

Andrew Blasko
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria

An Essay on Self-Enslavement: The Pathology of Power and Control

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.15.2.13>

Abstract This article discusses certain parallels between Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, Fanon's discussion of the neurotic inter-relationship between the colonial master and the native, and Marcuse's concept of one-dimensionality in order to draw an analogy between enslavement and the status of citizen in advanced Western-style societies today. The aim is to explore the exercise of power within these societies and cast light upon the manner in which the discourse of freedom both constitutes and masks submission to power. The argument is made that submission has come to be regarded as the fulfillment of human potential insofar as we have learned to look at ourselves through the eyes of those who exercise power over us, having lost the ability to imagine that the situation in which we live could, and should, be different than it is. The conception of symbolic interaction as it is now typically employed is drawn into question for the difficulties it faces in addressing unbalanced interaction in the power-submission relationship. The concept of nouveau colonialism is developed in order to capture how the relations that once obtained between a metropole and its overseas colonial possessions have in a sense been replicated between those who exercise power and those subject to power within one and the same community.

Keywords Double Consciousness; One Dimensionality; Nouveau Colonialism; Submission

Andrew Blasko is a Professor of Philosophy with a specialization in European Values and Culture whose present institutional affiliation is the Institute of Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He defended his doctoral dissertation at Sofia University under the direction of Asen Davidov on the question of how Sartre's conception of the progressive-regressive method, particularly as it is employed in the second volume of *Critique de la raison dialectique*, casts light on historical development as a process of totalization that does not have a totalizer. His publications have discussed a range of theoretical

and empirical questions arising from the ongoing social and cultural changes that have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe during the last three decades. He has also recently co-edited *Jane Addams and the Spirit of Social Entrepreneurship* (2018). Blasko currently serves as a member of the board of the European Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction and is Secretary-Treasurer of Research Committee 36 on Alienation theory and Research at the International Sociological Association.

email address: Andrew.Blasko@abvm.se

I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.
Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* as quoted by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008:1)

The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.
Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008:12)

When Interaction Becomes One's Fate

The American sociologist, historian, and political and social activist W.E.B. Du Bois argued a century ago that being of African descent in the United States meant being deprived of what he termed “true self-consciousness” since Blacks typically perceived themselves—and as a group had done so for centuries—through the generalized contempt that White America held for them. Being both African and American thus raised contradictions concerning the general American social ideals that African-Americans shared to some extent with White Americans, at least after the abolition of slavery.

Du Bois (1903:3) described this state of “double consciousness” as

a world which yields [the African-American] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever

feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

This “double identity” forced individuals and groups to identify themselves as members of two opposed social worlds, namely, African, as well as American, which generated psychological, as well as social tension insofar as they were incommensurable in respect to their status in American society. That is to say that Blacks were forced to view themselves as both insiders and outsiders at one and the same time in that Americans of African descent resided in obviously disadvantaged social strata in comparison with their former White masters.

Double consciousness is an awareness of one's self that is compromised by, or in conflict with, how others perceive you. Perhaps the greatest danger posed by double consciousness—and of what may be described in ontological terms as inverted or reversed reciprocity—resides in the possibility—or even the probability—that conforming with how one is perceived by an alien and objectively hostile other in fact changes one's identity to that perception, altering one's entire existence in the process.

My contention is that Du Bois' notion of double consciousness helps us to understand the ways in which mechanisms of public manipulation and social control function in modern societies not only in respect to despised minorities, but also for the population at large. While the latter case does not involve obvious dual identity as such, my contention is that it nevertheless does turn upon how the way in which

the other regards us comes to dominate the ways in which we view ourselves.

When Interaction Becomes a Disease

The work of Franz Fanon, as well as that of Du Bois serves to reveal what I term the “neo-slavery” and “nouveau colonialism”¹ that make possible the exercise of power in democratic society, which we misunderstand as our selfish freedom. Fanon, for his part, examines the pathology of colonialism in a fashion that fosters an understanding of how its mechanisms continue to function today in democratic society in the service of the exercise of power over ourselves rather than over the other in a foreign territory, who was regarded as culturally and/or racially inferior. Indeed, the exercise of power as such undercuts the basic Enlightenment principle—and one of the core doctrines of Liberalism—that each individual is capable of reason, rational behavior, and self-government. In this respect, it is useful to keep in mind that one of the primary consequences of modern European colonialism for the nations colonized was their identification as, at best, infantile proto-humans, if not savages, who did not share basic human traits with their European masters. I argue that one of the consequences of “nouveau colonialism” is that this type of identity is extended to a substantial degree to the population at large by the mechanisms through which power is exercised today.

