FANON AND THE THEORY OF RACE

Footnotes

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, Hubert Harrison, and Malcolm X, among others, could be added here.

[2] The literature on Fanon is extensive. Some important works include Lewis R. Gordon, Fanon and the Crisis of European Man (New York: Routledge, 1995), Renate Zahar, Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), Nigel C. Gibson, Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), L. Adele Jinadu, Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1980), Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), and James Saki Sayles, Meditations on Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth: New Afrikan Revolutionary Writings (Chicago: Spear and Shield Publications, 2010)

[3] Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 2008) 191.

[4] The history of black revolt in the Americas, and its pivotal impact on ending slavery, is ignored by Fanon.

[5] Fanon was not alone in his preoccupation with the Caribbean person as, in essence, a colonial being. Some Caribbean thinkers thought of this condition as a consequence of the radical discontinuity in black history as a result of slavery. It is a recurring theme among some, though not all, Caribbean thinkers of the period. For instance, see George Lamming, "The Occasion for Speaking" in The Pleasures of Exile, V.S Naipaul, The Middle Passage, and C.L.R. James, Party Politics in the West Indies.

[6] G.W. F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

[7] See Susan Buck-Morss, Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

[8] Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 118.

[9] Ibid., 119.

[10] Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 153.

[11] David Macey, Frantz Fanon: A Life (London: Granta, 2000), 164.

[12] Ibid., 165-166.

[13] See Karl Marx, Capital Volume 1, (New York: Penguin, 1990), 163-177.

[14] See Lewis R. Gordon, Fanon and the Crisis of European Man, 30-31.

[15] Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.

[16] The Négritude milieu was ideologically divided between its more culturalist wing, identified with Leopold Senghor, and its more political milieu, whose forerunner was the Marxist and Surrealist group around Légitime défense and, later, Tropiques. Fanon can be identified as belonging to the latter camp. For more on these debates see Michael Richardson ed., Refusal of Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean (London: Verso, 1996); Abiola Irele, The Negritude Moment: Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010); Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism; Aimé Césaire, The Collected Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[17] W.E.B. Du Bois. The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Penguin, 1989) 5.

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line of thought, which he went on to develop in a broader historical scale in his writings on anti-colonialism in Wretched of the Earth and elsewhere. For Fanon, the history of race and racialized people is, indeed, the history of the struggle of self-realization – a society in which content is free to determine its own form.

Du Bois was writing at a moment of renewed terroristic white supremacist reaction. In a time in which we are faced with a steady retrogression in race thinking in the U.S. and around the world, decades in the making, we must address the need to approach the problem of race again, and in new ways. Fanon's work is undoubtedly one part of that process, and we need to dig into it deeply. Like Du Bois before him, even if Fanon himself did not, and could not, solve the problem in his own day, he left a framework and way of thinking that captured the contradictions of race and white supremacy in their fullest development in the period that gave rise to our own and that, unfortunately, we have not surpassed.

Marx was reflecting on the limitations of the proletarian rebellion during the revolutions of 1848. For Marx, the specifically proletarian revolution was aimed toward the self-abolition of class existence, which, nonetheless, had yet to escape the limits of the bourgeois revolution. Similarly, in the conclusion of Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon considers the necessity and limits of Négritude, the predominate black nationalism in the French-speaking world at the time of its writing. Like Marx, Fanon's point is not only that people bring themselves and society into being, but that even their forms of thought and organization can reproduce their own alienation. As Fanon argues, in a white supremacist society the conditions of racial existence are the necessary ground for the self-abolition of race, and such conditions are not obviously overcome because their tendency is to reproduce themselves. Fanon saw Négritude as trapped in this contradiction. To put the issue more abstractly, the problem of form and content posits itself as a series of necessary limits whose tendency is towards the reproduction of obsolete, alienated forms of race and, at the same time, a new universal humanity – a humanity without race.

Fanon is not alone in tackling the problem of self-realization and its frustrations. He echoes and develops this dilemma, which periodically appears throughout 20th century black thought. One of the earliest and most precisely to formulate the contradictions of race and the problem of self-realization was W.E.B. Du Bois. In the opening chapter of The Souls of Black Folk, he writes, the black person is:

> *born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others…The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.[17]*

Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness perfectly captures Fanon's

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others
– W.E.B Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks

He who is reluctant to recognize me is against me
– Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary
— Malcolm X, Speech at the Founding of the OAAU

However, blackness, in the moment of absoluteness, becomes its own limit. At the end of the "Lived Experience of the Black Man" chapter, the narrator has established blackness, but remains alienated. Fanon argues that blackness becomes a limit that must be overcome. In the "Conclusion" of Black Skin, White Masks, he lays out the idea that freedom emerges only when the form of race is abolished. After all, blackness remains an alienated, one-sided, and objectified existence – "locked in thinghood," as Fanon laments (193). The imperative of "Disalienation will be for those Whites and Blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized 'tower of the past,'" which "will come from refusing to consider their reality as definitive" (201). Once again, Fanon emphasizes the movement of self-activity inverting its own objectification. He declares, "I am not a prisoner of History" and "I must constantly remind myself that the real leap consists of introducing invention into life" (204). Only universality – the ability to determine oneself in infinite, multi-sided ways – is true freedom. As Fanon reminds us, "There should be no attempt to fixate man, since it is his destiny to be unleashed" (205). The struggle against race, Fanon suggests, is not for "equality," which assumes the reproduction of bourgeois civil society and its narrowly determined individual. Instead, he conceives of a revolutionary abolition of race and the foundation of the truly social individual.

