

FANON, THE PHILOSOPHERS, AND THE MATTER OF THE BLACK MAN

FANON, OS FILÓSOFOS E A QUESTÃO DO HOMEM NEGRO

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ABSTRACT: From post-colonial theory as an interdisciplinary field of study that is concerned with historical, political, philosophical, social, cultural, and aesthetic structures and their discourses, this paper proposes a reflection on the matter of the recognition of the colonial subject from the dialogue settled by Fanon with three philosophers (Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Friedrich Hegel) in *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (2008). Special attention will be given to the issue of recognition from the counterpoint Fanon establishes with Hegel and the *Fenomenologia do espírito* (2003), in which the German philosopher addresses the logic of recognition, one of the central points of the process of dialectics. Fanon adverts that the Black man is out of the process of history because he is always presented inside the closed circuit of self-consciousness, or "in-itself" and never at the critical conscience stage of "being-for-itself". After all, he is not granted recognition reciprocity.

KEYWORDS: Fanon. Hegel. Post-colonial theory. Black man. Matter of recognition.

RESUMO: Partindo da teoria pós-colonial enquanto uma área de estudo interdisciplinar que se preocupa com as estruturas históricas, políticas, filosóficas, sociais, culturais, estéticas e seus discursos, este artigo propõe refletir sobre a questão do reconhecimento do sujeito colonial a partir do diálogo que Fanon estabelece com três filósofos (Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre e Friedrich Hegel) em *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (2008). Será dada atenção especial ao problema do reconhecimento a partir do contraponto que Fanon estabelece com Hegel e a *Fenomenologia do espírito* (2003), obra na qual o filósofo alemão aborda a lógica do reconhecimento, um dos pontos fulcrais do processo da dialética. Fanon adverte que o homem negro está fora do processo da história, porque é sempre apresentado dentro do circuito fechado da consciência-de-si ou "em-si" e jamais como o estágio da consciência crítica de um "ser-para-si", uma vez que não lhe é dada a reciprocidade do reconhecimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fanon. Hegel. Teoria pós-colonial. Homem negro. Questão do reconhecimento.

RESUMEN: Partiendo de la teoría poscolonial como un área de estudio interdisciplinaria que se preocupa por las estructuras históricas, políticas, filosóficas, sociales, culturales, estéticas y sus discursos, este artículo propone reflexionar sobre la cuestión del reconocimiento del sujeto colonial a través del diálogo que Fanon establece con tres filósofos (Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre y Friedrich Hegel) en "*Pele negra, máscaras brancas*" (2008). Se prestará especial atención al problema del reconocimiento a partir del contrapunto que Fanon establece con Hegel y su "*Fenomenología del espíritu*" (2003), obra en la cual el filósofo alemán aborda la lógica del reconocimiento, uno de los puntos cruciales del proceso dialéctico. Fanon advierte que el hombre negro está fuera del proceso histórico, ya que siempre se presenta dentro del circuito cerrado de la autoconciencia o "en-sí", y nunca como la etapa de la conciencia crítica de un "ser-para-sí", ya que no se le concede la reciprocidad del reconocimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fanon. Hegel. Teoría poscolonial. Hombre negro. Cuestión del reconocimiento.

Introduction

Anyone who reads the chapters of *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (2008) commonly recognizes Frantz Fanon's freestyle when talking about himself, his theories, and others. Fanon dialogues with the Eurocentric paradigm about its coercion in the minds of colonized people. Its theme of capital interest is, from start to finish, thinking about what the phenomenon of blackness is like from a humanist perspective, recognizing the part that belongs to whiteness and blackness. Fanon observes the world around him and his place as a social-historical individual in it, often mentioning the concepts of “existence” and “metaphysical culpability” of Karl Jaspers (1980; 2018), the legal and metaphysical interactions of the *Fenomenologia do espírito* of Hegel (2003), and, finally, Jean-Paul Sartre (1968), cited 36 times by Fanon, as the main interlocutor in the discussion about the condition of contemporary man, especially that of black men. The objective of this paper is to pursue, through a contiguous reading, the citations made by Fanon to these three modern philosophers and discuss how these passages illustrate aspects of Fanon's thought about the black man. The term “man” is always used below in the sense of “humanity”.