¹ The specific difference between neo-colonialism and what I refer to as “nouveau colonialism” is that the former refers to relations between the metropole and a former colonial possession, while the latter term is used to indicate analogous relations between those who exercise power and those subject to power within one and the same community. Neo-slavery denotes the hidden domination upon which today’s advanced societies both reside and depend.

The greatest difference between the world in which Fanon lived a half-century ago and ours is that all of us, White European masters, former slaves of African descent, and our former colonial subjects, are colonized today by an insidious power that comes to live within our very hearts and minds. The second greatest difference is that many of those who were previously colonized knew who their masters were, and sought to adopt their culture and language so that they could become “human beings,” too, while we believe that we already are free because our thoughts and feelings have already become those of our masters. Against this background, it may be argued that the globalization driven by advanced societies today goes hand in hand with a new contemporary type of colonialism that is directed against the populations of the advanced societies themselves, not those who reside in “undeveloped” countries and are supposedly racially inferior.

For example, Fanon bluntly states in respect to colonialism and ethnic discrimination that

The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior...This conclusion brings us back to Sartre: “The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start...It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew.” [Fanon 2008:69; see: Sartre 1960:69]

This may be understood in terms relevant to today’s advanced societies as follows: It is the one who exerts virtually irresistible power who *makes* the citizen who is convinced he/she is sovereign and free.

The citizen who is falsely convinced he/she is free could not exist without the master who is in fact free insofar as the master possesses the power to act as he/she pleases and utilize the other's submission in order to exercise power. Fanon (2008:168-169) thus reminds us that

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions.

The two poles of this interaction together thereby form a dialectical, inseparable whole, neither side of which is in truth free. As Hegel reveals, the master is at least as dependent upon the slave as the slave is dependent upon him/her. The master believes he/she is free, but he/she is in fact dependent on the creature he/she has created precisely because he/she has created a slave (Hegel 1977:111-19).

Sartre (2004:liv) quotes one of Fanon's relevant diagnoses of those who have been colonized to the effect that

The status of "native" is a neurosis introduced and maintained by the colonist in the colonized with their consent.

We might restate this for the world in which we live in today in the following terms:

The status of "free" is a psychosis introduced and maintained by those in power in advanced societies in those upon whom they exercise their power with their un-knowing consent.

It is no longer the African, Arab, or Indian who is constituted as sub-human by the colonial master in his/her drive to amass wealth while escaping economic crisis at home. It is rather we who have become sub-humans as power is exercised upon us "at home," so to speak. We consume what has been offered to us—not least of all values, ideas, worldview, and concepts—and thereby increase the power used to control us, all the while believing that we have fulfilled the essence of human potential in a world that can supposedly be improved only by being cleansed of those who challenge our way of life.

It is useful to note that although those who pose such a challenge may very well resemble us physically and be our neighbors, such as the economically and organizationally "inferior" members of the European Union to some extent, the very large majority are still identified by their supposed racial or cultural inferiority, if not both, and include many descendants of our former colonial subjects.

We may say in general terms that European colonialism involved a technique whereby European states endeavored to avoid domestic crisis by exporting their economic burdens onto weaker nations and peoples, seeking to resolve a deteriorating economic situation through territorial expansion. Large enterprises were driven to expand beyond their national borders in order to locate new markets and resources, including "inferior" human subjects whom they could dominate and eventually consume. These remarks strangely mirror the situation today in respect to the mechanisms of domination in advanced democratic societies. For example, analogous to the manner in

which modern industrial societies in Europe and North America were driven to expand their power and control over other nations in order to ensure stability and wealth at home, advanced societies today seek to deepen and expand the efficiency with which they manipulate and dominate their domestic populations, creating new mechanisms of surveillance with this goal in mind. The key word here is “efficiency,” for that implies, among other matters, a minimum of resistance on the part of those dominated. Not only should the latter be sufficiently compliant, they should welcome the exercise of power upon them if all is to take place as calmly as possible so that overt violence can be avoided. If the slave can be made to feel contented, and blood does not flow freely in the streets, so much the better.²

There is a need today by those who exercise power not merely to avoid domestic crises through territorial expansion, which had been the logic of colonialism typical of European powers, but also to squeeze as much value from the domestic populations as is feasible while leaving them to live as supposed “human beings” rather than as cattle or beasts of burden. Today it has become both possible and necessary for power to rest upon and take advantage of increasingly large numbers of people, both at home and abroad. Perhaps most importantly, the technology now exists to do so in a manner that does not rely upon open physical violence, but generates submission through a sense of self-satisfaction.

