

## CHAPTER XVI

### Fanon, Sociogenetics and the Self

#### *Introduction*

This final chapter examines the ways that Fanon's work thinks around the question of the 'individual' as agent (which he is in some respects radically committed to) without falling into individualism. Having begun this thesis with an outline of Black Skin White Masks with its primary focus on agency and traced themes through Fanon's work the focus has been on structures like class and gender. The final chapter shall examine Fanon's implicit model of the individual as a dialectic of structures.

In Black Skin White Masks one comes to feel in the text the experience of the structure of racism. Fanon looks at the way language shapes experience, how one is positioned by others, via the use of sexist or racist language which can be difficult to resist if the underlying social structures give the language social weight. What Fanon offers is the attempt to understand the world of consciousness dialectically as a series of structures that shape consciousness, which is always partial and contradictory. This reflects two things, first, the assumption that reality is contradictory. It attempts to resolve such contradictions that provoke 'psychological' problems. And secondly that our knowledge of such reality is partial - both in the sense of incomplete and in the sense of favouring the interests of one side.

Using Fanon's views as a method allows one to explore, not just the objective world, but the ways in which features of the objective world are mediated into 'lived experience'. Although Fanon does not spell out such a method<sup>1</sup> this chapter begins the process of sketching a Fanonist 'sociology' from this perspective. Fanon provides a number of bridges between structure and agency but at the heart of them is the master/slave dynamic that allows one to begin to break out of the mentalist view of the self. By seeing that our private 'personal' self is constructed in relation to others, particularly in relations of dominance and submission, shows that the 'self' is not really private at all. This is apparent from the earliest of Fanon's works. He begins what is apparently quite a personal exploration of his 'experience' of racism. While he identifies personal experiences and labels them an 'inferiority complex' it is clear to him from the outset that such a complex is not 'psychological' in the usual sense. It is not a problem in his head, nor is it a problem in 'society', nor does it come from the 'unconscious'. Fanon is aware of the racism and its effects. He explores the effects of racist structures as part of the 'ensemble of social relations' that inform his sense of self and that of other blacks like him (though early on he is less clear that he is a quite specific type of black man on the basis of his class and gender).

His analysis rests on a relational sense of the self that is dialectical. Dialectics is used here to convey the idea that Fanon's focus is not so much on things as on processes. To understand such processes one must first abstract, that is, select the key elements in the process and describe them as a static picture which one then puts into motion. There are two propositions here. One is that the 'self' is not the locus of social action but is enmeshed in a set of relations (subjectively termed

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<sup>1</sup> As he put it 'I leave methods to botanists and mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves' (1967a: 10)

‘Others’) in which the concept of a ‘self’ is not reified as an autonomous centre of consciousness but is seen as a process. For the purpose of analysis this process may be frozen, but needs increasingly to be made into a dynamic system of relations. Our self-identity is a layered construct of retrospective selections, cultural norms and images that others have of us. In this sense the self is not centred in a ‘psychological’ realm but is the ‘ensemble of social relations’ not just in the objective but in the subjective sense (manifest for example, in the look of the other). Instead of Fanon being - to coin a phrase - a man among men, one’s ‘essence’ is defined by an Other. In Fanon’s case the black body is located as a site of primitiveness and savagery, an object to be feared.

As Gordon (1995b: 99) puts it:

Fanon’s situation is ironic. He is seen in a way that Frantz Fanon is not seen. He is evaded. Missed. He is not seen in his individuality. To see him as black is to see enough. Hence to see him as black is not to see him at all. His presence is a form of absence.

Fanon notes that Sartre’s Being and Nothingness describes alienated consciousness but cannot be directly applied to black consciousness because the white man is not only the Other but also the master. This leaves the slave with a feeling of not just inferiority but of non-existence. Fanon dramatises the need to act, paralysed by guilt and fear. He feels himself caught between *white* being and *black* nothingness.

In the first instance it is useful to point out that there is much confusion in the discussion of psychological issues between the terms: self, subject and identity. In some respects they are interchangeable but for the purpose of this analysis I shall follow the distinctions spelled out by Lauren Langman and Valerie Scatamburla (1996: 151). They argue that:

the starting point for re-thinking the “subject” must first articulate the differences between self(hood), identity and the subject. In short we suggest that selfhood, identity and the subject represent different levels of analysis wherein (i) selfhood represents the realm of actual, embodied experience; (ii) identity a system of collective narratives that define culture(s) as well as specific positions and; (iii) the subject, an abstract concept of theoretical analysis most removed from actual experience.

