

Alienation within the Context of Modern Western Philosophical Thought, a Fanonian Retrospective

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand Frantz Fanon's concept of alienation against some of his philosophical interlocutors namely, Karl Marx and Jean-Paul Sartre. The notion of 'non-being' is brought to the fore in order to understand better this phenomenon. What emerges is that while Sartre's phenomenological analysis was the condition of European men and women, the application of the concept of non-being to the colonised situation shows a total deprivation of the conditions of possibility. The racial element brings in a radically new category namely, racial despair. *The paper argues that among the colonised cultures, the racial element produces a total deprivation of being-for-itself.*

Key words: Frantz Fanon, non-being, racial despair, total deprivation, original theory

Introduction

The importance and influence of Marx's thought as well as that of Sartre on the concept of alienation influences this paper to ground Fanon's thought on alienation within the context of these philosophers. As we shall see below, Marx provides a general idea of the concept of alienation which both Fanon and Sartre later make significant use of. However, it will be argued that although Marx's proletariat suffer alienation harmfully as the result of the system of private property and the organisation of industrial relations in capitalist societies, Fanon's colonised subject suffers a more profound form of alienation. This is due to the racial factor which underpins the modern capitalist order, what Charles Mills refers to as the 'racial contract'. According to Mills, the racial contract is an agreement among the whites - especially males - to exclude the non-whites in the process of establishing society, particularly modern society. Moreover, it speaks to "the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways,

continue to rule over non-white people” (Mills 1997, 1-2). It is a system that underpins the liberal democratic¹ order today.

So, one finds resonances in the manner in which both Fanon and Mills understand (black) oppression in the modern period, that is, as a function of the system of white power. For Fanon, the racially oppressed suffer a double-edged sword in the sense of being objectified firstly, on the basis of race; secondly, on the basis of the conditions of work which are far less conducive for human beings to work under. Slavery especially race based slavery, has the effect that it dehumanises those so affected by it. Racial slavery – such we have seen with the Trans-Atlantic slavery – regarded slaves not as complete human beings deserving of dignity and freedom, but instead regarded them as property or chattel. With this in mind, we shall below see how Fanon converses with both Sartre and Marx in formulating a framework within which Black alienation may be understood.

Alienation in Marx

Marx develops his theory of alienation against the background and intellectual foundation that had been laid by Hegel. Marx was of course heavily influenced by Hegelian philosophy, particularly in relation to the dialectical method in the formulation of his theory of alienation. Hegel laid an intellectual foundation and historical context upon which subsequent thinkers like Marx, Sartre and Fanon developed their ideas, particularly in relation to the notion of alienation. Thus, whereas Hegel conceived of alienation and historical progress idealistically as the function and product of Spirit’s objectification of itself in nature, that is, history as the product of the mind, Marx, on the other hand, turned this on its head as he thought that the converse was, in fact, true. He believed that history ought to begin from the real and actually existing conditions of men and women of flesh and blood. ‘We proceed from an actual economic fact (2011, 69) as Marx remarked. It is notable, therefore, that contrary to Hegel, Marx emphasises the material conditions as the point of departure. However, similarly to Hegel, he still views history as the product of consciousness, class consciousness in particular. Whereas for Hegel alienation becomes the function of the objectification of Spirit in the

¹ Although aware of the traditional social contract theory tradition as postulated by the giants of Western political thought, Mills’ major concern, however, with the traditional contract theory is that it masks the dynamics of white power and domination in the modern period. His aim is thus, to highlight white supremacy as the underlying political framework responsible for contemporary racial inequality. It is for this reason he speaks of the racial contract, instead. As he puts it “the peculiar contract to which I am referring, though based on the social contract tradition that has been central to Western political theory, is not a contract between everybody (“we the people” but between just the people who count, the people who really are people (“we the white people”). So it is a Racial Contract (Mills 1997, 3).

world, thereby creating culture and social institutions, Marx, on the other hand is of the view that these are the product of the human, particularly worker activity and criticises Hegel for conflating the two. This is why for Marx, alienation becomes a matter of and an outcome of the manner in which the conditions of work are organised in bourgeois societies.