"Let the Dead Bury the Dead"?

Fanon begins the conclusion of Black Skin, White Masks with a well-known quote from Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:

> *The social revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to find their own content, the revolutions of the nineteenth century have to let the dead bury the dead. Before, the expression exceeded the content; now the content exceeds the expression. (198)*

proletariat, forgetting that "black consciousness claims to be an absolute density, full of itself" (113). Sartre, he contends, misses the immanent, concrete process of the self-abolition of race, which develops as a series of negations. Fanon expands on the point:

> *The dialectic that introduces necessity as a support for my freedom expels me from myself. It shatters my impulsive position. Still regarding consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. There's no room for probability inside me. My black consciousness does not claim to be a loss. It is. It merges with itself. (114)*

Fanon's subject does not look for a universal because, in distinction to Sartre, no universal objectively exists, so far. Fanon's implicit point is the conditions for a universal proletariat do not yet exist and only emerge through self-active blackness. Initially, in a state of non-existence, blackness establishes itself as a conscious subject, making the world its object, and laying the foundation for recognition. Only as a series of concrete and immanant moments in the negation of race do the conditions for a universal humanity – a humanity without race — materialize. In "The Black Man and Hegel," found in the appendix of Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon explains further:

> *In its immediacy, self-consciousness is simply being-for-itself. In order to achieve certainty of oneself, one has to integrate the concept of recognition. Likewise, the other is waiting for our recognition so as to blossom into the universal self-consciousness. Each consciousness of self is seeking absoluteness. It wants to be recognized as an essential value outside of life, as transformation of subjective certainty [ ] into objective truth [ ]. (192)*

The self-abolition of race and the appearance of a universal humanity are predicated on mutual recognition. And recognition arises only in conflict with, and negation of, white supremacy. "Only conflict," Fanon writes, can "make human reality, in-itself-for-itself, come true" (193).

Introduction

Frantz Fanon is one of the most important 20th century thinkers on race, and any serious theory and strategy dealing with the reality of race has to grapple with his work.[1] At the same time, Fanon remains one of the most misunderstood revolutionary thinkers. Part of the reason lies in the hybrid nature of his work, which draws from, among other fields of knowledge, philosophy, psychiatry, literature, anthropology and marxism. Another reason for the conflicting interpretation of his work may be the conditions under which his writings were produced, often addressing the immediate theoretical issues of the day, whether in France, Algeria, the Caribbean, or the anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Further, dying of leukemia at the young age of 36, Fanon was robbed of the opportunity to more fully develop and synthesize his diverse and fragmented work.

During his lifetime, Fanon was first and foremost known as an associate of the FLN, the leading party of the Algerian Revolution, a proponent of the Algerian Revolution as a model of anti-colonial revolution, and a critic of the emerging national bourgeoisie. In addition, Fanon fostered relationships with French intellectuals, most famously Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. However, Fanon's work was never widely known in his lifetime in France, or, more broadly, in the metropoles.

It was not until Les Damnés del la terre was translated into English in 1965 as The Wretched of the Earth that Fanon reached a wider audience. The emergence of nationalist and Third Worldist movements, both globally and in the "Western" countries, meant new life for Fanon's work, as these movements drew on his work in various ways. Wretched of the Earth was at the center of this Fanon revival, while other important works, such as Black Skin, White Masks, were relatively ignored. Later, after these movements subsided, Fanon was the subject of intense appropriation and critique within American universities. The different moments and places in the reception and interpretation of his work meant that Fanon has been interpreted in widely different, and contradictory ways.

The purpose of this essay is to briefly examine some of the core tenets of Fanon's understanding of race, and it by no means provides an exhaustive account of his work.[2] Important areas of his writing are left untouched, as is most of the historical context. Instead, this essay explores some of the key categories and methodology Fanon uses in his analysis of race, with the aim of drawing out some of the lines in his thought. A particular emphasis is placed on his concept of racial alienation. The hope is to encourage others to take up Fanon, or engage with those who have already done so, as one step in the necessary reconstruction of a revolutionary theory of race and white supremacy for today.

The notes below approach the question primarily through a close reading of the important chapter in Black Skin, White Masks, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," although other parts of his work are touched on. This chapter is important because it lays out his core concepts of racial alienation and its self-abolition.

Fanon strongly criticizes Sartre's preface for its approach to the dialectic of racial alienation. He takes particular issue with Sartre's use of negation. In Sartre's hands, negation explicitly lacks positive content and, consequently, any objectivity. The event-like rupture with racial objectification brings forward its own content – new ways of organizing social life, a set of ideas, a whole 'structure of feeling' – which contends, as a practical critique, with existing white supremacist society. Therefore, in Sartre's hands, the negativity expressed by this rupture is a critique of existing reality, but does not generate new conditions – a new reality – based on its own self-active negation of white supremacist social relations. In a practical sense, the non-white is subsumed into a pre-existing, white reality: "I did not create a meaning for myself; the meaning was already there, waiting" (113). Sartre, Fanon argues, is forced to conclude that the proletariat already exists universally.