This chapter will focus on Fanon’s concern with the self, in particular the colonised self. While Fanon wrote about class dynamics and on the need to fight for one’s liberation, the question of healthy relations between people of different colour was an early theme of his work that would in one way or another occupy Fanon all his life. In Black Skin White Masks the vehicle for this, at least at first glance, appears to be psychological, indeed psychoanalytic. Fanon does display an interest in psychoanalysis, as you would expect anyone with psychiatric training to do, even though his training was in medicine. In many ways, however, the text of Black Skin White Masks is shaped by a critique of orthodox psychoanalysis which is threaded through the text as was argued in Part One. The neurologically oriented faculty would not accept a thesis that was existential and the engagement with psychoanalysis gave the text a more technical flavour than a phenomenological account would have done. Fanon does address a range of Freudian thinkers: Freud, Adler and Jung among them.

However, Fanon is quite eclectic in his use of psychoanalytic concepts. Recent appropriations of Fanon as a psychoanalytic thinker ignore the ways in which Fanon is deeply sceptical of Freud. Even though he opens his argument with the Freudian ‘what does the black man want?’ he dismisses the idea of the Oedipus complex on Martinique. He often uses dreams as a source of information but asserts that in the colonial situation ‘the discoveries of Freud are of no use to us here.’ Dreams need to be analysed not in relation to the unconscious but the ‘proper time’ that is,

death of thousands of ‘natives’ and ‘proper place’ that is, a colonised island (Fanon 1967a: 73).<sup>2</sup> In many ways while asserting its usefulness Fanon in effect exposes its limitations using two strategies. Firstly he exposes its Eurocentric assumptions.

This questions the effect of the inclusion of black people into the theory. He also looks at the effect on black people. Fanon notes that Negroes are phobogenic objects in Freud’s theory of the ‘unconscious’. Fanon does not just dismiss this as racist but raises two questions. Firstly, why this should be so? For Freud and Jung it did not require an explanation but Fanon challenges them to explain why. Secondly Fanon asks, given that Blacks are phobogenic, how does this relate to the fact that black people are not just part of the contents of the unconscious but are real people? Blacks then inhabit bodies that are phobogenic for others. The ‘unconscious’ here consists of repressing an aspect of the social relations in which we stand with others.

### ***Fanon’s Sociodiagnostic Approach***

Moving away from structures of class and gender towards Fanon’s model of self-identity this chapter shall now work back through Fanon’s texts picking up this theme.

In Black Skin White Masks Fanon lays the groundwork for his ideas with a focus on intellectual alienation. That the sense of inferiority felt by colonial ‘natives’ that psychologists would label a neurosis, was part of the system of colonialism was clear to Fanon from the start. This made it more than a personal problem. Though he does not develop an economic or class analysis it is clear that the colonial system lay at the basis of racism

Drawing on Hegel’s idea of recognition and Sartre’s ‘the look’, he explores the phenomena of anti-black racism phenomenologically via the self/other dialectic. He provides the first description of the sexualised nature of ‘the look’ and a dialectical and materialist critique of psychoanalysis. He opens with one of several Freudian references and comments on the need for Freud drawing freely on notions like neurosis. It is important to note that he later rejects the Oedipus complex (and Lacan’s early formulations). The Lacanian, Mannoni, is the subject of Fanon’s first systematic critique of colonial psychiatry. Though he credits Mannoni for breaking with biological concepts of racism and a willingness to look at both sides of the coloniser/colonised binary ultimately he finds Mannoni’s critique limited and conformist. Thus he coined the term ‘sociogenesis’ in *contrast* to Freud. It must also be remembered that Fanon reads these concepts through a phenomenological matrix.