Born in Martinique in 1925, Fanon's interdisciplinary work is infused with his personal experience. After completing his studies in psychiatry and philosophy in France, in 1953, he was appointed director of the Department of Psychiatry at the Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algeria – today known as the Frantz Fanon Hospital. Faced with frequent narratives of torture shared by Algerian patients, Fanon resigned from his post and left for Tunisia, where he collaborated with the Gouvernement Provisoire de la Révolution Algérienne (GPRA). Fanon's work in Algeria led him to become actively involved in the Algerian liberation movement and to publish a series of fundamental works on racism and colonialism. These include his seminal work *Pele Negra, Máscaras Brancas* (1952), a study of the psychic trauma caused by racism constructed by the colonial enterprise, written when the author was 25 years old.

Despite having lived a considerably brief life, the intellectual from Martinique was involved with resistance forces in North Africa, as well as in Europe during the Second World War, receiving two decorations for acts of bravery. Within this biographical trajectory, experiences with Nazism and colonialism emerge as essential pillars, capable of being interpreted as lenses to understand his life, work, and language. Fanon's contribution had a significant impact on black resistance movements, such as the Black Panthers in the United States, and influenced Brazilian thinkers such as Abdias do Nascimento, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, Paulo Freire, and filmmaker Glauber Rocha.

Shortly before his death, he published "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961), a broader study of how anticolonial sentiment could approach the task of decolonization. In these texts, Fanon brought together the insights he derived from his clinical study of the effects of colonial domination on the psyche of the colonized and his analysis of social and economic control derived from Marxism. From this conjunction, he developed his idea of a buyer class or elite that exchanged roles with the white colonial ruling class without engaging in a radical restructuring of society. The black skin of these buyers was "masked" by their complicity with the values of white colonial powers. Fanon argued that the native *intelligentsia* should radically restructure society on a solid basis in the people and their values.

As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) point out, Fanon, as well as the first revolutionaries of national liberation movements, such as C.L.R. James, from Trinidad, and Cape Verdean Amílcar Cabral, did not defend a naive pre-colonial vision. Fanon's nationalism was always what Edward Said in "Culture and Imperialism" defined as 'critical nationalism', that is, formed with the awareness that pre-colonial societies were never simple or homogeneous and that they contained class and gender formations socially prejudiced that needed to be reformed by a radical force (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 91).

As Said noted (apud ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 91, our translation), "[Fanon] had the notion that unless the national consciousness at the time of his success was somehow transformed into social consciousness, the future it would not bring liberation, but an extension of imperialism". For Fanon, the task of the national liberator, often drawn from an elite educated under colonial rule, was "to unite with the people in that oscillating movement which they are only giving shape to... which will be the signal for everything to be questioned" (FANON, 1968, p. 168, our translation).

For Fanon, the task of the national liberator, often drawn as he himself was from a colonially educated elite, was to "join the people in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to . . . which will be the signal for everything to be called into question" (1952:168) (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 92, our translation).

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon had a complex view of tradition and the pre-colonial, as well as their role in constructing the modern postcolonial state. If he recognized as legitimate the new leaders' search for a national culture that existed before the colonial era as a way of moving away from the Western culture from which they ran the risk of being suffocated, on the other hand, he also recognized the danger that these pasts could easily be mythologized and used to create new elite power groups, disguised as the liberators he had

warned about. For the Martinicized thinker, the responsibility of the colonized man of culture is not a responsibility towards national culture but a global responsibility towards the global nation of which culture is not just another aspect. Fighting for national culture is, first and foremost, fighting for national liberation.

It is not enough, therefore, to delve into the people's past to find elements of cohesion there in the face of the falsifying and negative undertakings of colonialism. It is necessary to work, to fight at the same pace as the people to determine the future, to prepare the ground where vigorous impulses already manifest. National culture is not folklore where an abstract populism thought it would discover the truth of the people. It is not the sedimented mass of pure gestures, that is, less and less linked to the present reality of the people. National culture is the set of efforts made by a people at the level of thought to describe, justify, and sing the action through which the people constituted themselves and maintained themselves. In underdeveloped countries, national culture must therefore be located at the very center of the liberation struggle undertaken by these countries (FANON, 1968, p. 194, our translation).

Starting from postcolonial theory, as an area of interdisciplinary study that is concerned with historical, political, philosophical, social, cultural, aesthetic structures and their discourses, in this second section, we will reflect on the issue of recognizing the colonial subject from of the dialogue that Fanon establishes with some philosophers in *Black skin, white masks* (2008).

Special attention will be given to the problem of recognition based on the counterpoint that Fanon establishes with Hegel and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2003), a work in which the German philosopher addresses the logic of recognition, one of the focal points of the dialectic process. Fanon argues that the intellectual contributions made by European philosophers, whose structures of thought support the Western view of civilization, represent a universal legacy of human experience and, as such, must be assimilated and not rejected by the colonized subject of culture. It is in this context that Fanon when investigating the structures of colonialism, uses concepts from the thought of Karl Jaspers, Hegel, and Sartre to highlight the epistemological blind spots created by the colonial project.