On this point, it is averred that Marx is correct insofar as the European experience is concerned. However, insofar as underdeveloped countries are concerned, industrialisation has not occurred here in such a manner as to produce a revolutionary class as envisaged by Marx to be a universal phenomenon. Accordingly, Marxism, on this point, finds a sharp critique in Fanon's oeuvre as we shall see below.

For, Marxian philosophical thought of alienation consists of there being a distinction between existence and essence and on the idea that man is estranged from that which he ought to be, his essence. As Fromm comments in this regard,

The concept of alienation is based on the distinction between existence and essence, on the fact that man's existence is alienated from his essence, that in reality he is not what he potentially is, or to put it differently, that he is not what he ought to be that which he could be (1955, 46).

What transpires from the explication above is that there is an essence that Marx attaches to human reality. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, he associates this human essence with the idea of a 'species being'. According to this notion, man finds joy when he, through his creative activity, produces for himself. Thus, Marx constantly refers to the idea of free and creative labour by which he has in mind the objectification of man's subjectivity in physical nature. This is free creative labour without external control. Nature thus constitutes an essential element for man on earth. To a certain degree, Marx views physical nature as intricately linked with the human body in the sense that man depends on nature for his survival. As he puts it 'Man lives on nature [which] means that nature is his body' (Marx 1973, 67). Thus, if there is a human essence, it subsists in the idea that man is able to use his free creative labour in order to meet his/her human needs. Marx thus links the human essence to labour which the idea of a 'species being' implies. From this we can discern that Marx views labour normatively as something that ought to be free from external control. Fromm (1961) notes that Marx rejects the idea of viewing man as means to an end, a condition particularly evident under the capitalist system. On the contrary, Marx insists that man must always be an end in himself. To this effect, Fromm observes that 'Marx's concept

touches here on the Kantian principle that man must always be an end in himself and never a means to an end' (1961, 53-54).

In virtually all his works, Marx evinces that within the system of capitalism, the human essence of free creative labour is perverted. This is because the means of production are not collectively owned but are held privately. Thus, a human being is made not to produce for him/herself as species-being, but for another who is/are the owner(s) of the means of production. Within the colonial context in which Fanon wrote on the other hand, the means of production are held by the colonising European powers. For Marx, the capitalist, as the owner of the means of production, appropriates and expropriates the worker's surplus labour for his own material gain. The result is that the worker becomes separated and alienated from the products of his creation. Estranged from him, the product then confronts him as an alien power standing over and above him. 'The object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer' (1973, 63). This means that the more he produces, the more he becomes powerless in relation to the products of his creation. In this instance, work becomes a means to satisfy animal as opposed to human needs. Moreover, as Marx demonstrates in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, not only does the worker become estranged from the product of his creation, he also becomes estranged from himself and other workers (1973, 65). As Marx puts it 'the proposition that man's species-nature is estranged from him and as such it means that one man is estranged from the other as each of them is from man's essential nature' (1973, 69). This clearly shows that for Marx, the idea of separation (estrangement) is key to his conception of the alienation of the proletarian class.

This reading of Marx is accepted by Marxists scholars such as Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, CLR James and Allen Wood who generally accept Marx's view of the capitalist system as characterised by estrangement. Wood identifies two themes in this regard: alienation as the frustration of human self-actualisation and alienation as the domination of social conditions over their creators (Wood 1981, 50). In both cases, human beings are frustrated and stripped of their freedom to carry out their own projects and thus become doomed to economic servitude. In the essay 'The Marxian Critique of Justice' (1972), Wood notes, in addition, that although capitalism leads to exploitation, the system itself is not unjust. For him, the evil in the system arises from the fact that it constitutes a form of servitude. As he puts it: 'Under the capitalist mode of production the appropriation of surplus value [by the capitalist] is not only just, but any attempt to deprive capital of it would be a positive injustice' (Wood 1972, 265). Wood is of the view that exploitation is not only necessary but is an essential feature of the capitalist system.