It is clear from Fanon’s life and work that he is committed to responding to oppression, and understanding its causes and effects. Although all psychology has some commitment to the person’s ‘environment’, Fanon’s concept is more radical. His early statement in Black Skin White Masks (pp. 10-11) commits him to a sociogenic perspective, which he never spelled out, although he grapples with it throughout his work. Bulhan (1985: 196) rightly identifies Fanon as exploring a dialectic between internalisation and objectification.<sup>3</sup> In the former the socio-historical aspect of existence is subjectivised, as in Fanon’s concept of epidermalisation in which a racist history is

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<sup>2</sup> The reference here is to Mannoni’s psychoanalytic reading of the so-called Dependency Complex of the Malagasy.

<sup>3</sup> For more empirical work on this see Bulhan (1977, 1980).

internalised as an inferiority complex. In the latter process the subject participates in the socio-historical via labour or praxis.

Fanon and other Martinicans grew up in a particular set of social relations namely colonial ones. In this set of colonial relations their sense of their self was racialised. In this case they identified as 'white' or French, (making the other, black and African). While this set of relations remains unquestioned then the 'lived experience' of blackness was not problematic. The contradiction of people with black skin seeing themselves as 'white' is not experienced (even though it really exists). It is relations with white people that alters this. Entering into a new set of social relations means that one's concept of oneself must alter.

The French occupation of Martinique saw the imposition of racist social relations - Fanon calls this a 'metaphysical experience'. Being the coloniser allowed the French troops to re-define the Martinicans as 'black'. Initially Martinicans responded by seeing these Frenchmen as exceptions, real Frenchmen were not like this. Though Fanon does not discuss this the dialectic of self/other also works in reverse. The French by defining Martinicans as 'black' and 'uncivilised' also defined themselves as 'white' and 'civilised.' In both cases there is a certain amount of 'partial consciousness'. Consciousness is not 'false' but there is a denial of an aspect of the social relations in which one is enmeshed. Blacks see themselves as white, skin colour notwithstanding, and French see themselves as 'civilised' whatever actual behaviours they engage in, which on wartime Martinique were pretty appalling. It is important to note that this is not really unconscious in the Freudian sense of a repressing an unacceptable idea into a hidden part of the psyche. It is a denial that a certain set of relations exists between the self and the other, analogous to the Sartrean idea of 'bad faith'.

Fanon discovers that the racism of the French was not an aberration of these particular troops but of a much wider set of colonial relations. Fanon describes vividly his experience of racialised structures in Paris. Even in his early work where the focus is on race (although class and gender are never absent) he recognises that there is an 'inferiority complex' among black people (or at least alienated colonial intellectuals). Even when using this Adlerian terminology, it is not 'psychological' in the traditional sense of mental or 'in the heads' of individuals but as Fanon puts it 'sociogenic'. The internalised inferiority has a social basis, namely the colonial situation, and is played out subjectively in the lived experience of a racial set of colonial relations, which shapes the particular views of the self (and other). For Fanon (and others like him) the contradiction between their view of themselves as 'white' and their skin colour is much sharper in the social relations of Paris. The contradiction cannot be ignored since they are no longer able to define their sense of self in relation to others like them but only in relation to whites. As Fanon says 'at times I catch myself hating Negroes' here it is not misrecognition but the recognition of internalised racism that is so poignant. Fanon explores vividly the effects of this contradiction. In essence its resolution takes three forms for the individual, which are not individualised but can be elaborated as three cultural stages by collectives.

While the individual is typically seen as an agent making choices within a passive environment or as a product of social structures that determine behaviour Fanon's work based on a relational view of the self allows one to see more clearly the mediations between these two poles. Choices are made but they are never truly individual responses. In relation to the race example given above while the individual makes choices there is a limited range of real options, not just at the structural level but at the relational level. One can firstly deny that one is black, adopt a white mask, speak French without a colonial accent, or take a white lover. As we have seen Fanon looks at the

‘sociogenesis’ of these alienated or neurotic behaviours, including how the experience of gender is shaped by race, how the look of the other is sexualised.

Fanon begins in Black Skin White Masks by setting a static stage: ‘we shall go very slowly for there are two camps: the white and the black in order to liberate the man of colour from himself’. Each side is initially posited as separate ‘The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness’ but then it is clear that the relation between these ‘two’ groups is not equal. It is a ‘vicious circle’ that gives rise to ‘two facts’: ‘white men consider themselves superior to black men’ and ‘black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect’. He states that there is a need for psychoanalysis but notes that there needs to be ‘immediate recognition of social and economic realities’ (1967a: 8-10).

