher finance will soon bring the truth home..." (Fanon, 1976:52).

The possibilities for radical outcomes in post-apartheid South Africa have been significantly limited by global power relations. We have to be mindful of Haitian history from the moment

¹¹ See Patrick Bond *Elite Transition* (2002), Hein Marais *South Africa Limits to Change* (2002) and Sampie Terreblanche *A History of Inequality in South Africa* (2002).

¹² See Desai & Pithouse "What Stank in the Past is the Present's Perfume" *Dispossession, Resistance and Repression in Mandela Park* (2004)

¹³ *This Day* 16 July 2004 'Shock UN ranking of SA below Palestine'

¹⁴ See Patrick Bond *Fanon's Warning* (2002)

when Toussaint l'Ouverture agreed to meet Brunet until now.¹⁵ It is absolutely necessary to tell that story. But to only tell that part of the story is to occlude internal complicities and power relations. As Sekyi-Otu warns: "the recognition of local relations of accumulation and exploitation as autonomous objects of political contestation" requires an overcoming of "the plea of constraining dependency – always the enemy of critical introspection and the ally of repressive unanimism"(1996:30). And, indeed, there are multiple clear instances, such as tacit support for the dictatorship in Zimbabwe, in which the ANC has risked offending transnational capital in favour of the material interests of local elites, and many more in which effective steps have been taken to repress dissent or to enable local capital's attacks on the poor, while health care, education, despotic 'traditional' and white power in rural areas, the prison system, and so on, sink further into grim misanthropy.¹⁶

Speaking in an unpublished interview in 1972, five years before he was murdered by the apartheid state, Steve Biko warned, prophetically, that

this is one country where it would be possible to create a capitalist black society, if whites were intelligent, if the nationalists were intelligent. And that capitalist black society, black middle class would be very effective...South Africa could succeed in putting across to the world a pretty convincing, integrated picture, with 70 percent of the population still being underdogs (1972:7).

¹⁵ See Paul Farmer 'Who removed Aristide?' (2004)

¹⁶ For one example of a highly repressive response to a just struggle from below see Desai & Pithouse, *"What Stank in the Past is the Present's Perfume" Dispossession, Resistance and Repression in Mandela Park* (2004)

With the active and serious support of American imperialism local white elites turned out to be intelligent. William Robinson makes a convincing case, substantiated with rigorous empirical evidence, that:

in US foreign policy... “democracy” is the most effective means of assuring stability... This is in contrast to prior periods in US foreign-policy history – and correlatedly, to the historic norm in centre-periphery relations predicated on coercive modes of social control, such as the colonial era – when military dictatorships or authoritarian client regimes (and before them, colonial states) were seen as the best guarantors of social control and stability. The intent behind promoting polyarchy is to relieve domestic pressure on the state from sub-ordinate classes for more fundamental change in emergent global society. Military regimes and highly unpopular dictatorships, such as Somoza in Nicaragua, the Shah in Iran, Marcos in the Philippines, the Duvaliers in Haiti, and Pinochet in Chile, defended local elite interests. *But they also engendered mass-based opposition movements that sought [like the Sandinistas] outcomes, beyond the mere removal of dictatorships, of popular democratization.* These movements became transnational in their significance as globalization proceeded and threatened core and local elite interests. The old authoritarian arrangements were no longer guarantors of social control and stability (1996:67-68).

So popular resistance has

inverted the positive correlation between the investment climate and authoritarianism. Now a country’s investment climate is positively related to the maintenance of a “democratic” order, and the “imperial state” promotes polyarchy in place of authoritarianism. But this shift required a corresponding reconceptualization of the principal target in intervened countries, from political to civil society, as the site of social control (1996:78).

Robinson explains that in the period after the Second World War, and especially through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, successive US administrations developed strategic alliances with the settler regimes in Southern Africa which included “low-key military assistance, political and diplomatic support, and intelligence information to white minority regimes” (1996:327). The State Department labelled the liberation movements as ‘terrorist’. But he also shows that after the

1976 uprising, the US and European powers began to push for some kind of transition and, by the mid 1980s, had shifted from supporting apartheid to 'promoting democracy'. For Robinson

US 'democracy promotion,' as it actually functions, sets about not just to secure and stabilize elite-based polyarchic systems but to have United States and local elites thoroughly penetrate civil society, and from therein assure control over popular mobilization and mass movements (1996:36).

Millions of dollars were committed to a programme designed to support moderate black leadership and marginalise radical black leadership and, in the words of a key USAID document, "broaden understanding of the free market system and prepare black business owners, managers, and employees for success in a postapartheid South Africa" (1996:30). Robinson summarises the goals of the various co-ordinated democracy promotion projects as follows:

1. identify and support an emergent black middle class of professionals who could be incorporated into a post-apartheid hegemonic bloc;
2. develop a nationwide network of grassroots community leaders amongst the black population that could win leadership positions in diverse organs in civil society and compete with more radical leadership;
3. cultivate a black business class among small and mid-level black-run, or mixed level or mixed enterprises that would have a stake in stable South African capitalism, develop economic power, and view the white transnationalized fraction of South African capital as allies and leaders (1996:31).

Hein Marais¹⁷ and Patrick Bond¹⁸ offer evidence of the similar role played by white South African capital and the World Bank. The World Bank has become a key agent driving the co-option of popular movements via its strategic moves towards becoming a 'knowledge bank' and to 'harmonising' and seeking further 'coherence' between its policies and those of the IMF, the WTO

¹⁷ Hein Marais *South Africa Limits to Change* (2002) 126-138.

¹⁸ Patrick Bond *Elite Transition* (2002)

and donors. In practice this means the seduction of massive funding, scholarships, consultancies, and endless NGO organised workshops and conferences, all with the direct aim of using “the market penetration strategies of the private sector” (Narayan et. al. 2000:279) to capture extant movements of the poor and create others under the guise of ‘strengthening civil society’. For example, Julie Hearn cites convincing evidence to show that in Mozambique “Aid is being deliberately directed to assist in the construction of new social groups committed to the market economy” (2000:19) She quotes a USAID reports which openly states that, in Ghana:

[P]olitical risks include growing polarization within the Ghanaian polity and perhaps an associated risk that a legally sanctioned change of government could have totally opposing development views and reverse long-term policies. USAID assistance to civic organizations that develop and debate public policy, and US support for consultation on government policies have been useful in shaping a vision for Ghana’s future which is developing broad, bipartisan support (2000:20).

In Zimbabwe Hopewell Gumbo writes that the Movement for Democratic Change started out opposing both the Mugabe dictatorship and neo-liberalism but that “Massive funding was poured in to the civic movement, mainly from the West” with the result that

the intellectuals now largely subscribe to the neo-liberal agenda and grass roots activists, many of whom have suffered as a direct consequence of neo-liberalism, are just bought in to toyi-toyi [protest dance] when numbers and credibility are needed. The middle class MDC leadership, together with the labour bureaucrats and big white bosses believe that giving actual power to grass roots activists would bring ‘instability’ into the movement (2002:4).