Karl Jaspers and existence

Karl Jaspers' name appears associated with his concept of “metaphysical culpability” in chapter four of *Black Skin, White Masks*, called “On the alleged dependency complex of the colonized”. However, Jaspers' name comes at the end of Fanon's critique of Octave Mannoni and his book *Psychologie de la colonisation* (1950). The fundamental question of this dispute lies in the divergence contained in the respective responses of Fanon and Mannoni to the same question: who is responsible for the colonized man's inferiority complex?

Mannoni argues that external reasons, such as population minority and economic class differences, are triggers for the pathological manifestation of racism as a feeling of inferiority which, however, is already in the bud in men. This is why, according to him, “[...] in South Africa, white workers are as racist as managers and bosses – and sometimes even more so” (MANNONI apud FANON, 2008, p. 85, our translation).

In turn, Fanon recognizes that said feeling is a pathological symptom and that man's attitude towards concrete historical situations is decisive in explaining how he receives and processes such influences; but Fanon disagrees with Mannoni when asking: “[...] why make the inferiority complex something pre-existing to colonization?” (FANON, 2008, p. 85, our translation).

Fanon's answer to the same question is very different and goes through the following thesis: “We defend, once and for all, the following principle: a society is racist or it is not” (FANON, 2008, p. 85, our translation). This means that, for him, it does not matter whether the pathology of the feeling of inferiority is caused by proletarian racism or bourgeois racism, just as there is no difference between inhumane behavior caused against a Jew or a black person. Discussing levels or types of evil is empty rhetoric for those who suffer from them.

The central point of Fanon's defense is that whatever the injustice or evil caused to a human being, all – we reiterate, all – concrete circumstances are irrelevant in the face of the greater evil, namely, the loss of the man himself:

Anti-Semitism hits me in the flesh, I get emotional, this terrifying protest weakens me, and I am denied the possibility of being a man. I cannot help but be sympathetic to the fate reserved for my brother. Each of my actions affects man. Each of my reticences, each of my cowards reveals the man (FANON, 2008, p. 87, our translation).

It is at this point that Jaspers' name appears due to the reference to the concept of “metaphysical culpability”:

Metaphysical guilt is the lack of absolute solidarity with the human being as such. It remains an indelible claim even when the morally pertinent demand has already ceased. This solidarity was injured when I was present when injustice and crime occurred. It's not enough for me to carefully risk my life to avoid this. If this happens and I was present and survived when the other was killed, then inside me, there is a voice that lets me know: the fact that I am still alive is my fault (JASPERS, 2018, p. 76, our translation).

What does this illustrate to us about the previous discussion between Fanon and Mannoni? Karl Jaspers was one of the first existentialist philosophers, along with Martin Heidegger, to establish the foundations of this line of thought. The concept of *Dasein*, for example, is one of the most widespread and refers to the factual dimension of human life. All men are in a body located in space, society, and time and must make decisions within external limits that are non-negotiable to them. *Dasein* is the objectivity manifested in each person's life and, in this sense, it is the "object" character of each person for the other; After all, man is a concrete being among other physical beings and is obliged to relate as such, both in his own body and about the bodies of others.

As existing (*Dasein*), objective beings, we are the diversity of individual beings asserting themselves. As absolute consciousness, we are the only subject of absolute thought, a subject present on a greater or lesser scale in the different subjectivities of existing people (JASPERS, 1980, p. 50, our translation).

However, this factual dimension does not exhaust humanity; on the contrary, it only opens it to something greater, the field of freedom in which man can make decisions in his conscience and see himself again as an unconditioned autonomous subject.

Ultimately, as a possible existence (*Existenz*) we are free. In its freedom, existence knows itself concerning the transcendence through which it offers itself. The reality of our existence is the self in its temporal becoming. It is in our love, it speaks, and it is our conscience; it puts us in a relationship with others and is our reason (JASPERS, 1980, p. 49-50, our translation).

It is in this second dimension of Jaspers' philosophy of existence that Fanon finds the meaning of guilt, and the reason is the following: man's openness to his free being presupposes his relationship with the world and with other men, and, by wanting personal and authentic, loving and rational life, man comes up against the limits of his own *Dasein*, which qualifies his will and inserts him into a dialectic of otherness over which he, man, no longer has control. In other words, by wanting to be unconditioned, a man stumbles upon his factual condition and discovers the anguish of his existence. Man is a short-flying bird that longs for the clouds.