This view is, however, at odds with other Marxian commentaries such as Allen Buchanan (1979) and Nancy Holmstrom (1977) for instance. In response to Wood, Buchanan points out that the latter's error is that he fails to comprehend the generality of Marx's theory of exploitation. Buchanan argues that Wood's mistake is to 'restrict 'exploitation' to the wage-labor process' (1979, 136) and thus fails to recognize that bourgeois human relations, in general, are exploitative. Buchanan argues that for Marx, it is not merely that the labour process is exploitative but that capitalist society, in general, is unjust. He observes that since under capitalism the capitalist controls the means of production, wage labour amounts to '*forced labour*' (Buchanan 1979, 123); and this has ramifications for other aspects of life. Labour is forced because the threat of unemployment and starvation hangs over the worker if he/she does not enter into a wage contract. At the centre of the disagreement between Wood's and Buchanan's reading of Marx is the scope according to which the theory of exploitation in Marx may be expanded. Furthermore, although they disagree in this regard, they do, however, share the view that the capitalist system as portrayed by Marx is essentially exploitative. Although Fanon would agree with the view of the capitalist system as fundamentally exploitative, he *would* at the same time contend that the degree of exploitation experienced by the colonised subject is far more profound than that experienced by Marx's proletariat. This is due to the category of race in the exploitation and alienation of the colonised.

Lewis Gordon defines racism as "the self-deceiving choice to believe that one's race is the only race qualified to be considered human or one's race is superior to other races" (1995, 2). In a similar fashion, Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness leader and anti-apartheid activist defines 'racism' as "discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation", and in this vein "one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate" (Biko 2002, 25). Although racism in consequence of the colonial encounter is at the heart of the colonisation and alienation of Africans in the modern period, it is important to stress that existential alienation concerning black people is something that predates European colonialism. This is so since existential concerns are phenomena that affect humanity in general irrespective of colour. However, what we have observed with European colonialism is the oppression of the darker nations on the basis of racial difference, a phenomenon that not only exacerbates alienation, but also exceptionalises it in the modern period.

Evidence in this regard can be adduced from Fanon's reference to the situation of the serf and that of the colonised subject in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Concerning the serf, he notes that although there exists inequality or 'difference' between the serf and the knight, this difference can be explained by reference to 'divine right' (1967, 31) which implies that neither violence nor oppression on racial grounds is

involved in the relation. When it comes to the situation of the colonised, however, there is the question of race and violence that accompanies domination and exploitation of colonised cultures. Thus, we can here ask the question: is Fanon's view justifiable in thinking that the colonised suffers far more exploitation than the proletariat? The answer here is in the affirmative that indeed the colonised suffer more profoundly compared to the European worker. For, although they both experience exploitation, what compounds the problem for the colonised is the reality and condition of racial depersonalisation and dehumanisation accompanying exploitation. Furthermore, since colonial domination is total, this exacerbates the exploitation and alienation of the colonised, it leads to the phenomenon of colonial despair. Regarding foreign occupation, Fanon comments that colonialism brings to the colonial world the 'destruction of native social forms and...[breaks]...up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life' (1967, 31). This aspect contributes to the totalitarian posturing of such systems as colonialism, in that, the system seeks to regulate and control both the public and private life of the oppressed.

Notably, when compared to his black counterpart in Africa and other so-called 'non-whites' in the rest of the globe where Western imperialism has made its mark, it becomes evident that the white worker experiences a less vicious form of alienation. Earlier, we noted that Fanon links colonialism with the economic interests of the coloniser. The economic rationale of the system is such that valuable raw materials and the mineral wealth of the colonised world are extracted only to be shipped for processing in the industrial countries of the North. This means that the European worker begins to get involved in the production process at a higher level of the value chain, the foundation of which had been laid by the oppressed under conditions of servitude. Since the colonised is, here, already cast outside humanity, his or her situation becomes ever bleaker. For, since he or she is stripped of all humanity, the black is condemned to produce under conditions of slavery. This is the reason why Fanon remarks that 'Racism belongs to the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another which has reached a higher stage of technical development' (1967, 38).

Fanon's positionality as regards seeing black labour as slave labour and as exceptional, can be construed to some extent, as a subversion of Hegel's idea that self-consciousness exists solely in being recognised (Hegel 1977, 111). We are speaking here with the colonial situation in mind. It is not that Fanon does not view recognition as fundamental to the human condition, rather his argument is that in the relation between the coloniser and the colonised, recognition is not essential. This is so because all the former wants from the latter is work (2008, 172) and not necessarily recognition. Thus, because of his emphasis of the racial dimension, Fanon can be read at the very least as 'suspending' the Hegelian idea of recognition in human affairs because the overriding concern for the coloniser is work. Under

such conditions the onus is on the colonised to demand recognition and reciprocity from the other. Central to Fanon's argument here is the notion that recognition is the fact of an independent self-consciousness and the colonial slave is shown to be lacking independence compared to the Hegelian slave.

