

# Locating Frantz Fanon in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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## Abstract

There is a huge re-emergence of Frantz Fanon's ideas and an equally huge interest in his work in post-apartheid South Africa, both in the academy and social movement and organizations. Contrary to some commentators, particularly his biographers, this article aims to locate Fanon within the South African struggle for liberation. It is argued here that Fanon, throughout his life, as evidenced by his writings, was highly concerned about apartheid just as he was about French Algerian colonialism. For him, the paper claims, apartheid was synonymous with colonialism and therefore his critique of colonialism was just as much a critique of apartheid. The resurgence of his name and ideas in the country is a consequence of this critique.

## Keywords

Frantz Fanon, South Africa, colonialism, apartheid, racism, Biko, Manganyi

There is a noticeable re-emergence and an upsurge of interest in Frantz Fanon in post-apartheid, apartheid South Africa, and this for good reasons. The resurgence is not accidental at all but a consequence of the events and the shape and form which the country has assumed and followed since the installation of Nelson Mandela as the first black president in 1994. No philosopher, political theorist, or radical and revolutionary thinker could have approximated Fanon's insightful and prophetic vision of South Africa as a post-colonial state. Indeed, most observers of post-apartheid, apartheid South Africa are agreed on the prescience, preciseness and relevance of Fanon's work in the country. A lot of attention has thus been paid to Fanon's insights in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) as a whole but more particularly on the third chapter entitled 'The pitfalls of national consciousness'. There is general consensus, among commentators and critics alike, that this particular chapter seems to have been written prophetically with post-apartheid South Africa in mind. This interest in Fanon, as I mentioned, is a re-emergence. No philosopher, except Karl Marx, or political theorist has influenced the political resistance in pre-1994 apartheid South Africa as Fanon did. The turning point in the South African political landscape was indeed a consequence of Fanon's impact on the Black Consciousness Movement and through it the 1976 Soweto High School students' rebellion. Introducing the aim of his highly acclaimed book, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, Nigel Gibson (2011) says: 'The aim here is...to recreate Fanon's philosophy of liberation

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in a new situation [post-apartheid South Africa]. This is exactly what Steve Biko did in the early 1970's when he found in Fanon's philosophy the ground for Black Consciousness' (2011: x–xi). Fanon, therefore, has been a major player in the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid formations in South Africa. Hence it is surprising that in contemporary European literature on Fanon, no reference is made to his engagement with South Africa, let alone his knowledge, interest and concerns about the country. This paper is an attempt to correct this error, to bring and locate Fanon right inside South Africa.

It is thus astonishing, for example, that in Irene Gendzier's (1973) 300-page biography of Frantz Fanon there is no entry for the word 'apartheid' in the index. More surprising is that the same thing happens in a massive 646-page biography of Fanon by David Macey (2000). Rather what one finds in both texts is a single entry in each of 'South Africa'. Even then 'South Africa' is mentioned en passant in Gendzier, not as the subject of discussion but merely with reference to a discussion of the liberation of Patrice Lumumba's Congo. In his massive work, Macey, on the other hand, asserts that in *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon makes 'critical references to South Africa, to its policy of apartheid, and to the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 when sixty-nine people were shot dead during mass protests against the pass laws', but these references were, Macey insists, 'not particularly "Fanonist" and could have been made by virtually anyone to the left of that country's National Party' (2000: 469). One wonders what Macey means by references being 'not particularly Fanonist'. It seems that he is here constructing Fanon not as a voice of anti-apartheid struggle, as someone who does not give organic expression to the anti-apartheid struggle, but goes on to accuse him of over-generalizing the colonial conditions which were only applicable to a few of his experiences such as in Guinea, Ghana, Tunisia and Algeria. Macey writes: 'The description of the "compartmentalized world" of colonialism applies to Algeria rather than to Martinique or to African countries that were not settler colonies with a large European population' (2000: 471). In other words Macey faults Fanon for over-generalizing. This is a similar criticism levelled against Sartre by Gabriel d'Arbousier.<sup>1</sup> First, Fanon was aware of this kind of objection and acknowledges its validity. In response to it he writes: 'Against all the arguments...I come back to one fact: *Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro*' (1967a: 173). Second, it seems that 'un-Fanonist' reference to apartheid contradicts the 'compartmentalized world' assertion of settler colonies such as apartheid South Africa. In contrast, I think that taken out of the context of the whole text, these remarks about South Africa could indeed be made by anyone opposed to apartheid. However, I argue in this paper that a close reading of this particular text, and indeed Fanon's other books, reveals his intense concern about and engagement with the South African situation: a concern expressed through a classical and most lucid phenomenological description of apartheid qua colonial and racist situation par excellence.

In point of fact, I think we are fundamentally faced here with the vexed problem of positionality. A Kenyan or Ghanaian born after independence would probably miss the import of Fanon's reference to apartheid qua colonialism. The problem with such a person, it seems to me, is that having perhaps no direct experience with the colonial, but certainly apartheid lived situation, 'that narrow world full of prohibitions', would most likely miss the symbiotic connection between Fanon's phenomenological description of colonialism and its intimation to apartheid. However, to those who have lived to witness the brutality of apartheid and experienced it qua its victims, Fanon's text, in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, 'mediates, names, and shows' them the life they led in apartheid conditions 'from day to day in its immediacy', the life they 'suffered without finding words to formulate [their] suffering' (1988: 79) In his writings, Fanon related to Black South Africans subjectively, that is, the same experiences of racism and colonialism, the same difficulties, the same complexes, such that a mere hint from him was enough to produce some form of understanding that enabled us to relate to his sufferings. A reading of Steve Biko, Noel Chabani Manganyi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Siphso Sepamla, Mafika Pascal Gwala and a host of black South

African writings,<sup>2</sup> will show how Fanon actually articulated the conditions and experiences of black life under apartheid. Indeed, some of them even applied Fanon's ideas to understand the existential conditions of South Africa. Thus, in trying to become clear about his own personal situation, Fanon made our situation clear to ourselves; to put it in Sartre's appropriate words, the black world 'finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* through his voice' (1968: 10). Put simply, Fanon was the conscience of black South Africans.

