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### Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Identity against Totality: the Counterdiscourse of Separation beyond the Decolonial Turn

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2010



## Abstract

Identity against Totality: the Counterdiscourse of Separation beyond the Decolonial Turn

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This project examines the question of identity-production in the work of French syndicalist Georges Sorel, black psychiatrist-turned-revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and exiled Argentinean philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel. Against predominant philosophical claims of universality and totality and their practical counterparts in the politics of unity and essentialist understandings of identity, I seek to excavate in these thinkers a counterdiscourse which privileges both the centrality of the moment of rupture and conflict in generating and consolidating political identities, as well as the broader process within which this rupture is situated.

To do this, I turn first to Sorel's analysis of class, a markedly non-orthodox account which rejects both the class essentialism Sorel perceived in some contemporary Marxists as well as the politics of unity that such Marxists frequently advocated. Instead, Sorel proposes a politics geared toward the construction of an absolute class identity, forged through conflict, as the first step in his reformulated Marxist dialectic. I then turn to Fanon, for whom the relevant identities—first race and later nation—differ from those of Sorel, but in whose work we can nevertheless perceive a structural similarity. Both race and nation are, in Fanon's thought, explicitly non-essentialist concepts which rather than merely existing must be constructed, and this construction occurs, as it did for Sorel, through a process of rupture and conflict.

Finally, in my discussion of Dussel, I turn to popular identity, or "the people," demonstrating that in contrast to some prevailing caricatures, many formulations of the concept of the people in contemporary Latin America are neither totalizing nor essentializing, but rather represent a conflictual identity which shares much with the model of Sorel and Fanon. However, whereas Sorel and Fanon framed their discussions in explicitly dialectical terms (albeit heavily reformulated dialectics), I analyze Dussel's fusion of dialectics with an "analectics" inspired by Emmanuel Levinas, a fusion which embeds itself at the heart of his concept of the people as an alliance of the excluded and the oppressed.

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## Introduction – The Counterdiscourse of Separation

If there was single point of inflection at which the discursive shift from the “Bush years” to this newly birthed “age of Obama” began in earnest, gaining a certain degree of irreversibility, this was certainly Barack Obama’s 2004 speech to the Democratic National Convention. And if there was a moment which cemented not only Obama’s potential electability, but which also structured the parameters for his future mode of governance, it came four years later, in his 2008 “race speech,” suggestively titled “A More Perfect Union.”<sup>1</sup> The 2004 speech which catapulted him to national fame as the chosen hope of party and nation rested largely on the oft-repeated claim that: “There is no white America. There is no black America. There is no Latino America. There is no Asian America. There is only the United States of America.”

In the midst of the 2008 electoral campaign, Obama would be forced to concretize this vision, distinguishing it from that of Reverend Jeremiah Wright in an effort to calm public concerns over his true intentions. Against those who would see him as sharing in Wright’s divisiveness, Obama insisted, his is instead a “message of unity,” but one which emerges dialectically through speech and the airing of discontents rather than through the flat, organic unity of silence that had prevailed with regard to race in other moments. Yes, there is and was racism and—in close correlation—poverty, but we nevertheless move inevitably toward “a more perfect union.” Obama thereby accomplishes a seemingly-paradoxical task: holding up and displaying the effects of racism, while ultimately washing the nation clean. It is precisely this which Glen Ford refers to as playing the “race, but not really, card,” whereby Obama appealed to blackness and not-blackness—alterity and sameness—in a way which made his path toward political unity infinitely more complex and effective than the brusque racism and nativism of his predecessor.<sup>2</sup> The anger prevailing on both sides of the racial divide (and notably, not merely that of the victims) is understandable, but ultimately “counterproductive,” and rather than focus on that anger (or even its causes), black Americans must bind their “particular grievances... to the larger aspirations of all Americans.”<sup>3</sup> “We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict,” or... Or? Here rhetoric inundates argument, and we are left with the optimistic gesture of Hegelian synthesis contained within the very title of the speech, at the intersection of “union”

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<sup>1</sup> This was also, not coincidentally, the theme of the 2009 Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco, whose official organizers represent a similarly assimilationist tendency.

<sup>2</sup> Glen Ford, “Obama’s Siren Song: A Knife in Our Hearts,” *Counterpunch* (June 14<sup>th</sup> 2007), <http://www.counterpunch.org/ford06132007.html>.

<sup>3</sup> This seemingly-contradictory position also appears in his *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown, 2006), where he expresses “caution” to those who would see this as a claim about “postracial politics” (137). Instead, according to Obama, we must “see the world on a split screen screen—to maintain in our sights the kind of America that we want while looking squarely at America as it is, to acknowledge the sins of our past and the challenges of the present without becoming trapped in cynicism or despair.” However, such a seemingly-generative view is not borne out in practice, as Obama deploys white privilege—counterintuitively, to say the least—in an effort to oppose a black power approach. Whites can cut themselves off in a way that minorities cannot, and for blacks to protect themselves psychologically is to “surrender—to what has been instead of what might be” (139). “As a result, proposals that solely benefit minorities and dissect Americans into “us” and “them” may generate a few short-term concessions when the costs to whites aren’t too high, but they can’t serve as the basis for the kinds of sustained, broad-based political coalitions needed to transform America” (146).

and “perfection”: “This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected.”<sup>4</sup>

These speeches struck a chord among many, and few would deny that Obama’s subsequent political successes reflect a broadly-felt desire for that discourse of national unity to reassume its position as a reality after eight years of perceived strife and division expressed in the oft-parodied dictum of the George W. Bush administration: “you’re either with us or against us.”<sup>5</sup> But it would be worth wondering aloud to what degree the Bush and Obama doctrines constitute fundamentally different approaches to understanding the socio-political life of the United States. We should pose the question as follows: do the Bush and Obama doctrines share political unity as an objective? Here, the answer seems to be clearly an affirmative one, as the antagonism contained within the Bush doctrine of “you’re with us or against us” is aimed precisely at the reassertion of an organic unity which distinguished “good Americans” from “terrorists” and a lesser degree “illegal aliens” (the qualifier “good” rendered necessary by the newly-minted category of “enemy combatant,” itself a discursive-juridical reflection of cases such as that of José Padilla, a U.S. citizen). But while Bush sought to create a certain sort of unity—in another frequently-parodied phrase, he sought to “be a uniter, not a divider”—and while this was devastatingly effective in some senses (especially in the days following September 11<sup>th</sup>), it eventually failed as a project due to the divisions it cultivated within the very organic national unity it sought to reinforce.

Here lies the fundamental complicity between the two projects: Obama appears charged with the task of repairing the broken unity of the nation that Bush had failed to consolidate despite his best efforts, seeking to do so by drawing the lines that distinguish inside from outside in different ways (i.e. the “good war” in Afghanistan versus the “bad war” in Iraq, a different view of the ethnic-cultural content of “true” Americanism, and a more accommodating position vis-à-vis immigration).<sup>6</sup> The Bush regime had failed *not* because it *sought* to cultivate division and conflict, but because it miscalculated the political effects of the enmity and divisiveness it had cultivated in the course of unification, and Obama was propelled to power by the promise of a new equilibrium, his soothing discourse assuring a wary white electorate that he could be trusted with the mantle of unity.

It is worth wondering here what is elided by this complicity between the Bush and Obama projects for national unity, and specifically, what political possibilities are foreclosed by Obama’s playing of the “race, but not really, card.” Here it would be most useful to set out from

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<sup>4</sup> Interesting about this speech and other statements by Obama is his appeal to biological determinism (in our framework, an “objective” basis for class) and to an organic conception of unity: he could not possibly be a proponent of black power since he is ethnically mixed, and that, as he puts it in the “race speech,” his family lineage “is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts - that out of many, we are truly one.” See also *Audacity*, 136: “I’ve never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe.”

<sup>5</sup> In an insightful talk, Lewis Gordon recently argued that Obama represents another in a long line of black figures who have functioned as “ideal exceptions,” who paradoxically represent the impossible while effectively preserving the racist system. For Gordon, Obama accomplishes this in two ways: firstly, by “speaking against monsters” (i.e. the Reverend Wright), and secondly, by facilitating a love for himself as narcissistic self-love, which is accomplished through a “re-discovery” (a re-obscuring) of U.S. history as “an idealized conception of American unity.” Remarks at the University of California Berkeley’s Chancellor’s Colloquium, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>6</sup> To adopt a Schmittian register, we could say that both sought to consolidate a national unity, with the only difference being what would constitute the parameters for internal affinity and external enmity.

what possibilities Obama *means to* obstruct, the target of his unifying rhetoric: the legacy of the black power movement and the “separatist” tendencies of Black Nationalism more generally. Here, Ford continues, with the stinging claim that:

Barack Obama is the antithesis of Black Power, a man who promises with every word he speaks, with every nuance of phrase and body language, and through his voting record as a U.S. Senator, that he personifies the definitive end of Black organized struggle in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Not that this is an accusation which Obama himself would deny. Here is, after all, a black American who confesses to have learned early on that his identity should not be a conflictive one, and that black power was not the path to social renewal.<sup>8</sup> Such a view lies in direct conflict with the constellation of identity, conflict, and unity that constitutes the extensive tradition of black power thought.

Within this tradition, Malcolm X is a central figure, for the simplicity of his formulations, for the way in which these were received in the black community, but above all for himself embodying the tensions of black nationalism as arguably no other black leader has. According to Robert Allen, Malcolm was “the ideological father of the black power movement,” but he only truly assumed this position after breaking in 1964 with the Nation of Islam.<sup>9</sup> What is crucial here is that the split occurred largely over *political* questions of activism: against a black nation which was totally separate from white America, Malcolm posed black power as an antagonistic movement whose objective was to transform the country as a whole rather than to control a small corner of it. As Allen puts it:

The kernel of black nationalism, [Malcolm] said, was the idea that black people should control the economy, politics, and social institutions of their own communities. Thus he identified black nationalism with the general [political] concept of self-determination. After the split [with the Nation of Islam], Malcolm no longer endorsed utopian separatism... [but] still rejected integrationism...<sup>10</sup>

It is this peculiar position—this tense space between separatism and integrationism—that is the subject of this project. Rather than an absolute separatism in which black unity was premised upon biological or cultural superiority and opposition to equally biologically-determined “white devils,” Malcolm X transposed his opposition to the social and historical-structural plane, arguing that this ideal of black self-determination was only possible “if the total society is changed.”<sup>11</sup>

This view was driven by an understanding of unity which drifted far from the waters Malcolm tread as a black Muslim: he would argue frequently, like the Nation of Islam, that “there must be black unity,” but this would always be appended with the qualification, “before there can be black-white unity.” Malcolm’s normative ideal, in other words, had been displaced from black identity and the black community as an end-in-itself to a stage in a dialectical progression, one marked above all by social and political struggle. But why, if “black-white

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<sup>7</sup> Ford, “Obama’s Siren Song: A Knife in Our Hearts.”

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Obama’s memoir, in which he settles accounts with the black power movement, black nationalism, and the legacy of Malcolm X. *Dreams from My Father* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004 [1995]).

<sup>9</sup> Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1990 [1969]), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening*, 33.



unity” stands as a final objective, did he continue to reject integration? Why did he displace this normative ideal into a distant future? According to Allen, this was because he saw integrationism in the present as standing for “either phony tokenism or an attempt to assimilate blacks into a decadent white society.”<sup>12</sup> This dialectical displacement, moreover, was based not only in material social conditions, but also in their psychological and ideological effects. In other words, black America had been tainted with the self-hatred taught and inculcated by white society, and was itself not yet prepared for integration: in Malcolm’s words, “we cannot think of being acceptable to others until we have first proven acceptable to ourselves.”

Here already we see a vision of the relationship between unity and identity that is far different from Obama’s. For Malcolm and others, there was indeed a “black America,” one constituted by those living subjects relegated to substandard living conditions and subjected to that self-hatred which frequently characterizes colonized peoples. To construct a political unity on the national level on the basis of these given materials, then, would be to construct a unity inevitably marked by both socio-economic and ideological white supremacy. Calls for political unity, in this view, undercut identity, threatening to hypostasize the present and thereby make existing inequalities permanent. It is only on the basis of a struggle for black identity and economic development, according to the black power tradition, that the foundations for eventual re-unification with white society can be laid. Unity—in this case, national—is displaced into the distant future and contingent upon the progress of political struggle. In this way, black power constituted a counterdiscourse to the prevailing discourse of American unity, and if this was a counterdiscourse which was in the past silenced by state-sponsored assassin’s bullets, its re-silencing in the present—in which the discourse of national unity assumes a black face—might be considered even more sinister.

But, one might object, to reduce Obama’s call for a “more perfect union” to integrationism surely seems unfair. After all, if there is a complicity of unity that joins Bush with Obama, we have already admitted both that theirs are two very different unities, one organic and one dialectical, and that some sort of dialectical orientation is shared by both Obama and the black power tradition. How does Malcolm X’s dialectical vision of separation and unity differ from Obama’s equally forward-looking and future-oriented argument for American perfectability? If these are indeed two dialectics, then they are drastically different ones,<sup>13</sup> as they set for themselves drastically divergent tasks in the present: where Obama professes “unity now,” Malcolm X and his heirs in the black power tradition (as well as the thinkers discussed below) profess a view better summarized as “unity perhaps, but only later” (a qualified or conditional unity). The dialectic of black power—unlike that of Obama—is driven from the subjective position of division in the present; it relies on the practical process of building and creating black identity, *not* as a process which leads to inward-oriented closure (what one might term “separatism” in the strong sense), but as a first and necessary step toward human reconciliation on equal terms. Put differently, the dialectical *view* professed by Obama—that past conflict has demonstrated the perfectibility of our union, and that this assumed perfectibility leads us toward the future—fails as a dialectical *practice*, allowing no division, rupture, or “diremption” (in Hegelian parlance) on the path toward synthesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Allen, *Black Awakening*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Responding, perhaps, to two Hegels, and two interpretations of the famous phrase “the real is rational and the rational is real.” This is a question to which we will return repeatedly throughout this project.

This dissertation, however, is not about Obama and not about Malcolm in any direct way, but the relationship between the dialectical visions the two propose can serve to usefully set the stage for my argument, making clear from the outset what potential *political* stakes and political positions this discussion entails.

## The Counterdiscourse of Separation

This project seeks to provide an optic through which we might be able to productively view this complex relationship between identity and unity. But this optic—which I term the “counterdiscourse of separation”—is not readily apparent or even visible. It is, like the discourse of black power, a “counter” discourse to prevailing political notions of unity, right or left, which by virtue of this unenviable position of opposition finds itself doubly-obscured, subjected to almost limitless efforts at erasure and silencing.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the thinkers we will track throughout this project find themselves embroiled in a war on two fronts: against discourses of unity, and against the purported opponents of such discourses (in the case of Malcolm, against the discourse of national unity on the one hand, and against the separatist discourse of the Nation of Islam on the other). This is an unenviable position, and one which entails that the object of our study is one whose history we can expect to be *doubly-obscured* as well: firstly by prevailing discourses of unity, and secondly by those nominal counterdiscourses who seek to reproduce it. When my enemy’s enemy is also my enemy, I am left with few friends, and if Malcolm X embodied this “counterdiscourse of separation” in his war on two fronts, then he also suffered the concomitant weight of its double-obscuration in the shotgun blasts with which the forces of unity and separatism joined to guarantee his physical destruction.<sup>15</sup>

But it is this same position that makes the counterdiscourse of separation so politically generative, for like Malcolm X’s version of black power, it is forced to fight a battle on two fronts: it is a discourse of identity against unity, but one which refuses to reproduce unity on the level of identity. Hence it stands against both those who would profess unity and those who would naturalize or hypostasize identity (e.g. in Malcolm’s case, some Black Muslims) in opposition to unity. This war on two fronts gives the counterdiscourse of separation an additional aspect: it is what I call a *counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse*. What I mean is this: the counterdiscourse of separation stands against prevailing notions of unity *and* those nominal alternatives to unity which—consciously or not—either accommodate themselves to unity or reproduce some of its elements or characteristics. In other words, this war on two fronts is no coincidence, and it highlights the fact that even the purported enemies of unity are capable of

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<sup>14</sup> What is most impressive about Allen’s *Black Awakening* is the degree to which he recognized and tracked from a very early moment the efforts deployed to co-opt the black power movement, efforts which eventually assumed the mantle and rhetoric of black power itself as a mask for financial subversion. It is precisely this prescience that marks Allen’s contemporary relevance, as indicated by the reprinting of a portion of *Black Awakening* in the recent volume edited by INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Boston: South End Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> While drawing Malcolm X into the orbit of the thinkers considered here may run the risk of comparing the incomparable, our task is more modest, focused as it is on thinkers with a clear historical and contextual relationship, and who occupy similarly dissident locations vis-à-vis the objects of their critique. Put differently, Malcolm may indeed pertain to what we are calling the counterdiscourse of separation, but it is not our task here to determine this with any degree of precision. It is worth adding, however, that such a relationship might be profitably charted in the future, beginning from the influence Fanon exerted on some of his clearest Black Power disciples: namely, the Black Panther Party.

reproducing the dangers of that unity on the level of identity. Our counterdiscourse thereby walks the fine (dialectical) line between the Scylla and Charybdis of unity and identity, neither rejecting the former as a laudable if utopian goal for the distant future nor accepting the latter in its essentialist form, as normatively valid in-itself at present.

This will become clearer when seen through the three primary thinkers who will come to provide the textual contours and nuances of this discussion: French syndicalist Georges Sorel, Martinican psychiatrist turned Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and exiled Argentine philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel. Like Malcolm X, these thinkers would find themselves walking a tightrope separating the imperative for political unity from essentialist appeals to identity. Sorel, writing in the context of the Revisionist Controversy, would adopt a peculiar position: agreeing with the revisionists that class was not an objectively given reality, he nevertheless refused their gradualist reformism (of, e.g., Eduard Bernstein) in favor of a subjectively constituted class identity. Fanon, similarly, rejected the black essentialism of some proponents of negritude (most notably, Léopold Senghor), while his attentiveness to racism prevented him from jettisoning black identity as a whole, leading him instead to see racial identity as a necessary, if transitory, subjective construct. In his later *The Wretched of the Earth*, moreover, Fanon would make an analogous claim about national identity, one which would set out *not* from the nation as pre-existing, but rather as a conflictive category which cross-cuts the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. Working on the basis of a similarly complex relationship toward Third World nationalism, Dussel would reformulate the concept of the people—against many critics—as a category of political rupture which is similarly anti-essentialist, internally heterogeneous, and radically transformative.

In their insistence on the importance of identity-as-rupture, all three thinkers rejected contemporary claims to political unity at the level of society, and in their resistance to essentialism allowed them to resist reproducing such unity on the level of class, race, or nation. Unity, instead, is displaced into the unforeseeable future, at the end (if indeed there could even be such a thing) of a subjectively-driven dialectic whose key ingredient is the identitarian moment of the present. A rough preliminary sketch of the dialectical process that is the counterdiscourse of separation would contain the following four moments, to which we will refer as guideposts throughout the project:

- 1.) The subjective, political *projection* of a non-objective identity, giving rise to
- 2.) a friend-enemy moment, in which the projected identity constitutes a frontier of *antagonism* vis-à-vis other sector(s), dividing the social unity.
- 3.) This antagonism and conflict has the effect of reinforcing and *consolidating* the identities of the parties involved, thereby
- 4.) politically *transforming* those parties, their relationship with one another, and transitioning toward a new but unspecified and unforeseeable universal, a future reconciled unity whose *character cannot be predicted*.

As should be clear from this progression of moments, the counterdiscourse of separation is one which insists that it is by projecting identity that this identity can come into being. As should also be clear, such a framework—while not foreclosing entirely on the possibility of resolution—explicitly places such resolution and unity beyond the scope of a foreseeable progression, dialectical, evolutionary, or otherwise. Therein lies its anti-unity impulse, as the counterdiscourse

of separation is premised upon a privileging of the moment of rupture and conflict, the moment of *diremption*.<sup>16</sup> And it is this privileging that gives rise to the paradoxical structure of the counterdiscourse of separation: if there is to be unity in the future, this can only be built on the basis of division, rupture, and the radicalization of identity in the present.

Furthermore, distinguishing these four moments within the counterdiscourse of separation—projection, antagonism, consolidation, and transformation—allows us to more easily grasp what it is that distinguishes this discourse from other prevailing approaches to the politics of identity. For example, insofar as the word “separatism” is used to invoke a concept (rather than a series of political practices), this concept is most often limited to the second and third moments above. In contrast, Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel situate identity in relation to a dialectical process (though this is certainly not the traditional Hegelian or Marxist dialectic), whereby consolidation is not an end in itself, but rather merely a political stage prior to revolutionary transformation. We will return more directly to the relationship between this counterdiscourse and dialectics more generally in our conclusion. This is because the concept of “separatism” hinges almost invariably on an essentialist identity, one which thereby renders projection (moment one) unnecessary and future transformation (moment four) predetermined and restricted to an expression of that predetermined essence. Essentialist separation forecloses the need for and possibility of radical social transformation (a mere reordering will suffice), since this identity is deemed already perfect in-itself. By contrast, radical separation as it emerges in Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel is, by virtue of the anti-essentialist and non-objective identity it invokes, conceptually narrower than “separatism,” given the restrictions it places on the latter. Put differently, the counterdiscourse of separation has a “separatist” moment which contains the general dynamic of conflictive identification, but this moment is effectively bookended by two moments which render it incompatible with essentialist “separatism” as generally conceived.<sup>17</sup>

This work takes the form of three chapter pairs, devoted to Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel, respectively. Each pairing of chapters seeks to draw a taut line between an early and a late text—*The Trial of Socrates* (1889) and *Reflections on Violence* (1906) for Sorel; *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) for Fanon; and *Philosophy of Liberation* (1976) and *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2006) for Dussel—in an effort to track the progression by which each thinker arrived at this peculiar position, this counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse. Whereas for Sorel, our two chapters constitute a progression, for Fanon as for Dussel they represent a re-deployment of remarkably similar formulations. In part, this is because clarifying Sorel’s development and revealing some prevailing interpretive errors requires that we begin

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<sup>16</sup> For Hegel, *diremption* is the moment of originary division that provides the anxiety fueling his philosophical enterprise. See Stephen B. Smith, *Hegel’s Critique of Liberalism: Rights in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17. See also the discussion of the concept, its origins, and its development in Enrique Dussel, *El último Marx (1863-1882) y la liberación latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1990), 346, 356n61; *Método para una filosofía de la liberación: Superación analéctica de la dialéctica hegeliana* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974), 18 and appendix.

<sup>17</sup> Hence while we might be inclined to tie this counterdiscourse of separation to German jurist Carl Schmitt, his formulation shares the same limitations of other separatist and unitarian discourses, the only difference being that the framework of reference is the nation rather than another essentialist identity. While Schmitt certainly recognizes the importance of the “friend-enemy” moment in the consolidation of identity, his anxiety toward “civil war”—national or international—indicates that the nation remained for Schmitt a hypostatized *a priori*. See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, tr. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1932]), 32. Any friend-enemy moment, then, could only map cleanly onto the pre-existing national totality, thereby precluding any endorsement of rupture or separation.

from one of his earliest texts. As a result, we find in *The Trial of Socrates* some, but not all, elements of the counterdiscourse of separation, and those elements we do find are situated within a nostalgia for ancient unity from which Sorel had yet to break. By the time of the *Reflections on Violence*, by contrast, Sorel had fully broken with the paradigm of totality and embraced class identity as a concept of radical rupture.

The distance between the publication of Fanon's early and late work is not so great, due in part to his premature death: a mere nine years separate *Black Skin, White Masks* from *The Wretched of the Earth*. But while I argue that Fanon's "mature" formulation of the counterdiscourse of separation is, in its broad strokes, fully present in the earlier work, this is not to imply that, by some miracle of political or intellectual clarity, this formulation sprang fully-armed like Athena from his brow. Rather, it is within *Black Skin*—a text as anguished as any—that Fanon is forced against his will to revise his early universalist inclinations.<sup>18</sup> Once this revision emerges, the black identity he formulates in *Black Skin*, I argue, constitutes the blueprint for his mature concept of decolonial-national identity in *Wretched*.

More coherent still is the pairing of Dussel's texts, as by the time he wrote *Philosophy of Liberation*, he had already experienced what would be a formative encounter with Emanuel Levinas' philosophy of exteriority, one which shook him from his "ontological slumber," and propelled him beyond both Heidegger and a certain form of Hegelian dialectics. While infusing dialectics with what he calls analectics—a process setting out from exteriority—I will argue that Dussel's formulation shares much in its broad strokes with those of Sorel and Fanon, and whereas the previous thinkers formulated rupture in term of first class, then racial and national identities, Dussel will set out similarly from nationalism to later formulate his own version of the counterdiscourse of separation in terms of a reformulated notion of "the people," or popular identity.

A word on terminology: the effort to draw together three thinkers, however historically linked these may be, entails certain terminological problems. While in this introduction I have attempted to speak in terms of *political* conceptions of unity, this will not be possible as a general practice for a variety of reasons. The first is the very different register adopted by the thinkers themselves, whose content I hope to respect. Thus Sorel, a more unabashedly political and practical thinker, speaks in terms of unity and "social harmony." Fanon, who oscillates between the political and the ontological registers, will accordingly speak of both unity and what he calls "universality." In Dussel, finally, the philosophical register assumes center stage with his direct critique of "totality," which is only then translated into terms of political unity. As a result, in an effort to smooth such terminological transitions, we will attempt to speak in the terms offered by the authors, while including parenthetical references to the paradigm of totality as a broad, overarching theme. It is hoped that these references, and specifically the typology of different totalities offered in Martin Jay's seminal *Marxism and Totality*—specifically the general distinction between descriptive and normative totalities, as well as the more powerful conceptions such as expressive and longitudinal totality—will help the reader to grasp the relationship between the thinkers in question in more consistent terms.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> We should not overstate the importance of publication dates: the events that Fanon phenomenologically recounts and analyzes spanned many years, with a particular emphasis on Fanon's experience of racialization upon arriving in France in 1946, a full six years before the text was published and 15 years prior to *Wretched*.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Jay's book expands upon and systematizes his previous five-fold typology of totality

## Counterdiscourse, Anti-Science, Genealogy

As we have said, this project hopes to track genealogically the development of what I call the “*counterdiscourse* of separation,” one which constitutes in fact a “counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse,” and which is as a result doubly-obscured by power and its sometimes unwitting allies. By this I mean that this is a discourse which stands counter to, against, contemporary discourses of unity, while simultaneously standing against the predominant counterdiscourses to that discourse of unity. As a result of this double-critique that our counterdiscourse undertakes, it is repaid with hostility, be it political or theoretical, from both sides. Such double-erasure and double-silencing of an object of study has clear methodological implications. Specifically, in deploying the terms “counterdiscourse” and “genealogy,” I am clearly taking a double methodological cue from Michel Foucault, one which indicates both a form of discourse and the mode of its recovery. In reality, however, this is but a single cue and is hardly limited to method, as the two are utterly inseparable, both from one another and from the subject matter of our study. For some, the two components of this double cue may seem initially perplexing, given a tendency to interpret Foucaultian genealogy as an inherently critical project, one fundamentally incompatible with the positive project of recovering a counterdiscourse.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, tracing the surface of Foucault’s work might give this impression, but we must not forget that lying beneath and slightly to the side of each of Foucault’s critical genealogies is a subjugated counterdiscourse to be excavated. Beneath the critique of medical-psychological containment there lies the counterdiscourse of “madness”; to the critique of carceral containment, the counterdiscourse of “prisoners” (this being, in fact, the context of one of Foucault’s first uses of the term “counterdiscourse”).<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, for the Foucault of the 1975-1976 Collège de France lectures—arguably his most sustained effort at the recovery of a counterdiscourse—there appears to be little in the way of opposition between the negative gesture of critique and the positive task of recovery. Quite to the contrary: as Foucault describes it in the introduction to the lecture series, there appears to exist a circular and complementary relationship between the critical vocation and the content of counterdiscourse. Critique, for Foucault, is able to reveal in a formal sense the existence of subjugated knowledges (“to dig [them] out of the sand”), but it is the very existence of these knowledges, their “reappearance”—this seems to be the crucial point—that makes critique both possible and effective.<sup>22</sup> Genealogical critique *presupposes* subjugated knowledge, and in fact,

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discussed in Martin Jay, “The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno,” in S. Avineri, ed., *Varieties of Marxism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 147-174.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault employs a variety of terms related to, and often substitutable for, counterdiscourse: reverse-discourse, counter-history, counter-memory, etc.

<sup>21</sup> See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, tr. J. Murphy and J. Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006 [1961]); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979 [1975]); for the reference to the “counterdiscourse of prisoners,” see “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze” (1972), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 209.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, tr. D. Macey (New York: Picador, 2003 [1997]), 7; 11. “To put it in concrete terms if you like, it was certainly not a semiology of life in the asylum or a sociology of delinquency that made an effective critique of the asylum or the prison possible; it really was the appearance of historical contents. Quite simply because historical contents alone allow us to see the dividing lines in the confrontations and struggles that functional arrangements or systematic organizations are designed to mask.”

Foucault here credits these disqualified knowledges, these counterdiscourses, with giving his own critical project its “essential strength,” by combining under the heading of genealogy both scholarly and disqualified knowledges:

both a meticulous rediscovery of struggles and the raw memory of fights... we can give the name “genealogy” to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics.<sup>23</sup>

This “provisional definition” of genealogy—arriving in 1976, peculiarly late like the Owl of Minerva—was in reality a clear statement of what Foucault had been practicing for years: a genealogical approach irreducible to pure critique.<sup>24</sup> We should not, however, discount the possibility that Foucault was engaged here in a self-critique of the lopsided emphasis—which privileged critique over counterdiscourse—of previous work (after all, how many pages are devoted to counterdiscourse in *History of Madness* or *Discipline and Punish*?). Regardless, genealogy now enjoyed a clear mandate: “to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle,” in short, to “reactivate” such knowledges.<sup>25</sup>

It is this positive task of genealogy as releasing and reactivating those very subjugated knowledges presupposed in the act of critique that further binds content to method. Genealogies, as Foucault goes on to describe them, “are, quite specifically, antisciences,” by which he means that they facilitate an “insurrection of knowledges” against the “centralizing power-effects” of scientific discourse.<sup>26</sup> Here, with regard to our object of analysis, the concept of “science” quite literally functions as an epistemological stand-in for the discourse of unity we have been discussing, since Foucault understands science as “the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter” knowledges, legitimating some and disqualifying others. “Science,” in this understanding, is the power-laden process of determining what counts and what doesn’t, prompting Foucault’s provocative critique of Marxism (as well as psychoanalysis and semiology): the problem is not that such discourses are or are not scientific, but that they *aspire to scientificity*, and thereby to the systematicity and objectivity associated with the paradigm of totality.<sup>27</sup> Hence genealogy as *method* is doubled in terms of the very revealed *content* that renders it effective: what is recovered is not just *any* historical discourse which has been

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Anna Laura Stoler recognized early on the importance of this reconceptualization or clarification of genealogy in the 1975-1976 lectures; see *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 60-65. For a critique of those who would see Foucault’s project as foreclosing on agency and thereby on the very possibility of counterdiscourse, see Mario Moussa and Ron Scapp, “The Practical Theorizing of Michel Foucault: Politics and Counterdiscourse,” *Cultural Critique* 33 (Spring 1996), 87-112. For Foucault’s own reconceptualization of the concept of critique, see Michel Foucault, “What is Critique?,” tr. L. Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. S. Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 10. Foucault is at great pains to make this claim comprehensive, as is clear in his framing of the relationship between archaeology and genealogy: “To put it in a nutshell: Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them. That just about sums up the overall project” (10-11).

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 9-10.

occluded from sight, but rather those discourses which pose a challenge to prevailing notions and practices of unity.<sup>28</sup>

For Foucault, a central instance of a counterdiscourse to the unifying aspirations of scientific discourse (perhaps *the* paradigmatic counterdiscourse), was what he deemed the “race war,” his discussion of which provides us not only an understanding of the concepts of counterdiscourse and genealogy, but also another central concept for our study of a counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse: that of discursive *recolonization* or *recentering*. Toward the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, according to Foucault, European states consolidated their monopoly on violence and “war was expelled to the limits of the State,” to the border.<sup>29</sup> But this expulsion, this exile of war from society to inter-state relations, was immediately challenged by a discourse which viewed perpetual war as the very basis of society, a discourse of what Foucault terms “race war.” According to this view, “a battlefield runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other... A binary structure runs through society.”<sup>30</sup> Such a discourse, for Foucault, has clear epistemological implications: if society is divided, then the speaking subject cannot aspire to be “universal, totalizing, or neutral,” and as a result, this concept of race war “is always a perspectival discourse. It is interested in the totality only to the extent that it can see it in one-sided terms, distort it and see it from its own point of view. The truth is, in other words, a truth that can be deployed only from its combat position” and this is a counterdiscourse which “tears society apart and speaks of legitimate rights solely in order to declare war on laws.”<sup>31</sup>

In the counterdiscourse of race war, Foucault sketches the parameters for a counterdiscourse to the paradigm of unity—parameters which apply, moreover, to *any* counterdiscourse properly speaking<sup>32</sup>—but he does more than this: he also shows the fundamental dangers of such counterdiscourses and the path of their co-optation, as well as the nominally-opposed dialectical and organicist vehicles of that co-optation. For Foucault,

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<sup>28</sup> Conversely, this explains why some discourses are subjugated while others are not, as the task is to “disinter something that has been hidden,” but not only hidden: “carefully, deliberately, and wickedly misrepresented.” Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 49. While we can find premonitions of Foucault’s analysis in Carl Schmitt’s analysis of the friend-enemy distinction, the normative orientation is in many ways quite the opposite, as Schmitt seeks above all to banish war and enmity to the border (while nevertheless insisting on its politically-generative capacity in interesting ways. See especially *The Concept of the Political*. In an earlier work, Schmitt’s interest in Sorel’s work is clear, but he upbraids the latter for not recognizing that “the energy of nationalism is greater than the myth of class conflict.” *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, tr. E. Kennedy (Boston: MIT Press, 1985 [1923]), 75. And if Schmitt’s later work valorizes the anti-totality moment of partisan warfare, he nevertheless resists the temptation to extend this sympathy to the global civil war he sees in Lenin’s theories. *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*, tr. A.C. Goodson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004 [1963]).

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 52; 73. He continues, describing it lyrically as “the counterhistory of dark servitude and forfeiture... of prophecy and promise... of the secret knowledge that has to be rediscovered and deciphered... of the twin and simultaneous declaration of war and rights” (73).

<sup>32</sup> Here, again, a note of caution is in order: while it is entirely possible that a fundamental relationship could be established between what Foucault is calling the counter-history of “race war” and what we are calling the “counterdiscourse of separation”—along the parameters sketched above—this is not my task here. As with the counterdiscourse of Black Power discussed at the outset, Foucault’s example is meant to be heuristic and instructive as an approach to framing the chapters that follow, which contain within them their *own* framework for understanding the thinkers and texts in question.



counterdiscourse—as a purely reactive phenomenon—is not inherently progressive, and is moreover immediately subjected to the inherent danger that “genealogical fragments... that we have been trying to dig out of the sand... will be recoded, recolonized by the unitary discourses... ready to reannex them and include them.”<sup>33</sup> The discourse of the race war was, according to Foucault, “immediately ambiguous,” put into the service of both popular revolt and aristocratic rebellion, and eventually this originally “decentered” counterdiscourse “will be recentered and will become the discourse of power itself.”<sup>34</sup> The two seemingly-divergent paths by which this recentering would occur map directly onto the two seemingly-opposed conceptions of unity which we have outlined above in the political discourse of Obama and Bush: the (conservative) dialectical and the biological.