The Hegelian slave, on the other hand, demonstrates independence by 'losing himself in the object' and in finding 'his work as a source of liberation' (Fanon 2008, 172). The colonial slave, on the other hand, looks up to the master. This is as the result of the creeping-in of inferiority complexes among colonised cultures as a result of conquest. Consequently, the colonial slave does not seek independence and instead 'wants to be like the master' (Fanon 2008, 172), a phenomenon referred to in existential phenomenology as 'bad faith'. In looking towards the master, the black slave abandons the object and his work while Hegel's slave, on the other hand, does the opposite. In this process, the black slave is shown to be possessing a slavish consciousness as the coloniser simply 'laughs at the consciousness of the [black] slave' (Fanon 2008, 172). It is against this backdrop, therefore, that Fanon arrives at the conclusion that the white master does not want recognition from the colonised, but labour. For the colonial slave does not seek, to use Sekyi-Otu's words, 'individuation and self-authentication' (1996, 57). In wanting to be 'like the master' the colonised slave only reaffirms the master's values and supremacy. In other words, the slave does not prove its being-for-itself, he only affirms his junior positionality in relation to the 'superiority' of the white master.

The recent historical fact of slavery in the New World provides another fundamental difference in the manner in which we can understand slavery and alienation between the Fanonian and Hegelian formulations. It should be remembered that for Hegel, his is about the development of *human* consciousness through labour. This means that the labour process is not definitive of the condition nor humanity of the slave, but is seen teleologically by Hegel as *part* of the human struggle and development towards (mutual) recognition. Chattel slavery, on the other hand, was obviously very different to the Hegelian construct, since slaves were within this context regarded, first and foremost, as piece of property, with no rights accorded them. As a consequence, slaves could be sold and bought as per the whims of the slave owners. Accordingly, there cannot be development of through labour, nor talk of the humanity of the slave as it were; slavery itself is what defined the condition of the slave/s.

The reality, therefore, is that European colonialism as a product of Western modernity splits humanity into a certain kind of Manicheism as it categorises humanity into white and black zones; the 'zone of being' and the zone of 'non-

being' respectively. We noted earlier that the notion of 'non-being' provides us with a framework within which we can understand alienation. Accordingly, the zone of being and non-being provides us with a window with which to understand particularly, Black alienation. Thus, in the zone of being, which is essentially the white zone, the way social conflict is managed is through law and such social institutions as the schooling, churches, the media and the like. This is the reason why social groups like homosexuals, working class people, women and the disabled, albeit being discriminated against, are still regarded as human beings. Their white skin accords them such recognition. In the zone of non-being which is the black zone, social conflict is managed through brute force and coercion. As a social critique of the society in which he belonged, Fanon comments in *The Wretched of the Earth* that in the industrial countries it is the 'education system', the exemplar of an honest worker who is given a medal after a long period of service, and other forms of 'aesthetic expressions of respect' that lighten the necessity for force and coercion in the management of conflict there (Fanon 1967, 29). In the zone of non-being, however, he notes that the intermediaries between the state and the people are the police and the soldiers who are 'the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression' (Fanon 1967, 29). The implication for work and labour in the two zones is clear. It means that the black worker is subjected to the most inhumane conditions without consideration for human rights because to him/her these do not apply. Fanon's extension and critique of Marxism demonstrates the profundity with which the colonised suffers in relation to Marx's proletariat. So, although Fanon makes use of the Marxian critique of society, he does not think it to be adequate in accounting for the situation of the colonised. It is for this reason that Fanon concludes in the *Wretched* that 'Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem' (1967, 31). Rather, Marxism as a social ideology, is a method that should not be applied mechanically but must instead, take into consideration the objective and subjective conditions existing.