Fanon begins looking at language as a means of exploring a psychology of self and other ‘for it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other’ (1967a: 13). The point of the analysis is, he notes, in an allusion to Marx is not to know the world but to change it. Language is a social marker that serves also as a means of positioning the other, of condescending and classifying. Its use to patronise patients (he is talking of his medical experience) is a ‘stigmata of a dereliction in my relations with other people’. He notes again that the problem involves a psychological economic system and that beyond the individual level because ‘to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture’ (1967a: 25-9). This is apparent in contemporary Algeria, with French as the language of the ruling class and a necessary condition for serious social advance. The attacks on Islamists are justified by arguing that they are “terrorists” and “extremists”. Threatening letters signed ‘extremist of the Francophony’ reflect the ways in which language is more than a means of communication.<sup>4</sup>

Fanon then moves from relations of speech to relations of desire (another way of being for the other). Here he examines the possibility of authentic personal relations between black and white, which he says will involve getting over inferiority and exultation. He critiques the autobiography of a black Martinican woman Mayotte Caprécia, in her personal relations she constructs herself (and is constructed by) relations premised not just on self and other but by a Manichean white/black binary of master and slave. Fanon is aware of the class connections in Martinique (where white equals rich) but focuses on the fact the Caprécia thinks that only white lovers are worthwhile and in relation to her white lover: ‘he is her lord’. In the converse case the declaration of love by a white man to Negress means recognition ‘from one day to the next, the mulatto went from the class of slaves to that of masters’. It is important to note that for Fanon this has implications for both black and white: ‘the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation’ (1967a: 43-4).

The desire for recognition that Hegel had elaborated did not take race into account. In Hegel the slave turns from the master to the object of labour Fanon argues that the Antillean Negro turns instead to the master. This is the basis for the desire for assimilation or lactification and the inferiority complex and self-destructive behaviours of colonised people. Fanon traces this in various contexts including rape and the sexual objectification of women. In Wretched of the Earth Fanon, radicalised by the Algerian war, still draws on the master/slave metaphor. For him

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<sup>4</sup> The role of language has been an important factor in poststructuralist discussions of the subject. The theories of language upon which they is based are all idealist. For a discussion of the need to develop a materialist theory of language and a critique of psychoanalytic explanations see Dawes (1995).

oppression is the problem of violence, disguised and mystified. The struggle for freedom and recognition is mapped over the coloniser/colonised relationship as two 'species' in conflict in which the latter must risk death in order to gain freedom by the practice of counter-violence.

For Negro men (or those in a similar position to Fanon) the desire was to be acknowledged not just as black but as white. In relations of desire, who but a white woman can do this for me? Fanon asks rhetorically. He looks again at another text - the story of Jean Veneuse. Veneuse is told by his French friends that, despite his skin colour, he is not black and should marry a white woman without any pangs of conscience. Veneuse fears, however, that this will confirm that he is really black after all - a 'primitive' lusting after white women (1967a: 50).

Fanon misses a key point here because he does not give enough thought to the gendered dynamics of self/other. While taking a white lover may achieve recognition one cannot help but feel underlying these accounts that Veneuse seeks recognition in the eyes of white men more so than white women. There is an important masculine dynamic going on here that Fanon overlooks. Veneuse needs a 'white man to say "take my sister"' (my emphasis). Here the exchange of women as well as racial dynamics needs to be considered. Fanon locates Veneuse within Guex's concept of abandonment neurosis in which abandonment gives rise to anguish, aggression and devaluation of self (p. 73). The character, Veneuse, describes his sense of abandonment at having been raised 'French' but not being recognised by them. He needs the recognition of the other, but can never feel secure.

The aim for Fanon is to make possible a healthy encounter between black and white (p. 57). Novels like *Un Homme pareil aux autres* turn out not to show how Maran is like other men but assume an 'organic unhealthiness' (p. 80). Fanon notes that the organic or constitutional is a myth only for those who can go beyond it. While Lacan has noted that neuroses emerge when personality structure reacts with the environment, Fanon notes that Veneuse does seek a change in his environment but his personality structure remains the same. Thus he does not develop a healthy outlook but externalises the neurosis. It is not simply a reaction to environment by the personality structure but:

The neurotic structure of an individual is simply the elaboration, the formation, the eruption within the ego, of conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which the individual reacts to these influences (p. 81).