The dialectical recoding of the race war, for Foucault, constituted not its philosophical salvation, but rather its *displacement* into the traditional terms of philosophic-juridical discourse:

the dialectic codifies struggle, war, and confrontations into a logic, or so-called logic, of contradiction; it turns them into the twofold process of the totalization and revelation of a rationality that is at once final but also basic, and in any case irreversible. The dialectic, finally, ensures the historical constitution of a universal subject, a reconciled truth, and a right in which all particularities have their ordained place. The Hegelian dialectic and all those that come after it must... be understood as philosophy and right’s colonization... of a historico-political discourse that was both a statement of fact, a proclamation, and a practice of social warfare.<sup>35</sup>

Here, we clearly face a serious challenge, as our project of linking three avowedly dialectical thinkers under the rubric of a Foucaultian genealogy of a counterdiscourse comes up against Foucault’s own open hostility to dialectics. But we must insist that Foucault missteps in his effort at the sweeping generalization of “all those that come after it must...,” especially since his seemingly-unqualified critique of dialectics comes only on the heels of a long list of qualifications to be added to the term “dialectic”: totalization, rationality, irreversibility, universal subject, reconciled truth.<sup>36</sup> What becomes of Foucault’s critique of dialectics if there exists a dialectic which does not carry all of these pernicious attributes? Is there a necessary connection between the dialectical form and totalization, reconciliation, universality, etc.? This is a question that drives the project that follows. As we have seen above, the ultimately misleading and conservative dialectic of Obama is irreconcilable to that proposed by advocates of black power, and similarly, the dialectical view endorsed by Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel will bear within it both a trenchant critique of precisely what it is that Foucault so thoroughly scorns in the prevailing dialectical perspectives (be they Marxian or Hegelian-Sartrean) of the day as well as maintaining a central place for the discourse of “social warfare” that Foucault here protects so

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<sup>33</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 11. This subject is discussed as well by Moussa and Scapp, who speak of the “insidious” capacity of hegemonic discourse to include its opposite, arguing that “counterdiscourses almost inevitably become discourses.” Moussa and Scapp, “The Practical Theorizing of Michel Foucault,” 92; 106.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 49; 61.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 58.

<sup>36</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth discussing the degree to which Foucault’s critique *does indeed* apply to much of the dialectical, and particularly Marxist, tradition. From Lenin’s definition of dialectics as “the unity of opposites” (as a privileging of unity) to Mao’s codification of the one dividing into two (generally without remainder), Foucault’s critique does indeed hold in many cases.

jealously.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the three thinkers considered in the chapters that follow seek to transform and reformulate dialectics—or a possible dialectics—in a manner that would be compatible with Foucault’s critique.

In fact, it is arguably the case that it is precisely Foucault’s clarification of the positive tasks of genealogy that renders his thought compatible with not all, but at least some dialectical perspectives. By opening up a space for discursive opposition (especially in the form of the binary opposition that he deems “race war”), and by formulating genealogy as a specific form of enabling that opposition, of “playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or nonlegitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter them,” Foucault tacitly allows those released opposites to then come into play, driving social transformation.<sup>38</sup> While certainly not compatible with what it is that Foucault most loathes about dialectics—namely, teleology and progressive-historical unity—this view is in many ways compatible with the self-professed “dialectical” view of the thinkers considered below, in which the subjective moment of rupture (for Foucault, “social warfare”) is privileged at the expense of any final resolution, any determinist progression, in short, any foreseeable horizon for substantive unity. It remains to be seen, and we will discuss later, the precise contours of this compatibility.

If the dialectical recoding of the race war allowed (as in Obama’s discourse) for the recognition of a lack of unity in the present, the “biological transcription” of the race war (which shares more with the Bush notion of unity) constituted a much more obvious process of “recentering,” whereby the race war was deprived of its original class content and reconciled with the conservatism of a preordained and essential unity. In this process of “recolonization,” struggle is displaced from a binary division *within* society to a division *between* society and its liminal and external biological foes, against whom the title of Foucault’s lectures—“society must be defended”—is deployed as a genocidal weapon.<sup>39</sup> As we will see below, moving beyond Foucault, the dual nature of this recentering process will be key to our study, providing as it does a concept suitable for understanding the war on two fronts faced by the counterdiscourse of separation, as well as its peculiar status (shared with what Foucault terms the “race war”) of a counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse.

Furthermore, Foucault provides as well a way of grasping the relationship between the thinkers we are discussing, of drawing them together under the heading of a common counterdiscourse. While some might interpret the genealogical impetus as pulling apart into its distinct, local moments the very theoretical lineage that I hope to discuss, Foucault himself would come to insist on what he termed in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* a “rule of double-conditioning” which functions to strategically unite the tactical moments comprising a discourse of power, even going so far as to insist that, “No ‘local center,’ no ‘pattern of transformation’ could function if...it did not eventually enter into an over-all strategy.”<sup>40</sup> Power

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<sup>37</sup> We could add: in the latter two thinkers, Foucault’s concern with “colonization” would acquire a concreteness that even his own formulation lacked.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 9. This, I believe, is suggested as well by Richard Terdiman, who speaks of a “dialectic of discursive struggle”; see *Discourse/Counterdiscourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 68-69.

<sup>39</sup> It is this biological conception of a centered race war that we can see in Moishe Postone’s seminal article “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust,’” *New German Critique* 19, n. 1 (Winter 1980), 97-115.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 99.

relations, in this view, “form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together... Major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations.”<sup>41</sup> Just as discourse is doubly-conditioned—spanning the local to the global, the tactical to the strategic—so too could we say that counterdiscourse I hope to excavate is equally doubly-conditioned.

Put differently, genealogy in this view cannot be *pure* insurrection, since what stands against the strategic unity of power (e.g., a counterdiscourse) finds itself drawn into an equally strategic relationship in the process by which it is excavated or assumes that position of opposition. Counterdiscourse shadows and stalks institutionalized discourse, both at the local level of resistances to specific institutional moments and at the more general strategic level of grasping and opposing the strategic unity of the governing discourse itself. As a counterdiscourse, therefore, what I am calling separation cannot lay claim to a particularly continuous historical lineage: while historical connections and relationships do indeed exist, and we will take note of these, we should not expect this counterdiscourse to be continuously visible to the historical eye. Emerging as it does in opposition, we might justifiably expect the counterdiscourse of separation to emerge periodically in response to the strategically-continuous claims of sovereign power and the established counterdiscourse of Marxism, and perhaps most often when these discourses essentially coincide (e.g. when the logic of sovereignty prevails within Marxism as an emphasis on political unity over class struggle, be this in Stalinist Russia or the electoral dealings of Eurocommunism).<sup>42</sup> As a result, we must be sensitive to these momentary irruptions, these non-continuous interventions into and interruptions of discourse, without allowing this irruptive nature to obscure the oppositional alliance that these moments constitute.<sup>43</sup>

Like Foucault’s genealogy of the counterdiscourse of the “race war”—a genealogy which in many ways provides the parameters for my own project—the analysis I hope to perform will be genealogical in both method and content. The counterdiscourse of separation is more than merely the doubly-excluded phenomenon described below, it is also an incarnation of Foucaultian anti-science itself, and it was this latter characteristic (the anti-unity impulse it shares with the counterdiscourse of the race war) which in many ways would explain the former (its political co-optation and/or exile). And crucial to my argument will be the degree to which this counterdiscourse resists what Foucault calls the process of “recentering”—the transposition and accommodation to discourses and practices whereby it finds itself “recolonized by... unitary discourses”—whether through biological-organic or dialectical means.<sup>44</sup> There is certainly a danger here, one which Foucault himself marks in his critique of the dialectic, and the degree to

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<sup>41</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 94. While power isn’t the result of sovereign decisions, tactical decisions have a logic and as a result “end by forming comprehensive systems,” and this is what Foucault means with the claim that “power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (95).

<sup>42</sup> Indeed as a *counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse*, we might expect such appearances to be even more sporadic.

<sup>43</sup> Our emphasis here on two thinkers in particular should not undermine the “oppositional unity” of the counterdiscourse of separation, which can be argued to include a number of other thinker and an even greater number of thinkers who coincide in part with its contents. Excluded from this study for reasons of length and overall coherence are thinkers from what I consider the “anti-Gramscian” tradition in Italian Marxism (including Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri)—Gramsci’s own debt to Sorel notwithstanding—as well as the Sorel-inspired theorist of revolt Albert Camus.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 11.

which the counterdiscourse of separation resists such recoding or recentering will depend heavily on the character of the dialectical movement that it sets into play.

But here we move beyond Foucault in two ways: firstly by extension and secondly through a leap to the meta level. As to the first, we employ the designation “counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse” as a linear extension of Foucault’s framework: while Foucault genealogically recovers the counterdiscourse of the race war and tracks the process by which it was historically recolonized or recentered, we pause to think more directly about the discursive constellation that such a process leaves in its wake. Foucault speaks of the double-transcription of the counterdiscourse of the race war—its divergent transposition into dialectical and organic discourses of unity—but it is worth reflecting on the *difference* between these two transcriptions. In effect, the bifurcation of transcriptions—of biological and dialectical—is what gives rise to the situation of a “counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse.” That is, Foucault’s “race war” found itself recolonized by both a conservative understanding of organic unity (in Nazism) and the nominal counterdiscourse of Marxist dialectics (at its most vulgar, Stalinism). Remaining resistance to unity that would seek to follow in the footsteps of the race war would consequently be relegated to a position of double-opposition, fighting the war on two fronts we have mentioned above.

Secondly, I hope to draw Foucault’s formulation of genealogy, counterdiscourse, and race war, onto a more general level, perhaps against Foucault’s own will. What I mean is this: beyond genealogical recovery of particular counterdiscourses, I hope that this study will help us to think, however tentatively, about more general questions of identity and unity, of the process whereby identity sets itself against unity, the stakes of such a positioning and the function of essentialism therein, the chain reaction this can under certain circumstances provoke, and the dangers of recolonization and recentering which have threatened and continue to threaten nominal counterdiscourses, be these Marxism, theories of identity, or Third World nationalism. To do so is to draw Foucault out of the epistemologically safe ground of diagnosing power and into the generative danger of conflictive political practices, and the fact that such practices have been and continue to be identified in dialectical terms poses both a possible extension of Foucault’s framework and a challenge to his reductive view of dialectics.

### **Black *Anti*-Jacobins?**

A final note before we begin. Latent in all that has been said above is an ambitious comparative project, one which draws upon but transcends what currently goes by the name “comparative political theory.” If we strip away the thinkers and the methods, we are left with four concepts which are generally considered to be utterly irreconcilable: class, race, nation, and people. But this irreconcilability often finds its historical roots in the discredited naturalisms of the past: infrastructural assumptions about class, biological conceptions of race, the nation as *a priori*, or the people as a combination of race and nation. In other words, I am suggesting that the incompatibility many find between, e.g., race and class, is rooted in untenable and often discredited claims about the biological nature of the first or the objective existence of the second. As should be clear by this point, none of the thinkers discussed in this study would go in for such assumptions, but nor would these thinkers adopt the contemporary posture of abandoning identity *tout court* as a result. By drawing them into dialogue, then, I hope to draw these identities into the common orbit of a specific *practice* embodied in the counterdiscourse of

separation. The advantage of this optic, I argue, is that in focusing on the process of identification—the dialectic wherein one both identifies *as* and *is identified as*—we are better able to grasp what these purportedly incompatible concepts in fact share.

If there has been in the past an exemplary model for the sort of comparative political theorizing I hope to undertake here, for the joint analysis of race, class, nation, and people, it took the form of C.L.R. James' epic effort—in *The Black Jacobins*—to recover the memory of what was perhaps the most systematically expunged and “disavowed” event in “modern” history: the Haitian Revolution.<sup>45</sup> But while the recovery of historical memory is urgent in and of itself, this was far from James' primary task. Rather, he sought—in a process of juxtaposition and direct analogy—to disrupt prevailing progressive narratives which we have seen to be complicit with the project of longitudinal totality. The full implications of James' contribution to such comparative political theorizing have yet to be fully borne out, and if I could contribute to his project I would consider it a blessing.

The radical kernel of *Black Jacobins* lies in the fact that it was not merely a history of the revolution in Haiti, but simultaneously of that seminal event with which it ran in parallel: the French Revolution. But even this radical juxtaposition—embodied in the descriptor “parallel”—fails to capture the project, since in reality these revolutionary processes were not perpetually held in equidistance from one another, but rather fully intertwined and, finally, entangled. Were it not for Thermidor, Toussaint would never have been thrust toward independence; were it not for France's utter reliance on the colonial economy, Bonaparte would never have given the final and decisive push. And bluntly put, slavery constituted “the economic basis of the French Revolution.”<sup>46</sup> Even beyond this totally-enmeshed relationship, James engages in a process of direct analogy: it was not that a slave rebellion or anti-colonial revolution had occurred alongside a bourgeois revolution in the metropole. This already would constitute a severe disruption of progressive historiography. Instead, James shows the interchangeability and even contamination of fundamental social categories: the French masses were analogous to the black slaves (and notably not to the “white rabble” of the colony), the French aristocracy to colonial planters, and the French bourgeoisie to the privileged Mulattoes of San Domingo.

Hence rather than a heroically creative class, the bourgeoisie—like the Mulattoes—was, as an “intermediate” class, politically unstable.<sup>47</sup> “A good bourgeois,” James observed “had an immense respect for royal blood,” and the class's political behavior would bear this out, as the French bourgeoisie found itself constantly divided, both for fear of the domestic masses and over the hypocrisy of its own colonial policy.<sup>48</sup> While the masses drove the bourgeois revolution from the left, their representatives—intoxicated with their own principles—denounced racism as “aristocracy of the skin,” and the more conservative sectors of the bourgeoisie repeatedly repressed and divided these masses.<sup>49</sup> The slaves, for whom Toussaint's label of “sansculottes” was applicable in a more literal sense, took more seriously the watchwords of the French Revolution, and these “half-savage slaves of San Domingo were showing themselves subject to

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<sup>45</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [1938]). On the disavowal of the Haitian Revolution, see Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 207; 230.

<sup>48</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 70-71; 80.

<sup>49</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 75; 120; 68.

the *same historical laws* as the advanced workers of revolutionary Paris.”<sup>50</sup> Beyond even analogy, the formerly-enslaved black masses even enjoyed advantages over their continental counterparts, specifically that they were not “so permeated by the ideas of the ruling class as a French worker or peasant would have been.”<sup>51</sup> In sum: “Had the monarchists been white, the bourgeoisie brown, and the masses of France black, the French Revolution would have gone down in history as a race war.”<sup>52</sup>

There is something very fruitful to be found in the space between James’ revisioning of the French Revolution as a “race war” and Foucault’s own formulation, in the same terms, of the binary division of European societies. This masterful and ambitious project of juxtaposition and analogy—besides clearing the way for a reunification of race, class, and nation—is fatal to all narratives of inevitable historical progress, of that optimistic “longitudinal” understanding of totality we are interrogating. Slavery, feudalism, and capitalism coexist in a mutually-reinforcing manner, and Marxist categories are projected backwards—no doubt against the best advice of the reigning Comintern Marxism of which James was a dissident element—with the black slaves effectively prefiguring the European proletariat itself:

The slaves worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors. But working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat *than any group of workers in existence at the time*, and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organized mass movement.<sup>53</sup>

And were this unmitigated assault on progressive narratives not obvious from James’ conceptual transpositions, *Black Jacobins* also sets out to drive the point home in no uncertain terms: African peasants were “superior” to European serfs, and—the nail in the coffin of longitudinal totality—European “civilization” is an education in nothing so much as brutality.<sup>54</sup>

With this phrase, and perhaps inevitably, James also addresses a subject of more than merely methodological concern for this project: the conceptual chasm that is perceived as dividing race from class from nation. While his own observations draw from the specific manifestations that these categories assumed in a particular historical context, we can nevertheless draw inspiration from James’ bridging of the race-class-nation divide in an insistently political and non-reductive way. He shows how what he terms “race feeling” waxes and wanes in response to its strategic appropriation by the powerful and to nationalistic irruptions, demonstrating the conditions and criteria of its reinforcement or dissipation while not losing sight of its inescapable parameters. While insisting that the distinction between Mulattoes and blacks “was no question of color, but crudely a question of class” (i.e. of the economic trappings of freedom) he was not averse to demonstrating how the political reality of the

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<sup>50</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 147; 198; 243, my emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 258.

<sup>52</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 128. Alternatively: “It was the quarrel between bourgeoisie and monarchy that brought the Paris masses on the political stage. It was the quarrel between whites and Mulattoes that woke the sleeping slaves” (73).

<sup>53</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 85-86, my emphasis. This gesture is also visible in James’ emphasis on the mass component of the French Revolution itself, a component which, if not subject to eventual repression and policing, bore the potential to *drive this “bourgeois” revolution beyond its own class limits*.

<sup>54</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 7; 88, 212. This latter point would be best espoused later by fellow Communist and Fanon mentor Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. J. Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review, 2000 [1956]).

threatened return to slavery gave race a certain tangible quality, thereby prefiguring Fanon's upending of the relationship between base and superstructure.<sup>55</sup> And all this is even without mentioning the manifold other ways in which James coincides in his thinking with Sorel before him and Fanon after.<sup>56</sup>

Hence we hope, however immodest such a hope may be, to walk in the footsteps of this radical comparative theoretical project, demonstrating the coexistence of parallel doctrines in the contexts of French syndicalism and African anti-colonialism, which together constitute a counterdiscourse in which race, class, and nation are neither distinguished categorically from nor reduced to one another. But in doing so are immediately confronted by an inevitable concern: if we are deeming the counterdiscourse running from Sorel to Fanon to be "anti-Jacobin" in its content, then how compatible could that lineage be with the bold assertion contained in James' title? This question, to which we will return, is one which might have the effect of complicating Sorel's simplistic opposition to the legacy of the French Revolution. For Sorel and Fanon, Jacobinism is taken to refer to the state as a structure of repressive minority rule, and while James posits an analogical relationship between Toussaint and Robespierre, this comparison has its limits. Despite the fact that the "black consul" Toussaint was in many ways a "born aristocrat," Robespierre was much more literally "born" into the bourgeoisie, and as a result, hit the wall of his class much earlier than would Toussaint who, after all, had been born a slave and could endorse black freedom with fewer reservations than could Robespierre endorse the unmitigated power of the French masses.<sup>57</sup> While Toussaint's aristocratic tendencies would eventually lead to his downfall—as he took for granted the black masses while courting white elites—this took place at a qualitatively later stage than Robespierre's betrayal, and hence the counter-revolutionary continuity of the process had a natural limit. In this interstitial distance between Robespierre and Toussaint, and further, between Toussaint and the black masses he more-or-less faithfully represented, there is more than enough space for agreement between C.L.R. James and the subjects of this study on the subject of "Jacobinism."

Here Arendt in her critical zeal tacitly attests to this Jamesian homology between metropole and colony: both the slaves and the unfortunate *malheureux* of the French Revolution "carried with them necessity, to which they had been subject as long as memory reaches, together with the violence that had always been used to overcome necessity. Both together, necessity and violence, made them appear irresistible—*la puissance de la terre*."<sup>58</sup> But to this *puissance* celebrated by Saint-Just, we reply with a different constellation, one which spans *not* the distance between the Bastille and San Domingo—as in the Jamesian version—but rather between a *puissance* more directly associated with the 20<sup>th</sup>-century French working class and a *puissance de la terre* (and later, arguably, a *pouvoir*) corresponding not to the French masses, but instead to an equally disparate and desperate colonized mass known as the *damnés de la terre*.

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<sup>55</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 166; 268.

<sup>56</sup> With Sorel, James coincides most strikingly in his analysis of the continuity and conservation of the *ancien régime* in the French Revolution (an analysis shared by Tocqueville, among others) (*Black Jacobins*, 78). With Fanon, he coincides even more: for example, on the colonial lesson of the effectiveness of force (82), as well as more generally in his diagnosis of the operations of race and internalized racism and his indictment of civilization. With both, he agrees on the fundamental distinction between two forms of violence: that of the oppressors and that of the oppressed (89), although he clearly would disagree with describing the former as unequivocally "Jacobin."

<sup>57</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 177; 147; 198.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1965 [1963]), 110.

## Chapter 1 – The Origins of Anti-Jacobin Myth: Sorel’s *Trial of Socrates*

In the three pairs of chapters that constitute this study, we will chart the ways in which three thinkers—in different contexts and with different theoretical tools at their disposal—grapple with prevailing conceptions of unity in political and social life, before each in his own way breaking with such approaches and opting instead for a theory and a politics of rupture, conflict, and what we have termed “separation.” While, as we will see, Fanon’s turn to separation would be perhaps the most anguished of the three, for both he and Dussel, serious and palpable premonitions of this turn would be visible even in their earliest works.<sup>1</sup> While part of what I will be arguing below is that this continuity holds for Sorel as well—drawing together the two works considered here: his 1889 *Trial of Socrates* and 1906 *Reflections on Violence*—it is worth pausing momentarily on the radical *divergences* that one could—and many have—identified as distinguishing Sorel’s early from his late work. While such a reflection does not in any way undermine the very real continuities existing throughout Sorel’s body of work, it does nevertheless give us a sense of the dramatic extremity of the shift he would undergo.<sup>2</sup> Tracking the precise relationship between dramatic shift and underlying continuity is part of what we hope to accomplish not only in this pair of chapters, but in those that follow as well. In an effort to draw out the sheer severity of this shift in Sorel’s work, this chapter analyzes one of his earliest and most peculiar books: *The Trial of Socrates*.

In contrast to the two authors who complete this study of what I call the “counterdiscourse of separation,” the Sorel from which we begin is one who was situated entirely *outside* this counterdiscourse. In other words, he had up to that point remained fully beholden to the theoretical paradigm of totality and the political aspiration toward unity, or in his own term—later to be deployed with bitter venom—“social harmony.” Writing from the French provinces and from a position *outside* social struggles (these political and theoretical outsides being intimately connected), the elements of what would comprise Sorel’s mature theory of working-class separation would appear in a sort of nostalgic suspension: with nothing to seize materially in the present (except for the sake of seething critique), both his anti-Jacobin egalitarianism and the mythical form whose content it would provide remained resolutely focused on a largely imagined ancient past.<sup>3</sup> It would not be until later that Sorel would discover the proletariat as the material bearer of this mythical anti-Jacobinism.

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<sup>1</sup> For Fanon, as we will see, this shift occurs *within* his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, which in many ways derives its very structure from that anguished transition. For Dussel, it has already largely occurred by the time he pens the first book in our discussion, *Philosophy of Liberation*. For Sorel, by contrast, the shift emerges in even more extreme form: from a position *outside* the counterdiscourse of separation in his *Trial of Socrates*, he nevertheless enters that counterdiscourse within a few short years.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley rightly criticizes Meisel, who had denied continuity in Sorel’s work on the argument that *The Trial of Socrates* lacks an understanding of the social myth. But Stanley’s own effort to unite Sorel’s work is unnecessarily evasive on this point: he finds such continuity in Sorel’s moral vision when it can be located as easily in the origins of social myth embedded within *The Trial*. John Stanley, *The Sociology of Virtue: The Political and Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 28. James H. Meisel, *The Genesis of Georges Sorel* (Ann Arbor: George Wahr, 1951), 60.

<sup>3</sup> In Jay’s terminology, this would constitute a pessimistic version of “normative totality” akin to Adorno’s “albeit faint, ‘hunger for wholeness’” (“The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno,” 163).



## Approaching Sorel, Situating *The Trial*

Any effort to work seriously with the texts of turn-of-the-century French syndicalist Georges Sorel is certain to be met with an initial question: Why? The incredulous tone of the question is followed by string of ugly-sounding adjectives expressing both intellectual worries (inconsistent, unsystematic, insufficiently academic) and political red lights (irrational, violent, in short: fascist). The fact that Sorel's work is so universally reviled has much to tell us about the *position* of his thought within our counterdiscourse, and moreover provides some insight into what it is that we mean when we describe the latter as a *counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse*. Sorel would find himself in opposition not only to a bankrupt and decadent European capitalism, but also in an equally hostile position of opposition to some sectors of the nominal antithesis of this historical constellation: Marxist-inspired European socialism.

When my enemy of my enemy is also my enemy, I am left with few friends, and such has been largely the fate of Sorelian thought, relegated for the most part to obscurity, and only occasionally inspiring revolutionary irruptions into radical thought and movements. But despite being nearly universally reviled by Marxists and revolutionaries, Sorel would consider himself both during much of his career. It is by excavating the thought of the counterdiscourse to the nominal counterdiscourse of official Marxism that we can best approach an understanding of the ways and moments in which variants of Marxism came to be, in Foucault's terms, "centered" as discourses of power, converted from tools for radical transformation into governing doctrines (whether in power or in the opposition). As we will see, Sorel is a resolute critic of so many elements of "centered" Marxism: its scientific pretensions, its embrace of totality, its objectivism and economic determinism, its utopian traces. It is this resoluteness that gives Sorelian thought its value, as against these, he will offer a similarly resolute and radically subjectivist account of revolutionary identity, a mythical mechanism loaded with hatred of the state, no matter who is in possession of it at the moment.

Many writers focus exclusively on the erratic political transformations that mark Sorel's intellectual trajectory. Inconsistency, we are told, is the hallmark of a thinker who is not to be taken seriously. Few, however, reflect sufficiently on the profound inconsistency that characterized Sorel's political *context*: from the early Third Republic to the Dreyfus Affair, to the rise of parliamentary socialism and the syndicalist movement, World War I and French proto-fascism. These were exceptionally turbulent times. That a political thinker not maintain absolute consistency during such upheavals seems unsurprising to say the least.<sup>4</sup> Sorel's work, we will see, is indeed consistent when viewed from a certain angle or refracted through the lens of certain criteria. Specifically, we will see that both the mythical form and the anti-Jacobin content of Sorel's mature *political* theory can be derived from his earliest works. What remained necessary in these early works was to lift these elements off their seemingly-solid foundation in atop paradigm of totality, to raze this foundation to the ground, and to allow Sorel's counterdiscourse of separation to stand upon its own two feet. By 1906, this would be accomplished, and by showing that the parameters of Sorel's mature political theory were largely in place at the very beginning of his philosophical career, we can reaffirm the coherence of his

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<sup>4</sup> Moreover, when we note that the "consistency" of many political actors of the time derived from an exclusive focus on electoral opportunism, while that of many philosophers derived from a hermetic exclusion of the political realm, we are in a better position to interrogate the virtues of the political-intellectual consistency that a thinker like Sorel fails to live up to.

thought while simultaneously disentangling several persistent confusions regarding the political implications of his work.

Georges Sorel's re-staging of the trial and execution of Socrates—published in 1889 as *Le Procès de Socrate*—was written in the French provinces, and this detail is of no small importance to the form that the book takes. While certainly “somewhat amateurish” as Roth has claimed, Sorel's “isolation in the provinces” impacted more than style and historical detail, and the work would “set the tone for all his subsequent work” in more ways than one.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, as an outsider to fashionable Parisian philosophical debates, Sorel's approach would perhaps inevitably appear somewhat eclectic, and this fact would be compounded by two elements. Firstly, Sorel's sources were limited to the texts available to him at the provincial library at Perpignan. Secondly, Sorel's formal training was in engineering, and it was as a civil servant engineering roads and bridges that he would, in 1879, settle in Perpignan, in the Eastern Pyrenees. Thus while Sorel was by any standard highly-educated, he was effectively an autodidact when it came to philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

This status as a *philosophical* outsider, moreover, would be compounded by Sorel's position as a *political* outsider, a result of his lack of contact with nascent political—and specifically working-class—movements. This disconnect is visible in his critique of the Paris Commune: while possibly admiring the courage of the Communards, Sorel later recalls being concerned by their “imprudence.”<sup>7</sup> However, while born into the *petit bourgeoisie*, two events would “separate [...] him from the life of his class” while simultaneously informing his later theoretical development.<sup>8</sup> First, his father, a wine trader, would be bankrupted on at least one occasion. Secondly, and more importantly, it was fear of an already-threatening *déclassement* that would lead Sorel's parents to deny him permission to marry his common-law partner, a near-illiterate former chambermaid named Marie-Euphrasie David. Here class and faith intersect quite clearly, as they would in Sorel's later proletarian myth: much like Sorel's own “mystical”

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<sup>5</sup> Jack J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 3-4. This continuity notwithstanding, Sorel would later, in a letter to Benedetto Croce, partly disavow *The Trial* and discourage its republication (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 47).

<sup>6</sup> See Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 2. Sorel's biographer, Pierre Andreu, provides a list of the works Sorel consulted in the library at Perpignan (*Notre Maître*, 320-323). Sorel's turn to philosophical self-education would only begin in earnest as he neared retirement and middle age. This period, which has been described as a “re-education” and which he himself terms an “apprenticeship,” had as its first phase the *pars destruens*, a ground-clearing exercise in which Sorel sought to “free [*délivrer*]” himself from his prior education, “to efface [*nettoyer*] from my memory the ideas which had been thrust [*imposées*] upon it.” Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, tr. T. E. Hulme, revised J. Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1908]), 5; *Réflexions*, 3-4. It is this early period, before Sorel turned once again to the positive task of learning (a turn which would coincide with his engagement with Marxism in the mid-1890s) that frames *Le Procès*. Sorel's autodidacticism is reflected in the eclectic variety of subjects he addresses during the late 1880s: from non-Euclidean geometry to physical causality to the Army of the Eastern Pyrenees during the French Revolution. Sorel would later recall: “I am a self-taught man [*autodidacte*] exhibiting to other people the notebooks which have served for my own instruction” (*Reflections*, 5; *Réflexions*, 3).

<sup>7</sup> Sorel, “Mes raisons du syndicalisme” (1910), in *Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Paris: Rivière, 1929), 249. Cited in Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 2. At the time, Sorel was a legitimist supporter of Henri V. This is perhaps unsurprising given Sorel's conservative Catholic upbringing, but such an anti-Revolutionary position could also be seen as contributing to Sorel's later anti-Jacobin political orientation (and occasional sympathy with royalists). Roth describes Sorel during this period as “anti-political” for his notable disdain for all of the existing political currents of the time (*Cult of Violence*, 3).

<sup>8</sup> Andreu, *Notre Maître Georges Sorel* (Paris: Grasset, 1953), ch. 1; cited in John L. Stanley, ed., *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987 [1976]), 5. Stanley is dubious of the importance of this experience.

mother, Marie-Euphrasie was both austere in her faith and a “woman of the people” who “made it possible for him to transcend his own class origins.”<sup>9</sup>

Sorel’s first two books appeared in 1889, the year of the centennial celebration of the French Revolution, and were nominally devoted to education. But the latter ought not divert our attention from the former, since education constituted the central battleground upon which contemporary debates regarding the legacy of 1789 (and 1794) were fought out.<sup>10</sup> Grappling with the aftermath of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Sorel would begin to engage simultaneously with the work of Ernest Renan and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in an effort to understand the lack of heroism shown by the French. The narrow context of these early books, then, was the Third Republic, which for Sorel and many contemporaries rivaled the military defeats of the Franco-Prussian War in its shortage of heroism. Renan’s 1871 treatise *Le Réforme intellectuelle et morale* placed the blame for the military defeat and subsequent moral decline of the Republic squarely on the shoulders of a degenerate educational system.

Later in the decade, education minister Jules Ferry took his secularizing educational reforms to new extremes, primarily by strengthening the state’s hand. To this trend toward secular education, Sorel would respond with a first book—his *Contribution à l’étude profane de la Bible*—which sought to vindicate the Bible as a heroic pedagogical text, and to recommend its inclusion in university curricula.<sup>11</sup> It was Sorel’s search for heroism—not his personal religious views—that brought him to write about the Bible (this was, after all, a contribution to “secular study” as the title suggested). Indeed, he recognized some benefits of *laïcité* in education, and followed Renan in blaming Jesuits for the sorry state of French education. But it was above all the transformed role of the state—reeking of the Jacobin excesses of the Revolution—that turned Sorel against secularization, and the Bible was then celebrated as a text which could “initiate the heroic life” in part by “arrest[ing] the propagation of the revolutionary idea.”<sup>12</sup> Jacobins, Jesuits, and (as we will see) Socratics all sought to disrupt traditional education: in the context of the French “Generation of 1870” this could only mean the annihilation of what little virtue remained in the Republic. Confronting similar concerns, both Renan and Proudhon would turn to the ancient Greeks as for inspiration on the subject of heroism, and to the ancient *polis* as a harmonious and unified whole comprising “the family, the church, and the state at the same time,” thereby drawing Sorel’s acute gaze in the same direction.<sup>13</sup> It was in this context that, alongside his study of the Bible, Sorel would pursue a much more closely-researched and coherent—but nevertheless quite shocking—study of ancient virtue and the birth of Western Philosophy.

Sorel’s *Trial of Socrates*, like the *Contribution*, a sort of educational treatise, and he neatly summarizes the centrality of education in ancient Athens in the following terms: “the chief aim of ancient education was the preparation for war: this education was not very complex, and

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<sup>9</sup> Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 26. While Roth (*Cult of Violence*, 3) claims that Sorel showed little interest in the French Revolution in these texts, such a position is erroneous given the centrality of “Jacobinism” to Sorel’s early political theory.

<sup>11</sup> Sorel, *Contribution à l’étude profane de la Bible* (Paris: Auguste Ghio, 1889). Here, Sorel already demonstrates a Viconian slant, since the heroism of the Bible and its validity as a text derive from the novelty of the ideas it expresses—the historical *corsi* the Christians represented—whereas we will see that in *Le Procès de Socrate*, the philosophers were seen as representatives of a decadent social class which marked Athenian decline.

<sup>12</sup> Sorel *Contribution*, cited in *From Georges Sorel*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 27.

consequently it was accessible to all citizens.”<sup>14</sup> While exceedingly straightforward, this passage contains all of the essential elements of Sorel’s appreciation of Athenian virtue: its martial nature, its simplicity, and its universality. Moreover, we can already perceive here a crude outline of how this virtuous constellation is arranged. It was from its locus in the family that Athenian education derived its simplicity and universality, and it is the nexus between the family and the defense of the homeland—possible only through a specific *type* of military doctrine—that made radical Athenian democracy (and the virtue it cultivated) possible. In tracking the decline of this virtue, Sorel would indict and convict, in equal part, those preaching “rhetoric” (*rhétorique*) and “truth” (*alétheia*), but this was not accomplished by a collapsing of the two categories, Sophists with Socratics. Instead, while Sorel sees the *actual* trial of Socrates as nothing less than utterly farcical, the first philosopher was nevertheless guilty of a social crime, and one more serious in its political implications than that of the Sophists.<sup>15</sup>

In mounting the prosecution for this second trial against Socrates, Sorel deploys a method that would inform his later studies. If one of Sorel’s later contributions to Marxism would be an arguably unprecedented emphasis on ideology, one which prefigured in many ways later developments in Western Marxism, this critique of ideology as it appears in *The Trial of Socrates* and later texts would remain firmly tied to and measured by material social and class conditions. Here, as later in the *Reflections*, there will be no final instance: the prevailing constellation of social classes informs and is in turn informed by philosophical developments and their translation into popular discourse. However, the central elements and institutions mediating this dialectical relationship between the ideal and the material would change according to the context, and in what follows, we will discuss those pertaining to Sorel’s analysis of ancient Athens.