The above notwithstanding, the idea of alienation emanating from the works of Marx and Hegel's influence, provide a philosophical framework in which both Sartre and Fanon become interested. For instance, the idea of alienation that emerges when being-looked-at by another in Sartre is symptomatic of the condition of otherness and alienation. Fanon's notion of the colonised as uprooted from their indigenous culture is constitutive of the idea of otherness or alienation as estrangement in Marx. Moreover, although there exist some similarities between Marx and Fanon, we noted that for Fanon the racial dimension that is at work in the alienation of colonised people produces an almost total deprivation of the black person's being-for-itself. Hence, in the following discussion, Sartre's realm of *non-being* is brought to explain why this is the case.

Alienation in Sartre

Unlike Marx, Sartre renders a more complex conception of alienation. This is due largely to him making an explicit distinction between alienation as an individual phenomenon (alienation from the self) as well as alienation as a collective problem. We find a treatment of the former in his earlier works *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*, whereas he treats the latter concept in his later philosophical works the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and *Anti-Semite and Jew among others*. The latter especially the *Critique*, shows a very strong affinity and influence by Marxist thought, and for this reason we will focus on that formulation which sets him apart from Marx, namely alienation from the self.

Accordingly, in terms of alienation from the self what we find is that Sartre discusses different manifestations of it namely, alienation that results from existential abandonment, bad faith, and alienation from 'the look'. Although the discussion that follows does not pretend to be exhaustive, we shall have something to say about each, this with the view to understand how Sartre is both similar and different to Marx and Fanon. So, from the outset, what we find is that Sartre understands alienation to be a problem of consciousness or more concretely as a function of freedom that self-consciousness possesses. For, as Sartre has stated human reality as a for-itself is condemned to be free. There is thus anguish and anxiety that inflicts consciousness by virtue of the inherent freedom that comes with the fact of being abandoned in the world and the responsibility that comes with the said freedom that the individual possesses. This is probably the first or primordial instance of alienation that we find in Sartre, alienation that stems from the fact of being existentially abandoned. However, this first instance of alienation is not due to the individual's own making but largely to being 'thrown' into the world. Moreover, unlike with the Christian existentialists like Kierkegaard, the absence of God at the foundation of being (to which Sartre's philosophy hinges) makes alienation even more pronounced. That is why alienation according to the existentialists like Sartre, becomes a function of this rather 'absurd' or radical notion of freedom. So, at a pre-reflective level, alienation for Sartre manifests as a function of anguish that responsibility and freedom entail. Unlike Marx who espouses an idea of alienation within the material conditions of the capitalist mode of production, for Sartre the matter is somewhat more profound because for him alienation is existential in nature.

The second instance of alienation relates to our inclination to deceive ourselves; what Sartre refers to as 'bad faith'. Abandoned in the world self-consciousness must make something of itself. This conception of alienation relates to the manner

in which individuals act in ways that are contrary to their freedom, and to deny their freedom.

At its essence, bad faith involves a self-aware individual avoiding reality and refusing to acknowledge or take responsibility for their actions and decisions. Sartre defines bad faith as “a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general...The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding (Sartre 1958, 48).” According to Percy More, the term encompasses various forms of human existence marked by self-deception, avoidance of self-awareness, the rejection of personal freedom and accountability, and the uncritical acceptance of pre-established values (2004, 99). In this way, bad faith is closely tied to the issue of authenticity, but instead of the individual confronting reality head on, they choose to deceive themselves by denying to live in accordance with their true selves. For Sartre, as conscious beings we are endowed with the ability to imagine what we are presently not and this ability and freedom to imagine what we are not thrusts us into infinite possibilities that we can become of ourselves. Our freedom allows us to be authentic about ourselves and our true possibilities. However, when individuals reject their authenticity, they become guilty of bad faith.

The third instance of alienation and one which interests Fanon relates to alienation arising from ‘the look’ or ‘the gaze of the other’. According to Sartre, the look from the other has an objectifying experience on the one being looked at. In order to illustrate the point, Sartre hypothesises a situation wherein one is peeking through a keyhole and on the other side of the keyhole is ‘the spectacle to be seen’ (1958, 259). At this point ‘I’, the one peeking through the key hole, am alone without another to inhabit my consciousness. As such my actions and my attitude are my own, that is, my subjectivity is without an outside. As Sartre comments, at this point ‘I am pure consciousness of things’ (1958, 259). Furthermore, looking through the keyhole I am like the Cartesian *cogito* absorbed in my own reflection of things.