There, alone with his strength, the man blames himself for not being able to be who he wants to be. Unconditioned freedom is incompatible with facticity.

It is this metaphysical guilt, a result of the failure of the unconditionality of human freedom, that Fanon identifies as superior to the thought offered by Mannoni: following Mannoni's thesis, there will always be people exempt from responsibility for the harm caused to others. It is possible to be white and rich in South Africa and be exempt from responsibility for the racism practiced by white proletarians on the outskirts of Johannesburg. But in that case, where would our humanism be? This is why Fanon's chapter four opens with an excerpt from a poem by Césaire (apud FANON, 2008, p. 83, our translation):

There isn't a poor poor thing lynched in the world,
a poor tortured man,
in whom I will not be murdered and humiliated.

Fanon proposes that there is a deep humanist dimension that underlies all experiences of inequality between men, and that evil, no matter who suffers it, attacks everyone; in the same way, it doesn't matter who does evil, because if we don't fight it, we are accomplices in it. The themes of racism and the condition of the black man are Fanon's main themes, but Jaspers' existentialist conception is more generic and covers all human relationships. In philosophy, each person's life is placed concerning that of others, and the challenge of freedom is the chance for the success of authenticity and the possibility of feeling guilty for failure.

Furthermore, as far as the subject is concerned, it is also never completely finished. Existence-with-others-in-the-world reinforces this incompleteness and makes the experience of failure even more profound. So deep that it becomes *guilt*. The subject experiences a *feeling of guilt* that arises from the original impossibility of *Dasein*, which is not sufficient for itself and must die, on the one hand, and from its own freedom, on the other. The subject contracts guilt because, by wanting the impossible, he cannot be completely what he wants (PERDIGÃO, 2001, p. 552, our translation).

Friedrich Hegel and the question of identity

Although in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) Fanon unveils the process of constituting the identity of black people from the Antilles, this work is a source of understanding of the psychic and sociocultural effects of countries colonized by Europe. Based on these writings, we will discuss ways of reifying the colonial subject, based on the dialogue that Fanon establishes with Hegel, in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (2003), which promotes the epistemological turn of modern philosophy by conceiving knowledge through

phenomenological self-reflection. The theory of consciousness is one of the most significant for modern thought, due to the German philosopher's effort to build a complex framework to demonstrate the process of formation of consciousness and its struggle for recognition.

As Paulo Andrade observes (2023, p. 112, our translation):

Fanon argues that the intellectual efforts produced by European philosophers, whose systems of thought support the Western worldview of civilization, are universal heritages of humanity's experience and should, therefore, be incorporated, not discarded. From this perspective, Fanon, when seeking to understand the structures of colonialism, appropriates Hegelian thought to expose the epistemological limits constructed by the colonial enterprise.

In the "Consciousness-of-self" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we find the core of Hegelian thought regarding the constitution of identity, which will provide support for Marxist theories (especially to alienation), for Sartrean existentialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and for the theories that reflect on the relationships between the colonial subject and the colonizer, elaborated by Fanon, a topic that we will address in this essay. Here is the paragraph by Hegel that provoked reflection in Fanon:

178 – Self-consciousness is in itself and for itself when and because it is in itself and for itself for Another; I mean, it's just like something recognized. The concept of this unity in its duplication, [or] of the infinity that is realized in self-consciousness, is a multilateral and polysemic intertwining. Thus, their moments must, on the one hand, be kept rigorously separate, and, on the other hand, in this difference, they must be taken at the same time as non-different, that is, they must always be taken and recognized in their opposite meaning (HEGEL, 2003, p. 142, our translation).

From paragraphs 178 to 184, according to the organization of the translator Paulo Meneses, Hegel addresses the logic of recognition, one of the central points of Hegel's dialectic process which will unfold through the figure of self-consciousness. Since consciousness is a relational structure, that is, it only exists in another consciousness, it points to a symmetry between the subject and the object. On the other hand, self-consciousness is closed, sees itself as autonomous, and relates to itself in the form of an object. As Vladimir Safatle (2007, p. 140 et seq.) explains, the object is not external data, something that consciousness observes through its perception; rather, it is contained within consciousness.