What is more, in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre warns European readers that Fanon did not write the book for them. The book, Sartre cautions the European, 'speaks of you often, never to you ... it speaks to the colonized only'. If Fanon exposes the crimes of colonialism, Sartre argues, that exposition is for his colonized brothers. In short, the words that Fanon wrote on paper have a different context for different people caught in different lived circumstances. Thus, Macey understood Fanon differently from what black South Africans understood him to be saying. The words of Fanon carried a different context between Macey and black South Africans. However, this does not mean that Sartre's European cannot speak. Instead, it simply suggests that they speak from a different *abschattungen*, that is, black South Africans speak from the positionality of lived experience.

## Apartheid and colonialism

To understand Fanon's serious concerns with apartheid South Africa, we need to first briefly re-articulate that very system itself. Very few political, social and economic systems in the latter half of the 20th century had generated so much controversy as apartheid in its South African flavour. Because of its complexity and wide ranging significance, apartheid has variously been defined from religious, legal, cultural, political, ethical, economic, social and racial perspectives and its origins theoretically ascribed to these various aspects. The breath and width of the apartheid phenomenon makes it literally impossible to attempt a comprehensive articulation of its varied and complex manifestations here. What follows is merely a humble scratch on the surface of a fundamentally deep and complex oppressive system.

To most people who did not live under it, experience it, be direct victims of it, apartheid means something different from the experiences of those who lived and were victims of it. To give us a sense of what apartheid really was, Jacques Derrida described it as 'an untranslatable idiom' of racism, 'the worst... racism par excellence', 'the most racist of racism' and 'the ultimate racism in the world' (1985: 291). Indeed, the numerous apartheid legislations represented 'racism's last word' (Derrida, 1985: 290). Finally, apartheid is the only racism 'on the scene that dare[d] to say its name and to present itself for what it is' (Derrida, 1985: 292). Literally, the word 'apartheid' is an Afrikaans equivalent of 'apartness' or simply the state of separateness. Introduced in an Afrikaans newspaper in 1943, it became the official doctrine and policy of the white Afrikaner Nationalist Party in 1948.

But one cannot simply say 'apartness' or 'separateness' in a vacuum. 'Separateness' is a relational concept that refers us to two or more entities or phenomena distanced from one another in space and often in time. When one uses the word 'apartness' one has to indicate *what* is separated from *what*. As a concept, 'apartheid' functions much like 'consciousness'. One cannot simply be 'conscious' without being conscious of something. Consciousness is always consciousness of something; it is intentional. The apartness of apartheid is the separation of the races of people. *Prima facie*, the doctrine 'apartheid' holds that each race has a unique destiny, history, religion, culture, values, etc. and that for this reason they must be kept apart. On face value, this might be taken to mean the separation of the different racial groups and their right to self-determination. However, in practice and theory, apartheid is a colonialist, capitalist, religious and racial ideology

designed to ensure the domination and subjugation of the majority of black people by the minority white European settlers. It is this very meaning that constitutes the identity of apartheid with colonialism. Fanon captures this connection when he states: 'By its very structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it and separates them. The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. Violence is in action all-inclusive and national' (1968: 94). This description of colonialism is, to all intents and purposes, an apt description of apartheid and captures its very primordial essence.

There is a widespread tendency to conflate apartheid with racial prejudice or discrimination, both of which are reducible to individual moral deficits. The fact is that apartheid was neither simply racial prejudice nor racial discrimination; it was, as Biko and his Black Consciousness comrades correctly claimed, a 'an absolutely evil system' which was put in place by the Dutch and British settlers long before the Afrikaner Nationalist Party introduced the word when it came into power in 1948. In point of fact, the doctrine emerged – at least in its practical manifestation – as a strategy of strengthening and perfecting an already historically extant system of racial domination and white supremacy long before its enactment by the Afrikaners. Rooted in the values of Europeans abroad and in South Africa, apartheid was a refined and fine-tuned British colonial policy of 'native segregation'. In the words of Sartre, this is how the system operated:

[Y]ou begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the former owners at starvation rates. Then, with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive; you finish up taking from the natives their right to work. All that is left for the [natives] to do, *in their own land*, at a time of great prosperity, is to die of starvation. (2001: 39; italics in original)

Apartheid was the violent and coercive enforcement by a minority of Europeans of a policy designed to keep the majority of the population, consisting of black people, in conditions of slavery or neo-slavery. Its basis as individual, institutional, state, cultural, legal and/or religious racism is essentially the claims to white supremacy, white domination and racial separation. According to its fundamental principles, the culture, customs, values and daily life of the white race must be preserved and protected against adulteration or contamination by African people who are believed to be alien savages, biologically and mentally inferior, undeveloped, lazy, irresponsible and dangerous. To achieve this project, each racial group must live, work and develop as much apart and separated from each other as political, social, economic, religious and cultural circumstances permit. Hence the ruling white Nationalist Party's first official statement on assuming power read: 'In our attitude toward the Natives the fundamental principle is the supremacy of the European population in a spirit of Christian trusteeship utterly rejecting every attempt to mix the races' (cited in Leatt et al., 1986: 77–78).