In this latter case, those mediating institutions are two—the family and the military—and the vehicle for their establishment and preservation but one: the Homeric epic. And the pernicious ideology which threatens to undermine these is none other than Socratic philosophy. The strength of Sorel’s materialist indictment of Socratic ideology, Neil McInnes tells us, rests in its peculiar status as “a sociological study of Socratism taken not just as a set of propositions about society but *as itself a social phenomenon*.”<sup>16</sup> This investigation of the nascent philosophy

<sup>14</sup> Sorel, *Le Procès de Socrate: Examen critique des thèses socratiques* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), 172; *From Georges Sorel*, 62. Where available, I also cite existing English translations of Sorel’s works.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Procès*, 106. Show trials, by their very simplicity, separate politics (as opportunistic and zero-sum point-scoring) from philosophy (the search for truth), but whereas Plato saw this as a general rule, Sorel sees it instead as conditional upon the trial as a form (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 31). Sorel’s anti-Jacobinism allows his hatred of political trials to seep through, visible despite his condemnation of Socrates. He concludes: “One might say, in a general manner, that great political trials are all corrupt by their very nature... The more important the cause and the higher up [*élevée*] the accused, the less fair one can expect the outcome to be.” *Le Procès*, 242. Sorel refers directly to the 1815 trial and execution of Michel Ney, one of Napoleon’s eighteen marshals, later tried and executed for treason to send a message to Napoleon’s other marshals. Like Ney, Socrates too was killed to send a message: Anytus believed that by striking Socrates he could strike terror into the hearts of the Sophists who were undermining Athenian virtue (*Le Procès*, 241). This hatred of the injustice of political trials would play a key role in Sorel’s later political transformations in the context of another trial: when anti-Semitic hysteria led to the accusation of Alfred Dreyfus on charges of espionage, Sorel would become a partisan of the Dreyfusard cause, and even after breaking with the political opportunism (and Jacobinism) that followed in its wake, he would maintain that the trial was unjust. Indeed, his position on the Dreyfusards would parallel his position on Socrates. See *La Révolution Dreyfusienne* (Paris: Rivière, 1909).

<sup>16</sup> Neil McInnes, “Georges Sorel on the Trial of Socrates,” *Politics: Australian Journal of Political Science* 10, n. 1 (May 1975), 40, my emphasis. This materialistic and sociological approach to philosophy—and indeed the

as a social phenomenon has two elements, one properly sociological and one which is nominally more philosophical. Firstly, we will see that Sorel accuses Socrates of embodying and contributing to a broader shift in Athenian society, undermining the foundations of Athenian virtue (specifically, the family-military nexus) while empowering its enemies (professional intellectuals and professional politicians). This is a crime whose guilt is shared in equal part by Sophists and Socratics, and which lays the groundwork for oligarchy in the form of “plutocracy.” Secondly, however, the Socratic-Platonic attachment to truth and wisdom as absolutes—which, as we will see, contaminates their very notion of virtue, or *arête*—makes them qualitatively *more* dangerous in Sorel’s eyes than even the much-maligned Sophists. It is through their belief that they represent absolute truth that the Socratics would lay the groundwork for a phenomenon against which Sorel would position himself during his entire life: Jacobinism.

### The Homeric epic: totality’s cement

If we have seen that *The Trial of Socrates* constituted “a genealogy of morals based partly on the superiority of poetry over philosophy,” we have also seen it as an attempt—undertaken in plain reference to Sorel’s contemporary France—to identify those “political and ideological movements that sabotaged the poetic spirit... [of] Homeric education.”<sup>17</sup> Here the correlation between virtue and education is far from accidental: if Sorel’s admittedly idealized view was one in which the pre-Socratic Athenians were a people of unparalleled virtue, equally idealized was the substance responsible for binding that virtue into a unified whole: the Homeric epic. To be clear: what follows is not an endorsement of Sorel’s occasionally anachronistic and even imaginary account of ancient Athenian life. In grappling with history, Sorel was also grappling with the contours and perceived shortcomings of his political present, and it is the political theory honed in the targeting of that present that we are most interested in excavating. Further, we are seeking the groundwork for Sorel’s later turn toward the proletariat as the material vehicle for transforming that present. Indeed, many of the glaring inadequacies of *The Trial of Socrates* result from the intersection of Sorel’s concern with the present and his desperate flailing for a revolutionary subject which was not yet on his horizon (and hence the notable conservatism of the work).

In the words of Ernst Curtius, on whose *Greek History* Sorel relies heavily, the linkage could not be clearer, since “each new progress in poetry was at the same time an extension of

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specificity of the critique of Socrates—would serve as a blueprint for much of Sorel’s later work, most notably his engagement with later rationalist doctrines in his 1908 book *The Illusions of Progress*. Sorel’s method—in line with his views on rationality—has as its tacit focus the irrational social consequences of rationalism. It was no coincidence, Sorel would remind us, that Socrates was a mystic, for rationalism itself is fundamentally mystical. “Reason becomes (openly, in the case of the Jacobins) a new goddess” (McInnes, 41).

<sup>17</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 28-29. Despite Stanley’s suggestive choice of words, and despite some undeniable similarities, it is clear that Sorel had not read Nietzsche’s celebration of epic poetry—formulated in *The Birth of Tragedy*—when he wrote his *Trial* (indeed, Sorel would only begin to cite Nietzsche’s account much later, e.g. in the *Reflections*). *Birth of Tragedy* was not translated into French until 1901, and no articles on Nietzsche had even appeared in France until 1891. See the extended discussion in Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 53-54n74. Moreover, as we will see later, while the two thinkers similarly celebrated the Homeric epic, Nietzsche is both less favorable to Aeschylean tragedy and considerably more optimistic with regard to the future than Sorel, who sees poetry’s death as inevitable. Here, Sorel is closer to the account offered in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, in which the latter claims that, “What they [the Athenians] reprobated in Socrates had already taken firm root among themselves.” G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (New York: The Colonial Press, 1900), 270.

popular education.”<sup>18</sup> For Curtius as for Sorel, epic poetry *was* Athenian education, and Homer was at its heart.<sup>19</sup> The epic poet was not merely an artist, but a teacher as well. Thus Homer comes to be coextensive with education itself, but Sorel celebrates Homer not only for his central role in a virtuous society, but for his function in *creating* and *maintaining* that virtue, and thus it is through understanding the *content* of this education that we can grasp Sorel’s reasons for celebrating Greek virtue more generally. Or better put, what we must understand is both the *form* this education would assume and the *content* that would breathe it full of life. And here, too, Curtius figures prominently: the education provided by the poets was “simple” and “unified... involv[ing] the whole man... inspir[ing] heroic feelings and the passion for lofty deeds.”<sup>20</sup> The epic, in this view, provides the basis for a unified identity and for the greatness associated with that identity (what Sorel would call “pride of race”<sup>21</sup>), but also serves to distinguish those claiming it from all competitors: Homer represented “the distinctive symbol of Greece as opposed to the barbarians.”<sup>22</sup> In this interplay of simplistic holism, of passionate attachment, and of the generation of a powerful and even fervent identity, Sorel here prefigures in a direct way his later understanding of the myth, long before having attended Henri Bergson’s lectures.

And it is not merely the *form* of Sorel’s later myth that we find prefigured here, but its radically egalitarian (and, as we will see, “anti-Jacobin”) *content* as well. The Homeric epic, in Sorel’s admittedly rosy view, was radically egalitarian and democratic in its implications if not its content: without Homer knowing it at the time, his work “would become the book of Greek democrats *par excellence*.”<sup>23</sup> This was above all because the education offered by the epic was simple and universally accessible to all citizens. This was not specialized knowledge; it relied on no elite training or capacities, only an education in familial-martial virtues.<sup>24</sup> This equality, moreover, was embodied in the pre-Socratic discourse of *arête*, or excellence, which was both

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<sup>18</sup> Curtius, *Histoire grecque* (Paris: Leroux, 1883-1884), cited in *Le Procès*, 173; *From Georges Sorel*, 63. It is possible that the centrality of this text was in large part due to the contingent fact of its availability at the Perpignan library.

<sup>19</sup> “Thus Homer was like the center of the national conscience.” Curtius, cited in *Le Procès*, 212; *From Georges Sorel*, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Curtius, cited in *Le Procès*, 172-173; *From Georges Sorel*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Le Procès*, 212; *From Georges Sorel*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Curtius, cited in *Le Procès*, 212; *From Georges Sorel*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Procès*, 212; *From Georges Sorel*, 69. Homer’s status as proto-democrat and radical egalitarian is far from universally accepted, and in taking up this position, Sorel arrays himself against many, not least of which is Upton Sinclair, who in his 1925 *Mammonart* would accuse Homer of many of the same crimes that Sorel heaps upon Socrates: Homer’s poetry is, for Sinclair, “ruling-class propaganda, written to glorify the ancestors of powerful chieftains and fighting men, and to inculcate the spirit of obedience and martial pride in the new generations... Homer serves these purposes, because he has the aristocratic point of view, and gives the aristocratic mind what it craves.” Cited in Abraham B. Feldman, “Homer and Democracy,” *The Classical Journal* 47, n. 8 (May, 1952), 337. Feldman goes on to vehemently oppose this view through a close reading of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, arriving at the same conclusion as had both Sorel and Lewis Henry Morgan more than a decade prior, namely, that Homer was a “bard of democracy.”

<sup>24</sup> It is not difficult to cast such a view as deeply conservative, but we must be clear on this point. Sorel himself emphasizes the conservative function of the epic: it “tied the past to the present,” thereby “impregnate[ing] the Greek brain with a conservative tint” (*Le Procès*, 212). But this conservatism was more a side-effect of the valorization of equality than an objective of epic poetry: it was conservative because it *embodied* the old values, but these values were not conservative in and of themselves. And Homer would be followed by Aeschylus, whose tragic *oeuvre* would “plead the cause of the old customs [*moeurs*]” during the period of Athenian decline” (*Le Procès*, 213; *From Georges Sorel*, 69). While occasionally casting Euripides in a positive light, Sorel largely accepts the view that Euripides himself undermined Aeschylean tragedy.

universally accessible and distributed across spheres, in contrast to the later hierarchization and specialization the concept would undergo at the hands of the Socratics.<sup>25</sup>

But this equality is not in any way a content divorced from form: it is nourished by the mythical structure (the form) of the poem—its simplicity, unity, utter transparency, and capacity to inspire “conviction,” “finality,” and “decisiveness”<sup>26</sup>—nourished the traditionally virtuous culture, creating what Sorel would later term “a nucleus of Homeric warriors.”<sup>27</sup> Form and content, moreover, intersect in the twin pillars of Athenian social life, the two institutions which would teach Homer while teaching life: the home, or *oikos*, and the military. By virtue of its simplicity, this warrior ethic required no special schools: the household would suffice, and the family was accordingly strengthened, in turn, by Homeric praise of *eros* as the substance binding together conjugal life. There is an interplay here between the text and life: the Homeric epic maintains these pillars ideologically while the pillars materially institutionalize Homer’s centrality.

Household, military, religion: all were fused in an “alliance between poets and the great sacerdotal families,” an alliance rendered possible by the institutionalization of the Homeric epic and its teachings.<sup>28</sup> This cross-class alliance provides a key insight into Sorel’s early relationship to the paradigm of totality: it rendered ancient Athens a coherent and harmonious social totality, reflected in an “ancient uniformity of culture.”<sup>29</sup> In embracing such a view, Sorel draws heavily upon Curtius for historical support, but equally heavily upon both the philosophical influence of Proudhon and Renan’s reflections on the contemporary significance of the ancient *polis* (although they would disagree on its applicability).<sup>30</sup>

Thus here, in this early text, the Homeric epic comes to contain both the form and content of Sorel’s mature theory of political identity. Its form was mythopoetic, reflecting the first, projective moment of our counterdiscourse: a simple, coherent, undivided vision for educating society, viewed at this point as a unified and homogeneous totality. And the content breathing life into that form was, at least in Sorel’s view, radically egalitarian and jealously conservative of its equality. However, while Sorel’s later formulation of identity would be one marked by separation and conflict that would take a dialectical form, such a dialectic would remain impossible and unimaginable within the framework of his nostalgia for an idealized Athenian unity. But Sorel, like the other thinkers considered in subsequent chapters, would not voluntarily assume this posture of rupture: this would be forced upon him by the failure of his own analysis

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<sup>25</sup> Saxonhouse emphasizes specialization (198), but we must not neglect the introduction of hierarchy with which such specialization was (inevitably?) intertwined.

<sup>26</sup> *Le Procès*, 213; *From Georges Sorel*, 69

<sup>27</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 160; *Réflexions*, 232.

<sup>28</sup> *Le Procès*, 222.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Procès*, 176; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> On Proudhon, see Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 5; Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 29. Sorel would later suggest that his esteem for the ancient *polis* was largely due to the fact that he saw the latter as an example—perhaps the only historical example—of the ideal Proudhonian community in practice (“Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon,” *Revue Philosophique*, 33-34). Renan’s *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (1879) openly celebrated the ancient *polis*, but “unlike Renan... Sorel upheld the Athenian *polis* as a valid model for the modern state, at least as a model from whose fate at the hands of the Sophists and Socrates several important lessons could be learned” (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 28). While disagreeing that Sorel saw a “model” in the *polis*, Neal Woods nevertheless agrees that, “He does believe, however, that something of its elan and social solidarity can be recaptured at a new and higher level by the creation of revolutionary syndicates of workers.” “Some Reflections on Sorel and Machiavelli,” *Political Science Quarterly* 83, n. 1 (March, 1968), 79.

and a forced recognition of the lamentable and tragic decline of the ancient *polis*, one heralded by the emergence of Socratic philosophy. It would be precisely this unified totality, this harmonious society, that would be destroyed once and for all by the introduction of Socratic philosophy as the corrupter of both of the twin pillars of Athenian life and as direct antagonist to the epic poetry which upheld and was in turn upheld by these institutional pillars. In simultaneously undermining the material-institutional and theoretical-ideological bases for ancient Athenian equality, moreover, Socrates and his heirs would effectively rupture the cross-class alliance that was the foundation for Athenian unity, materially empowering new actors and institutions by providing an ideological basis for inequality.

If Sorel glorifies ancient Athens and idealizes Homer as its bard through a selectivity that borders on willful myopia, his treatment of Socrates is the inverse, and these two gestures which structure *The Trial of Socrates* coincide in a single individual to whom Sorel turns to justify his analysis: Xenophon. His decision to shun the more familiar and respected Platonic dialogues like the *Apology*—which for Sorel present a “fictional Socrates”<sup>31</sup>—both explains and is explained by his peculiar condemnation of the philosopher, one so palpably foreign to most readers. That the decision is *explained* by Sorel’s already tainted view of Socrates indicates at least a degree of theoretical opportunism, but his privileging of Xenophon over Plato is not without other plausible explanations, however partial these may be. Specifically, while Plato’s unabashedly philosophical orientation can be seen as undermining his objectivity where philosophy itself is what is at stake, Xenophon was instead a historian, and furthermore, one trained by Socrates himself who nevertheless maintained some sympathy for and attempts to defend his old master.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as we will see below, the values that Sorel perceives—or reads into—Xenophon are precisely those which he himself had inherited from Proudhon, and which he would attempt to uphold in his polemic against Socrates.

But if Sorel here presages Leo Strauss in his preference for Xenophon, the two would disagree severely when it comes to the unity of the latter’s ancient *oeuvre*, and this leads us to a necessary discussion of precisely which “Socrates” it is that Sorel wishes to indict.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, in an effort to portray Xenophon as a defender of traditional Athenian virtue and Socrates as its opponent, Sorel must distinguish between Xenophon’s non-Socratic works (specifically, the *Oeconomicus*) and his Socratic texts (namely, the *Memorabilia*, *Apology*, and *Symposium*). While Sorel arguably fails both in establishing this distinction<sup>34</sup> and, as a direct

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<sup>31</sup> *Le Procès*, 95fn1.

<sup>32</sup> See Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 32. On *Le Procès*, 93, Sorel explains his decision to employ Xenophon’s *Symposium* instead of Plato’s version. Furthermore, there are a number of arguably easier tacks that Sorel avoids, for example, he does not emphasize either Socrates’ own or Plato’s critiques of democracy.

<sup>33</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 49fn28. See Leo Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the ‘Oeconomicus’* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), specifically the claim that: “Xenophon is the only one who, while knowing Socrates himself, showed by deed that he was willing to be a historian. Hence it would appear that the primary source for our knowledge of Socrates would be the Socratic writings of Xenophon” (83-84). Few others seem to accept the historical objectivity of Xenophon’s texts. It is worth noting, however, that Hegel, in his *History of Philosophy*, has both a similar critique of Socrates to that of Sorel, and similarly relies on Xenophon, but there is no indication that Sorel had read the Hegelian version (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 53n74).

<sup>34</sup> As Stanley demonstrates admirably, the *Oeconomicus* contains much of what Sorel opposes, whereas the *Memorabilia* contains much of what he values. A more Sorelian view of the centrality of *eros* over mere procreation is to be found in the latter text, whereas Sorel exaggerates the gender equality expressed in the former. Moreover, in the *Oeconomicus* as in what we know of his life, Xenophon emerges as embodying precisely what Sorel most opposes: military hierarchy and expertise. Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 44-45.



result, in his historical analysis as a whole,<sup>35</sup> this failure will in the end serve to prove our point better than would his success.<sup>36</sup> Put differently, in Sorel's failure to convict Socrates and failure to coherently uphold ancient Athens as a harmonious social totality, the way would be cleared for his turn to class separation in the *Reflections*.

### Chipping away at the twin pillars

Sorel's re-staging of the trial of Socrates is premised upon the perception that Socrates and his heirs corrupted and undermined this ancient mythopoetic egalitarianism both through the direct establishment of intellectual and political hierarchy where, at least in Sorel's idealized view, none existed before, and indirectly through the undermining of the twin pillars of Homeric education (the family and the military), and in undermining the authority of the poets. In what follows, we will consider these twin pillars, to see how the perceived Socratic attack on each of these effectively cuts across the form and content of mythical poetry. According to Sorel, Socrates was guilty of engaging in a two-pronged attack on the primary institutions that, in their unity, constituted Athenian virtue-as-excellence (*arête*). These institutions—the family and the military—represented the ideal (and arguably only possible) unity of theory and practice: it was only when the virtues inculcated in the family by epic poetry and labor held sway in military and thereby political life, that this radically democratic constellation peculiar to Athens could survive.<sup>37</sup>

For Sorel, the Socratic attack on the Athenian family is rooted in his dualistic distinction that the philosopher proposes in Xenophon's *Symposium*—one reflective of Socratic body-soul dualism more generally—between “Two Venuses”: the “Heavenly” (Uranian) and the “Common” or “Vulgar” (Pandemic).<sup>38</sup> While the former is to be despised, the latter is fully benevolent in its unassailable purity and perfection, and can therefore be “given free rein without danger.” Socrates, in this view, affirms “the superiority of the love of the soul over that of the

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<sup>35</sup> While Sorel would later accept that the *Memorabilia* did indeed represent Xenophon's own views to a large degree—insistently defending the “old Greek” against Marx's claim that he harbored a “bourgeois instinct” (*Reflections*, 237fn46; *Réflexions*, 344fn1)—in opting for consistency he lets slip his indictment of Socrates, making “the Xenophontic Socrates into something that was closer to Xenophon himself” (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 46; 44). Furthermore, he adds that the anti-urban and pro-rural sentiment Sorel locates in Xenophon can be found in Socratics like Plato and Aristotle as well (this despite Plato's admission in the *Phaedrus*, 230D, that Socrates himself preferred the urban life), and that in all three, the celebration of the rural was located on a higher class level than the imagined peasant-warrior of Sorel.

<sup>36</sup> See Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 30, where he notes that Sorel's “failures themselves foreshadow [his] later efforts to combine traditional virtues with modern productivity.” Again, this view is instructive but too limited to the moral realm to the exclusion of political dynamics, and we could reformulate it in our view as follows: Sorel's failures drive his political development, forcing a rupture with the paradigm of totality and social harmony and an embrace of the myth of the proletarian general strike.

<sup>37</sup> The conservative connotations associated with the defense of family and military values in our present notwithstanding, Sorel's was notion of virtue that was as radically subversive (in France) as it was conservative (for Athens). Sorel inherited from Proudhon his profound respect for both the family as an institution and the martial virtues it sought to impress upon the youth.

<sup>38</sup> *Le Procès*, 87. Here, Sorel refers to the Roman tradition. In the original Greek, these “Two Venuses” are instead “Two Aphrodites,” the “Heavenly Aphrodite” (*Aphroditê Ourania*) and the “Common Aphrodite” (*Aphroditê Pandêmos*). Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII.9. The distinction emerges as well in Plato's rendition, but in the mouth of the lawyer Pausanius, who deduces a distinction in types of love from the existence of two different temples to Aphrodite (*Symposium*, 180c-).

body,” and for Sorel, the effects on the Athenian *polis* could not be overstated.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen, Sorel places the family, alongside the military, at the very center of ancient Athenian life, as a pillar of the mythopoetic equality that it embodied. But this was a particular *kind* of family: the concrete family, capable of generating the warrior caste on which equality relied. But if in its concreteness the ideal Athenian family was conjugal, this was not for purely mechanistic reasons: for Sorel, *eros*—and not mere reproduction—stands at the very heart of the Athenian family, and he would interpret Socrates’ disdain for the corporeal as an attack on *eros* itself.<sup>40</sup> In his distinction between a “heavenly” and a “common” form of love, Socrates drives a wedge between the members of the conjugal couple, but here we must not mistake Sorel’s long discussion of pederasty for mere homophobia, but instead—in accord with his materialist method—an attack on what Sorel saw as the *effects* of the Socratic mind-body dualism.<sup>41</sup>

Specifically, by making ideal love heavenly, Socrates has effectively situated it beyond the reach of women:

it is not with his ignorant wife that the Athenian [man] could conclude this union of souls, so vaunted by the philosopher. No matter how educated a woman may be, she could never replace the lover in the Socratic system: she participates neither in the gymnasium exercises, nor in the discussions at the Pnyx, nor in the weariness of war. The love personified by Uranian Venus is necessarily homosexual [*unisexual*].<sup>42</sup>

“Socrates commits a veritable crime,” Sorel continues, in establishing such a theory of perfect love, which, much like any perfect concept, must necessarily reside in the abstract at the expense of the material, the everyday.

The celebration of Uranian love therefore coincides with the denigration of its Pandemic counterpart: the “abstract family” replaces the “flesh-and-blood family of the old system,” thereby reducing family life to mere procreation, in which “the moral force of woman’s erotic and moral love is replaced by a mere social contract.”<sup>43</sup> Rivaling Kant in the reduction of sex to utility, Sorel’s “finalistic” Socrates “defined marriage in terms of its political goal, which is to

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<sup>39</sup> *Le Procès*, 87; 89.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley deems this Sorel’s “psycho-erotic law” (*Sociology of Virtue*, 36). As Sorel puts it in a later essay: “the constitution of the family (influenced by political life) is the principal source of our moral ideas.” “Etude sur Vico,” *Devenir Social* (November 1896), 925, cited in Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 36. Later, he would add: “Love, by the enthusiasm that it begets, can produce that sublimity without which there would be absolutely no effective morality” (*Reflections*, 236; *Réflexions*, 342).

<sup>41</sup> His citations of Proudhon, who decries the spread of “Sodomistic gangrene” notwithstanding. *Le Procès*, 96. Interestingly, while Sorel’s stated objective is to reassert *eros* in the face of Socratic attacks, Proudhon’s own prudishness has been interpreted as anti-erotic. See, e.g., Daniel Guérin, “Proudhon et l’amour ‘unisexual,’” *Arcadie* 133 (January 1965); *Proudhon: oui et non* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> *Le Procès*, 95. While Sorel does not cite the Platonic version, it lends undeniable support to his claim. In it Pausanias claims that “Heavenly Aphrodite... has no female strain in her, but springs entirely from the male... Hence those who are inspired by this Love are attracted towards the male sex, and value it as being naturally the stronger and more intelligent” (*Symposium*, 181). For a discussion of Plato’s Socrates with regard to the role of women in ancient life, see Arlene W. Saxonhouse, “The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato,” *Political Theory* 4, n. 2 (May, 1976), 195-212.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 36. The contrast with contemporary family-based conservatism could not be more stark, as it is the latter who most often—for religious reasons or otherwise—view marriage in largely instrumental terms.

have beautiful children.”<sup>44</sup> Socrates’ “juridical” view of marriage not only fails to grasp the military and religious importance of the family in the consolidation of virtue—its function as a vehicle of mythical equality—but moreover contributes to undermining the importance of the concrete family in maintaining the virtuous society within which it was embedded.<sup>45</sup> According to Sorel, the substantive importance of conjugal marriage in the rearing of virtuous citizens, “restorative [*fortifiant*] teaching regarding the sanctity of the conjugal union [*lien*],” does not emerge in the Socratic canon, but rather must be sought in “the old national poetry.”<sup>46</sup>

Alongside this denigration of *eros* and the concrete family it upholds, Sorel also accuses Socrates of facilitating the emergence of an “abstract” family to replace it, and in so doing recasts the religious dimension of the trial. While deriding the formal charges of impiety as a petty farce, he nevertheless discovers a serious kernel in Socrates’ religious teachings in the encouragement the latter offered to the rise of cults. While traditional Athenian religion was rooted in the family, the mysticism of the cults replaced this natural and concrete bond with an abstract one.<sup>47</sup> Mysticism and cultism, then, finished what the Uranian Venus had begun: as the traditional ties that bound and unified the virtuous society together were progressively dissolved, the concrete family was replaced with anti-erotic love and an equally abstract family of believers whose only link was a shared by individualized relationship to the gods.

Aside from undermining the institutional foundations for equality, Socrates’ attack on the family undermines equality in a more direct manner by prefiguring the sins of Socratic philosophy more generally, in a way that we will see more clearly in terms of military science. It should not surprise us either that Socrates would scorn “Pandemic” love, or that such a scorn

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<sup>44</sup> *Le Procès*, 97. “We obviously select for wives the women who will bear us the best children” (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II.2.4). But this is repeated in the *Oeconomicus*, and the *Memorabilia* also includes an affirmation of *eros*.

<sup>45</sup> Sorel’s critique of the celebration of the abstract over the concrete would later reemerge as a critique of the concept of “abstract man” in the *Reflections*.

<sup>46</sup> *Le Procès*, 95; 92. Nowhere, we are told, is “conjugal fidelity” celebrated so “marvelously” as in Homeric epics and Aeschylean tragedy, and “these two poets, faithful interpreters of the national tradition” are diametrically-opposed to the “abstracters of perfect love” (*Le Procès*, 81). Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* epitomizes this worship of the conjugal bond: “For Aeschylus, the woman is not, as for a Roman jurisconsult, *filia mariti*. The poet does not understand union as a contract... The bond of marriage thereby becomes infinitely more sacred than natural bonds” (*Le Procès*, 82).

<sup>47</sup> According to Stanley, Sorel interprets Socrates to have “transformed the oracular nature of Greek religion, rooted in institutions—especially the family—into something personal, spontaneous—in a word, mystical” (*Sociology of Virtue*, 37). Such mysticism, according to Sorel, “transforms the infant into a novitiate against his family,” thereby dissolving the existing familial structure and facilitating the establishment of an undivided “ecclesiastical” state, a theocracy (*Le Procès*, 7). Hegel seconds this accusation, but argues that it did indeed represent an affront to Athenian religious beliefs: “Socrates is the hero who established in the place of the Delphic Oracle, the principle that man must look within himself to know what is Truth... This inward certainty... is undoubtedly another new god... and thus the accusation of Socrates was quite just.” *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, tr. E.S. Haldane (London: Kegan Paul, 1892), 435. Remarking elsewhere on the prevalence of secret societies (*hétairies*) during the period of Athenian decadence, and citing Curtius, Sorel writes: “As family ties were loosened these artificial [*factices*] attachments became more frequent. They even imposed on their members, up to a certain point, the obligation of breaking natural ties” (*Le Procès*, 207; *From Georges Sorel*, 67). Aristophanes’ portrayal of Socrates is meant to connect him to these upstart, immoral cults, to “denounce these new loyalties that were so disastrous for the family and the city. Neil McInnes emphasizes the family-religion linkage as follows: “Much more seriously, [Socrates] was properly taken as the theorist of a new educational doctrine that was proving ruinous of the old Homeric customs of a military society, particularly by undermining paternal authority, disrupting the family and encouraging secret societies.” “Sorel on the Trial,” 39.

would be interpreted as undermining Athenian democracy: after all, to be *Aphroditê Pandêmos* was to be a love that was universally-accessible to all members of that *dêmos*. Hence the standard translation as “common” or “vulgar” is at once grossly inaccurate and representative of Socrates’ intended meaning. By denigrating the body and its love, the philosopher was also demeaning the *dêmos* itself (a crime under Athenian law). But in accord with his method, Sorel’s point of attack is not Socrates’ overt hostility to democracy.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the degree to which Sorel excludes this element of the Athenian hostility to the Socratics is occasionally surprising, but by virtue of this exclusion his sociological case against the effects of philosophy becomes sharper and more effective. Rather, he emphasizes the fact that the Uranian Venus is—by virtue of its very definition—accessible only to the few, those with access to more “heavenly” pleasures, and this inaccessibility would be, for Sorel, symptomatic of the social effect of Socratic philosophy and Jacobin elitism more generally.<sup>49</sup>

Much as Socrates would undermine and facilitate the replacement of the concrete family, so too would he undermine the traditional warrior, facilitating his replacement with the professional soldier. And much as the attack on the family took the form of a hierarchical distinction within love whereby a perfect, heavenly love accessible to the few would prevail, so too did the transformation of the military entail a rigid hierarchy in which “experts” in military “science” would gain a newly privileged place. And this introduction of science into military affairs—Socrates’ second fundamental sin against Athenian equality—is not as distant from the familial-religious question as it might seem at first glance. Like the family, Sorel grants the military a politically generative role, insisting that “it is impossible to understand ancient constitutions without tying them to military institutions.”<sup>50</sup> Like the family, too, what is generated here is an Athenian ideal of mythopoetic egalitarianism. But while the family was more an institution of equality through education—i.e. through the *passing on* of myth—in the military myth and equality are more evenly weighted, and as a result, so too would be Sorel’s critique of Socrates on military affairs.

The centrality of military affairs to which Sorel refers is one which is closely tied to the question of political equality, since the very transition from aristocracy to democracy—from Solon’s reforms in the early sixth century through those of Cleisthenes’ later in the century—resulted largely from pressures *within* the military: a heavier reliance on infantry required that the political rights associated with Athenian citizenship be expanded. But for Sorel, the pre-Socratic military generated far more than the merely formal enfranchisement of its expanding warrior pool. Rather, alongside the family, military structures were central to the maintenance of mythopoetic Athenian equality:

In the old armies, the distance between the officer and the soldier was not great. A developed military science did not yet exist. One learned tactics by rote; it is from this that we derive the old proverb that obedience is the true school of command. It was only

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<sup>48</sup> On Socrates’ hostility to democracy, see I. F. Stone’s *The Trial of Socrates* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1988).

<sup>49</sup> The dangers, even in the realm of *eros*, are clear: “One need not be a great philosopher to recognize that this Socratic thesis is pure Sophism, that the alleged cult of Uranian Venus cannot remain pure and chaste” (*Le Procès*, 94). As we will see, this too is about more than pederasty: it is an attack on that mysticism of rationalistic philosophy by which it imagines itself in full control of its legacy. Socrates could prevent neither Critias nor Alcibiades.

<sup>50</sup> *Le Procès*, 167.

in the time of Socrates that one began to attack other cities scientifically; and even then military engineers were often artists hired for a single engagement. Armies were not permanent, and could not develop a hierarchy like that of modern armies. Formations and arrangements were very simple; one followed traditional rules. Each city had its national armaments and its style of combat: up to this point one did not occupy oneself with discussing the principles of scientific military organization. It is only after the death of Socrates that the Athenians modified their system.<sup>51</sup>

This was a radically egalitarian and democratic force, one in which *arête* was cultivated through practice, and which lacked the institutionalization of *aristos* as expertise.<sup>52</sup> Military excellence was within the reach of all men, embedded in both practice (simple formations) and transmission (rote learning). Moreover, this lack of institutionalized hierarchy insured smooth expression of one's capacities, regardless of origin, granting *arête* a mobility across spheres.<sup>53</sup> The Athenian military was, in short, the expression of an absolute equality that neither needed nor desired "savants."<sup>54</sup> And not only an expression, for military organization is also a fundamental *cause*, a motor for the generation of equality in other realms, since "these considerations [on military affairs] explain how egalitarian sentiments were powerfully developed within the population. The military organization led [*entraînait*], almost inevitably, to political equality."<sup>55</sup> This military structure dovetailed as well with economic organization, as the agricultural production central to Athenian life created a population which was naturally conservative in its egalitarianism and "did not aspire to change."<sup>56</sup> Whether in production, education, or war: "All are equal: this is the ideal of Attic democracy."<sup>57</sup>

While we can perhaps overlook the massive exaggeration contained in the last phrase, one rendered only slightly more plausible by its qualification as an "ideal," we must pause for a moment to note a point at which the text begins to dissect itself, where Sorel's fidelity to nostalgic, retrospective totality prevents him from coming to terms with even his own analysis. This dissection is most acute in the military itself, where both the generativity Sorel attributes to military affairs and the latent class war therein cut against his argument. As to the first, Sorel is quick to grant military affairs significant explanatory weight, presenting previous reforms (Solon's and Cleisthenes') as a natural outgrowth of the democratizing pressure of military demographics. Further, Sorel even shows the inverse, demonstrating the capacity of military

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<sup>51</sup> *Le Procès*, 168-169.

<sup>52</sup> Summarizing the message of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Stanley admits that "a certain expertise flourishes, but it is of a kind universally attainable" (*Sociology of Virtue*, 36).

<sup>53</sup> This mobility was limited by wealth, as Sorel himself recognizes in regard to the cavalry (*Le Procès*, 167).

<sup>54</sup> While Raaflaub argues that there was no leader class in ancient Greece because none was necessary (war was not so destructive, and there was little external pressure), Sorel's argument is a much more endogenous and ideological one. Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Homer and the Beginning of Political Thought in Greece," in Eric W. Robinson, ed., *Ancient Greek Democracy: Readings and Sources* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 36.

<sup>55</sup> *Le Procès*, 170.

<sup>56</sup> *Le Procès*, 170. "Agriculture was the central occupation of the Athenians: the people were modest [*sobre*] and economical." This was of no small importance, as Sorel refers to Aristotle's claim that an agricultural population is the best suited to political democracy. This appreciation for the countryside, again, is derived from Proudhon, whom he deems a "fanatical admirer of the countryside" in a footnote (*Le Procès*, 170n3). This largely explains Sorel's appreciation for Aristophanes who, despite a nominally aristocratic slant, places the peasant above the Sophist (*Le Procès*, 86). The process of demographic urbanization in Athens, largely driven by the city's role as a commercial center, would undermine this traditional economic structure.

<sup>57</sup> *Le Procès*, 171.

affairs to affect even demographics, noting that Periclean military strategy contributed to the decline of rural agriculture, making him possibly the “most formidable enemy of the old families.”<sup>58</sup> The striking importance and impact that Sorel attributes to military affairs suggests that his attempt to lump full culpability onto Socrates’ sagging shoulders—for the reversal of the reforms and for the decline of the rural sector—must inevitably fall short.

This question becomes more acute when we consider the fact that, despite his best efforts to present ancient Athens as a harmonious totality, Sorel cannot prevent the class war within the military from rearing its ugly head, recognizing that “the cavalry,” due to the extraordinary cost of horses, “was the pressure point of the oligarchs.”<sup>59</sup> The issue becomes more serious when we add the question of Athens’ ten generals, or *strategoï* who, unlike other positions, were not drawn by lot. Their annual elections thereby had the practical effect of both reflecting prevailing class divisions and contributing to their exacerbation: the wealthiest of citizens were funneled to the top of the military hierarchy (due to expertise in international affairs), and used these positions to further increase their wealth. Thus while Sorel would make a point of noting that the Xenophontic “Socrates loved to scoff at the choosing of magistrates by lot: it was easy for him to demonstrate to what degree such a system was anti-scientific,” again it is difficult to take this accusation seriously for its causal impact.<sup>60</sup>

Hence while military affairs were of the utmost importance to the Athenian system, they also appear in Sorel’s analysis as the site of the most significant chink in the armor of Athenian equality: a simmering class war with the potential to radically transform society.<sup>61</sup> This recognition of both the class war within the Athenian military and the potential for this war to propagate across society more generally is thus simultaneously an indication of Socrates’ innocence and a tacit admission that his own view of the ancient *polis* is highly idealized one. Moreover, these two elements in combination gesture forward toward Sorel’s later break with the paradigm of totality: indeed, it is in the failure of this idealized view of Athenian democracy that Sorel’s eventual break with totality would gestate.