However, there is another self-consciousness in the same situation. For Hegel, the subject sees himself as opposed to the external world, and this is what prevents true mediation, as we can see in the following paragraph:

179 – For self-consciousness, there is another self-consciousness [that is]: it came outside of itself. This has a double meaning: first, she lost herself, as she finds herself in another essence. Second, with this, she has the epitome of the Other, as she does not see the Other as an essence, but it is herself that she sees in the Other (HEGEL, 2003, p. 143, our translation).

In the process that will unfold in Hegelian idealist thought, this world will become a mirror where consciousness can discover itself. Self-awareness loses itself when seeing the other as an essence; however, it is not the other that she sees, but herself in this other self-consciousness. Consciousness maintains a double relationship, with itself and with the object of the world, that is, it will discover that the “[...] object of experience had the same structure as the Self [...]” and that “[...] [...] consciousness has the experience that the object has the same structure as self-consciousness [...]”. As Vladimir Safatle¹ elucidates, “[...] the first manifestation of the Other is as the one that leads me to the loss of myself by making me confront something of myself that occurs in my exteriority”. Self-consciousness loses itself when it perceives itself as another:

The Other is not the one who confirms my certainties. He is the one who deprives me, who strips me of my illusions of independence. I see in the Other only the image of myself, or only the image of myself as another (...) The loss of self is also the loss of the Other, since the Other is only so as recognized: “The consciousness of -self must overcome this self-being-Other”. This overcoming of consciousness is necessarily a return to oneself through the construction of a renewed concept of self-identity (no longer self-identity as an immediate experience of oneself, but an identity as that which is recognized by the Other (SAFATLE, 2007, p. 144, our translation).

As Safatle points out, we move from an internal relationship of subject and object (with consciousness) to an external relationship of subject and object with self-consciousness. In the same movement, it recognizes your difference from the Other. A difference that can then be recognized, because consciousness knows that it brings the difference concerning itself, that is, it will see in the Other the same difference that it finds in its relations to itself, as summarized by Hegel in paragraph 180:

180 – Self-consciousness must *suprassumir* this self-being-Other. This is the *suprassumir* of the first double meaning, and therefore, a second double meaning: first, it must proceed to *suprassumir* the other independent essence, to become certain of itself as an essence; second, it must proceed to

¹ For a broader and more detailed reading of these three figures (“self-consciousness”, “conscience” and “spirit”), we suggest Vladimir Safatle’s classes on Hegel, available in the *Integral Course “The Phenomenology of Spirit”, by Hegel (2007)*. There, Safatle gives a close reading of the paragraphs of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. See References.

suprassumir itself, since it itself is that Other (HEGEL, 2003, p. 143, our translation).

The meaning of “*suprassumir*”², a central issue in Hegelian dialectics, deserves to be better explained. When commenting on his choices for translating this work into Portuguese, Paulo Meneses explains, in the “*Presentation*”, that he maintained some terminological options from previous editions, such as “*suprassumir*”, “[...] based on the *sursumer* of Labarriere, since Bourgeois's “*supprimer*” and Lefebvre's “*abolish*” only retain the negative side of *aufheben* and suppress without conserving (Ibid., p. 9, our translation). For Hegel, *Aufhebung*, translated as “*suprassunção*”³, is a negation, but it does not mean nothingness or emptiness, but rather “*preservation*” and “*change*” at the same time. At each stage of the dialectical process, it is necessary to go through self-denial to reach the next stage, as exemplified by Hegel in the preface to the work:

Contradiction is the real and fundamental engine of Hegelian thought. Every movement presents its dynamics, of preservation and change, in which each stage not only denies itself but is affirmed and overcome. The bud denies itself as a bud to present its truth as a rose. In other words, the bud is subsumed, denied its individuality, and preserved, in its essence, in the rose.

Concerning paragraph 185, in which they discuss the logic of recognition, André Oliveira Costa and Agemir Bavaresco (2013, p. 45), in *Logical Movement of the Hegelian figure of the Master and the Servant*, observe that, in this second part of the movement of consciousness, Hegel applies the phenomenological experience by addressing self-consciousness and its process of duplication within itself in its unity. According to Hegel, “[...] an extreme is only what is recognized; the other, only what he recognizes” (HEGEL, 2003, p. 144, our translation), that is, recognition is a movement of self-consciousnesses that recognize each other, based on the denial of self-consciousness, autonomous, self-sufficient, and closed in itself, for the beginning of consciousness-for-itself.

In the paragraphs that follow, starting from 190, Hegel reflects on the dialectic of the Master and the Slave, discussing how the question of the logic of recognition is carried out through the mediation of the enslaved person. As naive consciousness overcomes “*sensitive certainty*”, it becomes critical consciousness, realizing that the process of obtaining knowledge is conditioned by process of domination, as we will see in the following paragraph:

² Facilitate the peak, ensure the top, and bring the highest degree to an action.