Committed to establishing and intensifying absolute white supremacy, ironically through almost complete separation, the apartheid government of the Nationalist Party enacted a series of racially discriminatory laws, such as the Group Areas Act, mandating residential segregation; the Separate Amenities Act, requiring segregating public facilities; the Immorality Act, forbidding sexual liaisons across the colour divide; the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, forbidding inter-racial matrimony; the Population Registration Act, the pillar of apartheid legislation which classified people according to their racial categories and ordering; the Bantu Education Act, enacting separate and unequal education for different racial groups; the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, preventing unemployed African work seekers from living in the white cities and towns; the Native Resettlement Act, coerced removal of Africans to Bantustans (homelands); the Land Act of 1913, the appropriation of African land, giving 87% of the total land to whites and 13% to Africans; the Influx Control Act, regulating the influx and labour of Africans in the white urban areas. All these acts together

with thousands of proclamations, regulations, by-laws and government notices were collectively a method of compartmentalization of the settlers and the natives, forcing apart the racial groups and instituting white supremacy in South Africa. In the apartheid world, therefore, race made all the difference; it determined one's mode of being, one's being-for-others, one's relation to objects, space and time, opportunities, in short, one's being.

Through these and a myriad other apartheid laws, South Africa became a quintessentially colonial racist society, a society violently compartmentalized into races that are ruled by a Manichean psychology. These laws legalized the separation of the races in almost every sphere of existence. Forced separation became the norm; from separate hospitals to separate cemeteries, from separate beaches to separate swimming pools, separate toilets to separate transport systems, separate territorial areas to separate residential areas, separate churches to separate jails, separate sports to separate types of jobs, existential separation in full flight except at work. As an example, in terms of the Influx Control Act Africans were divested of political rights whatsoever and required by law to carry the much hated pass or reference book (an identity document which Africans euphemistically called '*Dompas*' meaning 'stupid pass') by Africans to justify their presence in various places; passbooks whose restrictions and laws were so wide-ranging, dehumanizing and demanding that it was almost impossible to comply with all its requirements hence reducing the Africans to actual and potential candidates for police harassment, arrest and imprisonment. Blacks had neither economic nor cultural rights. Economically, they could not own property and were confined or supposed to be confined to 13% of the land with the rest owned by whites. Concentrated, cooped or 'hemmed' in the concentration camps called urban townships or 'locations' (the names referring to African satellite 'settlements' that serviced the white cities and towns with labour), blacks were allowed out – only with the pass or permit – to go and work in the white cities and return to their townships every night. An African who was born in the township of the city, who lived there without interruption (that is, in possession of what was called Section 10 (1) (a) rule which allowed Africans to be in the urban, so-called white areas), would in terms of regulation 17 (1) (v), Chapter II, of Black Labour Regulation, lose the right to return and stay more than 72 hours if he left the township for two weeks. This would mean that he forfeited his status as a resident of the township and acquired a Section 10 (1) (b) which required that he had to have a permit to be in the township for over 72 hours. If caught, he/she was deported to his/her supposed Bantustan (Homeland) even if he/she had not lived there or had no connections whatsoever with that place. Further, an African who was born in a township, lived there without interruption did not have the right to let his married daughter and his over 18-year-old son or his grandchildren stay in his house, if they were not born there. As Modisane puts it:

According to the Government Notice No 804 of 1958, any policeman is entitled to enter and search, without warrant, at any reasonable time of day and night, the premises in a town[ship] in which he has reason to believe or suspect that an African boy, eighteen years of age, is committing the criminal offence of residing with his father without having the necessary permission to do so. (1986: 104)

Such draconian laws put Africans in constant encounter with the wrath of the police and perpetually landed them in prison to be sold to the farmers as quasi-slaves. 'In our curious society,' Modisane explains, 'going to jail carried very little social stigma, it was rather a social institution, something to be expected;...more Africans go to prison than to school' (1986: 38). The resonance of Modisane's statement about police violence during apartheid resonates with Fanon's description: 'In the colonial countries...the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of force' (1968: 38).

European aversion towards Africans and their attempt to put as much distance and separation between themselves and the Africans was not peculiar to or new to the apartheid system. Indeed, this separation has been a distinguishing feature of colonial experience in Africa. According to Jane Anna Gordon, 18th century colonial France also associated ‘blackness with servitude and corresponding efforts to assure that blacks and whites remained separated’ (2014: 22). To ensure that this separation is maintained, she continues, ‘a series of theoretical and legal measures were enacted with the aim to shore up national and racial boundaries’. These boundaries, Jane Gordon asserts, were designed to keep Africans (natives) ‘out of sight and mind in safely distant offshore locations’ (2014: 23). Fanon makes the same point when he says that apartheid geography follows a Manichean logic. The town where whites live:

is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The [whites’] feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea, but there you’re never close enough to see them...The [white] town is a well-fed town...its belly is always full of good things... The native town [township] is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there...they die there. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other...The [township] is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light...The native town is a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. (Fanon, 1968: 39)

This apartheid world cut into two, this compartmentalized world inhabited by two different species, is a Manichean world of the good white and the evil black in which ‘the native is hemmed in’ (1968: 51,52,). Apartheid, then, is for Fanon, to be understood as a paradigmatic case of the logic of colonial antagonism, an existential prohibition fixed in space, coercive segregation and a relation of social closure. In this racially fractured colonial society, this ‘racial polity’ as Charles Mills calls it in his *Blackness Visible* (1998), the daily occurrence of state and police violence against the natives is normal. Hemmed in and brutalized by the apartheid policing system, the Africans subjected to continuous state violence, struggled for survival, ironically, in the midst of the euphoria generated by the independence of many erstwhile African colonial countries. It is these regular and constant occurrences of murder and violence that in the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 drew attention to the brutality of the apartheid condition.