Fanon's summary though strikes one as odd that Veneuse's skin colour is not a significant factor in his neurosis: 'Jean Veneuse is a neurotic, and his colour is only an attempt to explain his psychic structure. If this objective difference had not existed, he would have manufactured it out of nothing' (pp. 78-9). Veneuse is an intellectual who retreats into a world of ideas. His book is really the study of a neurotic who happens to be black, he is not an example of black-white relations, he needs to be emancipated from his infantile fantasies and to overcome his alienation from his fellow Negroes. Fanon's odd conclusion is clarified when he argues that it is not skin colour per se that creates neurosis but when one's colour is accepted as a flaw then neurosis and the 'quest for white flesh', the desire to be the other and the hierarchy of colour are a logical outcome. This 'solution' to one's sense of inferiority is part of the problem. He closes saying that 'we shall see another solution is possible. It implies a restructuring of the world' (pp. 81-2).

Fanon describes many such assimilationist strategies in Black Skin White Masks. Ultimately there are limits to this, as Fanon says, because he is a 'slave of his appearance.' From the point of view of the other (that is, the French) they too are positioned in colonial relations. They relate to

assimilated blacks by asserting that blackness is not an issue. They deny the significance of colour, they say that particular individuals are 'extremely brown' or are just as civilised despite their colour. The French sense of self here relies on being able to ignore the effects of colour which reinforces their sense of superiority whilst denying it any significance. The dominant white other sets the terms of the exchange.

Fanon continues his analysis of relations, turning away from the individual to a critique of colonial psychiatry in the work of Mannoni. Apart from finding him conformist he notes that Mannoni ignores that fact that it is the 'racist who creates his inferior'. Rather than some unconscious impulse that means the Malagasy were awaiting the white man to come and be their masters it was the challenge to their humanity by the colonising process that gave rise to any inferiority or dependency complex. This was the basis for their demand for recognition (1967a: 65-9).

In chapter five he looks directly at 'the lived experience of the black.' He describes the way the Black is defined pejoratively in relation to the white after black societies were destroyed and new values imposed. In this scheme blacks are reduced to objects 'put together by another self'. This sense of self is not just mental but corporeal - it implies a new dialectic between body and the world in which black skin is fetishised as the bearer of a history of savagery. Even those who succeed on white terms like black physicians bear the weight of history, knowing that they are 'black but gentle' and if they make a mistake they will once again become 'typical' blacks (1967a: 77-8).

Nevertheless, the process of creating a 'crushing objecthood' and the failure of assimilation also begins a dialectical process of creating a black self. One reaction to colonial racism was rediscovery of black history *a la* Senghor. This offered some hope of recognition but Fanon's optimism is short-lived. Whites respond that they have superseded this past even Sartre minimises Negritude as a 'minor term'. Fanon says that Sartre forgets that the Negro suffers differently from the white man for it is not just self and other, but master and slave (1967a: 98). This second strategy is not to deny that one is black, but to deny that black is inferior, in fact to argue that black is superior. While some such strategy must be part of any liberation struggle there are limitations. Instead of challenging the set of social relations that give the underlying sense to racism one simply inverts the logic. One does not deny that blacks are 'irrational', one celebrates the irrationality, emotionality (or natural rhythm) of black people. Fanon was sympathetic to this but was also critical of it. It relies ironically on the colonial Other's definition of blackness but inverts it.

In this inferiority complex 'the black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behaviour will be the Other (in the guise of the white man), for the Other alone can give him worth' (1967a: 109). However, racism is worse than mere lack of recognition. In the white imaginary the Negro represents the genital. Even though everyone 'knows' the myths about black people are wrong. Fanon argues that this is a phobic response, a fear of biological: 'projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves 'as if' the Negro really had them'. 'Face to face with this man who is "different from himself", he needs to defend himself. In other words to personify the Other'. This is evident also in comments like 'if we grant freedom to the Negroes they are just waiting to jump on our women' which reveal a sense that if the whites were in the Negroes place they would have no mercy on their oppressors (1967a: 117-21).