In contemporary South Africa the massive civil society projects of agencies like the World Bank and USAID exist alongside parallel civil society projects by the ANC.¹⁹ These projects take on a

¹⁹ For a brief discussion of this see Desai & Pithouse (2004).

variety of tasks but generally function to co-opt the expression and inhibit the development of social antagonism by encouraging various forms of (always unequal) 'partnership' that produce various anti-political corporatist arrangements for managing conflict (e.g. lobbying, consultation, public participation, etc.) on the terrain of constituted power and within the limits of what it chooses to prescribe as reasonable and negotiable. Often there is lucrative encouragement to shift from large membership driven organisations ('social movements') to small, professionalised NGOs or the mediation of NGOs. When political issues are taken up they are rapidly technicised, often via reduction to questions of policy or via reduction to depoliticising approaches to quantitative research. Resistances that cannot or refuse to be co-opted through the mediation of civil society are stigmatised as anti-national and destructive, and treated as criminal.

Amongst other things this means that civil society is not necessarily the appropriate zone for radical intellectual praxis. That space is, perhaps, better characterised as uncivil society – the unmediated development of counter-power outside of the technicising and depoliticising bureaucracies of extant power.

5.3 A theory of the history of how the people came to be re-expelled from history

In two papers published in 2001, Nigel Gibson made the first serious attempt to develop a Fanonian understanding of the failures of the transition from apartheid to neo-liberalism. Gibson doesn't deny that the transition was influenced by domestic capital and the transnational institutions of economic imperialism. However, he argues that the depoliticizing elite transition was not determined by these forces in any mechanistic sense, and was also shaped by key choices

within the liberation movements “including an ideological capitulation to neoliberal policies and a marginalisation of more radical projects advanced by the South African left”(2001:65).²⁰

Fanon’s thinking about the potential pitfalls of anti-colonial struggles is most widely understood in terms of the failure to develop nationalism into humanism with the result that the ideas and practices that once animated and legitimated resistances become ‘empty shells’ legitimating the co-option and plunder of the national bourgeoisie. Gibson’s analysis frames this in terms of Fanon’s critique of the “absence of ideology” and his insistence on the “need to fill that void with a humanist project that begins from the lived experience and needs of people”(2001:66). Gibson diagnoses “an anti-intellectualism that pervaded the anti-apartheid movement, including its intellectuals” (2001:67). He shows that when democratic intellectuality did develop in workerist and black consciousness movements in the 1970s it was stigmatised, marginalised, repressed and constrained by its internal failure to keep developing liberatory ideology in relations of transformative mutuality between intellectuals and grass roots militants. In Gibson’s estimation “This ideological pitfall was exploited by the ANC which was able to capture these narratives and celebrate the idea of ‘people’s power’ while remaining the self appointed future negotiators” (2001:72).

The assumption of a representative role by the elite within the ANC allowed an elite pact which required, in Fanon’s metaphor, that the people be sent back to their caves in order that politics

²⁰ Vishnu Padayachee’s (1997) excellent insider account of how progressive social scientists formerly aligned with the trade union movement shifted their allegiance to the emerging state during the transition with the result that their policy recommendations shifted dramatically rightward lends solid empirical support to Gibson’s theorisation. Andrew Nash’s essay *The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa* (1999) develops an account of the independent left’s ultimate capitulation to the SACP which also lends considerable weight to Gibson’s theorisation.

could be technicised, which is to say depoliticised, to the point where it “becomes the domain of the professionals” (2001:71). For Gibson “The South African case highlights what happens when the theorizations of spontaneity do not happen, when there is no dialectical relationship between spontaneity and organization” (2001:72). Gibson goes on to argue, citing Fanon’s warning that, without theorisation, people engaged in a strategy of pure spontaneity can succumb to the “mirage” of their “muscles’ own immediacy” and degenerate into “a strategy of immediacy that is both radical and totalitarian”(2001:73). He also argues that the ANC’s strategy of “making the townships ungovernable” (2001:74) turned ordinary people into cannon fodder, encouraged a counter brutality and, with slogans like ‘liberation before education’, left the people waging the most dangerous and damaging end of the struggle in a position where they were unable to contribute to its theorisation, or to share in the concessions it eventually won. Later, when people were asked to give up those practices of direct democracy that had survived state repression and the internal authoritarianism of the ANC in favour of parliamentary representation, and elite driven technocratic anti-politics, there was an inability to contest the battle of ideas. In Gibson’s view the outcomes may have been different had the liberation movements followed Fanon’s injunction to radically democratise – which means to encourage “the self-activity and the self-direction of the masses” and to take seriously political education – a collective and democratic “fundamental questioning” (2001b:376).

Gibson also lays particular stress on Fanon’s emphasis on the need for a dialectically and mutually transformative interchange between theory and the practice of resistance. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Fanon’s view new subjectivities and practices emerge in struggle, and so sticking to or reinscribing the Manichean categories of colonial domination is disloyal to the

experience of struggle – which is to say disloyal to the experience of subaltern agency. For Gibson, a key consequence of this Manicheanism in the anti-apartheid struggles was that it produced an uncritically celebratory affirmation of ‘the struggle’ and so failed to see its internal contradictions (2001b:384).

5.4 Seize the time

In his new introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha (2005) asks “Is Fanon Still Relevant?” For Bhabha the question centres around what he terms Fanon’s “political ethic of violence”. Of course Bhabha’s bad misreading of Fanon’s descriptions as prescriptions (and against Ato Sekyi-Otu’s arguments for a contrary reading which are vastly more attentive to Fanon’s actual writing) needs to be challenged. But there is one aspect of Fanon’s work against which Bhabha’s question does require an answer. Fanon often writes as though it is inevitable that set-backs in anti-colonial struggles will be overcome. On occasion there is a sense, perhaps a faith, that time is redemptive. In this, Fanon’s vision is very much in tune with other radicals of his time – Amílcar Cabral, Che Guevara and so on. *Chile: The other September II*, a recently published anthology of writing on the U.S. backed fascist coup that deposed Salvador Allende’s elected government in 1973, concludes with Allende’s optimistic defiance: “It is possible they will smash us, but tomorrow belongs to the people!” (2004:85). The accounts in this anthology of the early experiments in neoliberal economics designed in the Economics Department at the University of Chicago and implemented, via the mediation of Washington, at gun point in Santiago sound eerily familiar in many ways, but Allende’s defiant optimism seems anachronistic. In other words, the old problems remain current but the old optimism about inevitable redemption seems exhausted. And

we can understand why. Latin America's veins are still open. There is no good reason to assume that each passing day brings us closer to a polity that can redeem the living – let alone the suffering of the dead.

Neil Lazarus observes that in Ayi Kwei Armah's account of the betrayal of the great hopes of revolutionary anti-colonial nationalism in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* "time has ceased to be the repository of political hope; it had once been so, during the colonizing years, but now, in independence, it has become empty, barren, homogenous" (2004:609). So what is to be done in times like these – times when "the horses have vanished/Heroes hop around like toads" (Neruda, 2004:189)? Is it still, as Fanon argued at a moment when time seemed fertile, "our historic mission is to sanction all revolts, all desperate actions" (1976:166)? Could it still be, as it was for Guevara, potentially the case that "It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insurrection can create them" (Cited in Gogol, 2002: 344)? The answers to these questions depend on the degree to which current reality is conceptualised as a crisis. If that degree is small then the risk of opening time to unknown trajectories may be great but if that degree is large then the risks must be proportionately smaller. Hence for Slavoj Žižek "We simply *have to accept the risk* that a blind violent outburst will be followed by its proper politicization – there is no short cut here, and no guarantee of a successful outcome either" (2002:225). Elsewhere he argues that

in a truly radical political act, the opposition between a 'crazy' destructive gesture and a strategic decision breaks down. This is why it is theoretically and politically wrong to oppose strategic political acts...to...gestures of pure self-destructive ethical insistence with, apparently, no political goal. The point is not simply that, once we are thoroughly engaged in a political project, we are ready to risk everything for it, inclusive of our lives, but, more precisely, that only such an 'impossible gesture' of pure expenditure can change the very coordinates of what is strategically possible within a given historical constellation (2004:204-205).