## Fanon and apartheid

In both his major texts, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967a) and indeed even in *Toward the African Revolution* (1967b), Fanon repeatedly makes direct and indirect reference to South Africa which in his eyes, as Sekyi-Otu attests, is ‘an emblematic instance...of the colonial condition’ (1996: 2), and in his own words, an embodiment of the colonial system’s ‘geographical layout’ (Fanon, 1968: 37) with its system of compartments and the ‘dividing line’ (Fanon, 1968: 38) that constructs human existence into racial collectives within a ‘motionless Manicheistic world’ (Fanon, 1968: 51).

While it is evident in his work that Fanon’s fundamental concerns were with colonial conditions in general, specifically with the immediacy of the Algerian situation, yet he was however as much concerned about apartheid, which for him was the quintessence of the colonial order. He writes: ‘If we have taken the example of Algeria to illustrate our subject, it is not at all with the intention of glorifying our own people...but simply...that other peoples have come to the same conclusion in different ways (1968: 193). Besides the left and the South African Communist Party describing apartheid as ‘colonialism of a special kind’, the country itself existed as a Dutch and British colony

for several years. Two of South Africa's provinces, Natal and the Cape Colony, constituted part of the British colonial project. The other two provinces (Transvaal and the Orange Free State) that later combined with the British colonies to form the Union of South Africa, were colonies of the Dutch settlers, the Afrikaners. As the saying goes, 'colonialism bleeds into the postcolonial' such that 'The attitudes and systems of thought promoted by colonial classifications (racism, classism, orientalism, sectarianism, tribalism and so on) are often uncritically if not unconsciously mimicked and promoted as truth because life for the majority is still organized through such categories' (Gibson, 2013: 6). To this extent then, Fanon's description of the colonial condition was simultaneously a description of the apartheid condition. Every feature of the British and Dutch colonial system bled into the Union of South Africa and ultimately became the apartheid system.

Let me provide as evidence of my claims the number of times Fanon names 'South Africa' or 'apartheid' in his work and then appeal to some few germane citations from his texts that announce him, contra Macey's assertion, as someone fundamentally concerned with the oppressive colonial/apartheid system of South Africa; one which he describes as an archetype of the colonial division of human experience. In *Toward the African Revolution* the words 'South Africa' and 'apartheid' appear more than eight times, particularly in connection with the strategies and the means of liberation. In the chapter entitled 'Accra: Africa affirms its unity and defines its strategy', Fanon writes: 'Quite obviously, Angola, South Africa, and Algeria are the citadels of colonialism and probably the territories in which the European settlers are defending themselves with the greatest frenzy and ferocity...only armed struggle will bring about the defeat of the occupying nation' (1967b: 156). In the chapter 'Concerning violence' of *The Wretched of the Earth* reference to 'South Africa' appears more than five times in connection with the violence of the colonial system epitomized in apartheid. He states that in the colonial world, 'apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world' (1968: 52). In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon mentions 'apartheid' and 'South Africa' over 10 times and spends some time discussing it, particularly in Chapter Four 'The so-called dependency complex of colonized peoples'. In this book Fanon asks: 'What is South Africa? A boiler into which thirteen million blacks are clubbed and penned in by two million whites. If the poor whites hate the Negroes...it is because the structure of South Africa is a racist structure' (1967a: 87)

Mounting a forceful critique of Placide Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy*, Fanon cites a long passage from I. R. Skine's *Apartheid en Afrique du Sud* which describes the oppressive condition of blacks in apartheid South Africa. In anger, Fanon asks: 'What use are reflections on Bantu ontology when...Bantu existence subsists on the level of nonbeing, of the imponderable?' (1967a: 184–185). For him 'there is nothing ontological about segregation [apartheid]' (1967a: 186). Fanon is here not anti-ontology at all. For him ontology cannot commit itself strictly to 'what is the case' thereby becoming a 'metaphysics of presence'. This kind of ontology often ascribes necessity instead of contingency to being by simply positing the primacy of essence over existence, which in fact introduces the deterministic notion of human nature. But more importantly, this ontology risks rendering the question of 'being' ever more remote from concrete political concerns. Critical or radical ontology, as posited by Fanon, on the other hand, should acknowledge the importance of contingency in existence. Such an ontology requires the rejection of the Placidean ontology that is predicated on the idea of necessity. Instead it requires the admission of the fact that fundamentally, the situation doesn't have to be as it is. In short, Fanon, just as Simone de Beauvoir in her review of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, asserts that the ontological question concerning the meaning of human existence cannot be separated from the political question concerning the meaning of *lived human experience*. If *Black Skin, White Masks* is, as Fanon declares, a wish to liberate the black person from the 'zone of nonbeing' that is imposed upon him by a racist society, if as he proposes 'nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself' because, as he

puts it: 'There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men' such that 'For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white', then this book was undoubtedly about the invidious racism of apartheid South Africa and its dehumanizing effects on the existential reality of black people living here.