But to return to Sorel’s critique, in the military as in the family, an attack on the *institution* upholding equality coincides with an attack on equality itself: the military is undermined and the *savants* privileged. The “modification” of military affairs to which Sorel obliquely refers above was the Iphicratean Reform that began shortly after Socrates’ execution, transforming Athenian military affairs both technologically and organizationally.<sup>62</sup> Socrates’ sin in this regard would therefore be to anticipate and facilitate the work of Iphicrates. Again citing Xenophon’s Socratic works—notably the *Memorabilia*—Sorel paints a picture of a philosopher intent on modernizing the Athenian armed forces through the introduction of an unprecedented degree of hierarchy. Indeed, before even Iphicrates, “Socrates himself was already concerned

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<sup>58</sup> Urbanization was thrown into overdrive as a result of Pericles’ military policy—which abandoned the countryside in favor of exploiting the perceived Athenian maritime advantage (*Le Procès*, 216).

<sup>59</sup> *Le Procès*, 167.

<sup>60</sup> *Le Procès*, 185.

<sup>61</sup> Even Aristotle recognized this, but was blinded by his elitist perspective, arguing as a result that the wealthy should refrain from employing the poor as infantry, since in so doing they would “organize a formidable army against themselves” (*Le Procès*, 168).

<sup>62</sup> Again, there is little historical agreement on the implications of Iphicrates’ reform, which involved both a shift in spear and shield technology (though even this is contested), but also and as a result, new patterns of drilling and discipline. See J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 413.

with the question of armament and the perfection of military science.”<sup>63</sup> He scoffs at existing forms for teaching strategy generalship on the basis of tactics alone, complains that the troops are badly disciplined, and demonstrates to a soldier—“old” both in age and thought—that one cannot be a good general on the basis of experience alone (i.e. rote learning). Moreover, and if this were not sufficiently damning, “the philosopher observes, with the son of Pericles, that the Athenians would do well to modify their armament in the direction that Iphicrates would later transform it.”<sup>64</sup> Socrates’ efforts to introduce a military “science” contained *in nuce* the entirety of his attack on Athenian virtue, just as Sorel’s critique thereof contains an embryonic form of his mature theory of the dialectic of revolutionary subjectivity. Put differently, it was no accident that this military science required the institution of a rigid hierarchy: as we will see below, in Sorel’s view, *science entails inequality*, and it would be philosophy’s unique claim to truth—here assuming the form of military science—that would represent the most direct and pernicious danger to Athenian equality.<sup>65</sup>

But again, the implications of Socrates’ attacks on traditional military organization are not limited to the egalitarian *content* of Athenian social life, but extend to its Homeric, mythical *form* as well. Put differently, science entails more than just inequality: for Sorel it also entails the destruction of the mythical heroism that Homeric poetry so effectively cultivates. The two sides of the question are deeply intertwined: with military *arête* reduced to a hierarchical and specialized science, the warrior-farmer would be neither inclined nor allowed to cultivate glory in the present by emulating the heroic acts of a Homeric past. Military affairs *cannot*, for Sorel, operate scientifically, and it is here that war provides a framework for radical identity. To introduce science and professionalization into war is to disrupt the psychological operations of courage, and it was Homeric myth above all that cultivated absolute identity on the battlefield.<sup>66</sup> In a pattern we will see repeated in later chapters, science here threatens to short-circuit the mythical dialectic of *arête*, as “the old basis of Athenian democratic virtue in which mass action could be combined with excellence and in which heroism could emerge from anywhere in the ranks is now called into question.”<sup>67</sup>

“Socrates,” and here Sorel cites the philosopher Alfred Jules Émile Fouillee, “wanted an aristocracy of science, Aristophanes wanted one of great political men, poets, and theologians.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Le Procès*, 169n1.

<sup>64</sup> *Le Procès*, 169n1. It should be noted that this is slightly unfair to both the Xenophontic Socrates and to Iphicrates himself. Socrates does indeed say these things, but also, in the same discussion with the son of Pericles where he discusses updating armaments, he praises the past virtue of Athens, and moreover argues that to revive it, they need to remind Athenians of their earlier and most valiant ancestors (*Mem.*, 3.5.9). “If they find out the customs of their ancestors and practice them as well as they did, they will come to be as good as they were; or failing that, they need but to imitate those who now have the pre-eminence and to practice their customs” (*Mem.*, 3.5.14). But Sorel would be correct in noting that in the two gestures of this passage there is a deference to the epic function, but also an indication of *present expertise*. As to Iphicrates, it is unclear if his reforms are granted a fair hearing by either Xenophon or Sorel: the latter, at least, seems to exaggerate the hierarchical aspects of the reforms, which still involved quite a bit of rote learning in the form of drilling.

<sup>65</sup> In this sense, Sorel appears to prefigure some aspects of Foucault’s critique of the centralizing effects of science and his celebration of genealogies as “anti-sciences.”

<sup>66</sup> Incidentally, this is a lesson that Aristotle learned well. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he explicitly rejects Socrates’ equation of courage with knowledge and derides the supposed valor of professional soldiers.

<sup>67</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Citing Fouillee (*Le Procès*, 165). Whereas this latter, nobler form of aristocracy had indeed existed in Athens at the time when “the sacerdotal traditions and the songs of the great poets” held sway, the organic links binding the political actor to the epic poet to the religious citizen had long since begun to give way (*Le Procès*, 166).

Just as a new class of soldier was born in the blossoming of hierarchical barriers within military organization, so too was a new class born more generally, and Socrates' desire for an "aristocracy of science" finds but one instance in the transformation of military life. For this new science to be possible—in the military realm, but also beyond it—the Socratics needed to engage in a ground-clearing exercise, dispensing with the old system of beliefs, the primary target of which could be none other than the Homeric poetry that acted as the cornerstone of traditional Athenian education. It was only after dispensing with the poets directly that a new elite—educated in formal schools and rooted geographically economically in the rising urban class—would need to be philosophically, which is to say ideologically, empowered. But it was not enough for Sorel to merely defend the poets in a straightforward manner. As is well-known, in an effort to redeem philosophy, Plato's *Apology* attempts to establish a complicity between jealous poets (the "old accusers") and a new class of opportunistic politicians (the "new accusers"), the counterintuitive nature of which is erased in part by the very centrality of Plato's text as an account of Socrates' trial. Sorel's task would be to drive a wedge into this purported alliance, rescuing the poets from any guilt for having participated in a show trial, in order to establish complicity on a different level between philosophers and politicians.

Sorel sets about this task with a distinct and straightforward pleasure: "according to Aristophanes [one of the "old accusers"], the new [political] men [despised] the old poets. It seems quite certain that the Socratic philosophers shared this viewpoint."<sup>69</sup> As evidence, he cites the well-known line in the *Gorgias*—itself devoted to a reputable Sophist—in which Socrates himself, after having demonstrated poetry (and tragedy specifically) to be merely another "sort of rhetoric," deems it nothing more than "vulgar flattery."<sup>70</sup> And in order to debunk claims that this is merely Plato's own doctrine put in Socrates' mouth, Sorel also cites Xenophon's *Symposium*, which portrays the defender of Homer as a buffoon, thereby proving that "the supposed practical lessons, drawn from Homer and so praised by the ancients, really do not amount to much."<sup>71</sup> According to Sorel, and in line with the centrality that he grants the Homeric epic, "one could not be more unjust toward the most marvelous product of Greek civilization."<sup>72</sup> This dismissal of the poets is more than mere unfairness: like the injection of science into military affairs, Socratic critiques of the poets—especially in Plato's *Apology* and *Republic*—serve to undermine the very heroism that poetry seeks to inculcate. By demanding that poetry operate on the basis of knowledge, by enforcing a stifling rationalism onto the analysis, Plato (and Socrates) become openly antagonistic to what, for Sorel, was crucial about the epic form.<sup>73</sup> If in his *Apology*, Plato's Socrates dismisses the poets as operating on the basis of "inspiration" rather than knowledge, Sorel's defense of the Homeric epic is one in which such inspiration plays a central

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<sup>69</sup> *Le Procès*, 213; *From Georges Sorel*, 69.

<sup>70</sup> *Le Procès*, 213. We could also cite the *Protagoras*, in which the poets are compared to the Sophists directly, as well as the well-known denunciation, in the *Apology* (Plato's version), that poets rely not on "knowledge," but rather "inspiration."

<sup>71</sup> *Le Procès*, 215; *From Georges Sorel*, 70. Sorel additionally cites the conflict between Demosthenes and Aeschines over the embassy affair, in which the former accused the latter, and which was allegedly decided by Phocian, a Socratic general. "Philosophy had completed its work. Athenian democracy succumbed but it left behind an important monument to its grandeur and its genius in the work of Demosthenes" (*Le Procès*, 209; *From Georges Sorel*, 68). To this we could add the direct critiques of Homer that appear in *Republic*, chs. 35, 37.

<sup>72</sup> *Le Procès*, 213; *From Georges Sorel*, 69.

<sup>73</sup> See especially the condemnation of poetry as "imitative," in *Republic*, Book 10, and Socrates' interrogation of the poets in *Apology*, line 22.



and generative role.<sup>74</sup> When read for mere empirical data, Homer is nothing more than leaning forward to win a chariot race or seasoning wine with onion, but to do so is to miss the broader picture.

As we have said, however, Sorel's direct defense of the poets is but one half of the equation that is his re-indictment of Socrates, the other half of which lies in the complicity of philosophy with politics. With Hegel but against Nietzsche, Sorel sees the Socratic critique as ultimately fatal to the old form of life in Athens, but only because it empowered classes which were already very much in existence. Henceforth, it would prove difficult if not impossible to return to that virtuous state in which the family prepared young Athenians for war with nothing more than Homer's two weighty volumes, but in accordance with his materialist method, this is partly for demographic reasons. Those Athenians who sought to make of Socrates a sort of *pharmakos*—a scapegoat to purify the city's ills—were already too polluted themselves to be cleansed, and this pollution was as much rooted in a new class constellation as in the new ideological forms complicit with it.<sup>75</sup> "There were no more soldiers or sailors," Sorel adds wistfully in a later passage, "but only skeptical and witty [*spirituels*] shopkeepers."<sup>76</sup>

### Philosophy, oligarchy, Jacobinism

As we have said, Sorel is not content to merely redeem the heroic poetry of ages past: he also wants to indict the philosophy that stands as its primary ideological antagonist. If anything, the inevitable decline of poetic heroism renders this second gesture even *more* important for Sorel, who would similarly confront the decline of heroic institutions in contemporary France at the hands of a similarly Jacobin philosophy. In the triangular relation of the *Apology*, then, he must not only distinguish the poets from the political class—thereby excusing the former from

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<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 22b. Curiously, and perhaps as a result of his preference for the Xenophontic *Apology* over the Platonic version, Sorel avoids the question of inspiration, which bears some similarity to his early understanding of Homeric myth.

<sup>75</sup> But even after Homer, there was no shortage of poets who fought this process of slow decline. Aristophanes was, for Sorel, one of those fighting the good fight during the period of Athenian decadence, and we could interpret his *Lysistrata* as a staged re-constitution of traditional virtue. In response to a war carried out by the worst of the new political elements (embodied in the semi-chorus of old men) against the will of the traditional upper classes (the semi-chorus of old women), Lysistrata enters—as the incarnation of Athena—to fuse the masculine and the feminine, to transpose the *oikos* over the *polis* itself (in the occupation of the Acropolis), and reassert traditional values. Indeed, the very disruption of gender roles in the *Lysistrata* also clearly disrupts the public/private distinction which had played a role in destroying Athenian virtue. Here, Sorel's claim is that the pervasiveness of the public/private distinction in Athens is greatly exaggerated, and only truly flourished after the emergence of the new classes of professional politicians and intellectuals. The *oikos* was far more than a baby factory, as Pericles implies in his funeral oration: it was an institution that was simultaneously pedagogical, erotic, and military. For Sorel, Lysistrata's transposition of the *oikos* onto the *polis* would have been the perfect expression of Athenian virtue.

It is peculiar, given the lengthy treatment he has just afforded Aristophanes, that Sorel fails to mention the *Lysistrata* here, especially since it is there above all—in marked contrast to a text like *Women at the Thesmophoria*—that the *oikos* is celebrated as the locus of political virtues. Sorel devotes the entire (and lengthy) first chapter of *Le Procès* to "The Testimony of Aristophanes" (*Le Procès*, 23-73). However, at the outset, he distinguishes three categories of Aristophantic works. By categorizing *Lysistrata* as among the poet's straightforwardly political works (however "striking" their presentation), he excludes it from his analysis, thereby missing its relevance to his later argument about the basis of Athenian virtue (*Le Procès*, 25). Most commentators pay far too little attention to Aristophanes' prominent position in Sorel's analysis (Aristophanes' testimony is granted twice the number of pages as the chapter that follows, on "Socratic Mores").

<sup>76</sup> *Le Procès*, 207; *From Georges Sorel*, 68.

any responsibility for an unjust show trial—but also reveal the debt that these “new accusers” owed to the philosopher himself. In accordance with his materialistic method, however, Sorel will resist the temptation to frame this debt in personal terms—by tracking the political exploits of individual disciples of the old master (notably, Critias and Alcibiades)—but he will instead draw attention to a broader debt on the level of social class (prefiguring his later interests). Doing so would require that Sorel identify the institutional mediation connecting the philosopher class to the political class, which in this case would be the very same institution which would replace the household as the central locus of education: formal schools (and here again, Sorel’s contemporary concerns resonate). Sitting at the intersection of the ideal and the material, of Socratic ideology and its class basis, these schools would both reflect and exacerbate the class rifts that were already threatening Athenian social harmony.

In the history of Athenian inequality, the establishment of formal schools represented a crucial inflection point for Sorel. From Protagoras onward, students would be trained in the science of success through “demagogic flattery,” and the already endangered Athenian equality would be interrogated and discarded as “absurd in fact and in law.”<sup>77</sup> These two pursuits were not as incommensurable as they may initially seem: it was only by attacking equality (and undermining its twin pillars, as we have seen above) that the “success” of one’s students might enjoy free rein, crossing at will between the intellectual and political domains. But Sorel is always conscious—by virtue, no doubt, of his materialist method—that this widening cleavage within Athenian society was fundamentally the expression of a *class* distinction, both reflecting and contributing to previously existing social inequalities. “The poor,” he reminds us,

generally remained faithful to the old system; few of their children could go near the new schools. The innovators could only ridicule those who were indoctrinated [*engourdis*] in the old ideas, who [naïvely] admired the old poetic fables and were not up to date on the ‘correct’ ideas [*des belles choses*].<sup>78</sup>

According to the new criteria of a transformed *arête*—which Aristotle would later formalize in the Socratic equation of virtue with knowledge—the “old soldiers of the Marathon” in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* were no match for the new urban class.<sup>79</sup> As the education provided by the schools gained prestige and social expediency, this class cleavage would only deepen, but now according to slightly transformed parameters: “society was divided into two distinct categories” through the creation of an “aristocracy of intelligence and oratory [*la parole*].”<sup>80</sup>

While this juxtaposition of “intelligence” with “oratory” might seem strange, it is central to Sorel’s materialist critique of philosophy. While Socrates certainly *considered* himself to be “quite distinct from the Sophists, because he sought to convince of the *truth*,” even Sorel’s

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<sup>77</sup> *Le Procès*, 176; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

<sup>78</sup> *Le Procès*, 176-177; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

<sup>79</sup> *Le Procès*, 177; *From Georges Sorel*, 64. Class here intersects with the *geography* of traditional Athenian virtue, the decline of the agrarian economy, and a growing urban-rural divide: “From the lowly ranks of the urban plebes arose the skillful orators who governed the city.” *Le Procès*, 177; *From Georges Sorel*, 64. These successful plebes, it is implied, were not students at the schools, but instead profited through their individual skill and ambition from the rise of rhetoric and philosophy. Sorel’s disdain for the urban plebes is reflective of his pre-Parisian years. Not having come into contact with the urban proletariat, he continued to deposit all hopes for virtue in the “productive” class with which he was acquainted in the provinces: the rural producer. That “the poor” coincides with the rural and coexists with this dismissal of the “urban plebes” speaks to the tension underlying this view.

<sup>80</sup> *Le Procès*, 176-177; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

generous assessment contains a critical kernel drawing them back toward one another.<sup>81</sup> “He had a marvelous facility in debate,” Sorel admits, “no Sophist could be compared to him either for his dialectical finesse or for the penetrating grace of his language. All witnesses agree that he was irresistible.”<sup>82</sup> Here, we can already sense the direction of the attack to come. Viewed in terms of material *effects*, Socratic self-perception and intentions matter little, especially given Socrates’ role as an educator, one which entails a distinction of master from disciple. In terms of sheer oratorical capacity, Socrates is superior to the Sophists, a fact which is borne out in the students he would attract: Sorel is quick to point out that “we also know that his disciples did not always follow him in all his teaching... Critias and Alcibiades attached themselves to Socrates in order to become skillful politicians.”<sup>83</sup> And they were not the only ones: as McInnes reminds us, no fewer than *nine* tyrants were to pass through Plato’s “Socratic” Academy.<sup>84</sup> Here the parallel to love is direct: much as the Uranian Venus could not “remain chaste,” nor could Socrates’ “heavenly” philosophy remain aloof from politics indefinitely. This material fact—more than all the extensive debates over Socrates’ personal hatred of democracy—is the key piece of evidence for Sorel’s re-staging of the trial. And it is above all on the basis of the material effects of Socratic doctrine that the nominal distance between Socratics and Sophists is once again collapsed: “*For many of the well-reared [élèves] Socrates was the most admirable of professors and the most convincing of Sophists.*”<sup>85</sup>

But this collapse should not be confused with simple conflation, as Sorel makes clear in maintaining the professor/Sophist distinction. Indeed the *most dangerous* element of Socratic philosophy, the most potent threat it posed to the old, heroic ways of thinking and to the institutions which upheld pre-Socratic society, was one which escaped all comparison to the Sophists: the *pretense* of truth. It is the filtering of Socrates’ own self-image through the interests of an ambitious new class of wealthy urbanites that the father of Western philosophy is converted into his self-proclaimed opposite. The political effects of this “aristocracy of intelligence and oratory” were, in Sorel’s view, devastating for Athenian democracy. Philosophy was not content to—through its negative, critical gestures—undermine the family-military nexus that was the basis for Athenian egalitarianism. It also, in its positive doctrine and practical effects, empowered the very enemies of equality by transforming the Athenian class constellation:

When a society is divided into distinct classes in terms of knowledge, the question of oligarchy is soon posed... demagogic rule became a sort of oligarchy of the small shopkeepers and artisans of Athens—proud and cunning, liars and braggarts—who directed the business of the city to their own profit and to the detriment of the countryside.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “This supposedly anti-Socratic work contains a most generous assessment of the Socratic character” (McInnes, “Sorel on the Trial,” 38).

<sup>82</sup> *Le Procès*, 178-179; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

<sup>83</sup> *Le Procès*, 178; *From Georges Sorel*, 64.

<sup>84</sup> McInnes, “Sorel on the Trial,” 41.

<sup>85</sup> *Le Procès*, 179; *From Georges Sorel*, 64. Here, Stanley’s translation of *élèves* as “students” is positively misleading, as it is through this term—evocative of class and breeding—that Sorel transitions directly into the question of the oligarchy.

<sup>86</sup> *Le Procès*, 179; *From Georges Sorel*, 64-65. Sorel continues, making clear how relevant the question of intellectual oligarchy is to his contemporary France, attacking the “fallacious pretext that the city-dwellers, reading

How best to describe this degenerate regime in which disinterested philosophy and urban self-interest ruled hand-in-hand? Here, Sorel explicitly parodies Aristotle's classification of regime types in Book IV of the *Politics*. After all, it was Aristotle who would most directly tie *arête* to knowledge (albeit of a more practical sort), situating the nexus of the two as the foundation for a benevolent aristocracy.<sup>87</sup> For Sorel, as the above quotation makes clear, to equate *arête* with knowledge is already to corrupt the purported virtues of aristocracy, by eliminating the equality that stood, in practice, at its very foundation.<sup>88</sup> Lacking the necessary institutions to combat this new *arête*—and here Sorel substitutes his own Viconian inclinations for the Greek *kyklos*—the degenerative slide to oligarchy was then but the inevitable outcome.

But perhaps aware that his description of Athenian decadence was a far cry from Aristotle's own description of oligarchy, the latter would not suffice, and with a sly wink to Aristotle's own preferred "mixed constitution" (the *politeia*, often translated as a constitutional democracy), Sorel contributes a new, "mixed" regime type of his own to the classificatory scheme, but one which rather than being the best was instead the worst: "Of all governments the worst is the one in which wealth and 'talent' share power. The prejudice of the majority of our historians against the aristocracy has closed their eyes to the wrongs of constitutional plutocracy."<sup>89</sup> In reformulating Aristotle's political cycle in this way, Sorel emphasizes what he perceives to be most perilous in the emergence of Socratic thought. To put this differently, it is crucial that Sorel does not merely reduce Aristotle's aristocracy (government of the best and most knowledgeable) to oligarchy (government of an undeserving minority). To do so would be to rob both aristocracy and Socratic thought of what is central to its power: the claim to "truth," to "science." The danger of Socratic thought lies precisely in the fact that the poles of "intellect" and "oratory" are preserved and emerge in an ideologically concealed relationship to one another. It was the veneer of truth that made Socratic philosophy infinitely more threatening—in Sorel's view—than the morally-chameleonic Sophists.<sup>90</sup>

This peculiar power enjoyed by the Socratics but not the Sophists, this power deriving its force from the truth it claims, would provide Sorel with the theoretical bugbear that would guide

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their newspapers, were much more enlightened than the *rural, country-dwellers*." Again, this preference for the rural reflects Sorel's life in the Provinces and lack of contact with the urban proletariat.

<sup>87</sup> Simultaneously transformed in the process is the concept of *logos*. Like *arête*, pre-Socratic *logos* was universally accessible: Heraclitus defines *logos*, meaning "talk" or even "common sense," as "what is open to all" (Fragment 26), or in the scientific context, as the universal substrate grounding all existence. But the Socratics would resignify the term as the faculty of human reason, thereby allowing it to merge with *arête* itself. Moreover, this intellectualization of *logos* and *arête* have the same short-circuiting effect as Socratic military science, as it neglects the necessarily mythopoetic character of virtue. When combined with *logos* as a disembodied rationality, virtue as *arête* is transformed into its structurally exclusionary, superlative form: a resignified *aristos*.

<sup>88</sup> "To Sorel, this Socratic doctrine helped to separate the old-fashioned doctrines of excellence [*arête*]—of performing well—on the one hand, and democratic equality on the other; the traditional household/military virtues reconciled these two principles" (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 38).

<sup>89</sup> *Le Procès*, 210; *From Georges Sorel*, 68. Hence Sorel rejects Aristotle's tyranny as the worst of all regimes, instead combining the "best" (constitutional government) with a perverted aristocracy (i.e. oligarchy). We could argue, however, that Sorel's own recognition of class mobility in the rising urban centers does not, in *stricto sensu*, correspond to the fixity of plutocracy: "Athenian oligarchs came from all social classes. They opened their ranks to all capable and intelligent men" (*Le Procès*, 211; *From Georges Sorel*, 68-69). While Aristotle would explicitly condemn exchange and usury in Book I.10 of the *Politics*, Sorel's point holds: the *effects* of a doctrine are more important than the *intentions* of its philosophical proponents.

<sup>90</sup> "[Socrates'] philosophical success meant that he, not the Sophists, was used by the new urbanites to help formulate the ideology of the new urban oligarchy" (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 39).

his entire career, uniting his ancient and modern concerns: Jacobinism.<sup>91</sup> More than mere oligarchy and more than mere science, Jacobinism is, for Sorel, a potent and perverse combination of the two: an absolute truth embedded in the state, and the state imbued with and enamored of absolute and abstract truth. Despite his purported preference for a *politeia*, it is Aristotle himself—in his prevarications regarding ostracism—that leads the way toward a Jacobin politics.<sup>92</sup> Aristotle has, according to Sorel, proclaimed here the “absolute right of the genius,” and idea “common in Greece as a result of the schools,” but one which contains an inherent slipperiness embodied in the concept of “genius” which leads inevitably toward political manifestation: “privilege, reserved for the philosopher of genius, will quickly be claimed by talent, and the oligarchic principle is posed.”<sup>93</sup> But as we have said, this is no longer a question of mere oligarchy: the privileging of *arête* as knowledge is, for Sorel, a Pandora’s Box. The “metaphysical ideas” which ground Socratic thought “are raised to a new dialectical level” when the students imbued with such ideas claim power: it is the privileging of an Alcibiades that lays the groundwork for a Critias.<sup>94</sup> The cleavage that rends society is now conceived—in Sorel’s sarcastic rendering of Socratic-Aristotelian doctrine—in terms of a division between those with access to “divine Intellect” who “enjoy a kind of *grace*,” and those who do not.<sup>95</sup> “How nice it would be,” Sorel adds with characteristic sarcasm, “if the assembly had dialecticians instead of old sailors! Then natural laws could really be discovered and infallible decisions taken.”<sup>96</sup> Sorel is seething, and venomously recites the Socratic critique of ostracism:

In alienating scholars [*éloignant les savants*], democracy committed an *error* [*faute*]... In alienating the privileged, it commits a *crime* against divinity. It reverses every law of Providence; it places itself outside the law. Those who are prevented from action nevertheless have a *mission* to accomplish... duties to fulfill. They are not allowed to

<sup>91</sup> Here, Jacobinism prefigures in some senses Foucault’s understanding of truth/power.

<sup>92</sup> Aristotle raises the specter of the supremely virtuous and capable man—*aristos* incarnate—for whom enforced equality would be an injustice. Such an individual could only be considered a “god among men,” and since law can only apply to “equals in birth and capacity,” Aristotle concludes that “there is no law that embraces men of that calibre: they are themselves law.” They are like Antisthenes’ lions, whose only response to the hares of democratic equality is: “Show us your claws and your teeth” (III.xiii, 1284a3, p. 213). It is for this precise reason, according to Aristotle, that those societies which “attach such immense importance to the principle of equality above all else” engage in the traditional practice of ostracism (*ostrakismos*), the exclusion of the best (*aristos*) or most outstanding members of society. III.xiii, 1284a17, p. 213-214. Aristotle confirms the prevalence of ostracism in both ancient myth and Athenian practice during the Peloponnesian Wars, and to this we could add the eventual exclusion, albeit informal, of Alcibiades—himself an ex-student of Socrates—by the Athenian public. Here, however, Thucydides sides with Aristotle: it was not Alcibiades extravagant lifestyle that led to his exclusion, but rather the inordinate response of conservative Athenians to that lifestyle, a response which in the end doomed Athens to defeat in the aftermath of the failed Sicilian Expedition. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. R. Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), VI.15, p. 418-419. It would be Aristotle himself who would, in his *Athenian Constitution*, best document this practice, by which more than a dozen outstanding Athenians were excluded between 487-416 BCE. It is suggested that the practice fell out of use as dangers to Athenian democracy shifted from tyrants to oligarchs (i.e. an entire class, which could not be ostracized), after which point (approximately 415 BCE), it was replaced by the *graphe paranomon*, which could target a larger number of political actors for nominally violating established law. While his sympathies are clear, in III.xiii, 1284b22, p. 215-216, Aristotle conspicuously leaves the issue to be resolved by “nature.” He later concludes that the supreme individual “whose virtue is so outstanding as to outstrip that of all the rest” should be subject to neither death nor exile, ostracism nor the submission to law: “There is therefore nothing for it but to obey such a man and accept him as sovereign, not in alternation but absolutely.”

<sup>93</sup> *Le Procès*, 197-198.

<sup>94</sup> *Le Procès*, 198-199; *From Georges Sorel*, 65.

<sup>95</sup> *Le Procès*, 198; *From Georges Sorel*, 65.

<sup>96</sup> *Le Procès*, 239.

cross their arms and laugh at the stupidities of fools. They are born for action; they must act.<sup>97</sup>

Citing Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Sorel is consciously and pointedly showing a Socrates whose imperative to political action has long been heaped onto the shoulders of Plato.<sup>98</sup> When the truly knowledgeable (and privileged) are constrained by the uneducated (and poor), they have an absolute right—if not a duty—to act to break those constraints: “When the Good has been formulated and defined, is not a government which is opposed to the realization of the Good a social ulcer that must be cured by *sword and fire*? Is not right superior to a purely formal legality?”<sup>99</sup>

Again, however, it is not the philosopher himself who takes this final step, and Sorel argues that this is a systematic evasion of the (non-rational) material consequences of (rationalistic) philosophy: “there is no lack of fervent [*ardents*] spirits ready to draw all of the consequences from a doctrine.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly given the subject, and still less so given Sorel's demonstrated interests, his discussion then turns to the French Revolution, which he explicitly juxtaposes to the tyrannical rule of The Thirty in Athens: “The Socratics were submerged [*pénétrés*] in the theory of the *absolute*; they did not recognize the importance of historical law, this made them revolutionaries.”<sup>101</sup> Not revolutionaries in a generic sense: for the Sorel of this period, the word had but a single, defining historical referent. And not revolutionaries themselves, of course, since “men of science” tend to shun political life *in proportion to* the radicalism of their philosophy while “men who resort to violence are quite feeble theorists: we have the example of our revolutionary assemblies as proof of this.”<sup>102</sup> If Critias was, in the words of Stone, “the first Robespierre,” then Sorel's stunning transposition implies that Socrates was his Rousseau.<sup>103</sup> Sorel ridicules the likely responses of the philosophical pairing to their actional counterparts: their academic remonstrations are no match for his unyieldingly materialistic method.<sup>104</sup> Such are merely attempts to distance their thought from its necessary political result, to distinguish the theory of the absolute from its Jacobin practice.

Sorel's concept of Jacobinism—which here links ancient Athens to his contemporary France—emerges from a sort of law of conservative resistance which operates in all revolutions in which absolute theories figure prominently, thereby forcing the consolidation of power in the hands of the few:

One of the traits of revolutions is to create dictatorial powers in the hands of small groups. We have seen this very well in France in 1793. The majority of a country cannot, in general, easily accept great upheavals founded on absolute theories. A society develops historically and the masses cling to their traditions. Innovators can succeed only by boldness... The Jacobins were few in number... They proved to be more violent the more

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<sup>97</sup> *Le Procès*, 199; *From Georges Sorel*, 65.

<sup>98</sup> McInnes deems Sorel's critique “fatal” to those “idealizations” (he is thinking specifically of Karl Popper) which distinguish too cleanly between Socrates and his preeminent student (“Sorel on the Trial,” 38).

<sup>99</sup> *Le Procès*, 200; *From Georges Sorel*, 65.

<sup>100</sup> *Le Procès*, 201; *From Georges Sorel*, 66.

<sup>101</sup> *Le Procès*, 203; *From Georges Sorel*, 300.

<sup>102</sup> *Le Procès*, 204; *From Georges Sorel*, 66.

<sup>103</sup> Stone, *TS*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> *Le Procès*, 204; *From Georges Sorel*, 66-67.

they were isolated. They were perfectly logical. They alone possessed the revolutionary Idea. Right [*droit*] does not reside in numbers.<sup>105</sup>

Here we find the basic parameters of Sorel's notion of Jacobinism, a focal point for his hatred throughout his intellectual and political life. The Jacobin is the revolutionary imbued with the absolute, the philosophical idealist with nothing but contempt for the majority and their historical and material investments, where the professional politician meets the professional intellectual. By virtue of their privileged access to truth, moreover, any and all means are justified toward its enactment. It is this portrait of the Jacobin—as the violent, minoritarian absolutist—that in many ways provides the oft-overlooked red thread uniting this earliest of Sorel's books with better known works like *Reflections on Violence*, and as we will see in the next chapter, it is Sorel's resolute anti-Jacobinism that rescues him from his sometimes dubious later political associations. Further, it is this anti-Jacobin orientation that enriches the egalitarian *content* of the mythopoetic *form* that Sorel associates with the Homeric epic. His celebration of the poets has less to do with the epic form than with the radical egalitarianism that it cultivated and the terroristic philosophy it confronted.

### Toward the proletariat

Having laid the foundations for a *concept* of virtue through reference to an idealized Athenian past, Sorel would then turn to the central task of his political life: the search for a material *vehicle* of this heroic virtue in the present, a search which leads us toward the *Reflections*. Indeed, if the continuity from *The Trial* to the *Reflections* remained in any doubt, we could quote Sorel himself, who makes clear that his restaging of the trial of Socrates is merely a preface to more contemporary applications of his analyses: “The Athenians of olden times were quite superior to our envious, ignorant and gluttonous bourgeoisie. The Jacobin type did not exist in early Athens.”<sup>106</sup> And by the time we reach his 1902 *La Ruine du monde antique*—whose very title reflects Sorel's final acceptance of the irreversibility of Athenian decline—he had discovered a new material bearer of pre-Socratic Athenian equality: “Socialism returns to ancient thought; but the warrior of the *polis* has become the worker of large industry; his weapons have been replaced by machines,” to which Stanley adds: “and the myth of the general strike would be the new Homeric social poetry.”<sup>107</sup> After a close look at Sorel's discussion of the ancient world and the incipient class struggle which threatens to tear apart his pristine account of it (ironic, given his indictment of perfection), the transition from Homer to Marx no longer seems so extreme.

But the full contours of Sorel's fusion of mythopoetical identity with a radical, anti-Jacobin content—and the full implications of this fusion—would not be clear until the author departed the world of the idealized past and addressed himself directly to the modern French state. In other words, the firmness of identity, the “pride of race” projected via the Homeric epic, could not assume a separatist or dialectical form while beholden to the paradigm of totality.

This transition from the ancient world to France would coincide, then, with Sorel's break with the paradigm of totality and his embrace of a dialectic of rupture which would far outstrip

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<sup>105</sup> *Le Procès*, 205-206; *From Georges Sorel*, 67.

<sup>106</sup> *Le Procès*, 172; *From Georges Sorel*, 62.

<sup>107</sup> *La Ruine du monde antique: conception matérialiste de l'histoire* (Paris: Rivière, 1933 [1902]), 311; cited in Wood, “Some Reflections,” 79. Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 48.

his Marxist contemporaries in its severity. It was this simultaneous rupture with totality and with his Marxist contemporaries—many of whom endorsed a politics of social unity still imbued with the spirit of totality—that would give Sorel’s political thought the character of a counterdiscourse to a counterdiscourse. But if we have shown that this transition entailed a rupture with the totalizing nostalgia for Athenian social unity, it is worth noting briefly some moments in the *Trial of Socrates* which prefigure Sorel’s later break.