Zizek attacks the pseudo-politics of the cult of the victim, and advocates a return to the politics of the act undertaken in the face of the existential void and without external legitimation. He argues (2004) that, since Kant, there has been an entrenched philosophical suspicion that such acts are really driven by some unconscious pathology but that in reality it is an act in-itself and for-itself that creates so much trauma that it must immediately be contained in symbolic terms. The value of this line of argument is that it begins to offer a partial explanation for why a thinker like Fanon, and the more militant social movements and the increasingly frequent local revolts in post-apartheid South Africa²¹, attract such caricatured stigmatization from fractions of the left unwilling to connect theory to action. The fear of commitment to the actual is taken up by Hegel via his famous criticism of the conscience for which “Anything that exists *an sich* is demoted to a mere moment” (1977:574) with the result that

Consciousness, the relation of mind to something objective, has vanished into empty self-consciousness, and what we have is really the untruth of the moral consciousness rather than its truth. What emerges out of this emptying of morality is the beautiful soul, which is too fine to commit itself to anything. It lacks force to externalize itself and endure existence. It does not want to stain the radiance of its pure conscience by deciding to do anything particular. It keeps its heart pure by fleeing from contact with actuality and preserving its impotence. Its activity consists in yearning, and it is like a shapeless vapour fading into nothingness (1977:575-576).

The commitment to action requires us to reject the attractions of a sentimentality abstracted from actual struggle and helps us to better understand Adorno’s statement that “There is tenderness only in the coarsest of demands” (Cited in Eagleton, 2003: 174). For Hegel spirit is a bone so, from the *Phenomenology* to Fallujah. Arundhati Roy insists that:

²¹ David Hemson has catalogued over 850 illegal ‘service delivery’ protests in 2005 (personal communication).

The Iraqi resistance is fighting on the frontlines of the battle against Empire. And therefore that battle is our battle. Like most resistance movements, it combines a motley range of assorted factions. Former Baathists, liberals, Islamists, fed-up collaborationists, communists etc. Of course it is riddled with opportunism, local rivalry, demagoguery, and criminality. But if we are only going to support pristine movements, then no resistance will be worthy of our purity....This is not to say that we should never criticize resistance movements. Many of them suffer from a lack of democracy, from the iconization of their "leaders," a lack of transparency, a lack of vision and direction. But most of all they suffer from vilification, repression, and a lack of resources (2004:33).

On the 5th of September 2004 the following article appeared in the *City Press* newspaper:

Harrismith video

Sunday 5th September 2004.

From The City Press (South Africa) Shocking video on Harrismith STAFF REPORTERS

EXCLUSIVE but shocking video footage in City Press's possession shows how Harrismith police opened fire indiscriminately on demonstrators as they slowly crossed the N3 highway last week and then continued firing at them as they fled for cover.

This move led to the tragic death of 17-year-old Teboho Mkhonza.

The video shows how the toyi-toying group slowly started crossing the highway. The demonstrators were not throwing stones, as some reports claimed, and their numbers were nowhere near the reported 4 500 claimed by police earlier this week.

Before the demonstrators were halfway across the road, police opened fire without any warning. The demonstrators turned and ran for cover.

Police, however, continued to fire at their backs. They also continued shooting as people fell to the ground. The video clearly identifies three police officers firing at the fleeing demonstrators, although more were involved in the shooting. The footage then shows at least four police officers grappling with a demonstrator and forcibly pushing him into the back of a police van.

In extremely disturbing footage, one then sees a badly injured and bleeding Mkhonza lying on the floor of a police van. Fellow demonstrators locked in the van are visibly upset by police inaction to call an ambulance. Mkhonza wailed in pain and battled to breathe with what looked like a chest wound.

This short article was only noteworthy because it was such an isolated effort at taking Mkhonza's murder seriously. The following day the *Independent on Saturday*, in a tiny article on page 3, reported that Thabo Mbeki, speaking in response to the death of Teboho Mkhonza, had

sent out a clear message that the government will act decisively against communities that use violent means to protest against lack of service delivery...Mbeki said...his government would not tolerate the destruction of public property and anyone who broke the law would be arrested by the police (2004:3).

The words and phrases in Mbeki's discourse are loaded to fall against the poor. For example the rebellions that are breaking out around the country with increasing frequency are almost always fuelled by the exclusion of poor communities from services or access to land that they already have and not the failure of the government to 'deliver' fast enough. The view, pervasive in elite publics, that people must wait patiently while the state 'delivers' is self-serving dogma, in a situation where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer amidst increasing dispossession and enrichment by primitive accumulation. Furthermore, the process of excluding people from services and confiscating their goods to pay off debt is very often violent while occupying a road in protest is hardly violent. In 1649 John Warr observed that "what freedom we have by the law is the price of much hazard and blood" (1992:102). Centuries of struggle have not changed the fact that the law remains a terrain on which the rich easily out manoeuvre the poor. Most people can smash a water meter. Very few can win an urgent interdict, let alone an audience with the Constitutional Court. Nevertheless it remains a fact that the Constitution commits the South African government

to the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights and so, even within the legal logic of the system that consecrates Mbeki's rule, the police and the state are in violation of its spirit when they exclude the poor from basic services. Shooting peaceful protestors dead is in direct violation of criminal law. So Mbeki is, as protest songs with new words and old tunes often observe, a liar. This is unsurprising. The scandal is that there is no scandal. The police murder of Teboho Mkhonza, like the police murder of Michael Makhabane in a student protest in 2001²² and the police murder of Marcel King in an attempt to reason with the men disconnecting his mother's electricity in early 2004²³, and the de facto endorsement of these murders by elites is just another ordinary day in neo-liberal South Africa. Liberation is for the rich. For most participants in elite publics neo-liberalism is common sense and politics has collapsed into technicism to the point where the only political questions that remain are about advancing factional agendas. Knowledge of the small rebellions that are constantly breaking out around the country is, even when they manage to link up with other rebellions, to sustain themselves and to generate mass mobilizations, generally just repressed. But sporadic rebellions continue to break out in defiance of the elite common sense that cannot accept their rationality. Hence Ashwin Desai argues that, while Nietzsche recommended that we philosophise with a hammer, in neo-liberal South Africa, where people, and even whole schools and clinics, are regularly disconnected from water by the state and radical social movements 'illegally' reconnect people it is necessary to 'philosophise with a pair of pliers' (2002:17).

²² See Richard Pithouse *Student's Murder an Outrageous Assault on Democracy* (2001).

²³ See Brandon Pillay *Local Youth Dies a Community Hero* (2004).

But while the great danger of a failure to act is the endurance of the status quo – which in South Africa means local domination under and in league with global fascism (Patel and McMichael, 2004) – active militancy carries its own dangers. Fanon issues two crucial warnings in this regard:

The first warning concerns strategy and speaks to the dangers of taking on the immediacy that comes from the intensity of struggle:

The group faces a local attack as if it were a decisive test. It behaves as if the fate of the whole country was literally at stake, here and now. But we should make it quite clear that this spontaneous impetuosity which is determined to settle the fact of the colonial system immediately is condemned, in so far as it is a doctrine of instantaneity, to self-repudiation. The hard lesson of facts, the bodies mown down by machine-guns: these call forth a complete re-interpretation of events. The simple instinct to survive engenders a less rigid, more mobile attitude (1976:106-107).