² For further background on these and related issues, see, for example, Blaut 1989; Cohen 1944; Gandhi 1988; Guha and Spivak 1988; Kohn 2010; Kohn and O’Neill 2006; Mehta 1999.

The discourse of freedom in advanced societies has come to constitute the exercise of power. It creates the other of the one in power in such a way that the person subjugated willingly supports his/her submission because he/she feels himself/herself involved in a system that guarantees his/her independence. It is this conviction that ensures the possibility to exercise power by the one who possesses it. That is to say that the feeling of freedom in the one controlled is the form now taken by the exercise of power on the part of the one who controls power. It is no longer a sense of inferiority combined with a neurotic desire to learn the language and way of life of the alien master.

One could argue that the ideology of free individuals in advanced democratic societies is a result of the need to colonize the core instead of the periphery, as had formerly been the case, in order to consolidate power to an even higher degree. Perhaps it is generally more difficult today than it once was to export threats to domestic stability to nations that have been reduced to slavery through brute force and military conquest. That is not to say that the dominant nations—the infamous “international community”—are reluctant to use violence in pursuit of their aims whenever they deem it necessary to do so, such as has been the case recently with the effective destruction of much of the governmental and state structures in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria by, in particular, France, Britain, and the United States—with all the consequences that has had upon the dreaded migration of the supposed inferior poor into the European Union.

My argument is that the mechanisms described by Du Bois and Fanon, among others, have much in

common with the mechanisms of control and manipulation that typify modern, so-called democratic market societies. That is to say that their studies of the effects of slavery and colonization upon the human psyche and human existence cast light upon, and are very pertinent to, the situation that exists today in modern societies. The work of both Du Bois and Fanon is distinguished by the fact that they analyzed social and historical processes that are readily recognizable as pathological in character because of the suffering they create. Those afflicted with the double consciousness subsequent to American slavery, or with the neurotic, even psychotic, behavior associated with European colonialism, were clearly subject to racial discrimination, perceived themselves to be second-class citizens—if citizens at all—in the eyes of the masters, and were hated by their racial “superiors,” perhaps “deservingly” so in their own eyes. The misery in such situations could be hidden neither from those who participated in it, nor from those who observed it.

In contrast, those living in today’s mass surveillance “democratic” societies also view themselves through the eyes of their masters—those who exercise power over them for their own advantage—but they do so in a manner that conceals the exercise of control and manipulation. Indeed, they view their lives in a manner that makes them appear to be essentially positive, and they might well regard any questioning of such a view as pathological. Those who feel themselves to be enjoying the fruits of democracy obviously regard themselves to be living lives that are fulfilled insofar as they are living the way “normal” and “happy” people in “free” societies are supposed to live. They are blind not only to the fact of being

manipulated, but even to the possibility that someone might endeavor to manipulate them such that they cannot view their lives for what they are. They have been educated, as it were, to allow themselves to be entrapped in types of interaction marked by a private search for pleasure that in fact augments the power that has already been exercised upon them—as is indeed intended to be the case. Being taught to remain focused on what they themselves seemingly decide to do on their own keeps their gaze closely focused away from the mechanisms that guide their lives within an all-encompassing framework of power exercised by others.

Du Bois and Fanon described a world in which the misery of the poor and the enslaved obviously begot the wealth and power of their masters. We instead live today in a world in which the power and wealth of the other resides upon and is protected by our feeling of independence as sovereign individuals and by our false conviction that we are the masters of our own fate.

Ziauddin Sardar writes in his 1986 foreword that appears in the 2008 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks* that Fanon’s text was

the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism. It examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors. [Sardar 2008:x]

If we look at his discussion more closely, however, we can discern, on a more general level that leaves

asides the specific features of European colonialism, the way in which those who wield power in advanced societies create the type of citizens they need in order to pursue their own aims and increase their power. The resulting creatures do what is expected of them for the sake of someone else's power and enjoyment while thinking that they are doing only what they themselves desire and have chosen to do.