Yet, Fanon argues that a universal proletariat does not exist. Instead, the proletariat is always racialized, and the universal Sartre claims exists must, in fact, be created upon the conditions of mutual recognition. However, establishing the conditions of mutual recognition depends upon the disarticulation of racial alienation and establishing the claims of a non-white humanity. He argues Sartre misses the point that such a process unfolds immanently within the racial relation: black existence can only become the grounds of disalienation to the extent that the specifically black subject becomes conscious of itself and the white recognizes the absoluteness or claim to humanity of those who exist as non-white. In the dialectic of recognition, Fanon maintains, "consciousness needs to get lost in the night of the absolute," which is "the only condition for attaining self-consciousness" (112). As black existence becomes conscious of itself, new conditions for recognition are created in an immanent, concrete, and sensuous sense.

Like Sartre, Fanon sees race as a form of alienation, and that the tendency is towards abolishing of race. Fanon, however, particularly emphasizes the self-abolition of racial existence. In Fanon's critique, Sartre is guilty of idealism because his concept of negation subsumes the concrete, for-itself activity of black existence into a universal

Aimé Césaire. The history of blackness creates a foundation for the expression of the relation between the self-active black subject and his self-actualization in the contemporary world. In effect, the black subject is able to not only show how the attempt by whiteness to erase it from history failed, but that the present trajectory of black subject can be understood in light of its historical development.

The relation to the world is no longer mediated by whiteness in a direct sense, though, as we will see, black presence must, by definition, be conditioned by white supremacy. What is crucial here is the absolute character of the subject's claim on the world, as narrator states, "At last I had been recognized; I was no longer a nonentity" (108). Indeed, it is the fact of black existence, its objective character now also mediated by its own activity, that throws "the white man back in his place; emboldened, I jostled him and hurled in his face: accommodate me as I am; I'm not accommodating anyone" (110).

Further, the self-determination of the black subject establishes, for the first time, the basis for mutual recognition. Blackness has now established itself, not as moral plea, like in the beginning of the chapter, but as material, immanent fact. Blackness remakes the world in its own image. On this ground of self-certainty, a dialectic of joint becoming within the racial relation has been achieved.

Fanon emphasizes the objective character of this self-certainty by contrasting his approach to that of Jean-Paul Sartre, who was at the time an influential commentator in France on Négritude and anti-colonial movements. Sartre wrote one of the definitive commentaries on the Négritude movement for a French audience in the preface to Leopold Senghor's important Négritude anthology, Black Orpheus. There Sartre argues that blackness is a subjective stance in which the person affirms their "solidarity" with, or belonging to, the "objective, positive, exact notion of the proletariat" (111). Therefore, "race," Sartre continues, "is concrete and particular," while class "is universal and abstract" (112). Sartre concludes that blackness is the "negative moment" in an overall "transition" of the non-white toward integration into the proletariat.

Fanon and the Dialectic of Race

It is difficult to understand Fanon's concept of race unless we grasp his methodology. Important sources for Fanon's approach were the Heideggerian phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the Hegelian-influenced phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre, which he encountered as a young man recently discharged from the military and pursuing a degree in medicine and psychiatry. Sartre, in particular, drew from Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel in the late 1930s, later published in English as Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (1947). These lectures interpreted Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit through a Heideggerian and Marxist lens, and had an important impact on the development of phenomenology in post-war France.

Fanon found in the Hegelian theory of intersubjectivity a methodology for thinking about race and white supremacy. Just as Marx appropriated Hegel's theory as a foundation for his concept of social labor and class conflict, so Fanon established an approach to racial formation, alienation and struggle. However, as he states in the pivotal chapter, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," the premise of Hegel's theory had to be altered to address the contemporary reality of racism. For Hegel the problem of inter-subjectivity rested on the assumption that both parties struggled for recognition. Yet, Fanon seems to argue, the dialectic of mutual recognition does not apply to black people, who have not struggled for recognition in white supremacist society.

However, Fanon's argument here can be misleading. When it comes to the incompatibility of the dialectic and recognition and black existence, Fanon has in mind a specific kind of "black man." In "The Black Man and Hegel," located in the appendix of Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon writes that, since there is "no open conflict between White and Black," the process of struggle and recognition posited by Hegel is blocked. Reflecting on the end of slavery in the Americas – the formative historical experience of the African Diaspora – Fanon argues that "the white master recognized without a struggle the

black slave. But the former slave wants to have himself recognized. There is at the basis of Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be highlighted."[3]

Setting aside the questionable historical accuracy of this statement, Fanon argues that, since there was no authentic struggle on the part of freed slaves, there can be no genuine recognition on the part of the white man.[4] As a result, black people are denied the chance to achieve self-awareness since the process of recognition through struggle fails to take shape. Fanon makes a similar claim in the pivotal chapter in Black Skins, White Masks, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," again qualifying Hegel's dialectical theory of recognition. "Ontology," he writes, "does not allow us to understand the being of the black man," concluding that "The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (90). Fanon suggests that black social being has been emptied of content and its agency immobilized, preventing the process of self-becoming from getting under way. Black being is marked by a profound absence. As he answers elsewhere in the chapter, in a white supremacist society, black social being is characterized by its non-existence: "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing" (118).