Later in the *Wretched of the Earth* when Fanon speaks of the colonial world as a 'world divided into compartments', a world in which there exists 'native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans', then there is no necessity to 'recall apartheid in South Africa' (1968: 37). In describing South Africa's apartheid as an archetype of the division of human experience, Fanon writes:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall apartheid in South Africa...

This world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species. The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality and *the immense difference of ways of life* never come to mask the human realities. (Fanon, 1968: 39–40).

This apartheid colonial world, Fanon explains:

...is a narrow world strewn with prohibitions...a world cut into two...The zone where the natives live is not complimentary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. (1968: 38–39)

As 'a world strewn with prohibitions' apartheid South Africa, as indicated above, contained a myriad of prohibitive legislation for blacks. In her text *Apartheid, Power and Historical Falsification*, Marianne Cornevin (1980) reports: 'The number of repressive laws goes beyond imagination. Forty-nine racial laws were passed between 1909 and 1948; 53 between 1948 and 1960; 90 between 1960 and 1971' (1980: 202). What differentiated this compartmentalized world is 'to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species' and in such a world 'the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich' (1968: 39–40). In short, the apartheid world is a Manichaeian world of the good white and the evil black in which 'the native is hemmed in' in reservations, locations, townships or Bantustans. Apartheid, then, is for Fanon to be understood as a paradigmatic case of the logic of colonial antagonism, an existential prohibition fixed in space, coercive segregation and a relation of social closure.

In this racially fractured colonial society, the daily occurrence of violence against the natives is normal. Hemmed in and brutalized by the apartheid policing system, the native South Africans subjected to continuous state violence, struggled for survival, ironically, in the midst of the euphoria generated by the independence of many erstwhile African colonial countries. It is these regular and constant occurrences of murder and violence that in the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 drew attention to the brutality of the apartheid condition. Fanon (1968) writes:

The murders of Sharpeville shook public opinion for months. In the newspapers, over the wave-lengths, and in private conversations, Sharpeville has become a symbol. It was through Sharpeville that men and women first became acquainted with the problem of apartheid in South Africa.

Since violence breeds more violence, the victims of this violence, lacking the will or the resources to engage in counter-violence with the enemy, instead of directing their anger at the oppressor,

invariably turn the violence inward upon themselves. As Fanon correctly insists, when the violent environment is deprived of a channel through which it can express itself against its real target, it turns inwards, that is, the victim turns the aggression against his or her own people: 'The colonized man will first manifest this aggression which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. ...you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native' (Fanon, 1968: 52, 54). This condition of absolute auto-violence is the theme of many black South African novelists such as Eskia Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Siphon Sepamla and many others. In his *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele graphically describes not only the violent and dehumanizing conditions under which black people in South Africa's 'townships' live but also police violence, the violence on oneself and the violence on other black people, what is commonly called 'black on black violence'.

In his autobiography, *Blame Me On History*, Bloke Modisane, a black South African, recounts the violence that was part and parcel of the African existential condition in the heart of the apartheid world. Violence, he avers, 'exists in our day-to-day group relationships, the expression of the public conscience. It is the instrument maintaining law and order' This state and police violence invariably turns itself into auto-violence, 'black on black' violence: 'The African directs his aggression, perhaps more viciously, against his own group' (1986: 59). Complaining about the pervasiveness and debilitating effects of violence in these apartheid townships, Modisane writes: 'I am saturated with violence, it was a piece of the noise that was Sophiatown [a black township], of the feverish intensity of Sophiatown life, it was, and is, the expression and the clarification of our society...Violence is often the term of reference in our relationships'. And, he adds, 'violence and death walk broad...striking out in revenge or for thrill or caprice' (Modisane, 1986: 59)

Echoing Fanon, Biko argues that as a consequence of apartheid violent and brutal state repression, life in the zone where the natives live (township life) 'alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood. There we see a situation of absolute want in which black will kill black to be able to survive. This is the basis of the vandalism, murder, rape and plunder that goes on while the real source of evil – white society' (1996: 75) are sunbathing or relaxing in a completely diametrically opposed zone of peaceful exclusive beaches and beautiful bourgeois homes with 'brightly lit town' streets 'covered with asphalt', where the 'garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown, and hardly thought about' (Fanon, 1968: 39). This world, as Biko shows, is constituted by two zones whose logic is simply 'reciprocal exclusivity'. While there is peace and tranquillity in Lower Houghton – the zone where whites live – high cases of violence and murder were occurring in the neighbouring black township of Alexandria and not too far away, Soweto. Evidence for this claim was obtained from the 1979 crime statistics. During that year, Bulhan reports, 'the average rate of homicide in Soweto only was 27.7 per 100,000 compared to 9.7 per 100,000 in the United States. In 1980, there were 1,221 victims of homicide among a population of about one and one-half million in Soweto compared to 1,733 persons out of 7.4 million residents in New York City' (1985: 174). As Biko indicates above, if by any chance a Sowetan, (that is, a black South African) escapes being murdered by the police, he or she still runs a high risk of being murdered by another Sowetan.