Sardar (2008:xii) further observes that Fanon's struggle is concerned

as much with freedom from colonialism as with liberation from the suffocating embrace of Europe, and the pretensions of its civilization to be the universal destiny of all humanity.

One may argue that these same pretensions concerning the superiority of European-style civilization remain today with their full weight, but are now expressed with much more sophistication. They are no longer presented, at least openly, with the brutal ugliness of explicit claims to racial superiority and the universalism of power blatantly tied to racism, but now involve the dominance of an irresistible power masked behind the right to selfishness. This may be regarded as a grand narrative and dominant discourse that extends the notion of European superiority onto an even higher level. Stated otherwise, these same pretensions are now couched in terms of individual rights and economic prosperity.

Nevertheless, we are thereby degraded with such efficiency and efficacy into mere mechanisms for the satisfaction of those who exercise power over us

that we human mechanisms—clockwork people—are convinced that we are fulfilling our own selfish interests, even as we follow the wishes of another (Fanon 2008:12). We accept our servitude as normalcy, for why should anything be different? It is as if we have attained the end of history, which Francis Fukuyama trumpeted when Soviet-style society reached the end of its days. In contrast, Fanon's dissection of the open brutality of racism and colonial occupation serves to unveil the hidden brutality of the empty, self-deceived individuality that is created through a willing submission to the exercise of power in the name of supposed freedom.

Homi K. Bhabha, in his foreword to the 2008 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, refers to what he terms the "familiar alignment of colonial subjects—Black/White, Self/Other" (Bhabha 2008:xxiii). Today this has been transposed from our colonial domination of a racially defined other to the "domestic" subjugation of a self who is in fact the other, but instead regards himself/herself as sovereign. The "nouveau colonialist" era in which we are now living is thus populated not by subjects, but by objects who believe they are subjects. Sartre (2004:lx) asks in respect to Fanon's diagnosis, "What then has happened?" He then answers, "Quite simply this: we were the subjects of history, and now we are the objects." That is to say that, within the parameters of the present discussion, we have been colonized at home—by our fellow citizens, as it were—but we do not see their exercise of power, for it is hidden behind our apparent, but self-deceiving, choice of what has already been given to us for our purchase and consumption, in both a literal and figurative sense. We are thereby subjugated by mechanisms of power that we typi-

cally do not—and cannot—observe. Why are these mechanisms invisible? Because they are draped in the garb of a false freedom that serves the domination of another who dwells within our hearts and minds—whose deliberations, desires, and actions we accept as our own.

Bhabha (2008:xxx) states that colonialism was characterized by a “shifting boundary of otherness within identity.” How is this true for us today? The most important issue in this regard is that we have been created and educated to think that we, in our servitude, share the freedom of those who exercise power upon us and drive us to do their wishes, believing them to be our own. Our deformed being-for-self is thus a debased being-for-other. I am what I am not—that is, free and the master of my actions. All that appears to be my own exists in order to serve the power of another and increase his domination and satisfaction.

The resulting absolute depersonalization that was typical of colonized nations (Fanon 2008:xxiii) convinces us that we, in our selfish satisfaction, are what we are not, viewing ourselves through the eyes of the other exactly as he/she wishes that we see ourselves so that his/her exercise of power over us can proceed as efficiently as possible, with no opposition from us, his/her robot slaves. We have thus become robot subjects oblivious of how we are controlled, reveling in a false freedom that realizes the desires of our invisible masters, analogous to how our computers and telephones function when taken over by a malicious intruder. This is the alienation of the person for the sake of someone else’s freedom and satisfaction (Fanon 2008:xxiii). Our freedom is

but our servitude. There are still subjects amongst us—those who exercise power over us and through us—and we believe we are their equals, but what we believe to be our own personal mastery constitutes our subjugation.

Perhaps this false sense of freedom should be referred to as a form of psychosis, for, as Fanon (2008:125) observes, “Whenever there is a psychotic belief, there is a reproduction of self”—and the self today is reproduced through a type of unbalanced interaction that constitutes a state of submission that is understood as liberty and democracy.

Bhabha (2008:xxvii) notes that these collaborations of political and psychic violence within civic virtue—of alienation within identity—lead Fanon to describe the splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and society as marked by a “Manichean delirium.” I wish to suggest that the representative figure of such perversion is post-Enlightenment man in developed, post-colonial European-style society as he has been led to understand the fulfillment of human potential in terms of a selfish pursuit of private satisfaction that has debased the very notion of democracy and self-determination.