However, Fanon's initial step in a dialectical approach to race and white supremacy must be qualified. In Black Skin, White Masks he identifies this static condition of non-existence only within segments of the African Diaspora, in particular those from the Caribbean, an idea that reflects a preoccupation of many thinkers from the region during the 1940s and 1950s.[5] In short, the 'condition' Fanon identifies is not a universal one and he contrasts it with the African American: "We say the black Frenchman because the black Americans are living a different drama. In the United States the black man fights and is fought against. There are laws that gradually disappear from the constitution. There are other laws that prohibit certain forms of discrimination. And we are told that none of this is given free" (196). As Fanon makes clear, black people in the U.S., and presumably elsewhere, have moved from a state of non-existence to one of existence. Once this history of ontological and material resistance is established, Hegel's dialectic

nature as the domain of the black man. As "the drums jabber out the cosmic message. Only the black man is capable of conveying it, of deciphering its meaning and impact" (103). The narrator, returning "In a frenzy" to the past of great African civilizations, "excavated black antiquity. What I discovered left me speechless… it allowed me to regain a valid historic category. The white man was wrong, I was not a primitive or subhuman; I belonged to a race that has already been working silver and gold 2,000 years ago" (109). The reestablishment of Black history provides a foundation for the contemporary black subject by demonstrating the existence of a black subject that was combated and denied by white supremacy. The new black subject finds its footing in the present on the basis of the past, and offers the world an alternative humanity, another way of being. As the narrator tells us, sitting "Astride the world, my heels digging into its flanks," he claims the world as his own (103). The recovery of the past provides a content through which the narrator is able to claim and alter the present, establishing a continuity of the black subject in the world:

> *So here we have the Negro rehabilitated, 'standing at the helm,' governing the world with his intuition, rediscovered, reappropriated, in demand, accepted; and it's not a Negro, oh, no, but the Negro, alerting the prolific antennae of the world, standing in the spotlight of the world, spraying the world with his poetical power, 'porous to every breath in the world.' I embrace the world! I am the world!.... above the objective world of plantations and banana and rubber trees, I had subtly established the real world. The essence of the world was my property. Between the world and me there was a relation of coexistence. (106-107)*

Fanon embraces Négritude, even as he critiques its middle class limitations, with its intellectual interest in a 'magical black culture" that uneasily intersects with the 'objective world' of black farm laborers in the plantations of Africa and the Americas. In Fanon's view, the critical importance of Négritude is not the move to depict a fetishized racial essence, as in the hands of Senghor, but its ironic, polemical and historically contingent character, as developed by

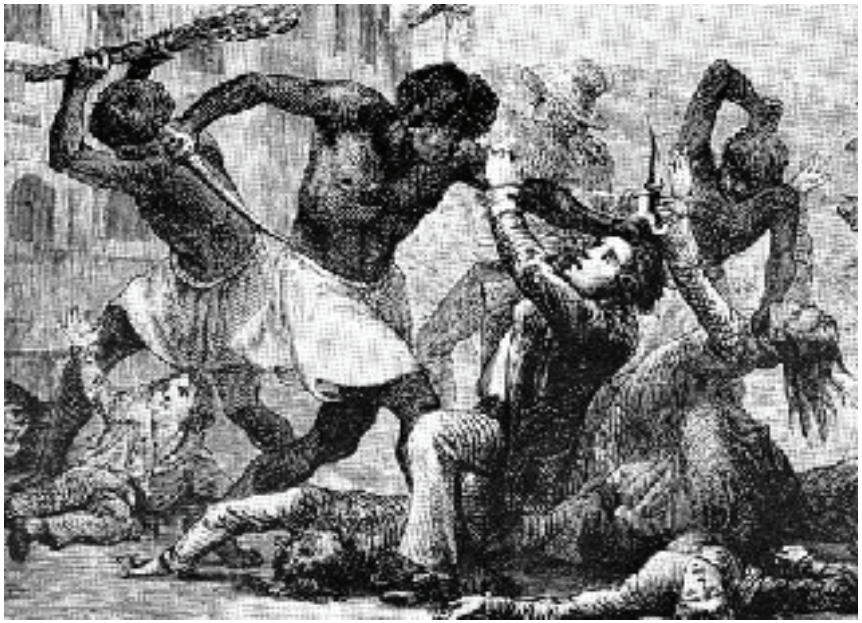
of the racial relation begins to crumble. A new human content is brought forth in response to the de-realization of racialized people. The black subject is actualized in the world with claims upon what it means to be human. Yet this content cannot be fully realized in racial form and comes up against its own limits. For Fanon, race remains a form of alienation. Freedom is the self-emancipation from, or the abolishing of race. This process of self-abolition establishes the conditions for a universal humanity to emerge. The dialectical supersession of race, in which one's existence as race is abolished, means that the emancipatory content of racial struggle and thought is preserved and realized in new, universal form.

As we have seen, the necessity of negation leads to the "creation of new men," in which the object is turned into a subject. The new content of blackness, then, establishes the self-certainty of the subject in an objective sense by actualizing itself in the world. In Black Skin, White Masks, the content of blackness is represented by Fanon's critical engagement with Négritude, the French-speaking black cultural movement primarily of the 1930s into the 1950s. Négritude, like its forerunner, the Harlem Renaissance, developed at a time when the very existence of a specifically black history was still questioned by the white world. Such denial, of course, was foundational to white supremacy, and the figures of 19th and early 20th century black thought did much to establish the terrain of black history. Fanon's narrator confronts the denial of black history within the context of the non-recognition at the heart of the race relation. Indeed the narrator must confront the fact that such a history, he is told, does not exist: "Too late. Everything has been predicted, discovered, proved, and exploited. My shaky hands grasped at nothing" (100). It is only when the narrator tells us "I finally made up my mind to shout my blackness" (101), that he discovers "On the other side of the white world there lies a magical black culture" (102).