At times the immediacy of struggle – the stress, lack of sleep, day to day confrontation with joy and terror - leads to a state of mind analogous to mania²⁴, with all the hubris that description implies. But Fanon's warning is that the battles are not the war and that there are no easy structural victories. Careful thinking about strategy and tactics is vital.

Fanon's second warning speaks to the purpose of struggle:

The militant who faces the colonialist war machine with the bare minimum of arms realized that while he is breaking down colonial oppression he is building up automatically yet another system of exploitation. This discovery is unpleasant, bitter and sickening; and yet everything seemed to be so simple before: the bad people were on one side, and the good on the other. The clear, unreal, idyllic light of the beginning is followed by a semi-darkness that bewilders the senses (1976:115-116).

²⁴ I am indebted to Raj Patel for this insight.

Although this warning also has consequences for strategy it is primarily a concern about the ethical character of the struggle. So it appears that with regard to both strategies for realizing a project and the ethical questions about the nature of the project militancy – aggression, war and so on – is not enough. It is also necessary to be scrupulous – meticulous, troubled by conscience and so on. Which comes first – militancy or scrupulousness? The ideal answer is to say that they go together and that if their registers are too different for them to be fused then they should at least be in permanent dialogue from the moment that a struggle begins. Fanon's answer, because he is interested in thinking through the dialectic of experience rather than in generating principles in idealist abstraction from the lived experience of struggle, is that engaged scrupulousness emerges from militancy and that there must then be a struggle within the struggle to subordinate militancy to scrupulousness. In other words the project of militant revolt produces, through its defeats and failings, an opportunity to struggle for a praxis of reflection and dialogue which can then become the project to which militancy has the relation of a tool to consciousness. It would do Fanon's immanent spirit an injustice to reify his reflective experience into some kind of formula.

But, still, Fanon's dialectical account of the Algerian Revolution does teach us that it would be a major mistake to demand the immediate practice of scrupulousness as the grounds for dialogical solidarity or to assume that struggle has an inevitable and inevitably progressive trajectory. Fanon's work also makes clear the need to work for the development of scrupulousness and its priority over militancy as quickly and effectively as possible. We should sanction all revolts, but always look for opportunities to participate in the dialogical production and development of scrupulousness from militancy. But the latter should not only not be used against the former but should also not be separated from the former. It is worth repeating that for Fanon "it is the essence of the fight which

explodes old truths and reveals unexpected facets" (cited in Gibson, 2002b:384). Similarly for Rosa Luxemburg: "A high degree of political education, of class consciousness and organisation...cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight" (cited in Bogues, 1997:122).

5.5 Inventing souls in the new struggles

Fanon famously concludes *The Wretched of the Earth* with an injunction to "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them" (1976:251). He is not recommending that an idea of Africa be counter-posed to Europe via the romantic fantasy of a return to tradition. On the contrary, earlier in the same book he launches a scathing attack on the bad faith of intellectuals who compensate for their alienation from the people with a "banal search for exoticism" (1976:178). Fanon's commitment to "recognise...the open door of every consciousness" (1967:232) leads him to insist that "The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one's own people" (1976:180). Against this he recommends turning away from "a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all" and going on until one "has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge" (1976:181). For Fanon "you do not show proof of your nation from its culture...you substantiate its existence in the fight which people wage against the forces of occupation" (1976:181). Outside of the context of a totalising anti-colonial war it is necessary to recognise that, even in the context of an economic catastrophe, being makes itself in a much wider range of social spaces than just overtly political struggles. But Fanon's broader point stands.

When Fanon writes that it is to the “zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is here that our souls are crystallized and our perceptions transfused with light” (1976:182-183) he is addressing himself to intellectuals, often members of the national bourgeoisie. He is suggesting that they should participate in the sites of popular struggle – sites of constituent power or counter sovereignty – where ideas opposed to those of ‘Europe’ can be forged. (Of course the legitimating ideology of ‘Europe’ is now often presented as a set of very particular interlinking conceptions of development, democracy, human rights, good governance, civil society and the market which are presented as universal in their value, conceptions best understood, respected and practiced by the broader white West.)

Fanon is in no doubt that material want will dissolve nationalist mystification: “Once the hours of effusion and enthusiasm before the spectacle of the national flag have past, the people rediscovers the first dimension of its requirement: bread, clothing, shelter” (1976:122). As Sekyi-Otu explains

for all the profound complications which the resurgent knowledge of class introduces into the reductive story of the racial divide...something of the inaugural plot of the colonial drama persists. That legacy consists in the fact that “class” would come to describe a spatial relation – a measure of proximity to or distance from colonial privilege (1996:25).

So, postcolonial revolutionary energies can manifest as a spontaneous response to a social structure that emerges from, in Marx’s terms, “a class in civil society but not of civil society...which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general; a sphere of society which can no longer lay claim to a historical title, but merely to a human one” (1992:256). For Fanon it is the poor – the rural peasantry and the urban lumpen

proletariat – that, in Sekyi-Otu's characteristically elegant phrasing “bear testimony to the limits of liberalizing a colonial-racial system of social closure” (1996:159). Fanon describes the “native’s decision to invade” the dominating zone under colonialism as a “biological decision” (1976:104). In post-apartheid South Africa rebellions against attacks on the means to bare life by the state and corporate power – disconnections from water, evictions from homes etc, remain, in this sense, biological.

In Fanon’s view the marginalised, exploited and dispossessed have an ontological priority in that they incarnate the experience of domination and, potentially, liberation. And so the struggle should be “by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts” (1976:165). However this crucial recognition can manifest itself in an anti-dialectical immediacy that becomes pathological. For example Antonio Negri, whose thought has a powerful (and, tellingly, racialised) attraction to many young left intellectuals in South Africa seeking to break with the Stalinism of the previous generation, argues that:

the multitude is ontological power. This means that the multitude embodies a mechanism that seeks to represent desire and to transform the world - more accurately: it wishes to recreate the world in its image and likeness, which is to say to make a broad horizon of subjectivities that freely express themselves and that constitute a community of free men (2004:112).

Negri’s illusion²⁵ about the uniform political purity of the desires of the ‘multitude’ functions in contemporary South African struggles to fetishize the spontaneity of the mass and reserve intellectualism for intellectuals. Very often this reinscribes a racialised division of labour. Moreover this illusion fails to acknowledge that desire is hardly always, as Hardt and Negri seem to assume,

²⁵ For Freud (1989) an illusion is a belief elicited and maintained by unconsciousness desires irrespective of evidential support.

for communism²⁶ or to take into account the simple logic of Žižek's point that desire follows fantasy and so, while the desire for survival will generate spontaneous rebellion amongst the excluded this only takes us so far, and, within the rebellion that it instigates, desire must be traversed²⁷ in order to avoid the collapse into fragmentation, messianic immediacy or counter brutality. For Holloway, the Negrian illusion fails to acknowledge the mutual "interpenetration of power and anti-power... Communism is not the struggle of the Pure Subject, but the struggle of the maimed and the schizophrenic (2002b:88-89).