Fanon (2004:235) observes in the same vein that

Europe has taken over leadership of the world with fervor, cynicism, and violence. And look how the shadow of its monuments spreads and multiplies. Every movement Europe makes bursts the boundaries of space and thought. Europe has denied itself not only humility and modesty but also solicitude and tenderness.

Today we might say that Euro-America, or European-style society, has taken over the world, but it is doubtful that the fervor and cynicism that characterized colonialism have diminished to any substantial degree. Moreover, the force behind European civilization's movement forward today has become internalized in such a manner that its reliance upon overt physical violence, although unquestioned whenever deemed necessary, has been eclipsed by what may be termed the colonization of the subject such that the other has become dominant.

Sartre (2004:xliv) quotes Fanon to the effect that Europe has never stopped talking of man, but

massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world. For centuries it has stifled virtually the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called "spiritual adventure."

He further claims that "The 'native' has but one choice: servitude or sovereignty" (Sartre 2004:xlvii). The situation today has moved beyond this point, however, for our sovereignty has become reduced to the servitude to power in the form of consumption. We have been reduced to little more than an ability to consume what has been presented to us so that someone else's dominance will grow. Not only have we ourselves willingly become the means whereby the other exercises power over us, we lack the conceptual means to identify the other amongst us insofar as we continue to seek the other amongst those whom we deem to be culturally and racially inferior to us, just as our fathers and grandfathers did when they were still the subjects of colonial history.

For example, we strive to refuse acceptance to so-called "economic" migrants into the European Union even though our diplomatic posturing and military actions have played a dominant role, both directly and indirectly, in driving them from their homes, whether that be in Syria, Afghanistan, or sub-Saharan Africa. We are driven to prevent those from other religious groups from finding a home in our countries, even though they have learned the languages of their former colonial masters, and we mock them with insults to their beliefs in the name of our supposed freedom and superiority.

But, there is no one for us to point to as the agent of our submission, for we have become our own submission—the other is us, not a former slave who is our racial "inferior."

All that Fanon writes about colonialism remains true for us today, for we are colonized by those in our midst who exercise power over us, and our reduction to what Marcuse (1964) terms one-dimensionality leads us to accept their thoughts and desires as our own. Fanon (2004:237) succinctly and clearly captures the essence of such one-dimensionality as a "stagnation where dialectics has gradually turned into a logic of the status quo." He also firmly declares

It is utopian to try to ascertain in what ways one kind of inhuman behavior differs from another kind of inhuman behavior...All sources of exploitation resemble one another; they are all applied against the same "object": man. [Fanon 2004:63]

What we have done to ourselves today in the name of building so-called democratic advanced societ-

ies is essentially no better than what we did to our slaves in the past. What we do may at first seem to be more attractive, less ugly, than what was done formerly, but both ideas and men remain corrupt and the smell of death still hangs in the air (Fanon 2004:175).

Is Interaction Possible?

Before proceeding further, we must note that the present discussion raises a number of important—and potentially very troubling—issues for symbolic interactionism as such insofar as the “nouveau colonialism” we have been examining transforms taking the role of the other, which is typically addressed in such positive terms as sympathy or empathy, into a form of self-deception and submission. Stated otherwise, this comprises a state of affairs in which we not only do not recognize the symbolic meaning of our interactions with others in that we are deceived, and deceive ourselves, about their significance, but we have in fact forfeited our right as a primary agent who engages actively and knowingly in the creation and recognition of that symbolic value. We must also question whether it is possible to take the role of one whom we constitute as socially, culturally, or racially inferior. For example, taking the position of the other may, from a certain perspective, constitute empowerment. However, what would be the motivation to value and/or seek such empowerment for one who already possesses and wields power over the other? There is no need to cooperate with the other, and thereby foster mutual empowerment, for one who already enjoys all which that power makes possible at another’s expense.

Above all, our discussion reveals that it is not necessarily a good thing either to take the role of the other, or to grasp the perspective of the other in the given role he/she possesses at a particular point in time. For example, when the role of the other is to be your master—to exercise power over you—then taking his/her role has two basic modalities, neither of which can be evaluated as positive in character. Moreover, both can be regarded as alienating.