In discovering a specifically black history, the narrator invokes the tropes of a Senghorian influenced Négritude.[16] As opposed to the self-proclaimed 'rationality' of the white man, the narrator embraces declarations of intuition, poetic creativity, and communion with

of self-realization becomes a useful tool that Fanon adapts to grasp the actual movement of racial struggle against white supremacy.

So, Fanon considers how racialized people rupture their objectification through a confrontation with white supremacy and their own conditions of existence. This rupture makes possible an active transformation of those conditions, thereby bringing the racialized subject into existence, and making it possible to establish its objective power in the world. It is only on such a foundation, Fanon argues, that mutual recognition is possible, and a trajectory toward the abolition of race is constituted.



Masters and Slaves

At the center of Hegel's dialectic of self-realization, or the "movement of self-consciousness," is the so-called "Master and Slave dialectic."[6] Hegel, who may have been meditating on the Haitian Revolution at the time[7], and not just the emergence of bourgeois civil society and its private individuals, argues that consciousness arises as a result of the coexistence of human beings and the world

around them. The concept of self-consciousness as a developing process that emerges from the relation between human beings and the world is an important one. As Herbert Marcuse writes, for Hegel "the subject of thinking is not the 'abstract ego' but the consciousness that knows that it is the 'substance' of the world." When true self-consciousness is achieved, Marcuse continues, "thinking consists in knowing that the objective world is in reality a subjective world, that it is the objectification of the subject. The subject that really thinks comprehends the world as 'his' world."[8] Self-consciousness emerges to the extent humanity "abandons the abstract freedom of thought and enters into the world in full consciousness that it is 'his own' world."[9] For Hegel, the struggle for self-realization unifies the world and self, which is the process of history itself.

Since people are immediately social, Hegel views the relation between individuals as a necessary unity. However, reflecting on the organization of bourgeois society, Hegel argues in the Phenomenology that, at the same time, each person exists separately as "distinct moments" of the whole — as private individuals — and in conflict with all others (111). In Hegel's language, as a result of this contradictory unity, people are both a "being-for-others" and a "being-for-self." On the one hand, each person exists through another, and must see oneself through another's eyes. Consequently, each consciousness knows that it is not universal, "aware that it at once is, and is not, another consciousness":

> *Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation. They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another. (112)*

Therefore, on the other side of the relation, each person is in danger of losing his or her distinctiveness in the other. The contradiction must be resolved and, inevitably, there must be a struggle. Consequently, each "does not see the other as an essential being," and, believing in their own universality, they struggle to achieve recognition from the other on their own terms (111).

the conditions of black existence become the basis for a struggle of self-emancipation.

On the basis of immediate racial existence an inversion occurs. In Fanon's narrative immediate existence becomes the condition for self-activity that struggles to "explode" objectification. Such a leap is central to Fanon's thinking, which he expands upon in the context of the anti-colonial struggle in The Wretched of the Earth:

> *Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The "thing" colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation.[15]*

The object is transformed into a subject and works upon the conditions of its existence to the extent that it disrupts and alters prevailing social relations. Through this inversion the black subject begins to realize itself by turning the world into its object and making it subject to its will. Like Marx, Fanon traces a movement in which the object in-itself becomes a subject for-itself. The fetishized racial body is no longer an expression of an eternal, natural essence, or a symptom of a false history, but the basis for a powerful negation of existing relations of race. It is on this ground that the capacity for a truly practical consciousness of race, and its self-abolition, emerges.

Blackness and the Self-Abolition of Race

Fanon argues that racial struggle is an immediate and necessary reality. However, he concludes the determinant negation of white supremacy is only one moment in an overall historical process that involves abolishing race. In the act and process of negation, the structuring, normative, 'common sense' and presupposed reality

(97). He finally realizes that racial alienation is an objective social relation, and that his anxiety arises from this fact. Thus, "armed solely with reason, there is nothing more neurotic than contact with the irrational" (98). Idealistic and subjective appeals to "equality," "justice," and "reason" in an objectively white supremacist society lead nowhere. Criticizing this society from the standpoint of a principle that has no objective basis ends in misdiagnosing the source of one's own "neurosis."

Only when the narrator directly confronts the material conditions of racial existence is he able to move forward in resolving his alienation. The chapter began with a street scene in which a white woman and her child call out, "Look! A Negro!" (89). This moment of racialization is not simply an act of naming, as if language on its own constituted material reality, but an expression of the material reproduction of the race relation. However, whereas before the narrator simply internalized the moment, or attempted to rationalize it, he now acts upon this reality in order to change it: "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame.' Her face colored with shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I realized two things at once: I had identified the enemy and created a scandal" (94). The word "ruminate" emphasizes the contemplative, passive character of the narrator up to this point. Therefore, Fanon implies that the static, objectified condition of the narrator is shattered only through the practical act of negating the power of the white woman – and by extension the reproduction of white supremacist social relations as a whole – to reproduce his own objectification.