These moments of continuity between the *Trial* and the *Reflections* center on the very failure of the totality whose immaculate image he seeks to uphold. After all, even Sorel would need to admit that it was not Socrates who *caused* the collapse of Athenian equality. Despite his best efforts, Sorel presents the Athenian social body as one already rife with a degree of division and conflict that was likely irreversible: in the military, where the cavalry represented “the pressure point of the oligarchs,”<sup>108</sup> in the emerging power of the urban class, in the “fundamental vice” of slavery,<sup>109</sup> and in his own endorsement of a single class (rural warrior-farmers) as the embodiment of unity itself against these new forces (and this despite the cross-class alliance, itself not fully encompassing, of which he speaks).<sup>110</sup> These continuities vis-à-vis the paradigm of totality would merge with the more straightforwardly continuous element which stands at the heart of Sorel’s political theory: a mythical form imbued with a radically egalitarian, anti-Jacobin content.<sup>111</sup>

Once Sorel had broken with the paradigm of totality, his anti-Jacobinism would assume the form of a double-opposition, to both the capitalist state and the Marxists who would seek to use it to their own advantage. This mythical anti-Jacobinism would thus gain the name “violence,” through which his opposition to the “superstitious cult of the state” would replace his opposition to Socrates’ “cult of political expertise,”<sup>112</sup> acquiring an altogether new character that we will call “separation.” The “absolute,” too, would be resignified, transformed, and “decentered,” shifting from the reviled Socratic Idea to the mythical basis for revolutionary identity, one which has more to do with Homer than with Socrates. But Sorel’s mature theory

<sup>108</sup> *Le Procès*, 167. Demosthenes provides insights into the similar class war simmering within manifestations of the law. Rather than recognizing the impact of this class division on one of his central pillars, and its implications for the military reform which he so firmly condemns, Sorel avoids the issue.

<sup>109</sup> “The fundamental vice of Greek society resides in slavery: this diabolical institution, any society which practices it loses; it corrupts the master, even more perhaps than the slave” (83-84). That this is an aside is clear from the fact that he cannot in reality pin the existence of slavery on the rise of philosophy (and nor can he excuse his idealized Athenian virtue from its participation in slavery). Ancient slavery, however, by virtue of the lack of “color-prejudice,” is *more dangerous* than modern, racist slavery, and this is because the distinction between slave and master was less pronounced in the ancient world (i.e. all men were, because fully human, at least *potentially free*). But Sorel insistently argues that the Socratics would only strengthen this pernicious institution: “The philosophers regarded slavery as essential to a *civilized [policiée]* society, because it dispenses with work” (84), and Aristotle himself would consolidate slavery philosophically. “These theses are based, as one sees it, on the principle of the absolute separation of the two elements, a principle completely admitted by Socrates, as we will see below” (84-5). The entire point of this aside, it seems, is to show that under slavery and any other social structure which eliminates the need for labor, “the demoralization is extreme” (85). The ethical importance of labor is, for Sorel, a *law of human nature* (86).

<sup>110</sup> The shift from the rural farmer-warrior to the urban proletariat as a locus of virtue indicates that Sorel’s position vis-à-vis totality was never entirely clear. To this we could add the fact that “Sorel ends by driving a wedge between justice and virtue” (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 43): as we will see, the rejection of justice is a rejection of totality (within which justice derives its meaning), and Sorel will perform a similar gesture in the *Reflections*.

<sup>111</sup> Also: his celebration of work, family, the warrior.

<sup>112</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 99; *Réflexions*, 137; Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 30.



would only emerge after he had abandoned the quiet provincial life of Perpignan for the intellectual bustle of Paris, where he would take up the mantle—ironic, given the content of *The Trial*—of the “Socrates of the Latin Quarter.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Roth, *Cult of Violence*, ix.

## Chapter 2 – Proletarian Violence against Jacobin Force: Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*

While the foundations for Sorel's mature theory of separation are to be found in his earliest works like *The Trial of Socrates*, the latter remained in several key senses within the paradigm of totality. Certainly, Sorel's re-staging of Socrates' condemnation took the form of a materialist class analysis—or rather, a study of the class effects of a specific philosophical orientation—but in the end, Sorel was normatively oriented toward mourning the decline of Greek virtue. This was, in other words, a nostalgic attachment to totality. This virtue, which for Sorel filled a mythopoetic, heroic *form* with radical egalitarian, anti-Jacobin *content*, was theorized as something to which *all Athenians* could have laid claim, had the pernicious specters of social class and oligarchic-Jacobin ideology not reared their ugly heads. While he was not so naïve as those Athenians who believed that the execution of Socrates would render irrelevant an entire class, Sorel's subject matter was such that—perhaps unavoidably—he remained melancholic, mourning the development of a social relation which was irreversible even in Socrates' time. At this point, to put it more plainly, Sorel remained what many would consider him to have always been: a conservative moralist, albeit a radically egalitarian one.

While a certain species of “moralism” would remain with him throughout his intellectual trajectory, Sorel would soon cease to be a “conservative” in any meaningful sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> While this transition was prefigured even in *The Trial*, it began in earnest only with Sorel's encounter with Marxism, one which began benignly enough (and was even, for a time, compatible with a descriptive form of totality), but which would almost immediately draw Sorel into the riptide of our counterdiscourse of separation. Almost immediately after embracing Marxist doctrine, Sorel would find himself turning against its then-predominant, “centered” forms, and formulating a counterdiscourse to “official” Marxist counterdiscourse. It is in this encounter, and in his diagnosis of the theoretical and political follies of orthodox Marxists and parliamentary socialists, respectively, that Sorel will turn decisively against the paradigm of totality, granting for the first time a *normative* weight to anti-totality, rupture, and the reformulated dialectic of working-class separation as a “violent” and anti-Jacobin process.

### Toward Marxism, away from Marxists

This break with the paradigm of totality would emerge through a two-fold encounter with Marxism: one epistemological and one more properly political. The first was marked by Sorel's rapid and total intoxication with Marx's own work, but this early embrace would, for a time, struggle to remain within the descriptively totalizing conceptions that Sorel associated with the notion of science. The second would be expressed through Sorel's encounter with the predominant French “Marxists” of his day and his responses to both the Dreyfus Affair and the Revisionist Controversy, which racked French society and international socialism, respectively. It would be through a dynamic interplay between these two levels—the epistemological and the political—that Sorel's break with totality would occur. The first step was his realization that the former—Marxist science—could not, in his interpretation of the time, account for the contingency of social and political life. This realization, in turn, would transform his

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<sup>1</sup> But as we will see below, this “moralism” should not be taken for granted, as he sought to distinguish himself from most of those who fell under that label.

understanding of both the theoretical and the political realms: his Marxism would turn toward the conception of the social myth; his politics toward a direct assault on the ideology of unity.

Sorel's encounter with Marxism would not begin in earnest until his provincial reveries into the Ancient world were interrupted in 1892 by the bustle of the capital, where he would eventually gain the title—supremely ironic given what we have just seen—of the “Socrates of the Latin Quarter.”<sup>2</sup> Alongside this geographical rupture, and perhaps through the wound it created, Marxism entered, metastasizing rapidly so that within a few short years it had completely occupied Sorel's intellectual horizon.<sup>3</sup> The standard reading has been one in which Sorel's rapid conversion to the Marxist faith was wholehearted and orthodox: a dalliance with dogma before his later revisionist stage. Jennings, however, alerts us to the fact that, “Sorel was always an eclectic thinker, never a wholehearted disciple,” and that as a result, it would be an error to overstate his early orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> As we will see, both are true to a degree, as Sorel's initial encounter with Marxist orthodoxy would, like his account of ancient Athenian unity, find him attempting to maintain theoretically the framework of totality while all evidence pulled him beyond it.

This stubborn effort to remain within the orbit of totality at all costs would manifest in Sorel's early understanding of Marxism as a “science,” one which appears in a peculiarly positive light given what we have seen of its role in *The Trial*, where science was a stand-in for intellectual hierarchy. Sorel's tenuous endorsement of both totality and science was possible only through his firm distinction between what he deems “the systematic” and “rational science.”<sup>5</sup> The former is concerned with experimentation and prediction, whereas the latter—the only true “science” for Sorel—seeks to grasp the systematic, underlying rational connections [*rapport rationnel*] that link seemingly disparate objects of analysis.<sup>6</sup> “Science,” then, does not concern itself with prediction: indeed, it cannot predict, but only delineate the systematic relationships that constitute a “completely determined” system, and nothing is more dangerous than the unwarranted extension of “the systematic” beyond its limited scope and into the realm of “rational science.”<sup>7</sup> “Rational science” entails the discovery of invariant cause-and-effect, and this is what Sorel means when he argues that Marx's understanding of capitalism is “completely determined.”<sup>8</sup> This “determinism” has little to do with what we generally understand as “economic determinism,” since the “laws” of capitalist development hold only for its present and tell us nothing about its future.<sup>9</sup> Sorel himself is quite clear that this “determinism” is a far cry

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<sup>2</sup> Roth, *Cult of Violence*, ix.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas we find no mention of Marx in Sorel's writings prior to 1892, he had already by 1894 established himself as one of the preeminent Marxists of the French milieu. Jeremy Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” *Political Studies* 31, n. 2 (June 1982), 226.

<sup>4</sup> Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” 225.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” 229. This distinction is established in Sorel's *D'Aristote à Marx* (Paris: Rivière, 1935), 96-7, a work previously published as “L'ancienne et la nouvelle métaphysique,” *L'Ere nouvelle*, II (1894), 329-51, 461-82; III (1894), 51-87, 180-205. The concept of “rational science” appears to be drawn directly from French philosopher of science Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude*, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” 231.

<sup>7</sup> Sorel, *D'Aristote à Marx*, 113. Cf. Diremption.

<sup>8</sup> Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” 232. This contextual interpretation of the concept of determination is also derived from Bernard. Sorel explicitly mobilizes Bernard to explain Marxism on several occasions. See Sorel, “La métaphysique évolutionniste de M. Brunetière,” *Le Devenir social*, I (1895), 579-593; “Les théories de M. Durkheim,” *Le Devenir social*, I (1895), 1-26, 148-80.

<sup>9</sup> Jennings, “Sorel's Early Marxism and Science,” 232.

from the sort of “fatalism” that he opposes, insisting that “we can no more say what the collectivist society will be like than we can say what the steam engine will be like a century from now.”<sup>10</sup>

Translated into the lexicon of totality, we could therefore say that this distinction was an effort to maintain a weak *descriptive* understanding of totality (an understanding of things as they are by way of their total interrelationship), by nominally stripping it of any claim to coherently grasp the broad strokes of history (what Jay calls “longitudinal” totality).<sup>11</sup> But if Sorel’s endorsement of descriptive totality in the guise of “rational science” represented an effort—much like that of *The Trial*—to cling to the paradigm of totality despite its manifest failures, he would soon break with even this limited understanding of totality. Sorel’s engagement with French socialists and the Revisionist Controversy would force him to come to terms with the failure of Marxism to even *describe* the capitalist totality in a scientific manner. Rather than break with Marxism, however, he would choose to view it in a different light, replacing “rational science” with a concept more in keeping with his celebration of the Homeric epic: “social myth.”

Beginning in the mid-1890s, German revisionist and leading light of the SPD Eduard Bernstein began to publish a number of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* which questioned the reigning orthodoxy of the Second International.<sup>12</sup> Bernstein specifically interrogated the validity of several of Marx’s “objective” claims, such as the coherence and validity of the labor theory of value and the assertion that class cleavages would automatically deepen as capitalism developed. For Bernstein, Marx’s errors led him to the unrealistic conclusion that capitalism’s downfall would be swift, catastrophic, and cataclysmic, and his recognition of these errors therefore favored a policy of gradual reform carried out in the political arena. This gradualist reformism was countered by Karl Kautsky’s reaffirmation of “orthodox” claims regarding the historical inevitability of sharpening class divisions, and the nominal opposition within Marxism between “reformist revisionism” and “revolutionary orthodoxy” proliferated antagonistic pairs across the continent, with Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès standing in as the French representatives of orthodoxy and revisionism, respectively.

Strictly speaking, Sorel’s response to the controversy was to adopt a “revisionist” position: while both parties derived their theories economically, the dogmatism of the orthodox faction rendered them wholly unreflexive. Bernstein argued that capitalist development had granted an increasing importance to ideological factors, and Sorel agreed wholeheartedly.<sup>13</sup> This agreement, however, would not extend to practical questions, as Sorel’s uniqueness lay in the degree to which he adopted a revisionist position while breaking with the assumption that bound theoretical revisionism to political reformism.<sup>14</sup> To the hollow revolutionary phrases of orthodoxy, Sorel replied: revision is necessary if we are to “return to the spirit of Marx, not the letter.”<sup>15</sup> Sorel broke with the “pillar of orthodoxy” Lafargue and others at the Guesdist *Devenir*

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<sup>10</sup> Sorel, *D’Aristote à Marx*, 115. In several articles, moreover, Sorel explicitly likens Bernstein to Marx, and denies that the latter equates determinism with fatality.

<sup>11</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 23-24 (on descriptive totality); 64-66 (on longitudinal totality).

<sup>12</sup> These were later published collectively as *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, published in English as *Evolutionary Socialism*, tr. E. C. Harvey (New York: Schocken, 1961 [1899]).

<sup>13</sup> Larry Portis, *Georges Sorel* (London: Pluto Press, 1981), 53. *From Georges Sorel*, 154-158.

<sup>14</sup> Cite Laclau and Mouffe.

<sup>15</sup> Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 10; Reflections, 120.

*social*, heir to the equally orthodox *Ère nouvelle*, and by 1897 he had “set out to demolish what remained of the orthodox position associated with Guesde.”<sup>16</sup>

Sorel’s peculiar rejection of both theoretical orthodoxy *and* political reformism centered on the one element which had most come to define the orthodox faction: the assumption that society was in fact, in Marx’s words, divided into “two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.”<sup>17</sup> Sorel’s critique of orthodoxy, and indeed his mature theory of class war, would sprout directly from the fertile interrogation of this formulation. What was the status of this claim? Did it purport to *describe* the totality of capitalist relations, or an inherent tendency therein? Or was it instead meant to serve a different, less literal, and far less scientific role? For the revisionists, Marx’s description simply did not map onto their observed reality: without intrinsic class opposition, there would be no inevitable revolution, and we must therefore—it was argued—prepare ourselves for a different sort of transition. The standard-bearers of orthodoxy, on the other hand, were often brazen in their blindness to this very same disconnect between theory and reality. As we will see, Sorel accepted the revisionist argument that class antagonism enjoyed no *a priori* basis without accepting in any way its purported political consequences: if class war was not guaranteed, he would eventually argued, then it must *be created*. But the full extent of Sorel’s radical revisionism would not manifest until he had broken decisively with the ostensible “Marxists” of the Dreyfusard movement and the parliamentary socialists that it had birthed.

To paint Sorel’s adoption of a heretofore unique theoretical position—unorthodox orthodoxy—as a more or less abstract process which found its resolution on the philosophical plane is to tell a partial story at best. For Sorel’s revolutionary revisionism was at least in part prompted by a peculiar *political* constellation which could be described in the words of Foucault as a “centering” of the previously oppositional discourse of Marxism.<sup>18</sup> Put differently, Sorel would discover an intimate relationship between the descriptive failures of Marxist science and the *cause* of those failures, as the very same parliamentary socialists who had debated the question of class conflict during the revisionist controversy would themselves *contribute* to the ideology of unity which threatened to erase class scission altogether. In this second, more political encounter with “Marxism”—albeit a Marxism between quotation marks—Sorel would confront the political face of the paradigm of totality in the *politics of unity* embraced by parliamentary socialism. Ironically, it would be this political embrace of unity by some nominal Marxists, and specifically the ideological effects of this politics, that would contribute to a weakening of class divisions, and thereby of Marxism as a scientific system seeking to describe the dynamics of the social totality.

Quite apart from the distinction between the catastrophic language of Jules Guesde and the reformist tone of Jean Jaurès—the French representatives of orthodoxy and revisionism, respectively—both sectors took part in a common, and historically quite new, enterprise:

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<sup>16</sup> Roth *Cult of Violence*; Portis, *Georges Sorel*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>18</sup> In his analysis of what he deems the counterdiscourse of “race war,” Foucault observes how this initially “decentered” discourse which posited a binary division internal to society “will be recentered and will become the discourse of power itself. It will become the discourse of a centered, centralized, and centralizing power... It is no longer: ‘We have to defend ourselves against society,’ but ‘We have to defend society...’ It is in the course of this “recentering” that such a counterdiscourse comes to “promote the global strategy of social conservatisms.” Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 61-62.

parliamentary socialism. The emergence of this phenomenon lay in what was a formative event in Sorel's life: the Dreyfus Affair. In 1894, in a concocted trial that reeked of anti-Semitism, Captain Albert Dreyfus was convicted of espionage. Sorel was clear on where he stood, and since it was the moderate revisionists led by Jaurès who leapt to the defense of Dreyfus (Guesde insisted that socialists had little stake in the intra-bourgeoisie quarrel), Sorel was briefly drawn into the orbit of parliamentary socialism.<sup>19</sup> The Dreyfus Case polarized French society, playing a key role in the eventual ascent to power by the left. First through Alexandre Millerand's participation in the 1899 government of "republican defense" cobbled together by René Waldeck-Rousseau, and later through the 1902 electoral victory of the leftist *Bloc des gauches*, self-professed socialists and Marxists for the first time in French history entered the halls of power *en masse*.

Understood schematically, this discursive-political moment is what is meant by the "centering" of official Marxism in France.<sup>20</sup> To be clear: it is not the mere fact of "centering" that Sorel opposed (and indeed, he did not initially oppose it), although this might be our conclusion were we to read his early work through the lens of his later work. Rather, it was this "centering"—with its concomitant discursive and political effects—that *provoked* Sorel, encouraging his subsequent formulation of a non-orthodox Marxism of rupture, a counterdiscourse to this suddenly-centered counterdiscourse, after which point he waged "a two-front war against the agents of European capitalism and those of parliamentary socialism."<sup>21</sup> For Sorel, of course, this centered "Marxism" was no longer anything of the sort, and much less was it "counter" in any substantive way to the operations of capitalist power. Rather it had fully conformed to the exigencies of a governing discourse; it had become fully ensconced in, made a home in, the paradigm of totality; it had come to mimic, to take its conceptual cues from other governing discourses.

Despite Sorel's longstanding opposition to "Jacobinism," he was surprisingly slow to react, and between 1898 and 1901, his position could be described as "reformist and Dreyfusard."<sup>22</sup> But once he noticed the governing socialists recreating behaviors he associated with other governing discourses—and especially that preeminently "centered" discourse he had deemed "Jacobinism" as early as *The Trial*—his reaction was swift and severe. This creeping Jacobinism had two principal targets: the Catholic Church and the military. With Jaurès at the

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<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps the most perplexing moment of Sorel's intellectual-political trajectory. While it is certainly incomprehensible on either the purely theoretical or the purely political planes, when taken together one can understand why Sorel followed the Dreyfusards to state power. Confronted with an incendiary controversy that divided French society, Sorel was forced to grapple with the orthodox Marxist claims of the Guesdists that this very real division was unimportant while the—for Sorel, fictive—division of social classes was insisted upon blindly.

<sup>20</sup> The precise timing or location of such a "centering" is complex: certainly, the reformist language facilitated by the revisionist controversy facilitated the left's ascent to power, and their discourse once in power underwent further mutations. What is important is both the *political fact* of coming to power (which combines with Jacobin behavior) and the *discursive fact* of a shift away from the language of class struggle and toward the language of social unity and harmony (i.e. from a discursive paradigm of rupture, present only sporadically in French Marxism, to one of totality).

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, "Translator's Introduction," in Georges Sorel, *The Illusions of Progress*, tr. J. Stanley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), xii.

<sup>22</sup> In the words of the mission statement of *Mouvement socialiste* (Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 15n79). Some see a turning point in his preface to Colajanni (Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 16). As late as 1901, however, he was defending Bernstein's revisionism as faithful to the spirit of Marx. For an early statement of his disillusionment with the Dreyfusard movement, see his 1902 preface to Pelloutier.

head, the Dreyfusards attacked the Church with the 1901 Associations Law, and in shortly thereafter this attack was extended to the military hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> As a simultaneous rebuke of both moves, in a 1901 essay, Sorel attacked the Dreyfusard reprisals, deeming Jaurès “anticlerical and unpatriotic.”<sup>24</sup> While Sorel had never been a fan of the organized forms of religion and military life, he certainly did not support the subjection of these partially independent institutions to the rationalistic strictures of a power-hungry, centralizing, anti-egalitarian state.<sup>25</sup> But lest we confuse the negative gesture of attacking the Dreyfusards with the positive celebration of the objects of their retribution, we should note that it was neither the Church nor the military that would be the bearer of a new, heroic morality. If Sorel’s account of the rise of Athenian social class was melancholic, this was because he had yet to adapt to this new reality, he had yet to formulate a new class-based vehicle: this role would be reserved for the working class.

If we recall that Sorel’s Athens was one in which virtue drew upon a mythopoetic heroism that was simultaneously religious and martial, we will find little difficulty understanding Sorel’s anxiety toward such measures. If we recall, further, that this Athenian virtue served to ground and guarantee an egalitarian state, we will better understand why Sorel would see the measures as “Jacobin.” And if we recall that Socratic rationalism threatened to undermine the mythical underpinnings of this martial equality, then we will easily see why it was that Sorel would turn back to the concept of “social myth.” This he did in a 1902 introduction to a collection of articles published in Italy under the title *Saggi di critica del marxismo*, observing that, “If Marxism has had so great an influence on the popular masses, it is above all because of the attractiveness of its myths.”<sup>26</sup>

It is here that Sorel’s break with totality—simultaneously descriptive and normative—can be located. While he had previously maintained a version of Marxist “science” in which the latter was prevented from predicting but allowed to describe, this partial endorsement of a specifically descriptive totality was but a way station on the road to a full break with the paradigm as a whole.<sup>27</sup> His revisionism intersects with his rejection of a centered parliamentary socialism, to foster not only a rejection of the objective basis for social class, but a political theory of rupture that seeks normatively to recreate that class basis.<sup>28</sup> In the words of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe:

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<sup>23</sup>In 1901, Sorel privately referred to Jaurès as “anticlerical and antipatriotic” prior to breaking with him publicly. Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 19.

<sup>24</sup>Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 19. But he also critiqued the Church for its anti-worker stance, revealing where his sympathies lay. Moreover, he attacked a vulgar pacifism, not a principled antimilitarism.

<sup>25</sup>“In noting that the life of production is the most fruitful for moral science... Sorel was led to Marxism. But in recognizing that custom was part of that historical development, that Marxism was itself intellectualistic, i.e. that Marxism preferred abstract justice to virtue [i.e. Jacobin], he was led away from it again.” Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 43.

<sup>26</sup>In Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 18. Similarly, in a 1902 speech, Sorel quotes Engels’ phrase from *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*: “To let loose a tempest in the masses one must present to them their own interests in a religious guise.”

<sup>27</sup>Sorel, 1900 “Preface,” in *Matériaux d’une théorie du prolétariat* (Paris: Rivière, 1919). Sorel would critique his earlier view, and Berth would regret its “scientisme.”

<sup>28</sup>In Jennings’s words, “In short, it was only through a radical re-evaluation of the epistemological status to be attached to Marx’s work that Sorel was able to combine adherence to Marxism with a recognition of the place and potentiality of human action. In place of the much vaunted *deterministic* notion of the economic collapse of capitalism, Sorel posited the *voluntaristic* conception of a moral catastrophe facing bourgeois society.” Jennings, “Sorel’s Early Marxism and Science,” 237.

The *totality* as a founding rational substratum has been dissolved, and what now exists is *mélange*. Under these circumstances... social classes... no longer play the role of structural locations in an objective system, but are rather poles of reaggregation that he calls '*blocs*'... he is compelled to displace the constitutive moment of class unity to the political level... the possibility of a dichotomous division of society is given not as a datum of the social structure, but as a construction...<sup>29</sup>

The revisionist controversy led Sorel to turn a critical eye toward the assumption by some sectors of Marxist orthodoxy that class identity emerged automatically from infrastructural conditions, in other words, that the Marxist concept of the class-for-itself (*Klasse für Sich*) was organically and genetically linked to class-in-itself (*Klasse an Sich*) (or indeed, that there was even such a thing as "class-in-itself").<sup>30</sup> But rather than merely rejecting the Marxist progression from class-in-itself to class-for-itself, a process of gaining consciousness of objective conditions, Sorel would notably *reverse* this formulation. In the absence of any objective basis for the very existence of class (as class-in-itself), this basis must be created by a political act. The class-for-itself, in other words, *precedes* and *produces* the class-in-itself.<sup>31</sup> Marxism here becomes a vehicle for this political assertion, attainin the status of "social poetry... artistic images intended to make us assimilate an idea," and Sorel's turn to the language of the mythopoetic—as a way of plastering over the glaring gaps in the economic base—represents a radical reformulation of his earlier analysis of the structure of heroic Athenian virtue. But this reformulation, as we have said, appeared within the context of a radical break with totality: in terms of the first two moments of our counterdiscourse of separation, we can say that Sorel's rejection of the objectivity of class society leads him to endorse the political projection of class as a now antagonistic division of society.

But this turn to the working class would not entail a break with the martial and religious virtues that Sorel had first celebrated in *The Trial*. Rather, religion—particularly in its most militant and warlike forms—would come to serve as the historical model for his interpretation of the present, and his advocacy of a "Christian scission" and a politics of "intransigence."<sup>32</sup> Christianity had succeeded, according to Sorel, not through reformism and moderation, but rather through a radical separatism, political persecution, and martyrdom. Early Christian history would provide the blueprint for a working-class politics with the same mythical structure, but this substitution of militant Christianity for the Homeric epic as a model heralded a striking shift, in which the nostalgia for an ancient Athenian unity yields to militant division, in which the politics of traditional cross-class alliance gives way to a politics of class separation. Before fully theorizing the positive face of his break with totality, however, Sorel would first undertake the

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<sup>29</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2001), 38-40.

<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that Marx does not reduce the class-in-itself purely to objective conditions, but understands it instead as a "class against capital but not yet for itself," with the class-for-itself subsequently emerging "in the struggle... [in which] the class becomes united." Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Italian Marxist Mario Tronti—excluded from this study for reasons of length—makes this reversal explicitly. Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 235. Elsewhere, I draw out the continuities between Sorel and Tronti: George Ciccariello-Maher, "'Detached Irony Toward the Rest': Working-Class One-Sidedness from Sorel to Tronti," *The Commoner*, 11 (Spring/Summer 2006), 54-73.

<sup>32</sup> Roth, *Cult of Violence*, 32-33. Relevant intermediate texts here include his early study of syndicalism—Sorel, *Insegnamenti sociale della economia contemporanea* (Palermo: Sandron, 1906), available in English as *Social Foundations of Contemporary Economics*, tr. J. L. Stanley (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984)—and his study of early Christianity: Sorel, *Le Système historique de Renan* (Paris: Jacques, 1905).



negative task of destroying totality's political basis, taking aim directly at the ideological foundations for the politics of unity peculiar to his contemporary France.

### The ideology of unity

If Marxist orthodoxy was guilty of one sin over and above all others, it was economic determinism. Sorel would go further than most in countering this pernicious tendency, and his diagnosis of parliamentary socialism would rely heavily on what one could deem the “ideological element.” What he grasped in this diagnosis was, in effect, the gradual ideological infection and distortion of French socialism—some of which went under the name “Marxism”—by a complex of influences which shared, not coincidentally, a paradigm of totality and a concomitant reformist political orientation. These *longue durée* ideological structures would then be compounded by various practical pressures, the most important of which would be the actual functioning of the French state (itself both a reflection of and support for the ideology of unity). Hence, Sorel's intervention into the ideological would in part serve to confirm the material weight of the political. Ironically, while Marxism would find itself “centered” in part through the development of revisionist reformism, this very same process of centering would prove to Sorel the validity of at least one key revisionist claim: the capacity of the capitalist state to defend itself.

The first component of this ideological complex was to be found in none other than Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself, who had furnished the theory of democratic unity in the guise of the “general will.” Writing in the preface to his *The Illusions of Progress*—in many ways an ideological companion-piece to the *Reflections*—Sorel charts the degree to which democracy had adopted the discourse of unity: “Democracy looks upon [for Sorel, genuine] Marxist ideas with horror, because democracy is always seeking unity,” and had “inherited the ancien régime's admiration for the state.” Democracy, moreover, had even “perfected” the ideology of unity, since in it, “acts of government are supposed to reflect the general will, in which each one of us is thought to participate.” This unitary theory, moreover, is only possible through the doctrine of abstract man which, despite Sorel's admiring citation of de Maistre, he does not see as “imaginary”: rather, abstract man was “invented” by natural lawyers as a replacement for the Third Estate to mask the existence of real, historical people and relations.<sup>33</sup> One such relation is class—here understood as a category of struggle than as an objective given—the presence of which “reduces to an absurdity the unitary dogma that democracy constantly opposes to the doctrine of the class struggle.”<sup>34</sup>

If the spatial-sectoral unity of society (for Jay, descriptive and latitudinal) was provided in the Rousseauian doctrine of the general will, historical-temporal unity (normative and longitudinal) was provided by a second element: the doctrine of progress. Here, the tautological assumption of the general will—that state action is by definition the expression of the people—combines with another tautology: that said action constitutes progress. As Stanley describes it,

the ideology of progress serves the victors of an epoch—the dominant class that inherits power—by making it appear that this class is destined to govern and that its domination is necessary for the continued “progress” of the state. And by uniting all aspects of

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<sup>33</sup> Sorel, *Illusions*, xlv-xlv.

<sup>34</sup> Sorel, *Illusions*, xli. See also Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 200-202.

experience into a coherent historical whole, the idea of progress, inspired by Cartesianism, appears to explain all aspects of life and reinforces a false sense of unity in society... legitimizing each revolutionary strengthening of the state.<sup>35</sup>

Progress, like the general will, was implicated in the historical process of centralizing and reinforcing state power, and the optimism that it would induce in leaders was for Sorel a dangerous political element.<sup>36</sup>

This ideological complex, moreover, would feed on yet another respected element of the French philosophical tradition: Utopianism. A Utopia, for Sorel, “a combination of imaginary institutions having sufficient analogies to real institutions” to provide the basis for legislative improvements, and is therefore counterintuitively not too distant, as some critics would have it, but too proximate: “the effect of utopias has always been to direct men’s minds [*esprits*] towards reforms.”<sup>37</sup> And beyond this structural reformism, Sorel adds that Utopias are intellectual products which are jealously guarded by their creators, themselves aspiring members of the political class who believe themselves uniquely suited to constructing the society of the future.<sup>38</sup>

These three elements would gradually fuse with one another in a single ideology of unity, but only when heated in the crucible of state politics. Central in this view, for Sorel, is the French Revolution: the birthplace of “Jacobinism.” While Rousseau himself might have opposed the Terror, this mattered little, since—partly due to the vagueness and rationalistic flavor of the doctrine of the general will and its relentless demand for indivisible unity—“the Jacobins discovered in the *Social Contract* the justification for all their upheavals, for they possessed the general will.”<sup>39</sup> Like Socrates before him, Rousseau could not control the actions of those who found inspiration in his doctrines. As a result of the concept of the general will, “the principle heritage bequeathed by Rousseau to modern times consists in the idea of an omnipotent democratic state.”<sup>40</sup> This doctrine of unity, moreover, would be further bolstered during the Revolutionary Wars, here operating both as cause and effect: the perceived threat to the nation served—in a Schmittian sense—to consolidate unity, thereby strengthening what existed previously as an ideological complex, while the severity with which the democracy enforced that unity can be interpreted as an outgrowth of that unitarian theory.<sup>41</sup>

This ideological complex—once refracted through the prism of the French Revolution and subsequent wars—would bear and typify all the characteristics of what Sorel would deem

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<sup>35</sup> Stanley, *From Georges Sorel*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 32-34; *Réflexions*, 11-13. “We can talk pessimism freely to each other... a doctrine without which nothing very great has been accomplished in this world. I have felt for some time that Greek philosophy did not produce any great moral result, simply because it was, as a rule, very optimistic. Socrates was at times optimistic [*parfois*] to an almost unbearable degree” (*Reflections*, 30; *Réflexions*, 8). In this critique of progress, we can find some premonitions of later post-structuralism.

<sup>37</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 29; *Réflexions*, 39-40.

<sup>38</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 29-31; *Réflexions*, 40-44.

<sup>39</sup> Sorel, *Illusions*, 55. This is partly because the thinker will necessarily be distorted by subsequent social actors, as Sorel had said of Rousseau in *The Trial. Le Procès*, 204; *From Georges Sorel*, 66-67. In the *Illusions*, Sorel cites Taine and Sumner Maine as highlighting the absolutist tendencies of the General Will, to whom we could add J. L. Talmon, himself a virulent critic of Sorel (see below). Sorel is clear, however, that Rousseau did not intend to support state terror; see Sorel, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” *Mouvement Socialiste* (June 1907), 527. See also Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 215n56.

<sup>40</sup> Sorel, *Illusions*, 53.

<sup>41</sup> Sorel claims that historically, democracy has been even harder on its rebels than monarchy, citing the repression of the revolts in the Vendée. Sorel, *Reflections*, 50; *Réflexions*, 68.

“Jacobinism.” But for Sorel’s mature formulation of this central concept, one which we found previously in his *Trial of Socrates*, we must turn more directly to the *Reflections*. But in so doing, we encounter an immediate difficulty: the reception of Sorel’s work, especially in the English language, has been characterized by a systematic exaggeration of the importance of the *Reflections*, at the expense of the remainder of Sorel’s *oeuvre*.<sup>42</sup> How, then, can we justify yet again emphasizing the *Reflections*? Because in terms of our object of study (itself one of many possible)—namely, Sorel’s theory of working-class subjectivity as a process of separation—no other work is as systematic and precise.<sup>43</sup> This political centrality of the *Reflections* results in part from its status as a “*livre de circonstance*,” which he emphasizes was composed for an internal audience.<sup>44</sup> Far from the suggestion of irrelevance that such a characterization might mean, for Sorel we could even claim that this internal quality of the work *increases* its political relevance: the *Reflections* was a book *for* a movement, it was meant to be *useful*.

In the terms of our study, this places the emphasis of the *Reflections* more squarely upon the politics of unity than the philosophy of totality. And the political circumstances from which the book emerged and to which it was addressed were particular, appearing as it did between Sorel’s disillusionment with the Dreyfusard movement and the brief period of militant struggle that preceded his disillusionment with syndicalism.<sup>45</sup> Resting gently in this pocket between disillusion, an impassioned *ricorso* before Sorel’s own arguably inevitable—and equally passionate—*corso*, the *Reflections* reflect to an unusual degree a balance between Sorel’s self-professed “pessimism” and the exhilarated optimism of revolutionary hope. And so it is not with an entirely guilty conscience that we will focus, yet again, on the *Reflections*: as a political theory of revolutionary subjectivity, as an expression of Sorel’s “counterdiscourse of a counterdiscourse,” its importance is unparalleled. Before turning to the counterdiscourse of separation itself, however, we must first turn to the second iteration of Sorel’s concept of Jacobinism.

## Jacobinism reloaded

In re-diagnosing Jacobinism—which Sorel does more thoroughly in the *Reflections* than he had in *The Trial*—he would draw heavily upon Alexis de Tocqueville’s identification of the

<sup>42</sup> Stanley, *Illusions*, ix-x. For years, it was Sorel’s *only* major work (only one of more than a dozen books books) to be translated into English, and this translation was received in a specific manner. While the original translation was carried out by T. E. Hulme, a sympathizer, the various reprinting and critical commentary that Sorel received were largely framed by what was perceived as an explosion of irrational violence on campuses and in the Black community during the 1960s. See Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, for one such discussion.