The first is to submit to the power of the other insofar as it is not possible within the existing structure of power to in fact acquire or share the other’s power by means of a mental exercise or act of observation, even if that be participatory observation in some sense. In this regard, our assuming the role of the other would constitute our acquiescing with his/her exercise of power over us. That is to say that it would involve the approval or even adoption of a sympathetic attitude towards having been made subject to the other’s power. Attempting to “get into” the role of the other in such circumstances would thus comprise an affirmation of the imbalance inherent in the relation and a recognition—if only non-reflective—that one justly has power over me. It would also constitute self-reference in the form of self-deception and, as such, alienation from self. But, it would constitute alienation from the other insofar as it would take the other for something he/she is not—my equal—and would not recognize the other for what he/she in fact is—my master.

This may be described as endeavoring to accept our master in a way that (falsely) makes us feel to be his/her equal. We thus seek to take the role of our master in the effort to be free—so that we can be like

him/her. This also comprises what may be termed a perverted form of sympathy and empathy insofar as it acknowledges that we are subject to the power of the other—and properly so.

The second modality is to endeavor to adopt the role of my master in respect to another and seek domination over one whom I constitute as having inferior status to me. This is tantamount to ascribing a positive value to unbalanced power relations as such, thereby letting the power (over me) that has been appropriated by another become mine in a certain sense as it flows through me to dominating another in my name as well. I thus participate in the power brought to bear upon me by becoming the lord, even if only on a secondary level, of one who is even more pitiful than me.

Taking the role of master over another, whom I have constituted as inferior to me, constitutes an affirmation of the structure of power in society as a whole in that we endeavor to participate in that structure by doing to another what has already been done to us. This comprises the acceptance and reproduction both of the particular state of affairs in which we find ourselves, and of the social order of power as a whole insofar as we seek to propagate it.

These difficulties raise a more general question concerning whose role we may in fact take—or whether it is in fact possible to take the role of another. For example, is it possible to take the role of one who is superior in status to us and utilize the structures of power in a manner that neither involves, nor depends on self-deception? Self-deception in this regard means that we in fact do not take the other's

role, but merely believe that we do so. Within an unbalanced power structure, it appears that believing we have taken the role of one who has a status superior to ours can be no more than wishful thinking. More importantly, such self-deception can be taken advantage of by one who has an interest in doing so insofar as it involves the powerlessness associated with both alienation from the other and alienation from self. Bluntly stated, if you do not know who and where you are, the other can, so to speak, lead you to wherever he/she wants you to be.

But, although we cannot exercise power over ourselves as the other does, we can nevertheless facilitate our submission to him/her by our acceptance of submission as the proper state of affairs. This point recalls Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, but without the self-hatred (of the slave) that follows upon the obvious hatred that the once and would be master has for the former and hopefully future slave. In the situation we are discussing, we tend rather to experience a sense of fulfillment in that we come to desire our submission, taking it as an affirmation of the state of affairs and the way things should be.

But, might it then be possible in some positive manner to take the role of one whom I identify or constitute as having a lesser status than me? Once again, this is obstructed by the unbalanced nature of the relationship. The constitution of one as inferior within a given structure renders it possible, at best, to sympathize, in some conversational sense of the term, with that person's status—if we are not inclined for some reason to accept social inequality. Sympathy and empathy in this sense are, generally

speaking, positive feelings, but they do not necessarily involve taking the other's role as such. Furthermore, one with an inferior status may very well not want our sympathy, or perhaps pity, for any of a variety of reasons, ranging from a sense of dignity or self-worth to a desire to take possession for himself/herself of our own seemingly superior role. This recalls Fanon's description of how one who is colonized neurotically—psychotically?—desires to become just like the colonial master so that he/she can be a human being, too.

In addition, taking the role of the other who is dominated as such would involve a bifurcation of the self that is self-contradictory and untenable, as if we would be submissive to ourselves, by virtue of the distinction between the agent as such and particular actions. Submission itself thus hinders any effort to take another's role by virtue of the passivity and inferiority that characterizes submissiveness. Sympathy for one in submission may motivate action on our part to alleviate the suffering which the other may undergo because of his/her status. However, this could be the case only if we ourselves had not become unable to act because of our own submissiveness or self-deception.

These issues require a more detailed discussion within a context intended specifically for that purpose.

Is There a Way Out?