White supremacy's denial of human recognition is premised on the materiality of the racial relation. In his struggle, the narrator now understands that he must interrupt the reproduction of this relation in order to live: "The black man is a toy in the hands of the white man. So in order to break the vicious circle, he explodes" (119). Therefore, "I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an innate complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known" (95). Here, the racial relation is turned inside out to negate the structuring and material power of whiteness, and

At this point, the social whole "splits into the extremes." Each person no longer recognizes the other, and they only relate to each other through their own "determinateness" (112). They now lack self-conscious of each other as a unity, as distinct and yet belonging together as two sides of a whole. Hegel says, we now have "two self-conscious individuals" who must "prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle" (113-114). They must have "certainty of being for themselves," and conceive of themselves as the "truth" in the "absolute negation" of the other (114).

The victor of the struggle becomes the "master" and the loser finds himself a "slave." While the master achieves self-certainty, the slave is reduced to a thing, a mere object or extension of the will of the master. As Hegel writes, the master ends up being "recognized, the other only recognizing" (113). Importantly, the master achieves subjective certainty by establishing his certainty as objective truth. In other words, the master remakes the world in his image, and he uses the slave to do so. The slave is not simply an extension of the master's will, but he has, in fact, no place in the world, which only expresses the will of the master. The slave exists as the object of the master and must work for him.

However, though subdued by the master and turned into a thing, the slave now becomes a "consciousness forced back into itself." Given his active, self-constituting relationship to the world through labor, the slave is slowly "transformed into a truly independent consciousness." It may appear that the world reflects the master's reality, but, because of his active relationship to the world, the slave has "within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self" (117).

Through his work the slave must confront the world as an independent reality, where his "formative activity" transforms him from nothing into a new positive—a new "being-for-self"—in which he discovers his "own independence" vis-à-vis the world (118). The slave is no longer an object, but becomes a self-active subject who internalizes the world as his own and, in the process, realizes that he and the world are subject to change according to his own will. As Hegel puts it, the slave's "attachment to natural

existence" is dissolved and the consciousness of a "being-for-self" arises (117). The slave now initiates a struggle with the master:

> *this objective negative moment is none other than the alien being before which it has trembled. Now, however, he destroys this alien negative moment, posits himself as a negative in the permanent order of things, and thereby becomes for himself, someone existing on his own account…this shape that is his pure being-for-self, which in this externality is seen by him to be the truth. (118)*

By negating the master there is an "absolute melting-away of everything stable," and the slave becomes a being for himself and not for the master. Charles Taylor argues that, for Hegel, the desire to risk struggle comes about when the slave can no longer "undergo the life-process unconsciously."[10] In his newly found self-consciousness, Hegel argues, the slave becomes an "absolute negativity," a "pure being-for-self" who has attained his own determination face-to-face with the master and his world (117). The slave seeks to reappropriate an alien world and self, making it his own by changing it to express himself. The struggle for reappropriation is critical because it signals a new consciousness that explodes the objectification of the slave. Hegel argues:

> *Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly for itself. If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centred attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity per se, and therefore its formative activity cannot give it a consciousness of itself as essential being. If it has not experienced absolute fear but only some lesser dread, the negative being has remained for it something external. (119)*

Finally, the overthrow of the master can just as well lead to the rise of new masters and slaves. Hegel presented a method to grasp the abstract movement of what he believed was the meaning of human history: the development of self-consciousness towards a universal freedom. Therefore, the slave, like the master, and all specific determinations, must be negated. Only then can there be "universal

encompassing anxiety. The narrator swings back and forth between self-loathing and pleas of understanding to white society, leading him to "becoming a nervous wreck" (98). Filled with "Shame and self-contempt," the narrator tells us how "I slip into corners; I keep silent; all I want is to be anonymous, to be forgotten" (96). And yet, in other moments, he "wanted to rationalize the world and show the white man he was mistaken" (98). At times, the narrator insists that all people are equal, and therefore "Reason was assured of victory"; however, even as he "reintegrated the brotherhood of man" in his mind, he is "soon disillusioned" in how such a "brotherhood" was impossible (99).

As Fanon's narrative dialectically unfolds, the narrator painfully learns that his problem is not rooted in individual prejudice, as his liberal friends insist: "We can only hope it will soon disappear"

and explode from within the conditions of his existence, thereby subjecting those conditions to his conscious will.

The Necessity of Racial Struggle

The narrator now understands that, in order to be a "human being," the objective basis of his existence as a racially oppressed person, and as a being alienated from himself, is an absolute limit that must be overcome. The objectivity of his existence has its own necessity that he must obey, and therefore, by necessity he must destroy it in order to live at all.

The narrator confronts the objectivity of his racialized existence in the form of his fetishized body and culture, and all the relations and interactions that make up social life, where "blackness was there, dense and undeniable," heavy with the determined weight of history (96). He must confront the fact that the naturalized appearance, "facticity,"[14] or common sense everydayness of racial existence and white supremacy is an all-encompassing reality. As such, the racialized self and its social relations are inescapable. In every aspect of life, the narrator continues, a white supremacist society "demanded of me that I behave like a black man" (94). And though a few may climb the hierarchical division of labor, they will remain "the Negro teacher, the Negro physician," marked by an inferior racial essence (97). Regardless of "merit," the social position of the non-white remains highly contingent and always open to question. For if that teacher or physician "made one false move, it was over for him and for all those who came after him" (97). As Fanon suggests, the objectivity of alienated racial existence means to live life in constant de-realization of oneself. In other words, the actual material conditions of one's existence negates or denies one's self at every turn. It is this contradiction that is the basis for the narrator's struggle for freedom, which emerges later in the chapter.