³ See discussion of the term in Figueredo (2013).

190 – The Lord also relates *mediately* through the Slave to the thing; the Slave, as self-consciousness in general, also relates negatively to the thing, and the *suprassume*. However, at the same time, the thing is independent for him, who cannot, therefore, through his denial, end it to annihilation; that is, the Slave only works it. On the contrary, for the Lord, through this mediation, the immediate relationship comes to be as the pure negation of the thing, or as enjoyment – which achieves what desire could not achieve: putting an end to the thing and calming down in the enjoyment. Desire could not achieve this because of the independence of the thing, but the Lord introduced the Slave between himself and the thing, and thus it ends only with dependence on the thing and purely enjoys it; while the side of independence leaves it to the Slave, who works it (Ibid., p. 148, our translation).

Bearing in mind that the other only reveals itself through the reciprocity of the subject, the recognition from the other, the object, the Slave, is also a subject. Within this relational structure, therefore, each self-consciousness relates to the other, either as a self-consciousness of the subject about the object or as the self-consciousness of the object about the subject. Intersubjective relationships are always relationships of servitude and slavery. The Lord is confronted with the other self-consciousness, that of the Slave. But, to reaffirm himself in his certainty and self-recognition, the Lord dominates the Slave, denying him all otherness and everything essential to him, that is, the Slave. In this movement of domination, the Lord *suprassume*⁴ the other, because the other is not another to him.

In this act of *suprassunção*⁵/domination when submitting the Slave, the Master depends on the Slave recognizing him as the Master. In this way, the Slave overcomes his condition of conscience submitted to that of the Master, while the latter, depending on the recognition and work of the former, degrades himself to an inferior condition. Thus, the positions of consciousness are dialectically inverted, and whoever was previously a subject is now reduced to an object, and the object is elevated to a subject. In summary, the spirit becomes aware of itself, the individual conscience, which denies it to transform it into conscience for itself, when it becomes aware of the other, which, by denying it, returns to the conscience of itself, in which the consciousness is integrated with all others.

⁴ Means apex, highest degree of (something)

⁵ 1) Deny (nullifying or canceling, such as when we suspend or cancel a trip due to bad weather); 2) Preserve; and 3) Elevate to a higher level.

Sartre and the post-colonial struggle

Sartre is perhaps Fanon's greatest interlocutor and intellectual partner; Therefore, there is a degree of confidentiality between them that is not measured by one or two moments, but by a great flag defended together: the fight against colonization. If we begin to investigate Fanon's reception of Sartre's work, especially through Fanon's negative criticisms of excerpts from *Orphée Noir* (1948), we run the risk of assuming that there are no deeper ties between them than the content manifest in these criticisms. The tone is always serious between the two, even in light moments and when they share interests, but the slightest slip-up by one is enough argument for the other to “ear-pull” their partner and make them come to their senses by force.

As an example, we have Fanon's criticism of Sartre for having made the mistake of talking about the being of black people, but without his participation (formally replicating colonialism, therefore): “And Sartre's mistake was not only wanting to reach to the source of the source but, in a way, drying up the source” (FANON, 2008, p. 121, our translation). In his friendship with Sartre, Fanon realizes that his ally naively thought he had managed, at some point, to address the issue of colonization *tout court*. Fanon analyzes this error by Sartre and identifies – using the work of Sigmund Freud – characteristics of childhood: naivety, a sense of abundance, and self-imposed loneliness. This puts us in an interesting game of readings between the authors: Fanon reads Freud to read Sartre, which gives us Freud reading Sartre through Fanon.

Hence, what imposes on us is the need to understand the “Freudian content” used by Fanon to access his reading of Sartre since criticism is made from this material. In another excerpt from his book, we find the psychologist Alfred Adler mentioned, from whom Fanon takes the methodology to evaluate any man based on the line that connects him to his childhood. Since Adler is a reader of Freud, this quote will link us to Freud in an interesting way because it connects what we have seen about Hegel to the Freudian contribution. Therefore, below, we use a long paragraph-by-paragraph quote from Fanon when he cites Adler's *Connaissance de l'homme* and ponders how to “fit” it into his thinking. Let's see:

To inventory a man's conception of the world, it is useful to carry out investigations as if, starting from a childhood impression, we were drawing a line to the current state. In many cases, we can effectively trace the path taken so far by the subject. It is the curve, the *line of orientation* on which the individual's life, since childhood, has drawn schematically [...], because, in truth, what acts is always the individual's line of orientation, a line whose configuration undergoes certain modifications, but whose main content, the energy and the meaning itself, persist, implanted and unchanged since

childhood, with a certain connection with the childhood environment, which will later stand out from the wider environment, inherent to human society (A. Adler, *Connaissance de l'homme*, Ed. Payot, p. 57-58.) (ADLER apud FANON, 2008, p. 67, our translation).