According to Sartre, my world is, however, suddenly turned upside-down when I hear footsteps in the hallway. I suddenly realise that someone is now looking at me. In that ontological encounter, I become aware of another “‘I’, [as a] for-itself I, as I am” (Husserl cited in Schacht 1970, 221). Through shame and the ego, the look from the other shocks and disorients me. This is because the other conceives of me only in terms of my physical determinateness: a *body* peeking through a keyhole. Thus, the other grasps my presence as an object like any other object in his visual field. As Schacht notes, ‘It is an object that I appear to him’ and since the other acts as reference to myself, it follows that ‘It is an object that I appear to him when he looks at me; and so, it is as an object that I now experience myself’ (Schacht 1970, 221). Thus, the other’s look necessarily and coercively

objectifies me as it alienates me from my possibilities and from the real me. In this regard Sartre states,

In the shock which seizes me when I apprehend the Other's look, it happens that suddenly a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are now associated with objects of the world, far from me in the midst of the world (Sartre 1958, 264-265).

It is at this moment of objectivity that Sartre speaks of the occasion of 'being-for-others'. For it is in this moment too that my bodily possibility reaches a certain cul-de-sac, a mortification which is an obstacle at the behest of another 'I'. In this moment, I exist not for myself, but as an object for the other (Sartre 1958, 264). Although it appears as if the one being looked at reaches a cul-de-sac in terms of her possibilities, it is still nevertheless possible, from the point of view of the one being looked at, to reverse the impact of the look. In fact, notwithstanding the other's look, Sartre wants one's existence not to be conceived in terms of objectivity but in terms of subjectivity and possibility, that is, as non-being. For, as non-being, the one objectified is able to reverse the impact of the look. Shame and the ego become instrumental in reversing the impact of the look. This ability to reverse the impact of the look, again, speaks to the freedom of self-consciousness that is conferred to it through non-being.

The reconfiguration of self-consciousness from objectivity to subjectivity does not entail turning the other into an object. This is because self-consciousness needs the other to confer recognition freely to realise its own subjectivity. The denial of subjectivity to the other takes away his or her freedom to give me recognition. So, Sartre insists that in the moment of objectivity the other retains and remains with his or her freedom. 'Through the look I experience the Other concretely as a free, conscious subject who causes there to be a world' (1958, 270). This is because it is not the other that is the object of degradation through the look but myself (Sartre 1958, 271). Thus, my re-emergence from objectivity to subjectivity does not entail the alienation of the other; it is but my reconnection with my possibility and myself as freedom that is at issue. Essentially, it is the individual regaining his/her existence as non-being. It is also in this vein that Schacht reads Being in Sartre's philosophy. He notes that in Being 'I am not merely an object, a thing among other things. Rather, my nature is to be conceived in terms of *freedom*' (1970, 221). Sartre adds 'it is my possibilities, and not simply my determinateness which are definitive of my existence' (1970, 221).

Reflecting upon the notion of 'the look' in Sartre shows it to be a phenomenon that is presented in a negative light, as objectifying and as a phenomenon that always makes the other into a thing. Martin (2002) is one of Sartre's scholars who reads the concept of the look mainly in this frame as he views it as a threat to enslavement to the for-itself (2002, 97). Arguably, this need not be the case. There are instances in human relations and interaction where the look is cordial and reciprocal. This could be when someone is showing affection to another person. Furthermore, the African social philosophy of *Ubuntu* requires each community member 'to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual recognition' (Nussbaum 2003, 2). Within the context of our discussion, all what this discloses is that the look need not necessarily be construed in negative terms, as a threat to the other's freedom, for there are instances when the look is positive.

It should be stressed here that there is no contradiction in reading 'the look' in Sartre as negative and in seeing self-consciousness as freedom as the two are not the same. The look is exactly that, another looking at me albeit it *may* have the impact of objectifying me. The freedom of consciousness is also something different; it is what Sartre ascribes to self-consciousness, or human reality and deems it to possess the dimension of non-being. So, the way I see myself as non-being is different from what the other sees in me. So, the positing of the look in a negative light (in Sartre's philosophy) does not contradict the positing of consciousness as freedom in the manner just described.