At this point Fanon criticises Lacan's model since it is colour blind. The Other for the white man is the black man. For the white the Other is absolutely not-self while for the black man 'historical and economic realities come into the picture' such that at the level of body image Fanon's Antillean

patients say 'I had no colour'. This can also be seen in children's stories and descriptions that talk of black children having 'rosy cheeks' (1967a: 114). As Fanon puts it:

One can understand why Sartre views the adoption of a Marxist position by the black poets as the logical conclusion of Negrohood. In effect, what happens is this: as I begin to recognise that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognise that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is base - since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the colour of evil. In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose between an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach out for the universal (1967a: 140).

Thus, as Césaire had realised before him, Fanon concludes:

The Negro problem does not resolve itself into the problem of Negroes living among white men, but rather of Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white, the Martinican is a Frenchman, he wants to remain part of the French Union, he asks only one thing, he wants the idiots and the exploiters to give him the chance to live like a human being (1967a: 144).

In Chapter Seven Fanon explores more explicitly the theory on which he has based his analysis. First he returns to the hierarchy of Antillean society. He argues that 'the Antillean is characterised by his desire to dominate the other' and that 'everything that an Antillean does is done for the Other. Not because the Other is the ultimate objective of his actions in the sense of communication between people that Adler describes, but, more primitively, because it is the Other who corroborates him in his search for self-validation.' (Fanon 1967a: 150-1).

He outlines Hegel's theory of the rise of self-consciousness from mutual recognition but goes on to show its Eurocentrism. The coloniser/colonised situation differs because the coloniser does not want recognition from the slave but work.

In the same way, the slave here is in no way identifiable with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds in his work the source of his liberation.

The Negro wants to be like the master.

Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave.

In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns towards the object.

Here the slave turns towards the master and abandons the object (Fanon 1967a: 157).

Having laid the basis for a sociogenetic understanding of the self in Black Skin White Masks, Fanon went on to study milieu therapy, which saw the hospital not as a carceral institution, but as creating a therapeutic environment in which patients could recover their sociality. In his psychiatric work he explores the role of the structure of the hospital on individual psyches based on the idea that mental illness is a 'pathology of freedom'. The role of the doctor and the hospital was to restore this lost freedom by providing a framework in which an individual can explore a simplified set of social relations on the path to rebuilding a self based on relations with others that are not hostile. If patient is not encouraged to recover their freedom within the structure of the hospital they retreat into fantasy to find freedom there.

Eventually Fanon recognises that the structures of the hospital themselves might be part of the problem though initially he sees them as a means to providing a supportive atmosphere in which identified patients can explore their social relations without being overwhelmed. Fanon concludes



that the mental health project is limited in the colonial context. The social relations under colonialism exist within the hospital and are an objective restriction on freedom which no amount of therapy can overcome, lest one start 'adjusting' patients to a situation of oppression. After the failure of the experiment at Blida-Joinville Fanon recognised that:

A leap has to be made. A transmutation of values has to be carried out. Let us admit it; it was necessary to go from the biological to the institutional, from natural existence to cultural existence (Vergés 1996a: 93).

Eventually Fanon would critique the hospital itself as sadomasochistic and see some symptoms as the response to hospital structure particularly in violent or agitated patients. Fanon pioneered such methods as the Day hospital as a logical extension of his ideas about patient freedom. Over time the idea of restoring patients to society raised awkward questions about the nature of that society. What if 'readjusting' people was problematic? What if madness was an appropriate response to the colonial situation?

In his speech 'Racism and Culture' he sketches out a materialist definition of culture, defines racism as a cultural phenomena (not a psychological aberration) and grounds it in the colonial situation seeing as both the site and source of struggle. The dialectic implicit in Black Skin White Masks is now spelled out as the series of cultural stages which has been used throughout this thesis but now linked to the individual. Thus:

If culture is the combination of motor and mental behaviour patterns arising from the encounter of man with nature and his fellow men, it can be said that racism is indeed a cultural element...The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing (1967b: 42).