While Fanon comments:

But we are anticipating, and it is already clear that Adler's characterological psychology will help us understand the colored man's conception of the world. As the black man is a former slave, we will also appeal to Hegel; and, to conclude, we will turn to Freud (FANON, 2008, p. 67-8, our translation).

In Fanon, this way of reading psychiatry follows the theoretical motto that men would not have problems in their lives if, fortuitously, they had not had a childhood. There, problems arise that will blossom later. And Sartre made one of those childish mistakes by following one of the typical white man's scripts. His mistake was to assume that the fight against colonization could be carried out without the engagement of the colonized, or without them, as a liberation coming from above. This judgment, formally like that of a child waiting for a paternal order to escape the punishment imposed by his parents, replicates that ontological absence understood by Hegel, and makes the black person, once again, an infant without the maturity to assume his intrinsic being.

On his side, and a long time after *Black Skin, White Masks*, Sartre accepted Fanon's invitation to preface his last work, the hastily written book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). It was the perfect occasion for Sartre to show his tribute and eternal alliance with the Martinicans. The first three pages of Sartre's preface are to present Fanon to praise him, or rather, to give him credit for his eloquence as a black man, militant of a high proposal of humanism.

In the eyes of the French existentialist, Fanon's merit stands out on the intellectual scene by peremptorily denying any positivity in the colonizing process. More than that, Fanon breaks the colonialist mask that he believes he has done a good historical job by naively detecting that he colonized so successfully that the colonized now speak for themselves. This is as true as wanting to keep the narcissistic rage burning. Far from that, open to man and with the black question as the central pillar of the text, Fanon asks that “[...] we leave that Europe that never stops talking about man while massacring him wherever he finds him, in the corners of their own streets, on every corner of the world. For centuries [...]” (FANON, 2008, p. 4-5, our translation). If we must predict something about how Sartre sees the work and the author, it is that he respects him and admires his psychiatric perspective.

When Fanon, on the contrary, says that Europe is digging its own ruin, far from letting out a cry of alarm, he presents a diagnosis. This doctor intends neither to condemn her without appeal – there are such miracles – nor to provide her with the means of cure; he sees that she is in agony (SARTRE, 1968, p. 5, our translation).

Looking at Sartre's side, Fanon's liberationist inspiration was always very clear to him, in which the end and destiny of all of Europe mattered little. They are two revolutionaries who put into practice the teachings of Karl Marx. Between pairs so focused on their respective national struggles – Sartre, hoping to sustain a republican Europe with his free France; Fanon, with his third-world struggles piercing the crust of racism in which black Antillean men and enslaved people in general agonize – are two warriors paired with flags and dispersed across the geography. It is even reasonable that there was a theoretical barrier between Sartre and Fanon due to their respective engagements. But the greatness of their friendship and companionship stands out – they both dream of decolonization. Let's read Sartre:

Fanon mentions our famous crimes in passing, Setif, Hanoi, and Madagascar, but he does not waste his time condemning them; he uses them. It dismantles the tactics of colonialism, the complex game of relationships that unite and oppose the colonists to the “metropolitans”, it does this for their brothers; Your goal is to teach them how to dismantle us (SARTRE, 1968, p. 6, our translation).

Each one fighting in their arena, Sartre knows that he will have more strength the more French people he convinces to read Fanon! This seems reasonable to him because, with Fanon's intellectual independence, the only one who can gain anything from this relationship is the European man. After all, in his internal struggle, he will know how people from other continents and countries see him himself. That is, he will have the experience of being an object for another man; he will know how he is seen, an objectual character of himself that, by his strength, he would never be able to come to know, except by a strange author – Frantz Fanon: “Tend to courage to read it, for the first reason that it will make you feel ashamed, and shame, as Marx said, is a revolutionary feeling” (SARTRE, 1968, p. 8, our translation).