So, like Sartre, Fanon wants to emphasise the freedom of every consciousness, he advocates the view that one's nature ought not to be conceived in the same way that one conceives of objects and that my nature ought to be viewed in terms of agency. However, we note in Fanon, that the racial dimension within the colonial context frustrates the categories of possibility for the oppressed. The system denies them non-being and thus deprives them of being for-themselves. This is accounted for by the fact that the colonised subject is apprehended in the same way that one conceives of objects, *qua* things. Racial oppression combined with the identification of the colonised with inanimate objects eventually leads to the adoption of violence by the oppressed. This violence stems from the fact that the oppressed are human beings and as human beings, they also possess the ability and the apperception of the need to revolt against social and political injustices and that they too desire freedom. What this means is that whereas Fanon had initially questioned Sartre's notion of the freedom of consciousness under conditions of colonial oppression, he is ultimately made to accept it to be so, too, of the oppressed.

There is evidence in Fanon's oeuvre to suggest that ultimately, he concurs with Sartre on the latter's position of the freedom of consciousness and that ultimately a human being is what he or she makes himself or herself out to be. Sartre avers in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that 'man is the product of his product' (Cited in Schacht 1970, 227). Similarly, Fanon holds that 'society unlike biochemical processes, cannot escape human influences. Man is what, brings society into being' (2008, 11). Here we can see that Fanon also wants to see being in terms of its *telos*, of possibilities, becoming and not as a reified existence. But, for the most part he realises that the system of oppression seeks to thwart this. Thus, the notion of the gaze of the other under conditions of racial oppression becomes interesting in the thought of Fanon, particularly insofar as it reveals the way in which the colonial system seeks to thwart the freedom of the oppressed. Furthermore, the divergent ways in which the look pans out under conditions of colonial domination in Fanon, furnishes a critique of Sartre whose ontological analysis has in mind the existential situation in Europe.

What Fanon does with Sartre's notion of the look is to historicise and contextualise it by extrapolating it to the colonial context and in so doing introduces a racial element. Like Sartre, he finds the look as utterly objectifying. His genius and originality is to be able to anticipate the differences between the impact of the look as merely an ontological problem and its impact under conditions of racial oppression. Institutionalised racism in a white supremacist society become, for Fanon, the necessary condition for the black person's experience of alienation. Whereas for Sartre the look becomes a question of one self-consciousness confronting another, the look for Fanon becomes a racial gaze. The peculiar impact of the racial gaze can be seen as when Fanon comments that the glances of the white man 'fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye' adding that 'an unfamiliar weight burdened me' (Fanon 2008, 82). We can say here that he becomes 'burdened' and 'fixed' because the white man's gaze is loaded with the historico-political situation of colonisation that the white man represents.

So what distinguishes Fanon from Sartre is that the feeling of black alienation is experienced here by the colonised subject through and within a power-inflected situation between the white coloniser and the black slave. In this relation, the reconfiguration of the self becomes impossible without changing the whole power political and economic superstructure. So, what we find is a certain endurance associated with the experience of the look under conditions of racial oppression in a way that denies the oppressed their non-being as it reproduces the obedience of the colonised subject. The oppressed are, therefore, unable to reverse objectification through the look. There is not a possibility to reciprocate, for the look assumes a one-sided dimension directed towards the dominated black subject.

His lament that ‘all this whiteness...burns me’ (2008, 86) is symptomatic of the racial gaze syndrome which is embedded in the colonality of power under colonialism. Fanon argues that the black person does not experience this when among people of his own kind. This is observed when he asserts in *Black Skin White Masks* that ‘As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor conflicts to experience his being through others’ (2008, 82). This means that there is general reciprocity that he ascribes to relations among the colonised people themselves perhaps in the same way that recognition is conceived through the philosophy of Ubuntu as we noted above.

Sekyi-Out echoes Fanon’s sentiments regarding the impact of the look when extrapolated to the colonised. He notes that when the element of race is involved, as in Fanon’s case, the look becomes a coercively ‘thingifying’ experience. In a colonial context, underpinned by the logic of racism, alienation or objectification through the racial gaze, cannot be overcome by simply ‘looking back’. This is so because here, the coloniser enjoys the monopoly of seeing without being seen. It is for this very reason, therefore, that Fanon concludes: ‘the black person has no ontological resistance to the white gaze’ (Cited in Sekyi-Out 1996, 72).