But, now we must ask whether it is at all within our means to rectify the pathology at the heart of Western-style society that Fanon has diagnosed. Is this at

all conceivable? Carolyn Cusick cites Sylvia Wynter to make the point that we are indebted to Fanon for having made it possible to

look for the explanation of our human behaviors not in the individual psyche of the ostensibly pure bio-ontogenetic subject, but rather in the process of socialization that institutes the individual as a human, and therefore, always sociogenic subject. [Wynter 1995:47 as cited in Cusick 2007:10]

She then proceeds to argue that

Fanon challenges us to establish a goal of creating a new humanity. Much work has gone into discussing what role notions of race will play in that new humanity; however...Fanon's sociogenic principle demands we look to the social world, the world of meaning and creativity, to find the freedom we so desire and deserve. [Cusick 2007:11]

Cusick (2007:11) finally adds that

Freedom is being actional, living in the social world as a creator and bestower of meaning. Unfreedom is the failure (often by force) to be actional; deciding ahead what, if anything, "race" will mean only limits our freedom.

Perhaps this second statement would initially appear to be meaningless today for most people living in advanced societies, particularly in respect to race. This would have at least seemed to be the case before the strong reaction that has emerged in recent years to the post-colonial situation in the Middle East and the subsequent military response,

including the extensive use of social media, by the so-called “international community.” Nevertheless, even in the “enlightened” states of North America and the European Union, the association of “unfreedom” with racial and ethnic identity can once again be clearly identified—and it is often connected not only with hatred, but also with unmasked hostility and violence against the one who is “unfree.” The recent issues in the United States concerning gun violence on the part of the police against the African-American minority have focused this matter in an alarmingly clear light.

Within the context of the present discussion, perhaps more revealing is the fact that the association of unfreedom and servility with inferiority complexes, which both Césaire and Fanon identified as characteristic of colonized peoples, has been broken in modern (by definition market-style) democratic societies. Those whom Marcuse (1941; 1964) identified as having been reduced to one-dimensionality in respect to their cognition, perception, desiring, and imagination in fact believe themselves to be living in the fulfillment of freedom. This combination of a submission to the exercise of power through the consumption of what can be bought and sold, strikingly given the absence of any sense of degradation or humiliation, serves to facilitate the exercise of power since any grasp of a need to oppose our masters is dissolved by the false conviction that there are no masters for us to fear—that nothing substantial needs to be changed in the way we live our lives.

Any possible resolution of the social deformity that is associated with the exercise of power, whether

or not it is openly violent, cannot be merely an intellectual matter, as if we were pure rational minds contemplating the Unmoved Mover, to use Aristotle’s terms. As Fanon (2008:17) appropriately observes,

I say that philosophy has never saved anyone. When someone else strives and strains to prove to me that black men are as intelligent as white men, I say that intelligence has never saved anyone; and that is true, for, if philosophy and intelligence are invoked to proclaim the equality of men, they have also been employed to justify the extermination of men.

This now applies to citizens in general in advanced societies, not only to the descendants of slaves and to those whose lands and lives were taken from them by alien, racially superior masters. Our reclaiming of human existence is not merely a matter of understanding, contemplation, and spiritual insight. We have to change the ways in which we see, think, and desire—so that we can then act and live in another way.

Fanon (2008:181) appears to be hopeful—if not determined—on this point, for he states that

It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.

It is true that we feel ourselves to become more powerful, albeit in a false and self-deceiving sense, as we identify with the other who exercises power over us. Moreover, this false sense of identification

can become very strong and convincing because we are not separated by language, race, or culture from those who exercise power over us. My body appears to be the same as the other's—as the body of the master—but it in fact has been deformed by the power exerted upon it, and has my soul, and my physical unity with the world has been reduced from being actional, to use Cusick's term, to a form of inaction, whereby I permit the other to be active through me. We thus carry our imprisonment in both our bodies and our minds, as we seek a life of isolated satisfaction in doing what we have been told to do.

We must then struggle against ourselves if we wish to cease being the mechanisms for the exercise of someone else's power over us. Since power today is exercised in a manner that conceals its origin, there is

no one against whom to revolt unless we first revolt against ourselves.

In order to complete the liberation of the individual begun with the emergence of the modern world, we must recapture the essence of what we have in common and seek our fulfillment neither by ourselves, nor through the exercise of power over others, nor in the submission to the power of another, even if doing so seems pleasurable. The ways in which we think, feel, see, and desire must be changed. We must find how to no longer be satisfied with living as mere partial-men and partial-women for the sake of someone else's joy and well-being, but rather live together with others in a society of equals in which difference is respected. This is the challenge facing us today.

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