Holloway's point matters for many reasons. For example the cripplingly unreflective self-righteousness that accompanies the fetish of the pure subject pushes some movement intellectuals and militants into debilitating fundamentalisms and sectarianisms, which are more indicative of a fundamental commitment to being radically ontologically superior than a fundamental will to resist domination. It's a curious and revealing fact that people who project fantasies of ontological purity onto the idea of multitude generally only assume the consequent lightness of being for actually existing human beings when they are part of the same or allied small, covertly vanguardist, middle class networks²⁸ - the same networks that often mediate the relationships between movements. It is

²⁶ Consider, for example, Ralph Ginzburg's account of the popular and festive rebellion against constituted legal authority in Georgia on 21 June 1920 that took the form of the lynching of Phillip Gathers by a white mob (2002).

²⁷ This is usefully discussed in by Kenneth MacKendrick and Christopher Craig Brittain in *A Messiah for Marxism: Review of 'Žižek, The Fragile Absolute'* (2003)

²⁸ These networks don't only reproduce relations of class domination. They are often also gendered and racialised and exhibit a consistent failure to address racism and sexism with sufficient seriousness or to seriously consider what should be required of a radical anti-racism and anti-sexism. The qualifying adjective 'radical' matters. If we consider feminism as an example it is apparent that elite publics in South Africa abound with World Bank feminism which advances female academics/consultants and the projects they sell their skills to by stigmatising poor men; various forms of racist feminism that advance white women by stigmatising black men; and white and black articulations of liberal (bourgeois) feminism that when they appear, as they do, in or (much more often) in the name of movements of the poor can result in

telling that there are certain cases where critiques of the middle class intellectual left sub-culture have generated paranoid and hysterical responses that issue counter-attacks infused with vastly more vigour than the responses of the same people to physical and ideological attacks on actually existing poor people.²⁹

Furthermore the assumption of ontological privilege reinscribes anti-dialectical Manicheism and inhibits self reflective praxis and critical thought about everything aside from questions of short term strategy. And, crucially, Negrian discourse about the multitude which, in its ahistoricism, is the mirror image of the World Bank's discourse about 'the poor,'³⁰ functions in movements to mask power relations, often racialised or gendered, between and within movements locally, nationally and transnationally.³¹

The Bank's discourses naturalise the poor through colonial tropes of passivity and ontological lack while Hardt and Negri naturalise the poor through Franciscan tropes of ontological abundance. But

the legitimisation of the subordination of these movements to the (left-chic) career interests of middle class women. However the radical feminist sensibilities of movement intellectuals like Amanda Alexander, Shereen Essof, Ann Eveleth, Mandisa Mbali, Raj Patel and others are beginning a promising conversation about the obligations and promise of a nascent radical feminism. (For discussions of some of these points see Richard Pithouse *Producing the Poor: The World Bank's New Discourse of Domination* (2002) and Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse 'Sanction All Revolts: A Reply to Rebecca Pointer (2005).

²⁹ This is not to suggest that there are never circumstances in which it is appropriate to contest these attacks. On the contrary the battle of ideas matters and matters enormously. The point is that as a new left elite solidifies, becomes professionalised and generates cultural capital through self-representation and glamorous international alliances some initiatives are, or become, much more invested in the pleasures and increasing material rewards of memberships of this elite than the project that brought it into being and which legitimates its existence. This results in movements being used to legitimate the left elite rather than, as it should be, the reverse. It is already clear that the South African left will pay a steeply escalating price for its wilful failure to take this up.

³⁰ See Richard Pithouse *Producing the Poor: The World Bank's New Discourse of Domination* (2002).

³¹ For arguments in this regard see Richard Pithouse 'Independent Intavenshan' *Frantz Fanon and the Dialectic of Solidarity* and Richard Pithouse *Solidarity, Co-option and Assimilation: The necessity, promises and pitfalls of global linkages for South African movements* (2005).

in both cases the poor simply are the poor because they are the poor hence poverty becomes an ontological rather than a historical condition. In the South African context this makes both the Bank and the Negrian discourses complicit with racism. As the anti-racist South African philosopher David Goldberg notes the tremendous radical energies of the various social movements against racism and colonialism were committed to “transforming the racial status quo, the prevailing set of stultifying and subjugating conditions of existence for those deemed not white”(Goldberg, 2004:9). But he shows that these movements have been co-opted and made safe for extant power by being reduced to principles that are “primarily, principally, or completely to anti-racial commitment” (2004:1). Anti-racism, he argues, requires historical memory. And historical memory renders the idea of the multitude – which would include a computer programmer in Seattle and someone scraping a living together in an *Umjondolo* [shack] in Durban – as linked agents of progressive change an illusion.

Fanon’s critique of spontaneity – the illusion of immediacy in time and place, the danger of brutality, the lack of liberatory ideology and so on – in anti-colonial struggles applies equally to resistances to liberalised colonialism and is a powerful corrective to Negri’s ahistorical and anti-dialectical philosophy. At this point we do well to make use of Jean-Paul Sartre’s framing of an important question in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*: “class-being – as practico-inert – belongs to the domain of the anti-dialectic. How are we to grasp the intelligibility of a praxis which has been mortgaged by a passive constitution?” (2004:67). The question is not new. For Marx “The point is that revolutions need a passive element, a material basis. Theory is realised in a people only in so far as it is a realization of people’s needs.” He insists that “It is not enough that thought should strive to realize itself; reality must itself strive towards thought” (1992:252). Sartre

suggests that we “reply to these theoretical questions like Diogenes, by walking” (2004:806). This is part of Fanon’s answer. Sub-Commandante Insurgente Marcos proposes, as a slogan, “Walking we ask questions” (2001:267) and argues that that “Speaking and listening is how true men and women learn to walk” (2001:76). This is also part of Fanon’s answer. Marx, in a characteristically declarative flourish, asserts that “Just as philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *intellectual* weapons in philosophy”(1992:257). This too is part of Fanon’s answer.

For Fanon the paradox created by the fact that the conditions that produce a spontaneous will to rebel amongst the excluded are also the conditions that produce the limitations of this rebellion must be resolved dialectically via chosen acts of will that take the form of the reflective and dialogical praxis of struggle. It is in this project that the intellectuals will, for Fanon, succeed or fail in their confrontation with history. But of course intellectuals do not inhabit the social marginalisation that produces the “necessary representative conditions for the biophysical explosion of social revolt” (Sekyi-Otu 1996:165). Nevertheless although Fanon is acutely aware that “Neocolonialism... addresses itself essentially to the middle class and to the intellectuals of the country” (1967b:122) he anticipates a crucial role for “honest intellectuals...in the decisive battle that we mean to engage upon” (1967b:142).

A generation has passed since Fanon observed that “The oil of Iraq has removed all prohibitions and made concrete the true problems” and railed against “The Marines...who, periodically, are sent to re-establish “order” in Haiti...”(1967b:122). If we inhabit global coloniality - an economic-military-ideological order that subordinates regions, peoples and economies world wide”

via a variety of strategies that include “heightened marginalisation and suppression of the knowledge and culture of subaltern groups” (Escobar 2004:207) then one key consequence follows: Rebellion is only real when it prioritises the flourishing of the agency and intelligence of the dominated. This means, as Jacques Depelchin writes in an essay arguing for fidelity to the tremendous world historical event of the Haitian revolution, “approaching politics as the realm of creativity in which all citizens, in conscience, participate, contribute their ideas from wherever they are, in order to change the situation in which we are” (2004:14).