Finally, it is in *Toward the African Revolution* that Fanon describes South Africa in crisp words as 'that very deep South Africa before which the rest of the world veils its face' (1967b: 192), in a word, a world – Fanon likens it to America's 'Deep South' of black slavery, Mississippi or Alabama, where pervasive lynching of black men gave rise to Billie Holiday's popular song 'Strange fruits' - which together with Algeria are the strongholds of colonialism ferociously defended by European settlers. Just as the countries against which Nazism manifested itself had to form solidarity in order to break the back bone of Nazism, so must African peoples do likewise for they have to 'remember that they have had to face a form of Nazism, a form of exploitation of man, of physical and spiritual liquidation clearly imposed, that the French, English, and South African manifestation of that evil need to engage

their attention' (1967b: 171). For Fanon then, apartheid as a form of Nazism, committed acts of genocide and African peoples should not be neutral to the genocide being carried out by apartheid South Africa (1967b: 172). In this 'deep' South Africa, race and class converge such that:

*{W}hat parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species...the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. (Fanon, 1968: 37, 39–40; emphasis added).*

Indeed, what really parcelled out the apartheid universe, was 'to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race'. Race, though some hardcore Marxists will object, was the determining factor in what one gets, how one lives and how long one would live. In the above citation, Fanon, contra Marxist interpretations, moves beyond the deterministic model of base and superstructure as cause and effect, and dialectically juxtaposes them such that the base can be viewed as the superstructure and the superstructure as the base. Hence his insistence that in the colonial situation, whites exist as the 'rich classes' and the 'rich class' exist as whites. Thus, Fanon counsels that when it comes to the colonial situation, Marxism must be 'slightly stretched'.

In a reassuring tone, Fanon asserts that colonized people of South Africa should know that they are not alone: 'In spite of all that colonialism can do, its frontiers remain open to new ideas and echoes from the world outside' (1968: 70). Indeed, these 'new ideas and echoes from the outside world' did reach the young black radical students of the late 1960s, this despite the presumably closed frontiers of the apartheid Manichean world expressed through the Censorship and Publications Board's restrictive laws (the Censorship and Publication Act) prohibiting influential literature such as Fanon's, Marx's, and a host of other revolutionaries from being distributed and landing in the hands, not only of anti-apartheid activists, but also of the South African people in general.

## Fanon and South African black radicalism

It is within this racial polity, this motionless Manicheistic world, this world which is the embodiment of 'racism par excellence', 'the most racist of racism' in which Biko Mandela, Sobukwe, Manganyi, Mphahlele, Sepamla, Serote, Gwala, Modisane, etc., etc., were born, constructed and nurtured. In Biko's own words, 'Born shortly before 1948, I have lived all my conscious life in the framework of institutionalised separate development [apartheid]. My friendships, my love, my education, my thinking and every other facet of my life have been carved and shaped within the context of separate development' (1996: 27). From birth it was clear to Biko that this 'narrow world, strewn with prohibitions', could only be called into question by absolute rebellion. Fanon's insertion into South Africa came through two of his famous texts: *Black Skin, White Mask* and *Wretched of the Earth*. These texts became the bibles and the guiding lights of the student movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. People acquainted with South African apartheid experience and confronted with the extracts from Fanon's work on apartheid, colonialism and racism, will undeniably understand why these texts proved to be such an irresistible attraction and influence on the radical young black students. His work spoke directly to the existential situation of black people by articulating their misery, despair, anxiety, anguish and desires under apartheid while at the same time keeping the light of hope alive. What Lou Turner and John Alan (1986) say in their book, *Frantz Fanon, Soweto & American Black Thought*, clearly indicates the bond between Fanon and the South African struggle:

It is not accidental that Fanon's thoughts are relevant to the liberation struggles in South Africa, as manifested in the Black Consciousness Movement...Fanon's philosophy of revolution has assumed the

quality of actuality in the brutal life-and-death struggle between the Black masses of South Africa and the arrogant white ruling class that would, if they could, reduce Black humanity to a thing – an object among objects. (1986: 38)

Even Cornel West, critical of Fanon and describing his words concerning decolonization as ‘strong... though excessively Manichaeian’, acknowledges that these words: ‘still describe the feelings and thoughts between...the South African Army and oppressed black South Africans in the townships... In other words, Fanon is articulating long century-long heartfelt human responses to being degraded and despised, hated and haunted, oppressed and exploited, marginalized and dehumanized...’ (1993: 13–14).

It is no accident, therefore, that Fanon became, ironically, a la Placide Tempels, the ‘vital force’, the catalyst behind South African black existentialist thought, especially the thoughts of Steve Bantu Biko and Noel Chabani Manganyi. For it is through Fanonian philosophy and its emphasis on black identity, agency and liberation that the Black Consciousness philosophy of Biko and Manganyi became embedded into the collective consciousness of the black masses that ultimately brought the apartheid regime to its knees. The attraction of Fanon is that he wrote as a black man at the pre-reflective level about anti-black racism. As a result, there exists a concrete knowledge of the black situation and an accompanying depth of passion in Fanon which could not have escaped the probing eyes and attentive ears of Biko, Manganyi, Barney Pityana and the other activists of the Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa. This influence is expressed by Pityana, one of the original architects of the Black Consciousness Movement and a very close comrade of Biko, who approvingly cites Fanon at length:

‘I am not a potentiality of something’ writes Fanon. ‘I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has nay place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It IS. It is its own follower’. This is all that we blacks are after, TO BE... This, therefore, necessitates a self examination and rediscovery of ourselves. Blacks can no longer afford to be led by and dominated by non-Blacks. (1972: 180)