<sup>43</sup> Only the *Insegnamenti* comes close, and it would hardly be justified to emphasize a rough draft entirely where the “finished” product is available. But it is also worth emphasizing that if intellectual products are never finished, Sorel’s were even less so. Moreover, with a touch of wry humor, Sorel’s “Letter to Daniel Halévy” that introduces the *Reflections* suggests another reason for its centrality: it represents the clearest example of the “defects” of his style. This claim, along with that which follows, describing his writing shortcomings as an “incorrigible vice” are certainly tongue-in-cheek, especially since his stylistic reference-point is none other than Rousseau. Sorel, *Reflections*, 4; *Réflexions*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley, *From Georges Sorel*, 2; Sorel, *Reflections*, 3; *Réflexions*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Reflections on Violence* was the name given to several articles appearing in the journal *Mouvement Socialiste* during the first half of 1906, and which were compiled and published in 1908 with a lengthy introduction, the “Letter to Daniel Halevy,” penned in mid-1907. These essays had previously appeared, in reduced form, in the Italian journal *Il Divenire Sociale*, and were collected and published in Italian as *Lo Sciopero generale e la violenza* (“The General strike and violence”), ed. Enrico Leone. See Sorel, *Reflections*, 45; *Réflexions*, 58.

fundamental continuities that connected the *Ancien Régime* and the post-revolutionary state.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Sorel's anti-Jacobinism can in many ways be interpreted as an extension and radicalization of Tocqueville's more moderate concerns, and specifically the "principle of conservation" he had previously identified in *The Trial*. In terms of penal procedure, the *Ancien Régime* had largely maintained the earlier practices bequeathed to it: "The Inquisition furnished a model for courts which, set in motion on very slight pretexts, persistently prosecuted people who embarrassed [*gènaient*] authority... its essential aim was not justice [*droit*], but the State."<sup>47</sup>

Despite his own condemnation of Socrates, Sorel had expressed disgust for political trials—which "are all corrupt by their very nature"—as early as *The Trial*.<sup>48</sup> It would be with this same spirit of disgust that Sorel would claim that, "the Revolution piously gathered up this tradition" and "displayed the scandal of its superstitious cult of the State in the full light of day," especially with the Jacobin Law of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Prairial, in which "the whole of the *ancien régime* is... expressed in clear-cut formulas... We have in this celebrated Terrorist law the strongest expression of the theory of the doctrine of the State."<sup>49</sup> Further, the same "principle of conservation" that allowed the Jacobins to re-deploy the methods of the *Ancien Régime* would later allow Napoleon to "put the country once more on a monarchical footing" with little effort, and such conservation extended to the parliamentary socialists of Sorel's day, themselves equally imbued with the "superstition of the God-State [*Dieu Etat*]."<sup>50</sup> Certainly, the political trial had not disappeared from French life, as the Dreyfus Affair demonstrated more than sufficiently, but, Sorel is quick to add: "By cruel experience, we know now, alas!, that the State still had its high priests and its fervent advocates amongst the Dreyfusards."<sup>51</sup> Political show trials, Sorel tells us, continued unabated after the *Bloc des gauches* came to power.

This continuity of political *practices* was furthermore closely tied to the *discursive* centering of the parliamentary socialists:

Experience has always shown us hitherto that our revolutionaries plead reasons of State [*raison d'Etat*] as soon as they get into power, that they then employ police methods and look upon justice as a weapon which they may use unfairly [*abuser*] against their enemies. Parliamentary socialists do not escape this universal [*commune*] rule; they preserve the old cult of the State; they are therefore prepared to commit all the misdeeds of the *ancien régime* [and, we could add, the Revolution].<sup>52</sup>

As a result, those same socialists who once encouraged agitation against the legal order: "combated those in control of public force, [but] they did not at all desire to suppress that force, for they wished to utilize it someday for their own profit; all the revolutionary disturbances of the nineteenth century ended by strengthening the State."<sup>53</sup> Just as the French Revolutionaries—the Jacobins of the Terror in particular—intervened both to strengthen and to be strengthened by a

<sup>46</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris, 1856).

<sup>47</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 97, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 136-137.

<sup>48</sup> Sorel, *Le Procès*, 242.

<sup>49</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 96-99, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 137-140.

<sup>50</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 81; 101; *Réflexions*, 114-115; 142.

<sup>51</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 101; *Réflexions*, 143-144.

<sup>52</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 103; *Réflexions*, 145. As a reflection of this discursive transformation, Sorel cites Jaurès' celebration of Robespierre in *Histoire socialiste* (1901), arguing that the same platitudes would apply equally well to the anti-Dreyfusards. However, it was not Jaurès himself who entered government.

<sup>53</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 17, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 23.

doctrine of unity whose centerpiece was the centralized state, so too would the parliamentary socialists of a century later. But these new, socialist Jacobins entered the state at a higher stage of development, at which unity had come to mean something qualitatively different: while the formal unity espoused in the French Revolution neglected the question of class, parliamentary socialism would represent a simultaneous recognition of the class element—largely for its effectiveness in “electoral dealings”—and its *reinscription* within the discourse and practice of unity.<sup>54</sup> This was, in other words, the re-establishment of a political unity which had come under threat by class forces, a clear example of the “dialectical” form of recoding that Foucault so scorns.

This reinscription took the form of an ideological gesture, but we should not confuse this with mere idealism, because in Sorel’s account, parliamentary socialism incorporates the working class into the unity of the state through two, very *material* interventions. Of these, the education of the proletariat—its indoctrination with a faith in unity—stands out as the more ideological side of the equation (but one, as in ancient Athens, which was not lacking in concrete institutions), whereas the role of parliamentary socialism in labor arbitration and collective bargaining represents its more directly practical side. As far as education is concerned,

The *wise men* [*braves gens*], the democrats devoted to the cause of the rights of man and the duties of the informant, the sociologist members of the Bloc, all think that violence will disappear when popular education becomes more advanced; they recommend, therefore, a great increase in the number of courses and lectures; they hope to drown revolutionary syndicalism in the saliva of the honorable professors.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, the bosses should be educated in the “practices [*mœurs*] of social peace,” which is rarely difficult since they share the same “civic, philanthropic, and religious ideas”—that is, the same ideological complex of unity—as the socialist parliamentarians who seek to convince them.<sup>56</sup> In short, they “imagine that harmony [*accord*] would be established if a better social education were given to the citizens.”<sup>57</sup> With this indictment of the *dangers* of education, we find a lifelong concern of Sorel’s turned on its head: while education remains tied to unity, this unity is now a pernicious ideology to be tenaciously fought rather than an ancient state of perfection to be nostalgically mourned.

This education in harmony finds its economic counterpart in labor arbitration. In this process, Sorel discerns above all a pattern of moderation: “to the demands of the workers [the bosses] reply that they have already reached the limit of possible concessions—while the philanthropists wonder whether the selling price will not allow a slight increase in the wages.”<sup>58</sup> Moderation and arbitration—which, as we will see, relies on the existence of an overarching totality as the framework for its valorization—further emerges on a higher level as the *raison*

<sup>54</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 51; *Réflexions*, 69. It was this political payoff more than anything else that would mark the emergence of parliamentary socialism as a force capable of co-opting and redirecting class antagonisms.

<sup>55</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 43, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 55; 56; *Réflexions*, 74; 76. Notably, this is not the case when it is a former member of the working class who has risen to the level of capitalist. Here, there is no fertile soil for the ideology of social unity.

<sup>57</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 57, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 77-78.

<sup>58</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 56; *Réflexions*, 76. It is worth noting briefly that Sorel’s Pascalianism plays a key role here: the moderate arbitrariness of arbitration is compared to the probabilism and laxism-latitudeism that Pascal attacks in the *Provinciales*. Sorel, *Reflections*, 69; *Réflexions*, 97-98. Sorel takes the side of the tutorism-Jansenism that Pascal defends.

*d'être* of parliamentary socialism: Sorel describes Jaurès as a “master in the art of utilizing anger,” and parliamentary socialism only justifies its own existence by proving its usefulness to capital by “boast[ing] before the Government and the rich bourgeoisie of their ability to moderate revolution.”<sup>59</sup> At a still higher level, this parliamentary socialism’s mediating function aspires to be regularized in a system of formalized, corporative social diplomacy. But to do so requires “much skill, tact, and calm audacity,” since it must “make the workers believe that you are carrying the flag of revolution, the bourgeoisie that you are holding back the danger which threatens them, and the country that you represent an irresistible current of opinion.”<sup>60</sup> It is only through such a tenuous balance that the working classes can be deftly inscribed into the enemy totality that is the bourgeois state. But this is more than the mere incorporation of existing social classes into a unified social framework: it represents a mortal threat to their very existence as classes at all. Absent any objective basis for the proletariat as a class-in-itself, ideological incorporation means its death as a class-for-itself and a halting of dialectical motion. But it remains to be seen how effective this assault on class has been, and what possible resistance can be deployed to halt its.

The “centering” of Marxist discourse in parliamentary socialism, and the Jacobin continuity of its state-worship, constitutes a reinscription of the language of class within the state, functionally uniting that state in a *new* synthesis (one which would not in the least disturb the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right*), a new, conservative dialectical resolution of class antagonisms into harmonious coexistence, mediated by the parliamentary socialists themselves. For Sorel, then, a structural analysis of the function of Marxist discourse for parliamentary socialists demonstrates that, rather than constituting a real entry of the working classes into politics, parliamentary socialism is the opposite: their *inscription* as a passive force within the totality of the democratic state. But this continuity was more than a merely abstract or axiomatic principle: it found its material basis in the historical relationship between the bourgeoisie and the state, one neglected by many Marxist thinkers:

We have to ask ourselves whether the ferocity of the old revolutionaries was not due to reasons depending on the past history of the bourgeoisie, so that in confusing the abuses of the revolutionary bourgeois force of [17]93 with the violence of our revolutionary syndicalists a grave error would be committed.<sup>61</sup>

The question of Jacobinism therefore turns on a class distinction which cuts to the very heart and divides what we commonly understand as “violence” into two fundamentally opposed and irreconcilable phenomena.

### **Violence, force, justice, duty**

It is this very class distinction, raised by Sorel in the context of Jacobin continuity—and inspired by his direct observation of the syndicalist general strike—which serves as our point of

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<sup>59</sup> “A certain amount of agitation suits them, but it must be within well-defined limits and controlled by politicians.” Sorel, *Reflections*, 66; *Réflexions*, 93. Hence parliamentary socialists could not accept Bernstein’s challenge—“Let it dare to appear what it is”—and instead insisted on using “a terminology which no longer corresponds to their ideas... they found it easier to accept the tactics of Millerand than the theses of Bernstein.” Sorel, *Reflections*, 47-48; *Réflexions*, 63-64.

<sup>60</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 68; *Réflexions*, 95.

<sup>61</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 95; *Réflexions*, 134.

departure for a discussion of “violence.” And fittingly so, since it coincides with Sorel’s own self-professed objective, one which he believes he has achieved: “I have, in fact, established that proletarian violence has *an entirely different historical significance* from that attributed to it by superficial scholars and by politicians.”<sup>62</sup> Few properly grasp the centrality of Sorel’s attempted resignification of violence, and when treated partially, it perhaps inevitably smacks of rationalization, subordinating means to ends and justifying a particular behavior within an existing framework.<sup>63</sup> But as we will see, this is far from the case, since the seemingly-ethical distinction between violence and force in reality prefigures and represents a factual division of the world while simultaneously serving as its material vehicle. It *embodies* separation. Thus when we reassert the centrality of the question of not merely violence, but its differentiation from force, we can see that beneath Sorel’s project there lies a fundamental rupture, not *within* ethics but *against* its very possibility.<sup>64</sup> This rupture—one already visible in his critique of socialist arbitration—transcends mere moralism, reflecting and pointing toward a deeper rupture with the paradigm of totality.<sup>65</sup>

As seen above, the distinction of force from violence turns largely on the question of Jacobinism and the State, or to put it simultaneously more broadly and more narrowly, on the question of the juridical and penal imposition of the will of a minority:

we should say, therefore, that the object of *force* is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs, while *violence* tends to the destruction of that order. The bourgeoisie have used *force* since the beginning of modern times, while the proletariat now reacts against the bourgeoisie and against the State by *violence*.<sup>66</sup>

The state—or at the very least its contemporary bourgeois manifestation—is thereby defined as an *institution of minority governance*, freeing the “absolute opposition between revolutionary syndicalism and the State” from a vulgar, formal, and abstract anti-institutionalism and drawing attention instead to the functional *content* of those institutions.<sup>67</sup> The state—as the bearer of force—is simultaneously defined by both economic (bourgeois) and political (minoritarian-Jacobin) characteristics, and when the bourgeoisie come to power, they inevitably “attack men in power rather than power itself; they hope to possess the force of the State.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 250, my emphasis; *Réflexions*, 365.

<sup>63</sup> This distinction is lost on most who discuss Sorel, notably Hannah Arendt, as we will see later, and even arguably Walter Benjamin in his “Critique of Violence,” in W. Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. P. Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1978 [1966]), 277-300.

<sup>64</sup> This will become important when we discuss Fanon and Lewis Gordon’s interpretation of the non-ethics of race.

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, in an article concerned less with Sorel (but appearing two issues after an article about Sorel, clearly as a reply/rebuttal) and more with the doctrines of violence and movements utilizing it considered to be his heirs (e.g. by Arendt in *On Violence*), Sidney Hook similarly attempts to distinguish force from violence, but with the objective of discrediting the latter. Apologists for violence often conflate the two, according to Hook, thereby naturalizing violence when only force is truly natural (as the foundation for all government). He revealingly defines violence as the “illegal” or “immoral” use of force (note the near synonymity of the terms), tacitly supporting Sorel’s claim that we are dealing with an trans-ethical distinction that is too often naturalized. “Force,” moreover, is “normatively neutral in meaning.” Sidney Hook, “The Ideology of Violence,” *Encounter* 34, n. 4 (April 1970), 29.

<sup>66</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 165-166, my emphasis; *Réflexions*, 240.

<sup>67</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 108; *Réflexions*, 152. This gesture will become crucial when we turn to Fanon, whose nominal incompatibility with Sorel could be erroneously derived from the later thinker’s willingness to support a national state.

<sup>68</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 107; *Réflexions*, 151. Recalling that, as early as *The Trial*, Sorel had associated Jacobinism with minority rule. *Le Procès*, 205-206; *From Georges Sorel*, 67. Martin Jay emphasizes the hypocrisy entailed by

As “anti-Jacobin,” violence is consequently less harmful and terroristic than is force. Much as Foucault describes “the practice of social war” as a “fact,” Sorel insists that “proletarian acts of violence have no resemblance to [Jacobin] proscriptions; they are purely and simply acts of war... carried on without hatred and without the spirit of revenge.”<sup>69</sup> To grasp this fundamental distinction between violence and force, then, we need “to adopt a terminology which would give rise to no ambiguity” in which “the term ‘violence’ should be employed only for... acts of revolt.”<sup>70</sup> Distinguishing violence from force therefore represents, for Sorel, a sort of ground-clearing exercise: separating violence—that “properly speaking, which constitutes *the soul of the revolutionary proletariat*”—from bourgeois force, was his own “important contribution to discussions on socialism.”<sup>71</sup>

But Sorel is quick to distinguish this defense of violence from the most important charge that could be leveled against it: that in distinguishing force from violence, and in aligning each with very concrete historical subjects, he is guilty of merely subordinating (violent) means to (proletarian) ends, and that all barbarism carried out by the working class is to be praised while even the most minor of bourgeois offenses is to be condemned. This view, if patent in some elements of Soviet Marxism, could be found in a weakened form in Lukács’ early essay “Tactics and Ethics”—one written while still largely under the sway of Sorel’s influence—and so it is worth noting briefly how Sorel’s view diverges from that of one of his most influential heirs. This divergence, one rooted in fundamentally different orientations toward the paradigm of totality, emerges with regard to the question of the possibility and status of ethics and duty.

Sorel is quick to distance himself from those “doctors of the ethico-social sciences” who jump on any irruption of violence to determine whether or not violent means are justifiable by the ends achieved.<sup>72</sup> Even those who advocated class struggle—as we saw to be the case with the parliamentary socialists—did so, more often than not, through appeal to a “higher” form of justice (thereby reflecting a very different view of dialectics). Ethics, for Sorel, are not to be calculated as though we were resolving a labor dispute, since both labor arbitration and means-ends ethics depends fundamentally upon the existence of an overarching totality as the basis upon which to judge (what we could understand as a fundamentally religious, God’s-eye view). However, Sorel’s break with his prior embrace of a descriptive notion of totality, the view that society can be grasped and comprehended as a single unit, undercuts what little basis remained for any such judgment, thereby eliminating the basis for any ethic or “duty” on the level of the social totality. Here, Sorel is pushed by the very internal dynamics of capitalism itself:

Why then speak of social duty? Duty has some meaning in a society in which all the parts are intimately connected to one another; but if capitalism is inexhaustible, solidarity is no longer founded upon the economy and the workers think they would be dupes if they did

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the bourgeois combination of the language of totality with the structures of minority rule. Jay, “The Concept of Totality,” 149. Jay also mentions here the German obsession with ancient Greek harmony, one which had previously held Sorel in its sway as well. For a discussion of Sorel’s anti-Jacobin anti-statism, see Preston King, *Fear of Power: An Analysis of Anti-Statism in Three French Writers* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 68-91.

<sup>69</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 105-106; *Réflexions*, 149; Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” 58.

<sup>70</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 165; *Réflexions*, 240. Here, Sorel’s direct influence on Albert Camus is particularly striking. See Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Knopf, 1956).

<sup>71</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 150-151, my emphasis; *Réflexions*, 365.

<sup>72</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 41; *Réflexions*, 54.



not demand all they could obtain; they look upon the employer as an adversary with whom one comes to terms after a war.<sup>73</sup>

No longer was a nostalgia for ancient unity sufficient to justify ethics in the present. Just as capitalist dynamics exceed all valuation and calculation in their very inexhaustibility, so too does proletarian violence exceed all ethical valuation. To paraphrase Foucault, in the context of a social war, ethics can only be “perspectival” and “one-sided,” and with Foucault but against Schmitt, Sorel here openly compares the social war to the anarchy of the international arena, in his insistence that “*social duty no more exists than does international duty.*”<sup>74</sup>

Appeals to social duty, furthermore, are more than merely blind to the ethics of violence, their errors more than merely epistemological. For Sorel, social duty and the broader totalizing framework of Justice that the concept entails, not only fails to grasp the relationship between force and violence, but rather falls heavily to one side of the equation. Justice, put differently, is coterminous with bourgeois force and Jacobinism: “If this philosophy of natural law [*droit naturel*] accords perfectly with that of force..., it cannot be reconciled with my conception of the historical role of violence.”<sup>75</sup> Here, Sorel refers to the fact that talk of duty had long served as little more than a bludgeon of the powerful in the French class war, and that even parliamentary socialists had come to “look upon justice as a weapon.”<sup>76</sup> In practice, appeals to “justice” and “social duty” served as the mechanism through which the parliamentary socialists sought to carry out their mission of civilizing and incorporating the proletariat into capital, always careful to undermine not the means of force itself, but merely the particular individuals exercising it at the moment.

In contrast to this ideology of social duty, Sorel emphasizes the fact that, between boss and worker, there prevails little more than a simmering social war whose opposing terms are utterly irreconcilable:

While the boss will always be convinced that he has done the whole of his duty, the worker will be of the contrary opinion, and no argument could possibly settle the matter: the first will believe that he has been heroic, and the second will treat this supposed heroism as shameful exploitation.<sup>77</sup>

In short, despite the Marxist insight that labor-power operates as a commodity, “our great pontiffs of duty refuse to look upon a contract to work as being of the nature of a sale.”<sup>78</sup> Instead, they gather together, debate, and discuss the matter in the absence of ethics but under their

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<sup>73</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 58; *Réflexions*, 80.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 52. Sorel, *Reflections*, 58; *Réflexions*, 80. Schmitt’s complaint regarding Sorel, a thinker who he seems to hold in some esteem, is precisely that he displaces the friend-enemy conflict into society, just as Lenin will later project it transnationally. See *the Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* and *The Theory of the Partisan*. Both Sorel and Foucault document the displacement of war to the bounds of the state, doing so in strikingly similar terms: for Sorel, this was when “anarchical elements” were “confined to the limits of society” (*Reflections*, 256; *Réflexions*, 372); for Foucault, when “war was expelled to the limits of the State” (“*Society Must Be Defended*”, 49).

<sup>75</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 15; *Réflexions*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 103; *Réflexions*, 145. This connects with Sorel’s previous work, since in *The Trial of Socrates*, “Sorel ends by driving a wedge between justice and virtue” (Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 43).

<sup>77</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 55, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 75.

<sup>78</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 55, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 75.

illusion: the only possible outcome is moderation, convincing the boss to slightly increase wages, the very arbitration that reinscribes the working-class into the social totality.<sup>79</sup>

But is this two-pronged ideological assault on proletarian identity as a class-for-itself—via an education in unity and labor arbitration—effective? Here, Sorel’s subjectivation and politicization of class relations gives rise to a palpable ambiguity which is arguably beyond all resolution, but which cannot pass without comment. At first glance, Sorel seems inconsistent on the matter: the power of the parliamentary socialists is “enormous,” and “efforts... to remove the causes of hostility... have undoubtedly had some effect.”<sup>80</sup> Here, cross-class contact is key, since “bringing the important men of the *syndicats* into contact with the employers” has the potential “to destroy the corporative feeling.”<sup>81</sup> However, alongside the effectiveness of parliamentary socialism’s moderating role, Sorel also notices “a recrudescence of the revolutionary spirit in a large section of the proletariat.”<sup>82</sup> This seeming inconsistency depends, however, on the smoothness of arbitration, and its capacity to avoid strikes. As long as arbitration manages to convince the bosses to make concessions—on the economic grounds of prices and wages, i.e., within a form of valuation already contained within the capitalist totality—the proletariat assumes that this arbitration takes place in the realm of “economic necessities.”<sup>83</sup> But if arbitration fails and a strike is pursued, these imaginary constraints are lifted and the workers are awakened to the “*inexhaustibility of production*”: whereas the boss first insisted that, on the basis of objective economic constraints, that further concession was impossible, this changes once the workers take action. Further concessions are made to appease the workers, but the effect is a counterintuitive display of weakness, and the workers “are led thus to the belief that the bosses are either ignorant or liars. These are not consequences conducive to the development of social peace!”<sup>84</sup> Hence it is only the general strike, and the violence it incarnates, that can intervene to save proletarian identity from dissolving into the “democratic morass [*marais*].”<sup>85</sup>

Duty, through arbitration, becomes a calculation, but proletarian violence “escapes all valuation, estimation and opportunism,” and this is precisely why it threatens parliamentary socialism: “If revolutionary syndicalism triumphs, there will be no more speeches on immanent Justice.”<sup>86</sup> In formulating violence in this way, Sorel breaks not only with his object of critique: a traditional view of duty inherited from philosophies of natural right which entails in practice measurement, calculation, and arbitration. He also, perhaps less consciously due to the period in which he wrote, but more likely due to his extreme hostility to revolutionary excess, breaks with the subordination of means to ends because he breaks fundamentally with the paradigm of totality which serves as their foundation. In Lukács, for example, the paradigm of totality is paramount, and it assumes a supremely powerful form: the “expressive” totality in which the proletariat serves as “meta-subjective totalizer of history.”<sup>87</sup> It is through this expressive totality that ethics operates and actions are to be judged, as it is within the “imperative of the world-

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<sup>79</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 55-56; *Réflexions*, 75-76.

<sup>80</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 72; 54; *Réflexions*, 101; 73.

<sup>81</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 54; *Réflexions*, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 54; *Réflexions*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 58; *Réflexions*, 79.

<sup>84</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 58, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 78; *Réflexions*, 110.

<sup>86</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 68; 18; *Réflexions*, 96; 24.

<sup>87</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 122.

historical situation” that the proletariat gains self-consciousness of the “historico-philosophical mission” that justifies its violence.<sup>88</sup>

Sorel, by contrast, sees no basis whereby proletarian violence can be justified in a totalizing sense, no broad and overarching framework through reference to which we can be convinced of its objective ethical goodness. Such efforts at valorization are themselves suspiciously Jacobin, bringing the force of the bourgeois state to bear on all efforts at rebellion, efforts which will inevitably appear as contraventions of justice and duty.<sup>89</sup> Given violence’s ability to transcend all valuation, a transcendence which divides both the social world and the foundation of ethics and duty, it only makes sense that the practical rupture of this Gordian knot of justice and duty itself requires a certain transcendent form, one which opposes measurement with the immeasurable.

### The myth of the proletarian general strike

With this trans-ethical rupture between bourgeois force and proletarian violence established, all that remains, in Sorel’s eyes, is to contribute to this newly-autonomous vehicle by “deal[ing] with the conditions which allow the development of specifically proletarian forces, that is to say, *with violence enlightened by the idea of the general strike*.”<sup>90</sup> But this, clearly, is to suggest that anti-Jacobin violence—and the “acts of revolt” that it describes—remains insufficient in and of itself, and that what is lacking is not merely the concrete fact of the “general strike,” but the “enlightenment” of its “idea” as well. While it is capitalist force that “drives the proletariat into revolt” by contravening their desires, “this revolt does not entirely determine the future of the proletariat,” which is another way of saying that such revolts—absent “the revolutionary idea”—are wholly insufficient.<sup>91</sup> “As long as there are no myths accepted by the masses,” Sorel insists, “one may go on talking of revolts indefinitely, without ever provoking any revolutionary movement; this is what gives such importance to the general strike.”<sup>92</sup> The general strike, the operative myth in Sorel’s analysis, therefore appears as a particular historical manifestation of the general category of “myth,” just as the violence of the syndicalist is but a particular historical manifestation of the trans-historical category that is “violence,” one which comprises all acts of revolt against structures of inequality and minority rule.

But what are the precise contours of Sorel’s myth? On this subject much ink has been spilled, mostly in error.<sup>93</sup> To begin from Sorel’s recognition that revolutionary movements

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<sup>88</sup> Georg Lukács, “Tactics and Ethics” (1919). See also Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 98.

<sup>89</sup> This inevitability will prove central to Fanon’s account of the inevitable violence of black subjects.

<sup>90</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 251; *Réflexions*, 365.

<sup>91</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 78; *Réflexions*, 109-110.

<sup>92</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 28; *Réflexions*, 38-39.

<sup>93</sup> The first error has been to mistake novelty for centrality. As we will see, the myth is but the *form* in which the ideological *content* of anti-Jacobin, anti-statist violence emerges, and this latter element has been systematically overlooked by most studies of Sorel (with the explicit purpose of rendering Sorel compatible with fascism: see below). A related and indeed concomitant error—shocking given how easily it is disproven—is the exaggeration of Henri Bergson’s influence on the formulation of the myth. It is for this reason that an analysis of *The Trial of Socrates* is so useful, as it provides the framework for Sorel’s later myth as early as 1889. Moreover, we have seen that this mythical formulation resurfaces in Sorel’s revisionist Marxism, under the name “social poetry.” It was only later that the Bergsonian framework would be grafted on top of Sorel’s own analysis (and indeed, the most

require more than disparate “revolt,” we can say that the first evident function of the myth is that of the *generalization* of struggle—one similar to that which Marx located between the class-in-itself and the class-for-itself—as it only “becomes possible to describe a picture [*tableau*] which constitutes a social myth” when “the masses are deeply moved [*se passionnent*].”<sup>94</sup> This process of the agglomeration of proletarian identity entails, obviously, a breaking down of barriers, but less obvious is the fact that this dissolution has a limit which prevents its reinscription within the language of totality: the language of the class war “complicates conflicts that might have remained of a purely private order; corporative exclusivism, which so resembles the sense of belonging to a locality or a race, is thus consolidated... doing excellent work for socialism.”<sup>95</sup> Hence the myth allows the transcending of the “private” but brakes at “corporate exclusiveness,” thereby consolidating working-class identity without simply drowning it in the morass of social unity. In other words, if the anarchy of the international arena is a suitable metaphor for class relations within society, for Sorel unlike Schmitt, class identity cannot be generalized outward to encompass the nation.

But unlike the process of generalization entailed by Lenin’s call for a national newspaper, in which much space would be devoted to compiling a list of accomplished, discrete fact and grouping that fact—admittedly, alongside ideological intervention—into a general picture<sup>96</sup>:

Revolutionary myths... are not a description of things but expressions of a will to act... myths lead men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things... A myth cannot be refuted, since it is, at bottom, identical to the convictions of a group, being the expression of these convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in consequence, unanalysable [*indécomposable*] into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical descriptions.<sup>97</sup>

In other words, the class-for-itself is not to be created through a laundry list of either past accomplishments or future aspirations, but rather through a unified “determination to act”: “*It is the myth in its entirety [l’ensemble] which is alone important: its parts are only of interest in so far as they bring about the main idea.*”<sup>98</sup> Moreover, unlike Hegel’s Owl of Minerva whereby the philosopher arrives late, and unlike the overly rationalist vanguardism of Lenin’s *Iskra*, for Sorel “myths *lead* men,” they are not *led by them*. This distinction points to the fundamental character of Sorel’s myth: it is a *projection*, or what he calls an “anticipation”:

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substantive discussion of myth in the *Reflections* occurs in the “Letter,” added nearly two years after initial publication).

<sup>94</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 27; *Réflexions*, 37. Those who accuse the myth of having a religious character have committed a sort of category error, presuming that the religious contains all nonrational elements of motivation in human existence, whereas for Sorel and Bergson it is but one form. Sorel, *Reflections*, 30; *Réflexions*, 42.

<sup>95</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 53; *Réflexions*, 71. This is a transition, in Foucault’s language, from the tactical-local to strategic-general, and one which moreover, strikingly reflects in its content Foucault’s analysis of the “race war.” Elsewhere, Sorel contrasts the “corporative point of view” with the “general” perspective of the myth. Sorel, *Reflections*, 76; *Réflexions*, 107.

<sup>96</sup> See Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (1901-1902), part 5, “The ‘Plan’ For an All-Russia Political Newspaper.” Lenin sees the newspaper as fulfilling the function of a “collective organizer,” which provides support for outbreaks of revolt. Certainly, the ideological function of *Iskra* would have mythical elements (Sorel is the first to remind us that myth commonly mixes with other elements, such as Utopianism), and Lenin is both exhilarated and wary of the mythical elements of his own proposal: “‘We should dream!’ I wrote these words and became alarmed.”

<sup>97</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 28-29; *Réflexions*, 39-40. To which he adds, “People who are living in the world of myths are secure from all refutation.” Sorel, *Reflections*, 30; *Réflexions*, 42.

<sup>98</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 117; *Réflexions*, 167.

And yet we are unable to act without leaving the present, without considering the future, which seems forever condemned to escape our reason... the *framing of a future in some indeterminate time* may, when it is done in a certain way, be very effective... this happens when it is a question of myths, in which are found all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party or of a class.<sup>99</sup>

Rationalism, for Sorel, imprisons us within the present, and as we have seen, Utopianism is an orientation toward the future which is by nature reformist and hardly allows us to escape that prison. Myth, on the other hand, by loosening the reins of rationalism and projecting contemporary aspirations into the future, can serve as a guide to action in the present, creating class identity in the very process of its deployment.

In this case, what is being “framed”—the action that is prefigured in the myth—is the re-establishment of proletarian identity, and to this corresponds a specific historical instance of the general mythical form endowed with “violent” proletarian content: the proletarian general strike, “the *myth* in which Socialism is wholly comprised, *i.e.* a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society.”<sup>100</sup> Whereas the myth provides the form the general strike will assume, its “proletarian” nature provides the “violent” (i.e. anti-state and anti-Jacobin) content. The myth of the general strike “groups” the various experiences and aspirations of the working class, creating “a coordinated picture [*tableau d’ensemble*] and, by bringing them together, gives to each one of them its maximum of intensity.”<sup>101</sup> This projection is something which “language cannot give us with perfect clarity,” and that language—and the corrupting, Utopian threat that it represents—must be circumvented: the myth cannot be expressed or represented, but must instead be grasped “as a whole, perceived instantaneously.”<sup>102</sup>

Hence working-class identity is achieved through an *absolute* assertion, and the myth therefore has a “character of *infinity*, because it puts on one side all discussion of definite reforms and confronts men with a catastrophe.”<sup>103</sup> But the fact that this identity is consolidated simultaneously through an equally absolute *opposition* to the bourgeoisie is also fundamental, and rejecting the mimicry on which exponents of social harmony rely is the first step toward establishing such an opposition. Sorel “cannot accept the idea that the historic mission of the proletariat is to imitate the bourgeoisie,” and insists that the “greatest danger” threatening the proletariat is the temptation to “imitate democracy” and its bourgeois culture.<sup>104</sup> Against this, the proletariat should resist becoming “alarmed at its own barbarity,” and here “barbarism” is faithful to the xenophobia of the Greek *barbaros*: to embrace barbarity is to embrace the cultural alterity of speaking an incommensurably different language, one which marks the irreconcilable division of the social totality.<sup>105</sup> Beyond mere class identity, then, what is projected above all is rupture, cleavage, and an antagonistic relation.

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<sup>99</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 115; *Réflexions*, 164.

<sup>100</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 118; *Réflexions*, 169.

<sup>101</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 118; *Réflexions*, 169.

<sup>102</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 118, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 169.

<sup>103</sup> This passage does not appear in the Cambridge edition, but is instead found in Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, tr. T.E. Hulme (London: Collier Books, 1950 [1906]), 46fn31.

<sup>104</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 171; 173; *Réflexions*, 248; 251.

<sup>105</sup> At one point, Sorel explicitly employs the metaphor of savagery to describe the manner in which the bourgeoisie views the proletariat and their own colonizing and civilizing mission. Sorel, *Reflections*, 14n13, 223; *Réflexions*,

The myth, then, constitutes the *form* that violent *content* fills: it generalizes that content by uniting tactical revolt within a horizon of strategic action. This horizon, moreover, constitutes the *identity* of the bearers of violence: the working class is dragged beyond merely “private” concerns into a “general” position of antagonism toward the bourgeoisie and the existing bourgeois state (as both political state and state of affairs). In other words, we have seen how the myth of the general strike fulfills the first two moments of our counterdiscourse of separation, those summarized as projection and antagonism: the myth itself is the projection of an antagonistic division within the social totality which establishes working-class identity against its domestic enemies. It is only through this mythical mechanism, in Sorel’s view, that reformist Utopianism can be avoided and the trans-ethical rupture embodied in proletarian violence can enter into productive practice. But it remains to be seen what the *effects* of carrying this rupture forward are, or put differently, how this myth manifests in the final two moments (consolidation and transformation) of our counterdiscourse of separation.

### The process of class separation

We have seen that Sorel characterizes proletarian violence as a rupture of the ethical basis for the bourgeois Jacobinism of state worship, and that it is this trans-ethical rupture with “social duty” reflects the fulfillment of his break with the paradigm of totality in its normative and descriptive guises. Further, we have seen how this rupture known under the name “violence” provides the content that fills the mythical vessel, that the unity of myth and violence emerges in Sorel’s *Reflections* as the “proletarian general strike.” Finally, we have seen that it is this mythical vehicle that effectively catapults this ruptural orientation into a real practice in-the-world, establishing an antagonistic division in society in accordance with the counterdiscourse of separation. But it remains to be seen what normative weight Sorel grants to proletarian violence and the class separation that it engenders. Setting aside for a moment the indeterminacy of the origins of this rupture (i.e. its lack of an objective basis) we might ask: is this a permanent separation between the classes that we might deem “separatist”? If so, what reason would we have to embrace this admittedly more honest representation of class society? This is a question that Sorel himself puts in the following terms in laying out his task: “we should wonder what will result from the introduction of violence into the relations of the proletariat with society... to find out what contemporary violence is in relation to the future social revolution.”<sup>106</sup>

In approaching this question, Sorel sets out from Marx, who as a theorist of rupture points us in the direction of this future revolution in his theory of class struggle. But due largely to his own historical context, Marx failed to recognize the importance of both ideology (in undermining that class struggle) and violence (in counteracting that ideology), instead offering “no other theory than that of bourgeois force.”<sup>107</sup> Capitalism “performs in an almost mechanical

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18fn1, 323. In so doing, Sorel disrupts the progressivist-developmental narratives that would smooth over class division by falsely claiming that the workers are all potential members of the bourgeoisie. Sorel’s critique of mimicry clearly draws its inspiration from Proudhon’s diagnosis of class dependency. See Portis, *Georges Sorel*, 33-34. This anti-developmental rejection of mimicry will be transposed onto the world system by thinkers like José Carlos Mariátegui and Frantz Fanon, and will be framed as a rupture with the stageism of Marxist orthodoxy and mimicry of European nations.