Edward Said noted that imperialism was open about its need to produce “an intellectual elite with which we can work...who would thus form a link between us and the mass of the natives...with a view towards preparing the way for agreements and treaties which would be the desirable form taken by our political future” (1995:245). In contemporary coloniality there is arguably a greater and more effective effort to co-opt Third World intellectuals to imperial projects. Greater because there are many more donor agencies, NGOs, scholarships, various opportunities for consultancies and ‘partnerships’ with all kinds of organisations including universities from the dominating countries. More effective because all of these projects are, at least in their public faces, deracialised, and because they all speak the languages of democracy, development, good governance, public participation, civil society and all of the other discourses that seek to appear to be progressive as they function to bind manifest and potential rebellion into relations of subordination to constituted power to the point where rebellion can only make limited appeals rather than transformative demands. The class position of the intellectuals inclines them towards compradorism and the risk of seduction is permanent. This risk increases dramatically with the professionalisation of the left, often under the rubric of civil society. But, as Sekyi-Otu notes,

Fanon, as a Sartrean, gives the national bourgeoisie the freedom to choose to put their skills in the service of constitutive power, to become revolutionary intellectuals; but as a Marxist he realises that most will serve constituted power. Sekyi-Otu writes that “What distinguishes [revolutionary intellectuals] ... from the bourgeois nationalists, then, is not their class origins but their *epistemic and political project*” (1996:245 emphasis in the original).

For Fanon the alliance between the revolutionary intellectuals and militants that have emerged from uncivil society is explosive. It produces “critical dialogue between avatars of the differing life-worlds which inhabit the hybrid body of the nascent society” (Sekyi-Otu 1996:172) that enables links between the rural and urban poor, better organisation, better reflection on strategy and tactics, and the fashioning of “what Césaire called a ‘common sense’ out of differing languages of existence” (Sekyi-Otu 1996:177). This includes the need for “an idea of man and of the future of humanity” (Fanon 1976:164). Sekyi-Otu, writes that “In place of the anarchic particularisms of spontaneous revolts...The outcome which Fanon envisages for this meeting of interlocuters from different social spaces is a ‘mutual current of enlightenment and enrichment’” (1996:179).

In our struggles against global coloniality there are a variety of reasons why our resistances should take their particular social and cultural spaces, in their extant and evolving hybridity, as primary organising principles of solidarity on the foundation of which wider alliances can be forged. The first is that particular extant culture has more accessible resources that can be used and developed to articulate and inspire resistances than abstract universal principle (or old traditions that only excite romantic and nationalist intellectuals). It puts agency and creativity within the immediate grasp of the marginalised and dominated. This is particularly well argued by Sub-commandante

Insurgente Marcos, and part of the project of making rebellion ordinary must be to locate it in the immediate life world of the dominated. Anything else quickly reduces the poor to the role of stage managed extras in their own struggles.³² Moreover, moving too quickly from local languages of struggle to allegedly 'global' languages can leave everyone but the militants and movement intellectuals (who often have a professional investment in 'global' languages of struggle) behind.³³

It is also the case that while all struggles against capital have some common concerns and aims, which they are more likely to achieve if they work together, the fact remains that different struggles exist in different places shaped by particular histories and occupying different positions in the global economy, and thus have some particular concerns and aims. Those who face particular challenges in a particular context have a particular interest in working together to develop understanding and contestation around their problems. This is hugely important in the African context where material realities are often radically different to those assumed by 'global' praxis in the metropole. For example, neither digital technologies nor casual assumptions of secularism are equally democratic everywhere. Or, for a different kind of example, certain popular strands of

³² Paulo Freire's Fanonian inspired insistence on struggle as the over coming of objectification (i.e. struggle as humanisation) needs to be revisited: "The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the subject as objects in order later to become human beings" (1993:50). Consequently he concludes that "leaders who deny praxis [the opportunity for reflection and action] to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis" (1993:107). If one sees the capture of state or other power as the central goal of struggle then two-stage thinking ('obey now, critique can flourish after we have won') makes some sense. But if we are with Fanon, or if we feel that Fanon is with us, then we do deny our praxis when we deny praxis to others. Ato Sekyi-Otu explains that for Fanon "the ultimate virtue of the revolution, the goal of historical action, is not the conquest of power but the resurrection of repressed questions and the disclosure of 'unexpressed values'" (2003:17).

³³ This argument for the need to root politics in the lifeworlds of the people whom it seeks to defend and enable should not be misread as an argument for not acting until a majority has been won over. On the contrary in this instance we can profit from a return to Lenin. Lenin insists that "To make such a demand... is nothing but a cover to hide one's own *flight* from reality" (Zizek 2002:145). Often it is the act – smashing the meter, reconnecting the water, smuggling the medicine, invading the rent office, burning down the repossessed house, occupying the vice-chancellor's office, marching on the ambassador's house, etc – that opens space for new praxis.

autonomism assume that the problem is the control over access and management of social infrastructure and the solution is to beat the state back. This idea can quite usefully be imported into urban areas that emerged from apartheid with basic infrastructure or into future communities based on newly won access to land. But it can't offer much to the destitute urban poor without social infrastructure, or to the HIV positive for whom the creation of a decent health care system remains an urgent necessity. And then there is the weight of history – a weight that demands reparation to balance the scales and which is, apparently, entirely disowned by the lightness of being (a white) communist in Europe and North America. If “The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution” (1989:47) is it not possible that contemporary coloniality is the economic basis of the Northern revolts against market fundamentalism? If this is so, we would do well to remember, using apartheid as a metaphor for global coloniality, both Biko's well placed scorn for white and black liberal-pseudo opposition³⁴ and his insistence that the oppressed can only achieve liberation through their own agency.

In the colonial period, segregation is explicit – the Manicheanism in the symbolic sphere is repeated in the material world. “The world is divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species”³⁵ (1976:30). Under these conditions it is clear that each

³⁴ Biko's critique of white and black liberal pseudo-opposition is discussed most usefully by Lewis Gordon in his new introduction to *I Write What I Like* (2002:vii-xiii)

³⁵ This should not be read, following Hardt and Negri, as an unfortunate simplification that uncritically replicates the colonial reduction of a diverse society into a binary Manicheanism. Fanon was very well aware that there were groups like the Berbers and Jews that didn't fit neatly into the French-Settler/Native-Arab divide. He explores the position of Jews in colonial Algeria in *A Dying Colonialism* (1965:153-157) as does Albert Memmi (1990:79-84). Mahmood Mamdani (2001:19-41) has done some interesting empirical work on how a variety of races and ethnicities have been identified as sub-categories of the fundamental native/settler binary. Memmi's point is that the Manicheanism imposed by colonialism is the primary structure of society and that people who are neither natives or settlers – in Algeria Jews, Southern Europeans, Maltese, etc., in Sub-Saharan Africa Lebanese, Indians etcetera – “live in painful and constant ambiguity. Rejected by the colonizer, they share in part the physical conditions of the colonized and have a communion of interests with him; on the other hand, they reject the values of the colonized as belonging to

'species' confronts different material realities and that, therefore, if the dominated group allowed the dominant group to speak of material problems in a general way the particular problems of the dominated would be obscured. Under these circumstances it is not only sensible but necessary to, say, speak of black housing rather than housing in general and to organise occupants of black housing separately.

But in the neo-colonial period there is a facile affirmation of universality.

The Western bourgeoisie has prepared enough fences and railings to have no real fear of those whom it exploits and holds in contempt. Western bourgeois racial prejudice as regards the nigger and the Arab is a racism of contempt; it is a racism which minimizes what it hates. Bourgeois ideology, however, which is the proclamation of an essential equality between men, manages to appear logical in its own eyes by inviting the sub-men to become human, and to take as their prototype Western humanity as incarnated in the Western bourgeoisie (Fanon 1976:131).