In response to his dilemma, the narrator begins to run out of options. Consequently, the contingency of black life in a white supremacist society permeates the narrator as a condition of all-

formative activity" (119). As Hegel says, it is not the mastery of particular kinds of being that is at stake. What is not needed is "skill which is master over some things"; instead, the goal is the mastery of "universal power and the whole of objective being" (119). In other words, freedom is defined by the power to interchangeably be any determination, and not confined to only a few.

Therefore, the overthrow of the master does not automatically lead to universal self-consciousness, where the whole of the world is conceived as one's own and subject to change. After all, the rupture with the dead objectivity of the master is accomplished through a negation by a new determining subject. As Hegel argues, this new determination is still a particular existence posed against another. The universal potential of human consciousness remains in contradictory unity, divided against itself. It is only when there is a negation of the new particular – in this case the slave who has destroyed his master – is itself negated that a universal consciousness emerges, one that is in immediate unity with itself.

Reviewing Hegel's dialectic of recognition and non-recognition helps in understanding the approach Fanon uses in his approach to race. Fanon argues that race is a process in which the unity of the world and self becomes mediated by a racialized objectification of the subject. Therefore, according to Fanon, race is a form of alienation. For Hegel the slave's existence is an expression of the objective reality or power of the master. The master is "recognized" and the slave lives in a state of "non-recognition." Similarly, for Fanon the alienated racial subject exists as an expression of the objective reality of whiteness. Racial existence, then, is a negation of the human content of racialized people; it is a profound state of 'non-recognition" and derealization. The process of racial objectification, according to Fanon, turns people into things, identified by their skin, racial or ethnic features, as well as culture.

However, since race is a social relation, it is constantly reproduced and subject to change. Similar to Hegel's dialectic, Fanon sees the conditions of racial existence as the basis for the self-abolition of race, just as the conditions of Hegel's "slave" becomes the ground for the negation of the "master," and the possibility for a universal

society. Fanon conceives of the black subject emerging in the active negation of whiteness and the social relations of white supremacy. Since blackness is the objective condition of its existence in a white supremacist society, the black subject thereby establishes its own "determinateness" on this basis by inverting its objectification, effectively making the conditions of its existence subject to its own power. The human content of racialized people now becomes real and actual in the world by changing it to fit its own needs. In the struggle, the black subject establishes independent self-consciousness of itself, and begins to exist as a being for itself with a new positive content in relation to the whiteness that would deny its existence.

Finally, like Hegel's dialectic, Fanon concludes that blackness itself becomes its own limit. The necessary determinate negation of white social relations reproduces the racial relation and its associated alienation. Blackness itself must be negated and overcome. In its struggle to destroy white supremacy, blackness abolishes itself. For Fanon the tendency in the struggle against white supremacy is to abolish race, and therefore destroy the racial form of alienation. Only then can a true, universal society emerge.

Race as Alienation

Fanon conceives of race as a form of alienation. This idea is at the center of "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," and Fanon's work as a whole. The chapter uses a pastiche-like narrative of black experience, where the problem of racial alienation drives the story forward. The narrator, which we can consider not only Fanon, but every black person, is confronted by a typical racist act of everyday life. The confrontation throws him off balance and disrupts his assumptions about himself and the way the world works. As the chapter continues, racist situations and voices periodically intervene, increasing the tension in the anxiety-ridden and delirious atmosphere. The narrative, then, represents the narrator's struggles to understand his subordinated situation in the white supremacist society in which he lives. By the end of the chapter, the narrator has

in front of me look at me, spy on me, wait for me" (119). Though he tries to posit himself, he ends up confronting himself as another being, which has an independent, objective existence he cannot escape.

It is for that reason Fanon emphasizes not only the objective character of racial alienation, but its reproduction and self-reproduction. The narrator cannot simply rethink himself or act differently in an idealistic fashion. He "composes," or reproduces his self as an expression of the objective relations of a white supremacist society. For the narrator, this "definitive structuring of my self and of the world" takes place within a "spatial and temporal world" marked by a particular historical development, based upon "a historical-racist schema," which had "woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" (91). Further, the marked inferiority of the black subject, naturalized in its appearance, is cast backward into history to justify racial oppression and exploitation. Racial appearance is the fetishized expression of a false history that is equally expressed ideologically in white supremacist society:

> *I couldn't take it any longer, for I already knew there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity...I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave-ships...(92)*

Here, Fanon's emphasis on "historicity," the concrete conditions of human existence and the conscious will to change them, marks the moment in which the subject is both brought into being and has the potential to shape it to its own ends. The narrator rejects "this thematization" of a false history, so that he might be "a man among men," and "to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together" as a common humanity (92). Yet, he learns that, given existing social relations, such a world is not possible. In order to do so, the narrator must negate "The white world, the only decent one, [which] was preventing me from participating" (94). In his struggle for self-realization, the narrator must directly confront

robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (90)

The narrator is reduced to his appearance, as his skin color and racial features become fetishized. The narrator despairs that "I am overdetermined from the outside, I am a slave" to "my appearance" (95). Once again, he has been "fixed," or objectified as "a new type of man, a new species" (95). To fetishize is to reduce social relations to things.[13] In this case, the narrator finds himself objectified, though he considers himself no different from any other person, filled with the desire to determine his own existence.