Up to this point, it is difficult to say that Sartre does not understand and does not make Fanon's political and ideological flags his own, despite being on the other side of the barbed wire. Sartre's description of the black man's struggle for his full (Fanonian) sense of liberation is very close to that of the Martinican and allows him to reinterpret it based on a subtle displacement of the point being spoken of, but not of what was said. The direct way in which Sartre speaks to other Europeans about Fanon's book (posed as a unique object of historical-

cultural alterity to the European colonist man) is very clear in his apology for how Fanon puts the contentious terms in simple and clear language: “Indigenato is a neurosis introduced and maintained by the colonist among the colonizers with their consent” (SARTRE, 1968, p. 13, our translation).

Final considerations

From the exposition made above, it is concluded that Frantz Fanon contains an open philosophical perspective on the black man. Without intending to exhaust the subject or build a cohesive and closed conceptual structure, the author dialogues with European philosophers insofar as their works encompass the aspects and meanings of the former's object.

In this sense, Karl Jaspers can be seen as the philosopher least bothersome to Fanon. Existentialism as a doctrine is broad enough to embrace the categories of “white” and “black” used, and, precisely for this reason, the concept of “metaphysical guilt” has its strict application in Fanon’s text. Indeed, unlike Hegel and his philosophy of subjectivity, Jaspers's theory does not need to be adapted to or shaped by Fanon; on the contrary, it is applied as it is by the author himself. This shows us how, on the one hand, Fanon specifically appropriates Jaspers and, on the other, how Jaspers is also an auxiliary, complementary author for him, with no major edges to be trimmed.

Hegel is different from Fanon. His work is inassimilable. The march of consciousness towards the Absolute Spirit is a trajectory of whiteness through the time of history in which blackness is just a stage to be assimilated by the next form of the spirit. However, if the whole is not compatible with its own interests, the parts of Hegelian philosophy do not lose their value. In addition to the famous lectures by Alexandre Kojève on the Phenomenology of the spirit, the excerpt from the dialectic of the Master and the Slave raised several interpretations, from the perspective of different aspects, from the reading made by Marx, as a metaphor for class struggles, to the developments Hegelian-Marxists undertaken by theorists such as Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse. But, as philosopher and historian Susan Buck-Morss (2011, p. 145) notes, the central issue is that white Marxist readers were not likely to consider slavery as meaningful, since that system was seen as part of a pre-modern world, which had already been excluded from history and relegated to the past, ignoring how much this model continues to operate in the contemporary world.

With the brief presentation of some paragraphs in which Hegel explains that the dynamism of reality, which manifests itself from a consciousness that gradually expands and presents itself as a phenomenon in constant becoming, we did not have the presumption of making a detailed reading of this complex and arduous grammar of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, but, first, contribute to the reading made by Fanon.

Reading a few paragraphs from chapter 4, of *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, and *Black Skin, White Masks*, shows two different philosophical projects. Fanon's commitment is to seek to mark the difference between Hegel's dialectic of Master and Slave and the master and slave of the colonial system. But, by marking this difference, Fanon seeks to draw a parallel with the Hegelian text, even knowing the complete incompatibility of the Hegelian system, because the colonized black person is denied an ontological explanation, as he points out in the chapter "The lived experience of the black person": "Of course, although there is a moment of "being for the other", which Hegel speaks of, but any ontology becomes unrealizable in a colonized and civilized society" (FANON, 2008, p. 103, our translation). For this reason, there is a visible distance between the Hegelian system and the colonial system⁶.

And finally, Sartre is read, reread, criticized, assimilated, defended, vilified, adored, spelled out, and forgiven by Fanon. Their points of intellectual disagreement are like the differences in strategies of two generals commanding the same army. They disagree on how to act, but not on what they both must act on and against whom to act. Thus, their respective theoretical faces are overcome by their joint praxis, and, if the two compose the same image of resistance and struggle, they do so with their gaze directed towards different sides, but with the same horizon in view.

In the brilliant "Preface" of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Lewis Gordon (2008) summarizes an idea that serves as an inflection point: based on Fanon's thought-provoking thought, Gordon states that "[...] freedom requires a world of others [...]", and then asks: "But what happens when others don't offer us recognition?". Gordon wants to show that racism forces a group of people to stay outside the dialectic between the Self and the Other, affecting all levels of these subjects' existence. Therefore, Gordon concludes, the fight against racism is not against "being the Other", but a fight to "enter the dialectic of Self and Other", and this fight, claims Fanon, is not just within the scope of the denial of social insertion, but concerning an entire axiological axis that is denied to them, be it reason or knowledge that underpins Western civilization.

⁶ Many researchers have tried to develop this point (see KLEINBERG, 2003; FAUSTINO, 2021).

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