Discourse shifts from race to culture³⁶, the market and developmental NGOs replace the church, the guns that keep order are now in local hands and the tacit message of the system is no longer 'you are collectively and inherently condemned because you are Black' (or Arab or Indian) but rather, and quite explicitly, that you are 'individually condemned because you have failed to be able to compete in the market'. It is true that a tiny proportion of Africans will be able to compete and, if they wish, change sides by taking jobs with multi-nationals, NGOs and states in the service of

a decayed world from which they eventually hope to escape." (1990:82- 83) David Roediger (2002:325 – 343) has done interesting work that, following an observation by Malcolm X, explores how in the US 'white ethnics' initially coded black have sought to become coded as white. This indicates that extant diversity doesn't negate the essentially Manichean structure of racism and is, on the contrary, structured by and in movement towards the two poles of Manicheanism.

³⁶ And so Nelson Mandela appears on television as part of a World Bank planned campaign to tell people that - in the midst of a cholera epidemic that is a direct result of the World Bank inspired cost-recovery policies that result in the poor being disconnected from running water - people are not getting cholera because they are not washing properly (Mbali 2002:7). As Gordon notes "the racists credo is that, ultimately, the problem with other races is the races themselves" (1995:29).

these forces, or emigrating. In this sense, neo-colonialism is substantively different to the racially rigid forms of English colonialism – but not that different to French colonialism which always made room for the inclusion of a few *évolués*.

So although Mamphele Ramphele can now get a senior post at the World Bank this does as little to stop the World Bank from acting against, directly and measurably, against the interests of ordinary Africans and in the interests of Western capital as Colin Powell's appointment by Bush Administration does for blacks in the American criminal justice system. The degree of Western control of economic policy is often as direct as it was in the colonial era but now local elites implement policies and the ideologies mobilised in support of these policies are no longer explicitly racist but rather technicist rhetoric about 'good governance'; 'international standards'; 'best practice'; 'standard procedure', etc. All of these terms refer back to policies developed by and for the interests of Western capital. It is clear that this is all conducted in the spirit of seriousness – there is no room for the human in this dogma: the Mbeki government is widely praised for an economic policy that has put 1 million people out of work; effected 10 million water and electricity disconnections; 2 million evictions and raised the proportion of South Africans living below the poverty line from just over 50% to just over 60%³⁷. It is also clear that the process of shrinking the left arm of the state (welfare, housing, education, health etc) while strengthening the right arm (prisons, police, army etc), cutting taxes to the rich, and shifting the burden of service provision to the poor is something that is happening all around the world. And it is hurting all the poor, including these days the white poor, in Eastern Europe and the underclass in the West. However, these policies are implemented with an extraordinary brutality in Africa. No European

³⁷ See David McDonald (2002)

government would even try to make primary school fees compulsory – African governments have been expected to do this. No European government could use lethal force to expel poor students from universities or poor people from their homes. It could be argued that this difference is simply due to the relative weakness of civil society and democracy in Africa that gives African governments more room to move against their own people and therefore less room to move against organised capital than their counterparts in Europe who confront stronger democracies i.e. that capital is a predatory force that feeds off whomever is weak without regard to race. But it could be argued that the extraordinary severity and brutality of the enforcement of neo-liberalism in Africa is, as with colonial domination, a result of both the weakness of African societies' capacity to effectively resist and a racist contempt for people that inhabit these societies. There is considerable evidence for the latter view – consider how the system as whole values lives in New York as oppose to those in Kigali. But the mere fact that neo-liberalism does racially disproportionate damage to humanity makes it a racist system irrespective of the desires³⁸ of the bankers, traders and policy experts that drive it; the media and academics that legitimate it; the military and police forces that protect it and the people that live with it. And, as David Goldberg has argued so persuasively, a politics and economics that denies race but doesn't address the historical legacies of racism is racist.

At this point Biko's critical distinction between assimilation and integration becomes important. Biko is for the integration of people who are economically, politically and culturally equal but firmly against "an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms

³⁸ It could be that their passion is for profit not racial domination, that that passion is best served by preying on the weak and that is just so happens that the most vulnerable are the victims of colonialism. This may be the case with some people. But even if this is the case the consequences of their actions are racially disproportionate and serve to entrench racial domination and are, therefore, racist.

and code of behaviour set up and maintained by whites...I am against the superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil" (1995:24). In the apartheid context a central reason for Biko's rejection of assimilation is that it denied the opportunity to create a space autonomous of the factual distortions and pejorative projections of racism in which self-motivated and organised action could undo internalised inferiority and passivity. Moreover, because oppression operates by undermining the self respect of the oppressed, real progress requires that respect to be won back in struggles by the oppressed.

This remains disturbingly relevant to contemporary South Africa's position in global power structures where dominant discourses are riddled with phrases like 'in line with international norms', 'international experience has shown' and 'international experts caution' which are clearly a coded way of saying that 'this is the Western way of doing things' which is in turn a coded way of valorising capitalist modes of social organisation. And the reference to the 'Western' way of doing things comes with the clear implication that the information to follow is beyond question. But oppositional discourses are very often just as dependent on the discourses of the metropolitan left. Sometimes both sides of our drama are played out in the languages developed for someone else's drama in another world whose wealth and status is built on the poverty and anonymity of our world. We have much to learn from other struggles, including struggles in the North. But what we learn must be taken into our struggles in accordance with our projects to take them forward more effectively and not imposed onto our struggles via the condescension of others or our own inferiority complexes - both of which can normalise the very structural inequalities against which we claim to be in revolt

It is also the case that movement intellectuals in South Africa are often attracted to fashionable postcolonial and other ostensibly radical theorists in the North - whose work generally assumes a different material reality and which, in some instances, is predicated on a simple contempt for the majority of humanity - at the expense of thinking that takes our situation more seriously. The material factors that encourage uncritical assimilation to metropolitan discourses in no way justify what is often, materially and psychologically, a simple case of selling out and buying in.³⁹

Fanon makes two crucial points⁴⁰ about open ended and unstable social space in which liberatory praxis must occur. The first is that the intellectual must begin from an appreciation of her estrangement. This caution does not mean that radical intellectuals or middle class militants are unwelcome interlopers in movements. On the contrary, they often bring valuable capacities with regard to knowledge, resources, networking and advocacy for movements in elite publics. This is not necessarily co-opting or predatory. In fact it can be essential and widely enabling political work. As James noted "It is on colonial peoples without means of counter-publicity that imperialism practices its basest arts" (1989:294). The point is simply that these capacities must be deployed within and in constant dialogue with the movements that nourish the insurgence of subaltern agency. What Fanon's warning does mean is that the intellectual must neither legislate

³⁹ Of course I am not suggesting that all ideas which originate in the North carry a genetic defect. Progressive and reactionary ideas emerge everywhere and interweave everywhere. The point is that we should take on fashionable ideas from the metropole only insofar as they can be made to enable our engagement with our situation. Their currency in the academic, intellectual, and 'global activist' economies justifies nothing. We need to be militant about this.

⁴⁰ Both are discussed very well by Ato Sekyi-Otu in *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (1996) and by Nigel Gibson in *Fanon, Marx and the New Reality of the Nation: Black Political Empowerment and the challenges of a new humanism in South Africa* The 3rd Annual Frantz Fanon Lecture (2004).

for the people or, in response to that error commit another and become a 'yes-man' for the people. He is advocating mutually transformative dialogue and learning.