<sup>106</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 43, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 57.

<sup>107</sup> This was partly because Marx sought to diagnose the capitalist system, but also because “he did not move in circles which had acquired a satisfactory notion of the general strike.” That is, Marx was himself too fully ensconced

manner,” but this mechanical functioning depends entirely upon its component parts. Put differently, a society composed of opposing classes will yield revolution, but what guarantees the “class” nature of the society in question? In the context of the ideology of unity, as we have seen, the existence of classes finds little guarantee: “This doctrine [of class struggle] is evidently lacking [*en défaut*] if the bourgeoisie and the proletariat do not stand opposed to one other.”<sup>108</sup> It was on the terrain of a conditional determinism that Sorel understood his own historical role: if the Marxist theory of revolution requires the fulfillment of a number of very precise conditions that have been lost, then the task is to re-establish those conditions.<sup>109</sup> It is only by intervening, by restoring the *conditions* foreseen by Marx as historically inevitable—that is, the separation of the classes—via the political projection of proletarian identity as a class-for-itself, that determinism and “certainty” can be restored to the Marxist system: “Only then is the development of capitalism pursued with that rigor which so struck Marx, and which seemed to him comparable to that of a natural law.”<sup>110</sup>

If the reincorporation and reinscription of the proletariat into the machinery of the state, its “civilization” through an education in natural justice and social duty and the formalized arbitration of collective bargaining represent the gravest threat to working-class identity and separation, then these are the very same mechanisms that must be resisted and reversed.<sup>111</sup> We have seen that the revolt of proletarian violence gains a “general” character in the myth of the general strike, and this generality is characterized by its consolidation as a class-in-itself by first projecting itself as a class-for-itself. Hence it is the strike that consolidates working-class identity. But how to affect the other “part” of capitalist development—the bourgeoisie—convincing it to reclaim the title “capitalist”? Here, the same threat is perceptible, and like the proletariat, the militant capitalist of epochs past has been similarly civilized, straitjacketed into the harmonious workings of modern society:

If... the bourgeoisie, led astray by the *tricks* [*les blagues*] of the preachers of morals and sociology, return to an *ideal of conservative mediocrity*, if they attempt to correct the *abuses* of economics and wish to break with the barbarism of their elders, then one part of the forces which were to produce the capitalist tendency instead functions [*est employée*] to its hindrance [*l'enrayer*], an element of chance [*hasard*] is introduced, and the future of the world becomes completely indeterminate.<sup>112</sup>

It is here we find the utter simplicity of Sorel’s fully subjectivized system, since proletarian violence itself has a *double-function*, operating on both sides of the equation. If “the role of

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in bourgeois culture: Sorel here cites a “law which prevents us from *thinking* anything but that which has actual basis in life.” Sorel, *Reflections*, 171-172 and fn42; *Réflexions*, 249-250fn1.

<sup>108</sup> He continues: “the more ardently capitalist the bourgeoisie, the more the proletariat will be full of a warlike spirit and confident of its revolutionary force, the more certain the [proletarian] movement will be.” Sorel, *Reflections*, 74-75, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> As an intellectual necessarily operating outside the workers’ movement, this objective could be approached by two routes: attacking bourgeois thought and challenging the proletariat to sharpen their weapons. One is reminded here of Sartre’s claim that, “The intellectual cannot be a revolutionary, but only an assassin.”

<sup>110</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 75-76, translation heavily modified; *Réflexions*, 106.

<sup>111</sup> Sorel suggests that, aside from proletarian violence, the only other “accident” that might reverse this development would be a “great foreign war.” While this might seem quite prescient, he suggests in a footnote that such a possibility “seems very far-fetched at the moment,” and seems to neglect the boost that such a war would inevitably give to doctrines of unity (itself borne out in his example of the Napoleonic Wars). Sorel, *Reflections*, 72 and fn5, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 101.

<sup>112</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 76, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 106.

violence in history appears as of the utmost importance,” this is because, in addition to establish class identity, “in an indirect manner it can [also] operate on the bourgeoisie so as to remind them of their own class sentiment.”<sup>113</sup> The elegance of the formulation is matched only by Lukács, but since in Sorel’s case the motor of class interest needs to be jump-started, the contrast between the two is stark: whereas Lukács maintains the Marxist optimism that the particular capitalist will undermine the collective capitalist, Sorel’s more pessimistic picture is one in which, through political-ideological intervention, the broader “collective interest” (which is akin to the interest of the “collective capitalist”) imposes limits upon the particular capitalist, thereby stalling the “motor” of class interest. Great charitable social works are often spoiled, Sorel reminds us, by the inopportune offenses caused by the workers, and this offense is to become a necessary world-historical weapon.<sup>114</sup>

If our objective is to restore class separation by operating upon capitalist identity, we need little more than the same mechanism—proletarian violence expressed through the general strike—that served to consolidate working-class identity in the first place. And this operation takes the form of a re-education of the bourgeoisie in their historical function:

To confront with *black ingratitude* the *benevolence* of those who wish to protect the workers, to meet with insults the homilies of the defenders of human fraternity, and to respond by blows to the advances of the propagators of social peace... [this] is a very practical way of indicating to the bourgeoisie that they must mind their own business and only that...

The capitalists must be taught, specifically, that “they have nothing to gain from the works of social peace or from democracy,” and that “they have been badly advised by the people who persuaded them to abandon their trade as creators of productive forces for the noble profession of educators of the proletariat.” It is then, and only then, that the bourgeoisie can regain a modicum of its original, heroic, and creative energy, thereby contributing to the re-establishment of “the separation of classes” that Sorel so desires. “The two antagonistic classes act upon [*agissent*] one other in a partly indirect but decisive manner,” but it is paradoxically only through this acting-upon that they exist as classes at all, much less antagonistic ones.<sup>115</sup>

The fact that Marx himself did not foresee the cowardice of the bourgeoisie does not eliminate the validity of his system, nor its possibility of fulfillment.<sup>116</sup> This is because Marx had

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<sup>113</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 77, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 108.

<sup>114</sup> Fanon will say the same of the masses, who often spoil the work of their self-appointed leaders.

<sup>115</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 77-78, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 108-109. To which he adds: “I believe also that it may be useful to thrash [*rosser*] the orators of democracy and the representatives of the Government... But these acts can have a historical value only if they are the *clear and brutal expression of the class struggle*.”

<sup>116</sup> Here, Sorel convincingly cites (*Reflections*, 78fn14; *Réflexions*, 110fn1) an article from September 1851 which was attributed to Marx (but later discovered to have been drafted initially by Engels), which places a heavy weight on the fact that the German middle classes had not come to dominate political power to the same degree as in England, thereby undermining the division of society into classes. “Like master, like man... The working class movement itself never is independent, never is of an exclusively proletarian character until all the different factions of the middle class, and particularly its most progressive faction, the large manufacturers, have conquered political power, and remodeled the State according to their wants. It is then that the inevitable conflict between the employer and the employed becomes imminent, and cannot be adjourned any longer; that the working class can no longer be put off with delusive hopes and promises never to be realized; that the great problem of the nineteenth century, the abolition of the proletariat, is at last brought forward fairly and in its proper light.” Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, “Germany at the Outbreak of the Revolution” (October 25<sup>th</sup> 1851), in *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch01.htm>.



also overlooked proletarian violence, which “comes upon the scene” to counteract aspirations toward “social peace”:

proletarian violence confines the bosses to their role of producers, and tends to restore the class structure [of opposition and separation], just when they seemed on the point of intermingling in the democratic marsh [*marais*].

“Proletarian violence,” and only proletarian violence, can “make the future revolution certain,” since it alone is capable of

compel[ling] capitalism to restrict its attention solely to its material role and tends to restore to it the warlike qualities it formerly possessed. A growing and solidly organized working class can force [*forcer*] the capitalist class to remain fervent [*ardente*] in the industrial struggle; if a united and revolutionary proletariat confronts a rich bourgeoisie hungry for conquest, capitalist society will reach its historical perfection. Thus proletarian violence has become an essential factor of Marxism.<sup>117</sup>

Translated into the terms of our counterdiscourse of separation, we can see that proletarian violence, projected (moment one) as an antagonistic frontier dividing society (moment two), has the further “indirect” effect of acting upon the bourgeoisie in a way that compels it too to harden its own identity (moment three), in a virtuous cycle of antagonism. Our fourth, openly transformative moment remains.

After then providing a peculiar analysis of the dangers facing humanity in the event that a revolution take place under conditions of economic decadence,<sup>118</sup> Sorel finds the antidote to such dangers in the reinvigoration and jumpstarting of the Marxist dialectic:

The dangers which threaten the future of the world may be avoided [*écarté*], if the proletariat attaches itself stubbornly to revolutionary ideas, so as to realize as much as possible Marx’s conception. Everything may be saved if the proletariat, by their use of violence, manage to re-establish the division into classes, and so restore to the bourgeoisie some degree of its [former] energy... Proletarian violence, carried on as a pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of the class struggle, appears thus as a very beautiful and very heroic thing; it is at the service of the fundamental interests of civilization... it may save the world from barbarism.<sup>119</sup>

While it might seem ironic that Sorel here uses terms such as “civilization” and “barbarism”—after having systematically celebrated the latter and derided the former—this is part of a strategy of inversion: the civilizing professors of social peace have themselves become the enemies of civilization by neglecting the dangers of halting dialectic, whereas the barbarians—the proletarian purveyors of violence—have become its saviors.

Given the importance that Sorel attaches to the Greek experience, we should be unsurprised to see him close his discussion of class separation with the following words: “Let us salute the revolutionaries as the Greeks saluted the Spartan heroes who defended Thermopylae

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<sup>117</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 78-79, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 110-111. Hulme’s original translation substitutes the future perfect “will have reached” for the simple future “will reach,” rendering capitalist perfection and the revolutionary future far more hypothetical than Sorel meant it to be.

<sup>118</sup> Thereby providing a secondary—but much less convincing—normative justification for his philosophy of separation.

<sup>119</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 85, translation modified; *Réflexions*, 120.

and helped to preserve civilization [*la lumière*] in the ancient world.”<sup>120</sup> But now, this is a salute to conflict and to a separatist combat against the very social unity that Sorel had previously found in the “ancient world,” and a displacement of any possible future unity to the far reaches of the revolutionary dialectic. Sorel’s break with the paradigm of totality and his abandonment of nostalgic attachment to unity is complete; what traces of normative attachment are displaced into a distant and unforeseeable future. The dialectic has been restored through subjective self-activity, but lest we overstate the implications of a re-established Marxist determinism, it is worth insisting that the precise character of the society borne of the inexorable class struggle remains entirely indeterminate (moment four), as a result of Sorel’s own epistemological skepticism, his fierce hostility to Utopias, and the sheer generativity he grants to proletarian violence, which “*entirely changes* the appearance of all the conflicts in which it plays a part.”<sup>121</sup> Proletarian violence merely forces the dialectic of history—now rusty, having ground to a halt through obstruction by many an ideological monkey-wrench—tentatively into motion once again: it tells us nothing of our destination.

### Diremption against fascism

If what little remaining attachment Sorel had to a normative conception of totality was replaced by the process of class separation and its creative, dialectical effects, this substitution would be paralleled and recast in the epistemological realm by the concept of “diremption,” which represents a systematization of his prior break with Marxist science as capable of grasping the social totality descriptively. In a fascinating appendix—entitled “Unity and Multiplicity”—added to the second edition of the *Reflections* published in 1910, Sorel attempts to fend off critics of class struggle by expanding his attack on the idea of unity. Social thought, for Sorel, cannot merely ape the methods of the biological sciences, for the simple reason that modern society is not an organic creature, or in Jay’s terminology a “natural totality,” to be grasped as such.<sup>122</sup> Whereas biology “can never consider the function of an organ without relating it to the whole living being,”

Social philosophy is obliged... to proceed to a *diremption*,<sup>123</sup> to examine certain parts without taking into account all of the ties which connect them to the whole [*l’ensemble*], to determine in some manner the character of their activity by pushing them toward independence. When it has thus arrived at the most perfect understanding, it can no longer attempt to reconstitute the broken unity [*l’unité rompue*].<sup>124</sup>

Here, we see that process which we have identified as class separation granted a methodological and epistemological valence, normatively re-grounded as a celebration of rupture.

<sup>120</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 86; *Réflexions*, 121.

<sup>121</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 17, my emphasis; *Réflexions*, 23.

<sup>122</sup> Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 27-28.

<sup>123</sup> “Diremption” emerges in seventeenth-century English (sixteenth century as a verb and adverb, from the Latin *dirimo*, literally to take apart) to indicate a process of separation, division, or even violent tearing. See Charlton T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 585-586. The term, moreover, has a decidedly theological connotation, perhaps unsurprising given Sorel’s predilections. The same root, moreover, is identified with the French term “dirimant” and the verb “dirimer” (English: diriment) which refers to juridical annulment, another “forcible separation.” Oscar Bloch, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). See also Dussel, *El último Marx*, 346; 356n61; *Método para una filosofía*, 18.

<sup>124</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 263; *Réflexions*, 384.

Here, we return full-circle to the question of Hegelian dialectics. For Hegel and many Hegelians, the inverse of the “aspiration to totality” (in Lukács terms) was a severe anxiety toward the moment of *Diremption*, division, and rupture.<sup>125</sup> By privileging the moment of diremptive rupture, Sorel is detaching himself from the predominant, totality-bound Hegelian and Hegelian-Marxist tradition, for which the synthetic reconstitution of the totality is insistently privileged over the prior, diremptive moment.<sup>126</sup> In so distinguishing himself, moreover, Sorel is also mounting a conceptual resistance to what Foucault most fears in the dialectical method: the reincorporation of change within totality, the recentering of the war that had previously divided that society into its very basis.

Recall that Foucault two forms of recoding, in which war is “recolonized by... unitary discourses: the dialectical and the biological.”<sup>127</sup> Hence while explicit object of Sorel’s critique is here biological—the organic view that subjects the part to the whole—the language of that critique and Sorel’s embrace of diremption suggests that he is simultaneously addressing both forms of recentering, critiquing the dangers of the dialectic (which he had already confronted in the practical function of parliamentary socialism in reincorporating the working class into the totality of capital) alongside the perhaps more obvious dangers of organicism

To turn briefly to the latter before concluding, it should be clear what implications the concept of diremption and Sorel’s refusal to “reconstitute the broken unity”—and the counterdiscourse of separation more generally—have for our understanding of Sorel’s relation to fascism. The accusations of fascism hurled at Sorel have a long and distinguished pedigree, one which lamentably makes this final note imperative, but perhaps the most powerful recent example is provided by Zeev Sternhell.<sup>128</sup> In his *Neither Right Nor Left*, Sternhell’s claim that Sorel represented the proto-fascist *par excellence* reaches its shrillest moment. For Sternhell, fascist ideology is “above all a rejection of ‘materialism’” (even if not all antimaterialism is fascism) which “did not depend on a class struggle” and, notably within the language of our own project, “constituted a totality.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, fascism—for Sternhell—sought to create

a collectivity in which all the strata and classes of society would work together in harmony. The natural framework of such a harmonious, organic human collectivity is the nation... the collective organism... The embodiment of this unity is the state... at the same time protector of that unity.<sup>130</sup>

Somewhat incomprehensibly, Sternhell insists that this picture of harmony and unity can be attributed to Sorel, claiming that the latter formulated “a form of socialism in which the

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<sup>125</sup> While we have little indication of the origins of diremption in Sorel’s thought, in the history of thought it travels from religious thinkers like Böhme into the entire Hegelian tradition. For Hegel’s anxiety toward diremption, see Smith, *Hegel’s Critique of Liberalism*, 17.

<sup>126</sup> Martin Jay seems to miss this. Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 71. Jay concedes that Sorel was *epistemologically* hostile to totality (71n159). His claim rests on a certain, erroneous understanding of the social myth as an end-in-itself (and whose indivisible form is thereby mistaken for a normative orientation toward totality).

<sup>127</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”, 11.

<sup>128</sup> For a critique of Sternhell’s treatment of Sorel, see Jacques Julliard, “Sur un fascisme imaginaire: A propos d’un livre de Zeev Sternhell,” *Annales E.S.C.* (July-August 1984), 849-61; Robert Wohl, “French Fascism, Both Right and Left: Reflections on the Sternhell Controversy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 63, n. 1 (March 1991), 91-98.

<sup>129</sup> Zeev Sternhell, , *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, tr. D. Maisel (Berkeley: UC Press, 1986 [1983]), 268-270. I will put aside for the moment the claim that Sorel is anti-materialist. He is certainly voluntarist, but materialism nevertheless plays a significant role in his analysis.

<sup>130</sup> Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 270.

proletariat ceases to have any particular importance... a socialism that opposes capitalism not in the name of a single class but in the name of the entire nation.”<sup>131</sup> Sorel, who in our analysis stands stubbornly against social harmony, against organic unity, against the state, against cross-class unity, in short, against the very totality that Sternhell invokes, is here miraculously transformed into his opposite.<sup>132</sup>

Further, Sternhell willfully distorts Sorel’s rejection of democracy (and this is common to critics of Sorel): Sorel’s stinging critique of bourgeois liberal democracy and especially its Jacobin ideological foundations and effects is conflated with a critique of democracy *in toto*. No attention is paid to Sorel’s contention that democracy is essentially coterminous with the sort of unity that Sternhell would see as a necessary component of fascism. Such an erasure of Sorel’s own definition of democracy would seem a necessity for Sternhell, if he is to skirt the question of his own Rousseauism and oppose fascism to Enlightenment.<sup>133</sup> For if Rousseau were to be brought into the picture, we would have a striking reversal: while Sorel did not have the vocabulary to express it, his critique of Rousseau’s general will and especially of the Jacobins who put it into practice, bears striking similarity to the natural harmony, the organicism, and the unity that even Sternhell himself—a devotee of Rousseau—associates with fascism.<sup>134</sup> While we might be able to accept Carl Schmitt’s critique of Sorel, namely that, from a historical perspective, Sorel overlooks the fact that “the energy of nationalism is greater than the myth of class conflict,” such a historical oversight can hardly be confused with an actual theoretical complicity with fascism, nationalism, or any totalizing political forms.<sup>135</sup>

We must look past and away from fascism for practical comparisons to Sorel’s work outside the class war. The most insightful offering to date is that of Stanley, who uses Sorelian

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<sup>131</sup> Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 271.

<sup>132</sup> Further, the claim that Sorel granted no importance to the proletariat is, as we have seen, patently absurd, since the proletariat’s importance is, in fact, a *double* one, acting both to shore up its own identity as a class-for-itself and to impose its will upon the bourgeoisie as well.

<sup>133</sup> “Kant and the ‘philosophes’ of the French Enlightenment have taught us that the only free and open society is one that recognizes the independence of reason and the autonomy of the individual. Reason determines the frontiers of knowledge, and reason, not religion, should form the basis of our moral and political decisions.” Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, tr. D. Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998 [1996]), xiii. The role of Rousseau is even more pronounced in *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, tr. D. Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994 [1989]), where fascism is presented as anti-Rousseauian from the very beginning.

<sup>134</sup> The irony only increases once we recognize that it was Sternhell’s own mentor, Jacob L. Talmon—himself also a critic of Sorel—authored what is perhaps the most recognized account of Rousseau’s totalitarianism. Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952). But notably, despite critiquing the totalitarian character of Rousseau’s general will, Talmon also critiques Sorel, but from a slightly different—if equally misleading—angle. While Talmon briefly mentions Sorel’s critique of eighteenth-century thought, it is only to quickly turn attention to his anti-rationalism. J. L. Talmon, “The Legacy of Georges Sorel: Marxism, Violence, Fascism,” *Encounter* 34, n. 2 (February 1970), 53. For a similar position, see Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1961). Notably, Horowitz himself praises Talmon for his celebration of none other than the “prophet of peace” Jean Jaurès, in his introduction to Talmon’s *Myth of the Nation and Vision of Revolution: Ideological Polarization in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991 [1981]). Interestingly, whereas Talmon implies that the distinction between force and violence belongs to the apologists of violence, Sidney Hook would insist only a few months later and in the same journal that the distinction is indeed necessary for opponents of violence, who should recognize the natural validity of force (“The Ideology of Violence,” 29).

<sup>135</sup> Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 75.

diremption as a lens through which to analyze Black Muslims in the United States.<sup>136</sup> But what this comparison misses is the clearly *transformative* aspect of Sorelian violence, its profoundly *generative* and specifically *mutagenic* quality, on which, as we said in our introduction, fundamentally divides essentialist separatism from the process we are calling separation. A violence which “entirely changes the appearance of all the conflicts in which it plays a part” is not compatible with the cosmologically-enclosed groupings that Stanley seeks to analyze.<sup>137</sup> But Stanley is not far off the mark, as it would be in the transposition from class to ethnicity that Sorel’s framework—and what we have called the counterdiscourse of separation—would find the most practical purchase. For this, we turn to Frantz Fanon.

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<sup>136</sup> Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 320-326. Stanley flies wide of the mark, however, when he turns his attention to Fanon.

<sup>137</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 17; *Réflexions*, 23. Sorel’s critique of moralists, who “simply try to appraise our already completed acts with the help of the moral valuations formulated in advance,” would also apply to a large degree to the Nation of Islam and other forms of essentialism. Sorel, *Reflections*, 46. Sorel’s claim that proletarian violence transcends all valuation, while not derived directly from Nietzsche, is nevertheless strikingly similar, and this critique of “moralism” (coming from someone often dismissed in those same terms)—in its resistance to progressive narratives, rejection of the punitive, and above all its demand for political action rather than substitution of it—shares a great deal with the Nietzschean analysis offered by Wendy Brown, *Politics out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 22-23.

### Chapter 3 – Rebuffed from the Universal: Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*

The task of reconciling two thinkers as nominally distinct as Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon may seem initially daunting, and all the more so when this reconciliation is to be framed in terms of identity. After all, we have seen in Sorel a radical insistence—verging on myopia—on maintaining and reasserting class identity even where class appears to be collapsing as a category. How to square this class-centrism with Fanon, for whom class was always an important but secondary phenomenon, and for whom the relevant category of identification was first blackness, or negritude (in *Black Skin, White Masks*), and later the decolonial nation (in *Wretched of the Earth*)? Further, if what defines Sorel’s position within the counterdiscourse of separation is precisely his insistence on class as rupturing with and dividing the prevailing (national) social totality, then how is this in any way reconcilable with Fanon’s analyses, and especially his seemingly-totalizing emphasis on the importance of Third World nationalism? It comes as little surprise, then, that most analysts seek to drive the two thinkers apart rather than drawing them together.<sup>1</sup>

Facing such challenges, one possible path stands out for its relative ease of travel, the brush having ostensibly been cleared and the analytic soil tilled by a thinker no less incisive and eloquent than Hannah Arendt. I refer to the route taken in her *On Violence*, where Arendt is peculiar in her effort to unite Sorel and Fanon, doing so *not* according to the underlying structure of their thought but rather according to their shared peculiarity as theorists of violence, their efforts (heretical, for Arendt) to politicize a non-political concept. But as becomes immediately clear on closer examination, what Arendt understands by violence is wholly incompatible with what both Sorel and Fanon mean by the term. Violence, for the Arendt of *On Revolution*, “is incapable of speech,” and as a result must be abandoned to the “technicians.” Not only is violence mute, but it is muting as well, since “speech is helpless when confronted with violence.”<sup>2</sup> Paraphrasing Foucault’s critique of the “repressive hypothesis,” we could say that Arendt’s violence is not merely one that says “no,” but moreover one which says nothing at all, even foreclosing upon the very possibility of speech.

By contrast, Sorel’s violence, as we have seen (and Fanon’s, as we will see), is one that we can grasp in Foucaultian terminology as “productive,” as profoundly generative of political consequences. This is, in short, a violence that *speaks*. By reducing violence to what Sorel and Fanon would see as its purely formal characteristics and neglecting the content both grant to the concept, Arendt both *does* “violence” (in her understanding) to their formulations and fails to grasp the richness of their understandings of the radical dialectic of identity-formation that we have called the counterdiscourse of separation. In so doing, what she abandons to the

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<sup>1</sup> The existing literature dealing with the relationship between Sorel and Fanon tends to be of two types, either seeking to defend and recuperate Sorel by distinguishing him from Fanon, or vice-versa. For those siding with Fanon against Sorel, see Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, tr. N. Benabid (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006 [2000]), 222; Irene L. Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Gove Press, 1973), 203-204; Hussein A. Buhlan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 145-148; David Caute, *Frantz Fanon* (New York: Viking, 1970), 93; Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation*, tr. W. Feuser (London: Monthly Review, 1974), 86. David Macey is an outlier, insisting on distinguishing the two, but without taking sides. See his *Frantz Fanon* (New York: Picador, 2000), 465. More balanced views can be found in L. Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1986), 91-94; Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue*, 328-332.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1965 [1963]), 9.

“technicians” she so despises is ironically something which can be understood as profoundly “political” in her own terms.

To concede to Arendt’s hypostatization of the concept of violence would be to seal it off hermetically from the chain reaction of generativity that it sets into motion, to insist that it does not speak, produces nothing, and cannot exceed the boundaries of its own enactment. It is therefore the stark incompatibility distinguishing Arendt’s understanding of violence from that of Sorel and Fanon which forces us along a more difficult and less-trodden path, one which leads us beyond the concept of violence strictly understood and along the chain reaction binding this violence to the identity it creates. It is this entire process that I am calling the counterdiscourse of separation, and it is this entire process which allows for a more sophisticated and substantive understanding of the intellectual and political commonalities linking Sorel to Fanon. Hence if Arendt is unique in drawing Sorel and Fanon into the same orbit, she does so with the goal of dismissing both, whereas we seek to do the opposite. But if Arendt was uniquely insistent on drawing these two thinkers together, Jean-Paul Sartre (in many ways Arendt’s real target in *On Violence*) would be equally insistent in his efforts to distinguish them.

### Sartre’s disavowal

The searing venom that Sartre reserved for Sorel in his preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* is well known. It was there that he dismissed “Sorel’s fascist chatter [*bavardages fascistes*]” in an effort to clear the ground for what he well knew would be a controversial analysis of violence in Fanon’s text.<sup>3</sup> But, its nonchalant deployment notwithstanding, this dismissal appears at a crucial moment in Sartre’s text, at which he offers the second reason that Europeans must “have the courage to read this book.” This second reason, after the “revolutionary” shame that only one’s victims can summon, is violence, but it is worth wondering what is contained in this brusque sidelining of Sorel at precisely the moment where his position as the premier French theorist of violence might be of some interpretive and analytical use. What is contained in this displacement, I will argue, is *disavowal*.

In an effort to describe the curious and shadowy semi-presence of the Haitian Revolution in accounts of modernity, Sibylle Fischer turns to the psychoanalytic concept of “disavowal.” Whereas the literal meaning of disavowal involves a more clear-cut refusal of acknowledgement, Fischer notes the way in which Freud’s understanding of the concept is considerably more complex, reflecting his trademark theory of psychical continuity with rather than clean rupture from the object of disavowal.<sup>4</sup> For Freud, disavowals are always “half-measures, incomplete attempts at detachment from reality. The disavowal is always supplemented by acknowledgement.”<sup>5</sup> While it may seem unnecessarily harsh to apply such a definition to someone who had denied the validity of psychoanalysis as resolutely as had Sartre, we need not go so far. This is because we need look no further than Sartre’s preface itself to establish the

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), xlix; *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991 [1961]), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 37-38; 307-308n95.

<sup>5</sup> This definition appears in the 1938 text *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, published in J. Strachey, *et al*, eds., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23 (London: Hogart Press, 1974), 204. Cited in Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 38.

rhetorical traces, so textually-patent, of the acknowledgement embedded in his disavowal of Sorel.

While the epithet “fascist”—whose dubious explanatory value for Sorel’s thought we have already discussed—effectively diverts the reader’s attention away from this acknowledgement, and toward Fanon’s contribution, the acknowledgement is present nonetheless. This we can see if we refocus on the phrase as a whole, situating the disavowal within its broader textual context: “if you set aside Sorel’s fascist utterances, you will find that Fanon is the first since Engels to return the midwife of history to the light [*remettre en lumière l’accoucheuse de l’histoire*].”<sup>6</sup> The praise could not be more explicit! To understand violence, Sartre implies, is to understand—in Engels’ famous phrase—“the midwife of history,”<sup>7</sup> and in the long and illustrious progression toward grasping this aided birth of the new, but three figures stand out: Engels, Sorel, and now Fanon. For as yet unclear reasons, the second of these is to be “set aside [*écarter*],” but this displacement should not obscure the fact that Sartre clearly grants Sorel a degree of mastery over the historical role of violence.<sup>8</sup>

What, then, explains the imperative to disavow Sorel’s contribution? While we cannot easily determine Sartre’s intention or his own views on Sorel, what we can detect in this anxiety toward Sorel’s legacy in France is a *second* form of acknowledgement embedded within his disavowal: not only did Sorel *understand* violence’s historic role, but as a result, Fanon’s theory of violence would bear inevitable traces of that of his predecessor. This similarity will only become more evident in Fanon’s later critique of Engels, as in pushing Engels away due to his overly materialist view of violence, Fanon effectively draws Sorel closer. In the end, either due to his own sympathies with Sorel or as a provocative rejection of French intellectual pieties, Fanon’s tack would be very different from Sartre’s, and he would allude playfully to his intellectual forbear by describing the first chapter of *Wretched of the Earth* as containing his own “*réflexions sur la violence*.”<sup>9</sup> But to discover the roots of these similarities—according to which we would situate Sorel and Fanon within a common counterdiscourse of separation—we need first to step back to a time prior to Fanon’s explicit discussion of violence, when the gulf between Sartre and Fanon, mutual respect notwithstanding, was undeniably wider. It would be in Fanon’s earliest work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, that he would undergo a process similar to that which Sorel underwent in *The Trial of Socrates*, whereby he would be driven by force away from dreams of universal harmony and toward a political practice of separation, conflict, and radical identification with his blackness.

“As long as the black man remains on his home territory,” Fanon would write while reflecting on his early years in Martinique, “except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others.”<sup>10</sup> While race was certainly a heavy presence in interwar Martinique, its aspirational reference-point—whiteness, Frenchness—was largely held at arm’s length, allowing local racial distinctions to flourish and the self-congratulatory illusions of the

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<sup>6</sup> Sartre, “Preface,” in Fanon, *Wretched*, xlix, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase is from *Anti-Dühring*, but what Sartre calls violence is in most translations of Engels’ work rendered as “force.” This is of relevance both for Fanon’s relation to Sorel, who distinguished clearly between force and violence, and in Fanon’s later critique of the *Anti-Dühring* in *Wretched of the Earth* (see the next chapter).

<sup>8</sup> Even if we interpret *écarter* as a more thorough rejection (as, e.g., “dismissal”), this still doesn’t explain why the gesture is even necessary, i.e. why it is that Sorel must be disavowed.

<sup>9</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 63; *Les damnés*, 145.

<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 89; *Peau noire masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil. 1952), 88.



relatively wealthier and lighter-skinned segments of Antillean society to thrive unchecked. It is only upon crossing the line demarcating metropole from colony—a line which in this case coincides with the vastness of the ocean—that one experiences “being for others,” which is to say, racism.<sup>11</sup> One can exist for many years in the content racial daydreams of the colony, but following Sartre’s observations regarding anti-Semitism, the later the colonial subject confronts her own racialization in the eyes of the colonizer, “the more violent the shock.”<sup>12</sup> It is the lateness of Fanon’s own confrontation with his race—one documented within the pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*—that would set the stage not merely for a “violent” shock, but moreover for the transformation of that “violence” into an object of study in its own right. This moment of confrontation would rattle Fanon’s universal pretensions, driving him for a time away from the normative totality of universal human love and into the dialectical detour of identity, as it drove him momentarily away from the totalizing pretensions of reason and into mythical irrationalism.

As we have said, the pages of *Black Skin, White Masks* document this trans-Atlantic (and, as we will see, trans-ontological) crossing. Indeed, for Fanon this was a sort of Middle Passage in reverse, traveling first from the French Caribbean to North Africa to fight for the universal values of the French Revolution against the Nazis, before finally making landfall in Paris in late 1946. According to the author himself, the first three chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks* attempt to deal regressively—that is, analytically—with the existing situation of black men and women and their escapist efforts to sidestep the limitations of race, largely within the colonies. But it is the fifth chapter—arguably the book’s centerpiece—which deals with this metaphorical “crossing” to the metropole, in which Fanon takes a severely different course, dealing with a black subject who has “nothing in common” with the black subject (in the colony and elsewhere) who “wants to be white.” Here, the method is no longer regressive-analytical, but instead progressive-phenomenological—as indicated in the title, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man”—as this is a chapter which “shows the black man [i.e., Fanon himself] confronted with his race... striving desperately to discover the meaning of black identity.”<sup>13</sup>

This fifth chapter, dealing as it does with the dialectic of black identity, will necessarily be our central focus, as it carries within it much of the conceptual apparatus that we have deemed the counterdiscourse of separation. While Fanon’s initial approach will be one of universal generosity, his confrontation with French racism—especially a formative moment in 1946 Lyon—will effectively foreclose upon this path, driving him backward to seek a new outlet for his humanity. It is at this moment that Fanon embarks on the process of separation: knowing full well the mythical nature of black identity, he is left with no alternative but to embrace it and to embrace it fully—“mythically” and “violently”—in the hope that this embrace will provide racialized subjects with the necessary “ontological weight” and reciprocity jumpstart the Hegelian dialectic of recognition. This, we will see below, is the function of Fanon’s counter-

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<sup>11</sup> This metaphorical “crossing” is in many ways similar to that experienced by W.E.B. Du Bois, and whose importance I discuss in George Ciccariello-Maher, “A Critique of Du Boisian Reason: Kanye West and the Fruitfulness of Double-Consciousness,” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, n. 3 (January 2009), 371-401.

<sup>12</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 128n10; *Peau noire*, 122n10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, tr. G. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1995 [1948]), 75.

<sup>13</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, xvii-xviii; *Peau noire*, 10-11. The original translation of this chapter’s title was positively misleading, rendering it “The Fact of Blackness.” As will become clear, for Fanon, blackness was neither an objective nor immortal fact. In this passage, the new translation explicitly exaggerates the Du Boisian references, by choosing such words as “striving” and “folk” to complement Fanon’s reference to the “black soul.” Given the fundamental similarities exhibited by the two thinkers, however, this can be pardoned.

ontological violence, which like Sorel's proletarian violence stands against and is irreconcilable with repressive, Jacobin *force* (which is, for Fanon, racist-ontological).

But even then, as we will see, Fanon's misgivings about the dialectic are tangible, and he will push further, upbraiding Sartre himself for the overly prefigured and "closed" nature of his own dialectic. Put differently, if Fanon's retreat to black identity constituted the first, projective moment of our counterdiscourse of separation, one setting into motion the antagonistic consolidation of identities in the second and third, his critique of Sartre represents an insistence on the unpredictable open-endedness of the fourth, transformative moment. This process of separation—from the subjective projection of identity, to violent confrontation, and the displacement of reconciliation into the distant future—simultaneously marks Fanon's proximity to Sorel as well as the continuity between Fanon's earliest work and *The Wretched of the Earth*, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

But first, it is necessary to speak briefly to the subject of terminology and concepts, and inevitable difficulty when one seeks to draw different thinkers with different vocabularies into a dialogue. Where Sorel spoke, for the most part, of unity and social harmony, Fanon's focus will tend to be the universal and ontology, and underlying this terminological distinction is, on the one hand, a significant difference, but also fundamental correspondence. Whereas Sorel saw the danger of a *descriptive* totality which all-too-often assumed *normative* characteristics (in which simultaneously describing society as a unified totality and social harmony as a laudable goal served the ultimately conservative function of erasing class and legitimizing the status quo), Fanon's argument takes an inverse path. Denied immediate access to the celebrated *normative* totality of universal human love through racialization, Fanon will seek the source of this denial, finding it in the *descriptive* totality of ontology (the underlying equality of access to being), whose practical outgrowth is a discourse of formal rights and equality which conceals and legitimizes what Fanon would see as prevailing inequalities in access to ontological status.<sup>14</sup> Hence, Sorel's "unity" is Fanon's "ontology" (bearing in mind that the former operates on a political level and the latter much deeper), and Sorel's "harmony" is Fanon's "universal." For both, moreover, the *longitudinal* totalities<sup>15</sup> linking the descriptive to the normative along the deterministic path of progress, and entailed by *both* the unifying aspirations of rationalism *and* certain determinist forms of the dialectic—Marxist for Sorel, Sartrean-Hegelian for Fanon—are ultimately cast under suspicion. Both thinkers, as a result, will find themselves rejecting the universal claims of the prevailing totality and the idea that it represents an already-completed fulfillment of the (normative) ideal of human unity, throwing themselves instead down a path of scission and separation in which the radical division of this totality stands as the only possible path to an eventual normative reconciliation.