Nigel Gibson explores the dynamics of the look by observing the divergent impact the look has among the colonised people and the Jews thus noting that the Jew can become intellectual about things and that by becoming intellectual he can transcend bodily confinement. This is because the Jew sometimes cannot be seen in who he is and as such he or she can escape objectification through a ‘disembodied intellectualism’ (Gibson 2003, 20). By making the distinction between the Jew as an intellectual other and the black as an embodied other, Gibson concludes that ‘The Jew is an internal Other, [while] the Black [is] the external Other’ (2003, 20). This position of the black as an absolute other finds corroboration in Fanon when he states that:

Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I 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! (2008, 87)

So, it can be inferred from this passage that the black person is alienated because of skin colour and unlike the Jew, she/he cannot hide who she/he is, for skin colour is the most conspicuous manifestation of identity.

To recapture, as an existential thinker, Fanon like Sartre, wants to conceive of consciousness as freedom or non-being. However, under conditions of colonial and/or racial oppression, the black subject is, because of overdetermination from without, denied his/her freedom. Sartre’s realm of non-being was brought upon to

understand how this is so. It was noted that while freedom is possible in Sartre's philosophy, the racial dimension in Fanon, prevents the conception of black being as freedom or possibility. This denial of possibility in Fanon leads to despair.

Conclusion

The current paper had set out to locate Fanon's thought insofar as the concept of alienation is concerned within the context of other uses in philosophy, particularly Hegel, Marx and Sartre. It was noted that while Fanon converses with these thinkers, he taps into their intellectual resources in order to formulate an original theory of alienation for the colonised subject. It was argued that while these thinkers wrote with the European context in mind, the racial element at work in the oppression of colonised cultures produces a total deprivation of being-for-themselves. It was noted that while freedom is possible in the philosophies of Marx and Sartre, this proves to be problematic for the black subject under colonialism.

Marx's conception of alienation was explored in some detail and it was argued that although Marx's proletariat suffer exploitation as workers under conditions of bourgeois social domination and as the result of the system of private property, the colonised suffer a more profound form of alienation. Here, racism denies the colonised any rights such that 'labour', if we can call it that, takes place under conditions of legalised and institutionalised slavery. The European worker, on the other hand, remains with his/her rights as recognised to be a member of the white race while the black subject, on the other hand, loses not only his/her rights but also his/her sense of self-hood. Racial prejudice brings in a new dimension, the total deprivation of possibility and freedom.

Sartre's concept of alienation was also discussed, this with the view to ascertain the extent to which his thought on the subject is both similar to and different from Marx and Fanon. To this end, it was noted that Sartre discusses alienation at three manifestations of alienation namely, existential alienation, bad faith, and alienation from 'the look'. Alienation from the self was deemed to be that which distinguishes Sartre from Marx. On the other hand, Fanon becomes particularly interested in Sartre's discussion of alienation resulting from being looked at. However, we noted that what Fanon does was to extrapolate the concept to the colonial context. So while for Sartre the impact of the gaze of the other can be reversed, the opposite was proved to be true when extrapolated to the case of colonised peoples. The impact of the look thus endures because, in an antiblack world, the look becomes a racial gaze. Moreover, while it seemed as though Fanon rejects the idea of the freedom of consciousness as construed from the lived experience of black people

in anti-black social systems he is, in fact, made to accept it to be so of the oppressed.

As an existentialist thinker, Fanon does not want to view being in terms of its physical determinateness: the object-self. If the colonist apprehends the colonised negatively as a 'thing' among other things, Fanon, on the other hand, wants to conceive of being in terms of agency and as possibility. What this means is that although Fanon acknowledges the objectification of the black person in consequence of being structured under conditions of anti-blackness and although the colonial system tries to instil in the mind of the oppressed the idea of black inferiority, ultimately, Fanon is made to accept Sartre's thesis of the freedom of consciousness. So, although colonialism takes the body and the mind of the oppressed to be a singular determination of black being, ultimately Fanon, like Sartre, takes the view of consciousness as always free. For, it is this freedom of consciousness that makes it possible for the oppressed to begin imagining a post-colonial world.

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