Biko’s political views are well known. What, however, is less known or deliberately ignored, is his contribution to philosophical discourse, especially the existential phenomenological basis of his thought that has its root in Fanon. Although a detailed elaboration of Biko’s existentialism and its Fanonian connections is more than I am prepared to do in this paper – I have attempted to deal with this elsewhere<sup>3</sup> – it is however worth noting that Fanon constitutes the pillar of the Black Consciousness Movement’s theorization in South Africa. Like the early Fanon, Biko’s concerns were not with theoretical abstractions, but with the concrete and existential struggles which shape human – especially black – existence, what Fanon in Chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967a) describes as the ‘lived experience of the black’, l’expérience vécue du noir. It is this concern with ‘being-black-in-the-world’ that inexorably situated Biko, together with Manganyi and their comrades, within the Africana existential philosophy whose leit motif is the concern with racial problematics. As Gordon points out: ‘In Africana existential philosophy, this reality [racial problem] has meant detailed explorations of this dominating factor in the lived experience of African people. It has meant an exploration of their lived experience of blackness’ (2000: 8).

Both of Fanon’s classic texts became the grounding texts of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Biko’s text, *I Write What I Like*, clearly testifies to Fanon’s influence on him and his movement. Besides the numerous references to Fanon in the text, some of the chapter titles of Biko’s work directly echo Fanon, for example, ‘Black souls in white skins?’, ‘Black consciousness and the quest for humanity’ or ‘White racism and black consciousness’. When asked by Gail Gerhart

about the thinkers who influenced his thinking, Biko responded: ‘people like Fanon, people like Senghor... They spoke to us, you know. These people were obviously very influential’ (Interview, 24 October 1972). Hence, as Turner and Alan observe, it was no accident that Fanon’s philosophy proved to be relevant to the liberation struggles of the Black Consciousness Movement, for, ‘It was Fanon who had... deepened the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness and in his sharp *critique* of “reciprocity”, denied that there is any reciprocity when the relationship of Master and Slave has the additive of color’ (Turner and Alan, 1986: 38)

Another notable influence by Fanon is Noel Chabani Manganyi who brings forth a mixture of Fanon’s phenomenology of blackness, Sartre’s existential phenomenology, Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy and Aime Césaire’s *negritude*. A clinical psychologist by profession, Manganyi, like Fanon, uses phenomenological and existential psychoanalysis and logo-therapeutic analysis to understand the effects of racism on the personality and identity of the oppressed black person. His fundamental point of departure, ‘*being-black-in-the-world*’ is an idea that incorporates Fanon’s phenomenological interpretation of the ‘lived experience’ of the black bodily being in an anti-black society. Indeed, the very title of his seminal text, *Being-Black-in-the-World* (1973), is in many ways a rephrase of Fanon’s climactic fifth chapter, whose literal translation is ‘The lived experience of the black’ in *Black Skin, White Masks* and clearly indicates the influence of Fanon. Two of his other books, *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society* (1977) and *Mashangu’s Reverie and Other Essays* (1977) contain chapter titles with a Fanonian existentialist flavour, and a Fanonian concern with the problem of alienation among black people. Like Fanon, he believes that blackness cannot be understood in the context of the black among their own. It is only in the encounter with whiteness, more especially the white imagination, that the analysis of the experience of racial difference of being-black-in-the-world, the other, can be undertaken. Blackness for Manganyi and other black existential phenomenologists, is a way of being, a mode of existence in an anti-black world ruptured by alienation, hate, indifference and exclusion.

One interesting reading of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is to approach it as a text about the phenomenology of the human body. Indeed, it can be said that the text is arguably a *phenomenology of the black body* since it is replete with metaphors and direct reference to the body. It talks of the *epidermalization* of racist values, alienation as an *amputation* or *haemorrhage*, the skin as a *uniform*, etc. It also develops the notion of the body-image or body schema – a notion developed by existentialists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, among others – which Fanon defines as:

a slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world. – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world. (1967a: 111)

Sartre gets reprimanded for forgetting ‘that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man’ (Fanon, 1967a: 138), because in a colonial apartheid compartmentalized world, the black person, hemmed in, is reduced to a bodily being. Fanon’s readers will recall the famous and striking example of the alienation which he experienced from his own body when the white child screamed in absolute fear on seeing him on the train: ‘My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day’ (1967a: 113). It is ultimately to the body that Fanon appeals in his final prayer: ‘O my body, make of me always a man who questions’ (1967a: 232).

Arising from this existential phenomenology are two primary human modes of being-in-the-world, – what Fanon calls ‘the immense difference of ways of life’ – fashioned by the contingency of our body that are, according to Manganyi, products of being-white-in-the-world (white consciousness) and being-black-in-the-world (black consciousness). But what constitutes these distinct perspectives, what makes these different experiences possible? These two modes or ‘ways of

life' are in Manganyi's historicist position, fundamentally products of the anti-black racist worlds constituted by historical phenomena of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. In a statement reminiscent of Fanon's notion of Manichaeism, Manganyi asserts:

One of the legacies of colonialism in Africa has been the development of the dichotomy relating to the body, namely, the 'bad' and 'good' body. The white man's body has been projected as the standard, the norm of beauty, of accomplishment. Not only the body proper, but its periphery; its embellishments have been recognised as such. On the contrary, the black body, projected as the 'bad' body, has always been projected as being inferior and unwholesome. (1973: 28)

A Manichaean world, a world of struggle between the principle of good and evil becomes encoded – in the sphere of the symbolic order and lived experience – with colour significance: black becomes the colour of evil while white becomes the colour of 'right', 'good' and 'light'. These in turn became epidermalized or physicalized in race-supremacist societies.