What is obscured by his "racial" appearance – the way he exists in society – is the fact that his objectified existence as "black" is the result of a social relation between black and white. This socially mediated relation takes independent form as race and seems to be imposed from the outside. The self-determining agent is turned inside out, and the object creating human being exists as an object that is created by another subject. The narrator becomes subject to blackness, which seems to be an inherent, natural property of a racial essence.

The inversion of subject and object is the central dynamic of alienation, but it is critical to grasp its dialectical character. The alien being that determines the narrator's existence is not simply the white Other, but himself. In an immanent sense, he is both the racialized 'black man' and a 'man'. Given the social relations of race, the narrator is both the alien being and the person who desires to create his own life. He exists as something he is not – a "third person" – whose alien quality both negates his subjectivity and expresses his existence. Fanon dramatically illustrates this dialectic at the end of the chapter. When the narrator goes to the movies to watch Home of the Brave, a Second World War story about a black soldier, he anticipates the racial types that will be projected on the screen. Filled with anxiety, the narrator apprehensively states, "I can't go to the movies without encountering myself. I wait for myself. Those

reached a new self-awareness of his racialized, alienated existence, if not a way out.

The central focus on racial alienation is announced in the opening passage of the chapter. Fanon starts the narrative with a jolt of recognition that begins the struggle of self-realization:

I came into the world anxious to uncover meaning in things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects. Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation….Nothing doing. I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me. (89)

The narrator experiences a verbal assault – captured in the racial epithet that opens the chapter – revealing a social conflict previously hidden by everyday life. Apparently, the narrator assumed his place in society was based on merit. However, he begins to realize that he must conform to a pre existing categorization of himself, captured in the racial epithet. The narrator becomes a prisoner of a racial situation in which he is objectified. However, at the same time, the incident has shook the narrator out of himself. This kind of situation or conflict becomes the foundation for a self-awareness of his true condition in a white supremacist society.

In the opening passage of the chapter, Fanon emphasizes the dialectical relation between white supremacy and the black subject. The narrator must "experience his being for others" (89) as a racial object, which is "the moment when his inferiority is determined by the Other" (90). Racialized existence, then, gives rise to a split in the self. The narrator is objectified, embodied in the very language of the racial identification that began the encounter, and transformed into something he is not. The subject, seeking to create life as his

own object, is instead turned into an object. The narrator does not live for or determine his existence. He is perceived and identified as a racialized other, and confronted by this alien being. In response, the narrator "demand[s] an explanation" and, ultimately, "explodes" in response to his objectification.

Fanon further suggests that objectification is internally reproduced, where "the fragments [are] put together by another me," and not simply imposed from the outside. The other, racialized self, exists independently and, recalling Hegel's dialectic, for-itself. The narrator exists racially as another self, one he perceives as alien, but is determining of, or expresses his social being, nonetheless. Here, Fanon indicates the contradiction between the capacity to create and determine oneself, and the conditions in which one exists, which determine us. Thus, if we keep Hegel's subject and object relation in mind, Fanon proposes that the racialized self is reproduced by the narrator's own activity as a result of his social position, or relations in society.

It is important to notice that Fanon emphasizes the active, rather than passive dimensions of the encounter that opens the chapter. The narrator is acted upon and disassembled, even as he, too, tries to act to preserve himself by "appealing" to the white man and, eventually, "exploding." Fanon presents a social relation that is created and does not simply exist as such. He poses the idea that society is composed of a racial relation that is in constant motion, conflict, and reproduction, which only moves forward, or is resolved through action and struggle. The emphasis on the constructed nature of the social world, and the centrality of self-activity in its reproduction, highlights the concept of "lived experience" in the title of the chapter. "Experience" must be distinguished from the passive consciousness of everyday life. Instead, lived experience is a moment or threshold that produces a change in consciousness and self-understanding. As David Macey explains, Fanon's focus on experience was a result of his engagement with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, where the category of experience does not refer to typical everyday existence, but has a particular philosophical meaning. In its phenomenological context, the

idea of experience refers to an essential truth of a situation, and suggests an active seizing of the world and shaping it by a subject. [11] Therefore, Fanon is concerned, then, with how a black subject emerges to confront its racialized existence, and change it.

Despite the narrator's attempt to confront his situation, his initial bid for self-determination fails. The narrator has yet to realize that the confrontation with white supremacy is not an individual, but a social process. The first act of the chapter narrates the agony of the individual appealing to the white Other in an attempt to dissociate himself from the appearance of his racialized self. However, the racialized subject is founded on a set social relations – expressed in the "gestures and attitude" of the white man – with a deep history and institutional presence that precedes the encounter. The actions of the white man arise from the structure of society and have a particular history that shapes the existence of the narrator. Accordingly, Fanon emphasizes the materiality of the subject. Theoretically, there is a free development of the subject in society:

> *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 is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world—definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world. (91)*

Fanon draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to illustrate the materiality of racial alienation by considering the subject or self as it concretely exists and constructs itself in the social world. As David Macey points out, Fanon had in mind Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the construction of the self, embodied or actualized through the body. Our sense of self, or "being-in-the-world," is actualized, or authentically enacted and perceived to the extent it corresponds to, or expresses our desire and ability to shape the world around us.[12] When this process is short-circuited, an inauthentic, or alienated existence is the result. Thus, in a white supremacist society, no such freedom exists. Fanon writes:

> *And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. The real world*