However, Fanon's case studies of the development of radical political solidarities across class and race all, unsurprisingly given the all-or-nothing context of the Algerian war, plot a uni-directional movement of progressive enlightenment. But dialectical overcoming is not achieved in permanence. On the contrary it must be permanently worked for in the vortex of the drama of lived experience. If the doctor that Fanon describes as becoming a part of the Algerian social body survived the war she would find that pharmaceutical companies, aid agencies, NGOs, corporate media and the state would be interested in her in a very different way to the interest they would show to many of her former comrades. Mutualities - grounded in the lived experience of subjectivities changing in and consequent to struggles must be constantly worked for as a permanent mode of being. There is no permanent initiation into mutuality through some transcendent (due, ironically, to its pure immanence) event⁴¹ like people with very different histories and futures coming together for a moment in a clash with the police or a victory celebration. The dialectic is a social space in which movement occurs in all directions and not, as it often seems when massive systems of domination begin to crumble, a teleological force.

The second point is the historic necessity for political education. Fanon commends the development of liberatory ideology in an ongoing and mutually transformative dialogue between intellectuals, militants and the broader base of social movements. For Fanon this dialogue can

⁴¹ These events are important and transformative and often have positive long term consequences. But the point is that, as with any carnival, we may have learnt some things and changed in ways we haven't properly understood and which will only reveal themselves to us in the future, but we go back to ordinary life. No experience, of collective joy or suffering, ever gives us permanent absolution from the commitment to work against all the structural inequalities (and the plural matters) *within* social zones that aspire to rebel.

counteract both the hollow rhetoric of both the nationalist middle class and the romanticising, and potentially retrograde, nativist ideology, with its appeal to traditions. The problem of a lack of liberatory ideology is expressed in the failure to convert the openings created by mass movements into a moment of change – a genuine revolutionary moment (1976:357).

As Gibson explains consciousness has to be enlightened as a permanently ongoing dialogical project “that encourages the people to reflect on their own experiences, to think for themselves” (2002b:357). This can produce “a subjective attitude in organized contradiction with reality” (1976:53). This vision of popular intellectuality that takes the form of a collective reflection on the experience of struggle is at the heart of Fanon’s vision.

5.6 Conclusion

It is often the case that ‘ordinary’ grass roots participants in movements are more ideologically conservative (in orthodox left terms) and more concerned about very local issues than militants and movement intellectuals. But ‘ordinary’ participants are much more numerous, much better able to understand the nature of the ordinary experience of suffering and much better able to express their ideological militancy in popular registers. This means that a practice of mutually transformative dialogue may slow down ideological movement but speed up and deepen political movement and solidify its gains. This might not satisfy intellectuals with the idealist tendency to assume that political problems are solved discursively. But the more profound political movement produced by mutually transformative dialogue richly rewards the investments required to produce it. After all, as James told us, “It is force that counts, and chiefly the organised force of the masses...It is what they *think* that matters” (1989:286).

CONCLUSION

If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe.

- Fanon (1976:254)

Fanon asserts the open door of each consciousness. He asserts the value of all humanity. He asserts that the world is not structured to recognise this value, and that some people are objectified, in the symbolic and material realms, as less than human. He argues that, against this misanthropy, the value of all humanity will have to be fought for and that the fight is, in-itself, humanising. In Fanon's view this fight is likely to begin as a simple clash between oppressor and oppressed. However as it develops, this original binary fractures as rival projects individuate themselves. Some, like elite nationalism, seek domination and others, like class and gender struggles, seek to contest modes of domination not yet (or sufficiently) called into question. At this point, Fanon argues, the fight needs to be waged with increasingly clear ideas of what it is for and what it is against. He is clear that although this unfolding of struggle can reach towards the universal, the universal can not be asserted as its immediate foundation. We live, he argues, from within the reality of the particular. Identities may be constructed but, when they are imposed from without, they are lived as reality. Those who are dominated in the name of particular identities must fight within those identities to change their meaning and to develop political autonomy. In contemporary South Africa, where national elites are being incorporated into the structures of colonial domination, the fight to humanise the world continues. Often this takes the form of short and sporadic outbursts of popular resistance. Radical intellectuals should be present in these expressions of popular resistance with a view to engaging in a mutually transformative dialogue that can draw out the rationality of these rebellions and seek to develop and entrench them. Amongst other things this

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will require the cultivation of autonomous spaces for radical practice outside of those created by the European left¹ and elite nationalism. This, in essence, is the argument made in this thesis.

I have tried to situate Fanon's philosophy in the streams of thought with which he was critically engaged as an important innovator – especially the work of Marx and Sartre. I have also tried to situate my own readings of Fanon in the secondary literature and, in particular, the work of Fanon's pre-eminent existential reader, Lewis Gordon, his pre-eminent Africanist readers, Ato Sekyi-Otu and Nigel Gibson and his pre-eminent activist reader – the same Nigel Gibson. The combination of the existential, African situationist readings and activist may offer some originality although its parts draw heavily on Gordon, Sekyi-Otu and Gibson. If there is some original contribution in this work, it lies in the seriousness with which I have taken Fanon's claim to be asserting a radical humanism and his understanding of the extent to which struggle is a battle of ideas – not a battle between the grand claims of contending ideologies or elites, but a battle within and on the terms of the popular praxis of struggle. Fanon, I hope to have shown, although I have not stated this, is a philosopher in the classic mould in so far as he sees philosophy as 'a way of life'

¹ This is not to make the objectifying suggestion that ideas articulated in Europe have a genetic inability to speak to African struggles. On the contrary Fanon goes so far as to say that "All the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in Europe" (1976:253). And it is certainly the case that ideas articulated in Europe have been very profitably used to theorise African struggles. Fanon did this and, as Andrew Nash notes in an important paper, a generation of South African radicals effectively used Western Marxism in the 1970s to:

overcome the dogma and reductionism of Stalinism and Trotskyism, to engage with history as a living process rather than as a mechanical formula, to found a historical consciousness linking local struggles to global processes, and implant itself in a working-class movement which sought to control its own destiny, openly and democratically, rather than submitting to the authority of nationalism or pseudo-science (1999:66).

Fanon's critique of Europe, and his injunction to leave Europe, is because Europe has failed to "reconsider the question of cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connexions must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanised (1976:253). The geography of reason must, as the Caribbean Philosophy Association has asserted, be shifted.

Conclusion

(Hadot, 1995). Philosophical discourse is not the primary object of his analysis. The primary object of his analysis is the lived experience of resistance to the racialisation of humanity that has enabled colonial and neo-colonial modes of global domination.

If this reading of Fanon is accurate, and if Fanon's analysis is correct, then we require two revolutionary shifts as improbably and as courageous as the Haitian revolution. The first is a break with Europe, and its World Bank on its right wing and its NGOs on its left wing. The second is an equally fundamental break with local relations of domination masked by elite nationalism. Against this we require a militant assertion of the humanity – the value and agency and intelligence – of the wretched of the earth. Such a break will only be possible when Europe no longer appears to own both the practice of oppression and resistance to that oppression, and when a deeply complicit elite nationalism no longer appears to carry the hopes of the oppressed against the long rule of Europe. The praxis of oppression and resistance to oppression must be owned by the oppressed. There is work to be done, human work.

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