Colonialism begins with new values imposed by force. 'Native culture' was not destroyed but 'mummified'. This amounts to an 'elaborate sadism' in which the coloniser 'respects' the native culture as an object or as exotic but not as the incarnation of a set of values enacted by the natives themselves. With the use of force the natives themselves are reduced to objects. Initially racism is biologicistic but with growing worker's consciousness in the metropole it takes more subtle cultural forms. 'Objects' which internalise guilt and inferiority, 'natives', lacking an alternative, absorb the sense of 'inferiority' and seek assimilation. As their technical level improves they find that they are still the object of racism. The coloniser argues that this racism is only residual ("There are a few racists but on the whole..."), they create anti-racism programs, forgetting that racism is a consequence not a cause.

Fanon argues that racism is not a psychological quirk but part of the cultural whole. Discovering that their alienation continues the native returns to his 'original positions', they now returns to their culture and overvalue it. 'Formerly inferiorised, he is now in a state of grace.' They retreat from the technical and rational, into the emotional. The culture though is 'not reconceived, grasped anew, dynamised from within. It is shouted'. Intellectuals consult shamans, customs and traditions formerly denied are affirmed; 'the worship of ancestors resumed'. As paradoxical as this is 'the plunge into the chasm of the past is the condition and source of freedom' (1967b: 42-3). Fanon argues that this is the basis of the struggle for national liberation. The 'natives' bind together in struggle and the coloniser tries to revive old racism based on primitivism but this is no longer effective. National struggle frees the native culture into a new growth and liberation makes it possible for universality and mutual recognition to emerge once the colonial status is removed. Fanon notes that the self/other binary is a relation such that 'racism bloats and disfigures the face of

the culture that practices it' (1967b: 37) as the discussion of the effects on the French nation in the previous chapter made clear.

The earlier discussion focused on various aspects of A Dying Colonialism but here the focus is on the 'transformations of consciousness' in Algeria. 'The thesis that men change at the same time that they change the world has never been so manifest as it is now in Algeria'. The need for recognition is still evident though this time it is national: 'Algeria is virtually independent it only remains for France to recognise her'. Class is not absent as an axis, Fanon notes that 'France will make peace in Algeria by strengthening its domination over Algeria or by smashing the European feudal interests in Algeria' (1965a: 28-32).

The dialectic of three responses is evident in A Dying Colonialism but strongest of all is the theme of the oppressed as agents acting to liberate themselves. The struggle occurs in a context but is forged out of resistance by the oppressed. In relation to the veil there is the cultural struggle we already analysed - the cult of the veil as a response to French 'civilising'. Important also is Fanon's argument that the veil blocks the process of objectification such that there is no reciprocity (1965a: 44). He explores not just men's response but that of European women.

Earlier chapters examined debates in the Marxist movement around the questions of class, nation, the role of the party and of revolutionary strategy in Wretched of the Earth. Here the focus is on the self/other dynamics. Fanon begins by describing the Manichean situation of the colony in spatial terms before linking this implicitly with the psychology of the coloniser/colonised. This dichotomy is the abstract starting point of a long analysis of black versus white, subject versus object. In the opening chapter he argues, as he had in A Dying Colonialism, that the only way out of the master/slave relations of colonialism is revolutionary praxis and in Algeria that meant armed struggle. In this way the oppressed find their way out of their 'crushing objecthood' to self-determination as a people and as a nation.

He then goes on to trace this process of consciousness raising: he looks at spontaneity, sketches an individualised history and examines the role of the party. When Fanon explores the colonial situation in Wretched of the Earth, his concern is not just with strategic questions but also the lived experience of structures. He sets up a first static approximation of the colonial situation. It is Manichean, experienced by French and Algerians alike as divided in two. Sometimes this is physical but it is also part of the structure – 'one is rich because one is white.' As he sets the static picture in motion the division in the structure is not so clear-cut. There are not just French/Arab divisions but some Arabs threaten to form a new class of exploiters. He examines the need to move beyond French versus Arab nationalism to a focus on class and includes comments on petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, which offers a critique of the Eurocentrism.

## **Summary**

This chapter retraced the key themes of Fanon's work from the point of view of his implicit sociogenic psychology. Having looked at the key themes that united his work throughout the thesis it is clear that apart from structural issues there is a model of the self, particularly the subordinated self, which is another common theme in his writings but which remains implicit. This is part of the reason why appropriations of his work have tended to focus on either the structure or the agency side of the question.