Biko and Manganyi represent the pre-1994 apartheid South African Fanonians. Post-apartheid apartheid South Africa has equally experienced the emergence of Fanonians in various forms. As Richard Pithouse rightly observed, 'there are many ways in which [Fanon's] work speaks directly and with tremendous illuminating power to the current situation in South Africa' (2011: 227). The persistence and intransigence of anti-black racism in its various old and new forms, especially black anti-black racism, has animated the political and discursive practices of the young black South Africans annoyed with the complicity of the national black bourgeoisie in black oppression. Numerous vigorous local resistance organizations have emerged to challenge community disempowerment in townships and squatter camps drawing on the previous experiences under apartheid. These new movements, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack-dwellers),<sup>4</sup> The Treatment Action Campaign, The Landless People Organization, September National Imbizo,<sup>5</sup> etc., are demanding answers to the following social and political issues which to them are an expression of the continuation of white supremacist conditions that can only be described as neo-apartheid conditions. Inspired by Fanon's work, particularly the *Wretched of the Earth* and Biko's *I Write What I Like*, these movements pose the questions: Why is it the case that it is only blacks who: (a) are still taught under trees without proper classroom and educational facilities; (b) live in Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses, mostly designed for less-than-healthy human occupation and usually built in the middle of nowhere; (c) are being evicted by a black government and white farmers; (d) are the only shack dwellers and constantly burn in shack fires with numbing regularity; (e) burn tyres, block roads, endure police live ammunition and rubber bullets; (f) have schools without textbooks or late delivered text books; (g) have the highest unemployment rate; (h) are the most affected by poverty, HIV AIDS, crime, incarceration? Both Fanon and Biko, I suggest, provide explanations and answers for the occurrences of these phenomena.

## Conclusion

I have attempted here to remedy the dislocation of Fanon from the South African apartheid terrain, a dislocation that has significant implications for a deeper and much richer understanding not only of Fanon but also of the general struggle against an invidious system known as apartheid, a system which Derrida described as 'racism's last word'. Fanon's thoughts have, since the 1960s, played a dominant role in the struggle against apartheid. His continuing presence in this country, a presence that manifested itself in many ways and forms – through the liberatory praxis of social, political and ideological movements for the total liberation of black people from the mental and political stranglehold and grip of the vicious apartheid system, through institutions and individual commitments, through current social movements exemplified by the Abahlali baseMjondolo – cannot be ignored.

Even today, in what I call ‘post-apartheid, apartheid’ South Africa, the voice of Fanon reverberates with greater intensity and urgency than before. This simply because his prophetic message in *The Wretched of the Earth*, particularly in the chapter ‘The pitfalls of national consciousness’, speaks with deafening noise to the black youth of the country. The dominance of neo-liberal capitalist economic and social conditions has given birth to the emergence of a rapacious elite black bourgeoisie promoting western imperialist greed at the expense of the growing number of the poor peasantry and lumpen proletariat. Dialectically, this dominance of neo-liberal capitalist greed has also invariably given rise to social movements driven by the insights of Fanon to defeat ‘post-apartheid’ apartheid. This ultimately means: the struggle continues and Fanon is right in the middle of it.

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## Notes

1. For d’Arbousier’s criticism of Sartre, see Frantz Fanon (1967a: 172) *Black Skin, White Masks*.
2. See for example, Es’kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele (1959) *Down Second Avenue*. London: Faber and Faber; (1962) *The African Image*, New York: Praeger; (1973) *The Wonderers: A Novel*. New York: Macmillan; Mtutuzeli Matshoba (1979) *Call Me Not a Man*. Johannesburg: Ravan; Sipho Sepamla, (1979) *The Root is One*. London: Rex Collings; Manganyi, NC (1973) *Being-Black-in-the-World*. Johannesburg: Sprocas/Ravan; (1977) *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society*. New York: Nok; (1981) *Looking Through the Keyhole*. Johannesburg: Ravan; Can Themba (1972) *The Will to Die*. London: Heinemann.
3. See my: (2008) Biko: The Africana existentialist. In: Mngxitama A, Alexander A and Gibson NC (eds) *Biko Lives: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*. New York: Palgrave; (2010/2011) Gordon and Biko: Africana existential conversation. *Philosophia Africana* 13(2): 26–45; (2011) Fanon and the land question in post-apartheid South Africa. In: Gibson N (ed.) *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave; (2012) Black Consciousness Movement’s ontology: Politics of being. *Philosophia Africana* 14(1); (2014) The intellectual foundations of the Black Consciousness Movement. In: Vale P, Hamilton L and Prinsloo E (eds) *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
4. For a detailed discussion of Abahlali baseMjondolo, see Gibson NC (2011) *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press; Pithouse R (2006) Struggle is school: The rise of a shack dwellers’ movement in Durban, South Africa. *Monthly Review* 57(9): 30–52; Pithouse R (2006) ‘Our struggle is thought on the ground running’: The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo Centre for Civil Society Research, No. 40, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban; and the 2008 Special Issue on Abahlali baseMjondolo of *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43(1).
5. ‘Imbizo’ is a Zulu word meaning a gathering. For more on September National Imbizo see my (2015) The transformative power of Lewis Gordon’s Africana philosophy in Mandela’s house. In: Davis D and Cooper G (eds) *Thought as Transformative in the Philosophy of Lewis Gordon*. (Forthcoming).

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