## Rebuffed from the universal

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<sup>14</sup> This explains the difference in the thinkers' respective approaches: since workers are not denied ontological status, Sorel's task is a more *practical* one which consists of determining which mode of activity will successfully restore class divisions to society. Fanon, on the other hand, confronts a practical problem with an ontological origin, and is thereby forced into the depths of philosophy before returning to the realm of practical action (which, in effect, is not fully resolved within *Black Skin, White Masks*).

<sup>15</sup> For Jay, "a belief that history could be understood as a progressively meaningful whole." Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 26.

Fanon was, to put it in a way, an unwilling participant in the counterdiscourse of separation with its anti-totality implications. His entire being ached for the universal, for a fully-reconciled normative totality comprising all of humanity, and it was for the universal that he himself screamed, wept, and finally, prayed. He begins:

Toward a new humanism...  
Understanding among men...  
Our colored brothers...  
I believe in you, Man...  
Racial prejudice...  
To understand and to love...<sup>16</sup>

And concludes similarly:

I, a man of color, want but one thing: that the tool never dominate the man....  
Superiority? Inferiority?  
Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, to reveal ourselves to one another?  
Was my freedom not given [*donée*] to me to build the world of the *You*?<sup>17</sup>

Here was a man for whom race did not exist as an objective biological category (thereby sharing with Sorel's understanding of class the necessary anti-essentialism of the first moment of the dialectic of separation). "Blacks" are only such on the basis of "a series of affective disorders" resulting from racialization and situating them within a certain "universe"; there is nothing inherently distinct about them.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, and here paraphrasing but broadening Sartre's formulation of anti-Semitism as a political category: "*It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.*"<sup>19</sup> Given such an orientation, such an explicit and generous *openness* to the world which can only be characterized as universal love, it would not be easy for Fanon to descend into the conflictive realm of black identity, threatening as it does a fundamental rupture of this universal ethic, this powerfully-normative view of humanity as a harmonious totality. But as his "Lived Experience" painstakingly charts, this was not a choice that Fanon made willingly: "I had to choose. What am I saying? I had no choice."<sup>20</sup>

The opening scene of this phenomenological retreat into black identity, where Fanon himself was "confronted with his race," would unfold while he was studying medicine and psychiatry in Lyons in 1946-1947. This is the now-famous "Look! A Negro!" of young child to mother, Fanon's response to which would bear within it the fundamental contours of his theory of revolutionary separation, identity, and violence.<sup>21</sup> While we will discuss the full implications of this moment later, our direct concern here is the crushing blow this objectification dealt to the

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<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, xi, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 206, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 187-188. Or, alternatively, "I wanted quite simply to be a man among men. I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together." Fanon, *Black Skin*, 92; *Peau noire*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, xii-xiii; *Peau noire*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 73; *Peau noire*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 106; *Peau noire*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 89; *Peau noire*, 88.

young Fanon's optimistic universalism. Desiring only the ethical intersubjectivity of the "world of the *You*," he was instead "fixed" by the gaze of the Other as a slide is "fixed" in preparation for the microscope, and "sealed into... crushing objecthood."<sup>22</sup> Since the world is determined intersubjectively, to lose one's status as a subject is to lose access to the world as well, and here as elsewhere, Sartre's observations on the gaze of the other stealing the world attain an unprecedented and burdensome reality: "I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room. I approached the other... and the Other, evasive, hostile, but not opaque, transparent and absent, vanished. Nausea."<sup>23</sup>

Fanon had been "prepared to forget everything"—slavery, a history of racist violence, and even the abuses of the present—"provided the world integrated me," but integration was not to be had, and his disbelief that such a generous offer could be rejected is palpable:

What? Whereas I was prepared to forget, to forgive, and to love, my message was flung back at me like a slap in the face. The white world, the only decent one, was preventing me from participating. It demanded that a man behave like a man. *It demanded of me that I behave like a black man*—or at least like a Negro. I hailed the world and the world amputated my enthusiasm.<sup>24</sup>

Here, in the distance separating "man" from "black man" and "black man" from "Negro," Fanon has begun to sense a distinction operating at the most fundamental of levels, one which calls into question any effort to describe the contemporary state of humanity as a unified whole. But even this amputation, this slap in the face, was not enough to dampen Fanon's longing for the universal—his "aspiration for totality" in Lukács' terms—and this initial rebuff only sets in motion an intricate intra-dialectical dance, a double-helix of Fanonian generosity and rejection by the racist world that finally drives him to accept identity and its separatist dynamic.

Confronted with a racist rejection which divides the human family, Fanon first opts to meet this affront to the universal head-on, armed with another form of universality: the totalizing, longitudinal aspiration of reason. Sartre had shown the irrationality of anti-Semitism, and this too colors Fanon's account, but his phenomenological approach initially prevents his incorporation of Sartre's conclusion until he himself had experienced it: that racism is more than simply irrational, but rather a form of "bad faith" which is self-referential and beyond recourse to reason itself.<sup>25</sup> This Fanon was soon to discover, however, and this discovery—"for a man armed solely with reason"—would be profoundly traumatic.<sup>26</sup> "I felt knife blades spring up within me," he writes, recalling a momentary respite from despair when escape from the racist nightmare seemed imminent, "I made up my mind to defend myself. Like all good tacticians, I wanted to rationalize the world and show the white man he was mistaken."<sup>27</sup> Like Sartre's Jew, Fanon

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<sup>22</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 89, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 92; *Peau noire*, 90. In fact, Fanon's entire phenomenological treatment of this moment must be read as a critical analog to Sartre's analysis of "The Look," in *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, tr. H. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956 [1943]), especially 340-345.

<sup>24</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 94, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> To be clear, I am referring to Fanon's phenomenological account of his confrontation with racialization, one which coincides approximately (in 1946) with the publication of Sartre's text. By the time Fanon wrote the phenomenology, he had clearly digested Sartre's message.

<sup>26</sup> "The psychoanalysts say that there is nothing more traumatic for a young child than contact with the rational. I personally would say that for a man armed solely with reason, there is nothing more neurotic than contact with the irrational." Fanon, *Black Skin*, 98, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 98, my emphasis, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 95.

momentarily embraces reason, assuming the role of “missionary of the universal,”<sup>28</sup> collecting the relevant facts from history and science, all in an optimistic effort to convince the racist of the error of his ways, and in so doing, to reconstitute the broken totality in an instantaneous fusion of normative and descriptive, human equality in the here and now: “Reason was assured of victory on every level. I reintegrated the brotherhood of man [*les assemblées*]. But soon I was disillusioned. Victory was playing cat and mouse; it was thumbing its nose at me.”<sup>29</sup> Science and reason, which had seemed Fanon’s only possible escape, was also being used to justify the irrationality of racism.<sup>30</sup> This way, too, was blocked.

The psychological devastation of such a blockage was severe, and Fanon was tempted—against every generous shred of his being—to throw himself headlong into the irrationality of black essentialism:

I had rationalized the world, and the world had rejected me in the name of color prejudice. Since there was no way we could agree on the basis of reason, I resorted to irrationality. It was up to the white man to be more irrational than I. For the sake of the cause, I had adopted the process of regression, but the fact remained that it was an unfamiliar weapon; here I am at home; I am made [*bâti*] of the irrational; I splash about in the irrational. Irrational up to my neck. And now let my voice ring out...<sup>31</sup>

But here, revealingly, the words that follow are not those of Léopold Senghor—representative of the more essentialist wing of the Negritude movement, with his insistence that “emotion is Negro as reason is Greek”<sup>32</sup>—but rather Aimé Césaire’s:

My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of day...

My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral...<sup>33</sup>

This choice reveals the deep but palpable ambiguity Fanon himself felt toward the flight to the irrational—a flight not chosen but forced—and toward the distinct variants of the Negritude movement more generally. From here on out, his path was chosen for him, but he would occasionally look back wistfully, and since we have seen how essentialism short-circuits the process of separation—setting out as it does from an already perfect completeness which forecloses on an open future—it was this looking back that would allow him to walk the fine, if dialectical, line dividing identity from essentialism and distinguishing the dialectical progression of the counterdiscourse of separation from the frozen fixity of separatism proper.

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<sup>28</sup> Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 113.

<sup>29</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 99; *Peau noire*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> See also Fanon, *Black Skin*, 12, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 99: “When a bachelor of philosophy from the Antilles refuses to apply for certification as a teacher on the grounds of his color, I say that philosophy has never saved anyone. When another desperately tries to prove to me that the black man is as intelligent as any white man, I say that intelligence has never saved anyone, for if philosophy and intelligence are invoked to proclaim the equality of men, they have also been employed to justify the extermination of men.”

<sup>31</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 102, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 99.

<sup>32</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 106; *Peau noire*, 102. On Fanon’s relationship to Senghor, see Robert Bernasconi, “The Assumption of Negritude: Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and the Vicious Circle of Racial Politics,” *parallax* 8, n. 2 (2002), 69-83.

<sup>33</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 103; *Peau noire*, 100. Here Césaire senses a complicity between a certain form of essentialist negritude and what Sartre would describe as the anti-Semite’s desire to possess “the durability of a stone.” *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 18.

Fanon decides to accept black history as his own, but is immediately forced to “think twice,” for history—especially that of racialized subjects—is frequently written by others, thereby threatening a slippery slope back to cannibalism and a “third-rate [*au rabais*] humanity.”<sup>34</sup> Here we find clear echoes of Böhme’s early formulation of diremption in religious terms, but Fanon’s anxiety is that this version is wrongly formulated: “Sacrifice served as an intermediary between creation and me—it wasn’t the origins I rediscovered, but the Origin.”<sup>35</sup> In the black essentialist creation myth, the Fall of Man—the division of an originary perfection into a history of racial slavery—leads not back to Fanon’s desired universal, but is instead disguised as completion, as synthesis in and of itself: the innate perfection of blackness. But even had Fanon wanted to embrace this essential perfection as a tangible anchor in a racist world, it would not have mattered, as this too was stolen from him, reduced to a past genetic phase in the linear progressive history leading to the perfection that is whiteness. “My originality had been snatched from me. I wept for a long time, and then I began to live again.”<sup>36</sup> Assessing the tattered remains of his essence—up to that point consisting of little more than rhythm and poetry—it seems weak, but it is at this point that Fanon makes a momentous discovery: black antiquity.

Once this had been dug up, displayed, and exposed to the elements, it allowed me to regain a viable historic category. The white man was wrong, I was not a primitive or a subhuman; I belonged to a race that had already been working silver and gold 2,000 years ago.... I put the white man back in his place; emboldened, I shoved him and hurled it in his face: you must accommodate me; I’m not accommodating anyone. I snickered to my heart’s delight. The white man was visibly growling. His reaction was a long time coming. I had won. I was overjoyed.<sup>37</sup>

Having been told that his history was but a stage in a linear progression, an *evolutionary* form of longitudinal totality, Fanon was reinvigorated by the discovery of not just *any* past, but one which explicitly shattered and inverted the linearity of progress. Having risen to a new height of exultation, however, the crushing devastation this time would be infinitely greater, and all the more so since his possible escape routes were growing increasingly slender.

Fanon had rejoiced at disrupting the racist’s evolutionary narrative which situated blacks as a prior stage of human history, a relic, a vestige of the past surviving in the present. Having broken with an evolutionary totality, having demonstrated through historical evidence its flaws and undeniable oversights, another slap in the face, but this time not evolutionary, but rather dialectical:

“Lay aside your history, your research into the past, and try to get into step with our rhythm... there is no longer room for your sensitivity... Of course, they will tell me, from time to time when we are tired of all that concrete [*nos buildings*], we will turn to you as our children... blank...ingenuous... spontaneous. We will turn to you as the childhood of the world. You are so authentic in your life, so playful. Let us forget for a few moments our ceremonious, polite civilization and bend down over those heads, those adorable expressive faces. In a sense, *you reconcile us with ourselves*.”

<sup>34</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 105; *Peau noire*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 104; *Peau noire*, 101. On Böhme and diremption, see my “Introduction.”

<sup>36</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 108; *Peau noire*, 104.

<sup>37</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 109-111; *Peau noire*, 105-106.

So they were countering my irrationality with rationality, my rationality with the “true rationality.” At my every move, I was losing. I tested my heredity. I did a complete diagnosis of my sickness. I wanted to be typically black—that was out of the question. I wanted to be white—that was a joke. And when I tried to claim my negritude intellectually as a concept, they snatched it away from me. They proved to me that my effort was nothing but a term in the dialectic.<sup>38</sup>

Racist society could admit the value of black particularity, the essential rhythms and emotion of these other sub/non-humans. It could even, evidently, admit to a history which effectively disrupts its own self-conceptions of historical superiority. In this perverted mirror-image of black essentialism lay another version of the diremptive creation story, but one in which the Fall of (the black) Man serves the perfection neither of himself nor of a universal humanity, but only of the racist society which imprisons him. The elements of his essential uniqueness were—through an all-too-familiar process of cultural appropriation—deftly reincorporated into and subsumed to the totality of a foreclosed dialectical synthesis which steps in as a strategic substitute for the evolutionary one, with black softness providing whites a necessary respite from the hardness of the concrete. Here again, Foucault’s concern with dialectical “recolonization” rings true. Whereas Fanon had initially aspired to bring the universal into being in the present, here too normative and descriptive totalities merge, but in the service of a very different goal: the hypostatization and legitimation of existing racial hierarchies. Against this—and against black essentialism—Fanon is forced to drive a wedge between the descriptive and the normative, returning to a regressive analysis of the prevailing totality of the racist world.<sup>39</sup>

Fanon had found his encomia to the normative totality of universal love brusquely rebuffed by the white world. When he responded with the equally-totalizing (longitudinal) aspirations of reason, he found the enemy impermeable to such “knife blades.” He was left no other choice than to diagnose *descriptively* the world he was inhabiting, in a desperate effort to grasp the impermeability he confronted, this bad-faith totality from which he was nevertheless excluded. In so doing, Fanon’s break with the paradigm of totality would be complete: having returned to regressive analysis to describe, this description would only yield a starker choice which entailed a further break with rationality and the universal, to throw himself fully and unreservedly into the black identity that had been imposed upon him. After having believed he had defeated one enemy totality, only to witness another arising in its place, it begins to dawn on him: *the whole belongs to the white man; only the part is available to the black*. It is then that Sartre will again enter the picture, this time not as ally but as unwitting traitor and agent of totality.

### Ontological force and the “hellish zone of nonbeing”

Having probed the receptiveness of the world through phenomenology, that is, progressively, Fanon would nevertheless find it necessary, once that world had been denied to him, to return to a regressive, analytical analysis. Having seen in practice the irrational insistence

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<sup>38</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 111, translation modified, my emphasis; *Peau noire*, 106-107.

<sup>39</sup> Here, too, Fanon’s methodological statements regarding psychology acquire a clear political weight: if sociogeny is privileged over Freudian ontogeny for understanding neuroses, here *sociology*, the analysis of existing social structures, is privileged over Hegel’s dialectical *ontology* as an approach to grasping differences within being. See Fanon, *Black Skin*, xv; *Peau noire*, 8.

with which a racist society resists claims of equality, his fundamental question would persist: “again I want to know why.”<sup>40</sup> Here the totality in question shifts, or rather, Fanon is forced to reckon with it on a different *level*: from the universality of mankind we now speak, on a different plane, of the universality of ontology, of being itself. This is a step back in dialectical terms, but one taken in preparation for a reformulation of the dialectic, as in the midst of the objectifying gaze of the Other, Fanon is forced to critically reassess Hegel’s assumptions of ontological (descriptive) totality:

There is in fact a “being for the other,” as described by Hegel, but any ontology is rendered impossible in a colonized and civilized society... In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people, there is an impurity or a flaw that *prohibits any ontological explanation*.<sup>41</sup>

Ontology, with its universal pretensions—and here Fanon’s critique applies equally to Sartre’s abstract formulation of “the look” of the Other<sup>42</sup>—conceals the particularity of black experience, and it is this particularity which reveals the illusory and exclusionary nature of the prevailing totality. If Hegel can be credited with formulating an intersubjective and dialectical ontology, this intersubjectivity incorporates only intra-ontological difference (differences *within* being) while effectively excluding “sub-ontological” difference (differences *between* being and sub/non-being).<sup>43</sup> Dialectic conflict and progression, in Hegel’s formulation, is only possible among ontological equals.<sup>44</sup> The black man, for Fanon, is not merely black: he is also, always, black *in relation to white*.<sup>45</sup> It is on this plane of relationality that both ontology and the dialectical potential Hegel associates with it are foreclosed upon: “The Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the White.”<sup>46</sup> Black subjects are seen but not seen; they *exist* but they *are not* (human).

The source of this “flaw” which results in the denial of ontology is to be found within the Hegelian framework itself, and specifically the master-slave dialectic, which Fanon critiques only to then obstinately stretch it to fit his subject. Self-consciousness, in isolation, is a “for-itself,” and it is only on the basis of the recognition of the Other that it gains the objectivity of an

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<sup>40</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 100; *Peau noire*, 97. This universal vocation for understanding, seems to reflect but simultaneously transcend the mere absurdity of Albert Camus, pushing beyond the conflict between mind and world to understand in a more substantial manner their interrelatedness.

<sup>41</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 90, translation modified, my emphasis; *Peau noire*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> See George Ciccariello-Maher, “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze: Intellectuals and the Colonial Difference,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 9, n.2 (Fall 2006), 139-165.

<sup>43</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres uses this term in contrast to Emanuel Levinas’ formulation of “trans-ontological difference,” which marks “the distance between Being and what is beyond Being; or Being and exteriority.” Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, n. 2 (March 2007), 253-254. See also Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, Fanon derives his reading of Hegel—and the importance he places on the master-slave dialectic—largely, albeit not exclusively, from Alexandre Kojève’s lectures.

<sup>45</sup> In his critical response to Alfred Adler in the final chapter of *Black Skin*, Fanon documents how this ontological distinction derails open conflict between self and other, limiting such conflict only to the racialized-colonized, who overcompensate vis-à-vis one another because true self-assertion vis-à-vis the colonizer-white is impossible. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 190; *Peau noire*, 174-175. Further, these are separated along *sociogenic* lines: one side enjoys the social privilege to *define* being, and the other cannot possibly hope to attain it. For Fanon, the situation is worse in the Antilles, where the line of demarcation is also the ocean, preventing both a proper realization of the situation and lacking the necessary proximity for the conflict necessary to overcome it.

<sup>46</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 90, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 97. Elsewhere, Fanon speaks of “amputation” (94, 119).



“in-itself,” thereby “blossoming into universal self-consciousness” (in-itself and for-itself).<sup>47</sup> Here we find two overlapping moments of interest to our discussion, in which the progression:

for-itself → in-itself → universal self-consciousness

gains a double-meaning. Firstly, it embodying “the transformation of subjective certainty (*Gewissheit*) into objective truth (*Wahrheit*),” we find a precise parallel of the process traced in the counterdiscourse of separation, wherein an identity is projected subjectively and mythically (as “certainty”), thereby producing itself as an objective reality.<sup>48</sup>

Secondly, and interrelatedly, in this progression from the for-itself to the in-itself, we find a direct counterpart to Sorel’s inversion of the traditional Marxist schema in which the class-in-itself (the objective relations constituting the material basis for identity) precedes the class-for-itself (the expressive outgrowth of that material basis). Like Sorel, Fanon privileges the primacy of the moment of the for-itself (the initial, projective moment of the process of separation) as the subjective gesture which sets the dialectic into motion. While this may not be surprising, since Fanon here draws directly on Hegel, that is, prior to being “turned on his head” by Marx, this is not a simple regression to idealism, as Fanon’s critique of Hegelian ontology is resolutely *material* in its appeal to that black experience which he finds (sub-)ontologically excluded from the Hegelian schema.

This exclusion occurs when the “two-way movement” of reciprocity—the dynamic source of this progression—is short-circuited, thereby blocking access to the conflictive tension which births the intersubjective humanity of universal self consciousness. It is this blockage of access to the reciprocity which is the precondition for the dialectic that characterizes the anguished existence of the racialized-colonized subject (and here Fanon is theorizing what he had previously tracked phenomenologically):

For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master scorns the consciousness of the slave.  
What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.

Likewise, the slave here can in no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work.

The black slave wants to be like his master.

Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave.

For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.<sup>49</sup>

Hegel, like Sartre after him, had theorized recognition in an overly abstract manner, in which I am always potentially the Other, the master. But as Fanon reminds Sartre, “the White is not only ‘the Other,’ but also the master, whether real or imaginary,” to which we could add this critique of Hegel: the master is not only the Other, but also White, the standard-bearer of Being empowered to deny it to others.<sup>50</sup> While recognition is blocked, this does not eliminate the intersubjective nature of the encounter, and hence the blockage preventing universal self-consciousness is double, or better, two-sided. On the side of the master, the black subject’s lack

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<sup>47</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 192, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 176.

<sup>48</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 192; *Peau noire*, 176.

<sup>49</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195n10; *Peau noire*, 179n9.

<sup>50</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 117n24, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 112n22.

of “ontological weight” prevents her being perceived as a subject of recognition, standing instead as an object, a tool providing only brute labor. More perversely, on the slave’s side, Fanon is addressing the question of an ontological inferiority complex in which the distinction between white being and black sub-being leads not to resistance and the conflict necessary for recognition, but rather to efforts to slip or sneak into being through becoming “white.” It is these two *faces* of the blockage of recognition posed by the ontological “flaw” that will be essential for Fanon’s eventual response.

Rather than moving about in the space of the universal, the space of the human, black subjects—as a result of this ontological blockage—occupy a quite different space, “a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential... a veritable hell.”<sup>51</sup> This “hellish zone of nonbeing,” as philosopher Lewis Gordon calls it, is marked by *absence*, by its status as “a zone neither of appearance or disappearance,” and it is across this chasm that separates being from non-being that the master-slave relationship appears in racialized form.<sup>52</sup> Not only does this “below-Otherness” render politics—as *publicity*<sup>53</sup>—impossible, but the same applies for ethics: “damnation means that the black (or better, the blackened) lives the irrelevance of innocence... the absence of a Self-Other dialectic in racist situations means the eradication of ethical relations. Where ethics is derailed, all is permitted.”<sup>54</sup> Just as Sorel had formulated his rupture with the overarching paradigm of totality as a rupture *against* rather than *within* ethics, one premised on the absence of a final arbiter, so too does Gordon here formulate Fanon’s understanding of the denial of ontology as a denial not of access to ethics but a denial of the very *existence* thereof.

And not only that, but here too we find an explanation for what had so confounded the anguished Fanon’s phenomenological account: one does not dialogue with non-beings, much less justify one’s actions or explain oneself rationally. Reason is premised upon ontological status—here revealing the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* as relying on its inverse—and to paraphrase Aristotle, one simply does not debate those (e.g. animals, women, slaves) capable only of making noises.<sup>55</sup> Racialization, put simply, creates a situation which lacks the necessary reciprocity for the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to operate. Fanon’s aspiration to the normative totality of universal humanism had been dashed, as had his then strategic appeal to reason (itself replete with totalizing aspirations). Standing behind this blockage of access to normative and longitudinal totalities—of the unity of humanity and the inevitable progress leading us to its perfection—Fanon had discovered a rupture in the descriptive totality of Hegelian ontology—a tear in the fabric of being itself—one which prevents some subjects access to the reciprocity that Hegel had presupposed to be universal. For equality to be contemplated, for the obligation to recognize the other to have any traction at all, racialized subjects must first seize access to ontology, storming the fortified heaven of *being itself*. While we have already seen hints of how this might be done in the only path Fanon sees as open when all others are blocked, it remains to sketch the contours of how he formulates this path of resistance.

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<sup>51</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, xii, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Lewis Gordon, “Through the Hellish Zone of Nonbeing: Thinking through Fanon, Disaster, and the Damned of the Earth,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* V (Summer 2007), 11.

<sup>53</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 45-53.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon, “Through the Hellish Zone,” 12.

<sup>55</sup> Here, Spivak’s famous dictum on the subaltern, adopted from Marx—“they cannot speak, they must be spoken for”—achieves an ontological concreteness.

But first, however, Fanon introduces a second torsion—similarly rooted in black experience—into the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Not only is the master *white*, and thereby in a position to deny ontological status to the black slave, but, in a parallel process, the master is no longer even master in a strict sense. The implications of this are more than a mere formality, or better put, it is *as* formality that this shift is most pernicious. How is the historic liberation of the slaves *parallel* to and how does it *reinforce* the ontological violence that disqualifies them from humanity, when it seems to openly contradict and counteract that disqualification? Quite simply because, “the White, in the capacity of master, told the black man: ‘From now on, you are free.’”<sup>56</sup> This was an act undertaken, however grudgingly, *as master* (both practically and ontologically), on the basis of the already-bestowed power of ontological determination. The master as *white*, *standing above* the master-slave dyad (not merely within it), decided who would henceforth occupy what position:

The black man is a slave who was allowed to assume the master’s attitude.

The White man is a master who allowed slaves to eat at his table.

One day, a good white master, who exercised a lot of influence, said to his friends: “Let’s be kind to the niggers...” So the white masters grudgingly decided to raise the animal-machine-men [formally] to the supreme rank of *men*...

The upheaval reached the Black man from the outside. The Black man [*le Noir*] was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled around him in a colorful dance. The upheaval did not change the negro [*différencié le nègre*]. He went from one way of life [*mode de vie*] to another, but not [substantively] from one life to another.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, in the absence of Hegel’s dialectic of recognition, the *formal* passage from slavery to liberation is not accompanied by a concomitant shift in the *substantive* ontological status of the former slave: here there is more continuity than rupture, and the former master continues to look to the former slave for labor rather than recognition while the former slave is transfixed by this lack of recognition, precluding all independence of spirit. It is this conundrum of the free-but-unfree former slave that causes Fanon’s existential explosion and leads him to theorize a violence which runs counter to the symbolic ontological force of racialization. If Hegel’s dialectic assumed the basis for a universal *spirit*, Fanon here tracks the parallel course of liberal universalism, one which is complicit in its assumption of access to ontology as the basis for universal *rights*. In this anxiety toward a purely formal liberation as a substitute for substantive social and individual disalienation, Fanon’s analysis leans heavily toward what we will see in *Wretched of the Earth*, with the poisoned gift of formal emancipation here prefiguring the similarly tainted granting of formal national liberation to the colonies.

If, as we have said, Sorel distinguished “force” from “violence,” reserving for the former the function of maintaining the state, then how does this “force” relate to the ontological division that prevails within a racist society? While one might initially protest that the state, for Sorel, is an instrument of class rule, this does not preclude comparison in the least, since class rule is but one form assumed by the state as a broader category of what Sorel deems *minority rule*. Here the similarities become clearer, and what we find in Fanon is above all an ontologization of Sorel’s

<sup>56</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 179.

<sup>57</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 194-195, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 178.

conception of force.<sup>58</sup> This *ontological force* which disqualifies the racialized from full access to the human is analogous to the bourgeois force that Sorel interpreted as upholding the state, in that it serves the “Jacobin” function of maintaining that state as an instrument of rule by a privileged minority. Now, however, the privileged minority appears in racial terms, deploying force not to divide class from class but to erect thick walls within being itself. This is a symbolic power enjoyed by those who, through social positioning and control over the prevailing totality are able to make the rules and to define truths (such as, e.g., the equation of whiteness with those normative aspects of full humanity, the status of the present and future vis-à-vis the concept of totality, etc.). Here again, the ontological appearance of the descriptive totality emerges as a strategic *function* of existing social structures and inequalities (i.e. sociogenically).<sup>59</sup>

Having diagnosed this ontological force, what remains is to turn to the other side of the equation—one which Sorel delineated in such clearly antagonistic terms—gaugeing Fanon’s reply to this ontological disqualification in an effort to discover what similarities it bears to the anti-Jacobin function of Sorel’s proletarian violence. We have already seen—in Fanon’s rebuff from the universal—two key elements drawing him into the orbit of Sorel’s analysis: the recognition that contemporary claims of universality (descriptive totality) are flawed and that this (ontological) flaw functions to impede both a future universal and longitudinal rationality as the path by which to reach it. These lessons about totality and rationality would bear fruit in a Sorelian fashion in Fanon’s response to the conundrum racism had imposed upon him.

### “To make myself known”

We return to Lyon for a moment, for the concluding act of Fanon’s dramatic encounter with white mother and son, and consequently, with himself. And strangely enough, this concluding act comes near the beginning of his fifth chapter, only to then be followed with a double-helix of phenomenology and analysis which parallels the double-helix of Fanon’s rejection by the white world.<sup>60</sup> What begins with the objectification of “Look! A Negro!” provokes first a smile, then feigned enjoyment which immediately discovers its own impossibility, leaving both Negro and boy trembling:

The White man is all around me; up above the sky is tearing at its navel; the earth crunches under my feet and sings white, white. All this whiteness burns me to a cinder... I can feel the familiar rush of blood surge up from the innumerable dispersions of my being. I am about to lose my temper. The fire had died a long time ago, and once again the Negro is trembling.

“Look how handsome that Negro is...”

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<sup>58</sup> In fact, etymologically-speaking, “state” entails a “standing,” whether this be the fixed characteristic of an individual or a structure “standing” over society, and as such bears an inherent relationship—at least in its fetishized, naturalized form—to the *ontos* of being. Furthermore, to “state” something is to “place” it, or in our terms, to *class-ify* it. On race as “class-ification,” see Aníbal Quijano, “The Coloniality of Power and Social Classification.”

<sup>59</sup> For an analysis of this phenomenon through the category of “symbolic violence” and the formulations of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière, see George Ciccariello-Maher, “Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine: Symbolic Violence from Fanon to Chávez,” *Theory & Event* 13, n. 1 (2010).

<sup>60</sup> This progression is suggested as early as page 89, the first page of the chapter: “I lose my temper, demand an explanation.... Nothing doing. I explode. *Here are the fragments put together by another me.*” Fanon, *Black Skin*, 89, my emphasis; *Peau noire*, 88.

“The handsome Negro says, ‘Fuck you,’ madame!”

Shame flooded her face. At last I was freed from my rumination. I accomplished two things at once: I identified my enemies and I made a scene. Overjoyed. Now we could have some fun.

The battlefield having been drawn up, I entered the lists.<sup>61</sup>

Fanon’s outburst—provoked by his own experience of the lack of ontological resistance—contains within it the basic structure of his theory of violence, separation, and identity. But why should the identification of the enemy and the making of a scene cause such a seismic ontological shift? Because to discover an enemy, and to discover it clearly, was also to turn away from the master and discover something essential about oneself: as Fanon puts it, “I had incisors to test. I could feel that they were sturdy.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, the antagonistic projection and consolidation of identity that intersect at the heart of our counterdiscourse are intimately related in an almost Schmittian fashion.

If Fanon had earlier insisted that zealotry [*l’enthousiasme*] is the untrustworthy weapon of the powerless [*les impuissants*], then this is the moment that marks his full recognition of his own ontological powerlessness, or better put, that such zealotry constituted his only remaining source of power.<sup>63</sup> Since ontology had been denied, since there was no basis for the smooth operation of Hegel’s dialectic of recognition, such a basis had to be created: “I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an *innate complex*, to assert myself as BLACK. Since the other was reluctant to recognize me [*me reconnaître*], there remained only one solution: to make myself known [*me faire connaître*].”<sup>64</sup> Fanon’s theory of counter-ontological violence, one which demonstrates with the utmost clarity both his similarity to Sorel and relationship to the counterdiscourse of separation, can thus be summarized in these three words: *making oneself known*.

This is the moment of Fanon’s tortured and anguished submission to separation, to identity, to the part over the whole, and to the unreason which divides the longitudinal aspirations of Western rationality. And it is no coincidence that this occurs within the realm of his phenomenological account, since it is precisely black *experience* that ontology—despite its universal pretensions—cannot accommodate. The lack of *ontological* weight that black subjects carry coincides precisely with the lack of *rational* weight that Fanon’s own arguments carry, and this “weightlessness”—this lack of *gravity* in both its senses—leads in both cases to an explosion. This explosion is simultaneously violent and mythical, as we have said of Sorel before him: violent in its anti-Jacobin *content* (here understood in ontological terms) and mythical in its subjectively projected *form*. In this case, moreover, we can see clearly how form and content blur, as mythical form itself constitutes a rupture of the totalizing claims and aspirations of rationality. And again, like Sorel, what is projected is the firmness of an absolute identity: Fanon is not merely “making himself known” as an individual, as an enlightened rational subject suitable for formal citizenship, but rather asserting himself “as BLACK.”

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<sup>61</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 94, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 94, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, xiii; *Peau noire*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 95, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 93. Here borrowing from Sartre’s diagnosis of the charitable gaze, Fanon would say that for the colonized to *force* any emotion onto the colonizer is already a step toward ethical reciprocity. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 77.

Hegel's ontological error notwithstanding, Fanon would—through this self-assertion—set out to *reconstruct* the master-slave dialectic on the basis of this ontological “flaw” and the blockage it entails (as Sorel had sought to *reconstruct* a Marxian revolutionary dialectic on the inversion of the in-itself and the for-itself). As we saw above, the blockage that race constitutes for the Hegelian master-slave dialectic is a *double* one: the master seeks not recognition, but work; the slave seeks not liberation in work, but an unrequited recognition. Put simply, the master cannot turn *toward* the slave, and the slave cannot turn *away* from the master. Hence the response to such a situation must have a dual effect in accord with Hegel's emphasis on the two-way street that is self-consciousness: to somehow *force* the master to open his eyes to the being of the (black) Other, and to *disalienate* the slave, to rid her of her long-cultivated inferiority complex and make possible independence in work.

On the subjective side, Fanon's initial flight to negritude is accompanied by an exhilaration whose practical effects could hardly be exaggerated. From being denied the world, he suddenly owned it; from suffering the effects of the world, he suddenly controlled it: “Astride the world, my heels digging into its flanks, I rub the neck of the world like the high priest rubbing between the eyes of his sacrificial victim.”<sup>65</sup> The black subject suddenly finds herself “rehabilitated, ‘standing at the helm,’ governing the world with her intuition,” seizing it back in a certain way from the white:

the Negro, alerting the prolific antennae of the world, standing in the spotlight of the world, spraying the world with his poetical power, “porous to every breath of the world.” I embrace the world! The White man has never understood this magical substitution... As a magician I stole from the White man a “certain world,” lost to him and his kind. When that happened the white man must have felt an aftershock he was unable to identify, being unused to such reactions... The essence of the world was my property... My “speaking hands” tore at the hysterical throat of the world.<sup>66</sup>

And here already we see that the *external* function of Fanon's violent black self-assertion is inextricably intertwined with its *internal* function: the very same gesture and content that frees the black subject from her self-alienation, that makes possible a “turning away” from the master, does so by stealing the world away in a zero-sum fashion, serving simultaneously as the gesture which provokes suspicion in the master “unused to such reactions.” The master, worried that his slave might have stolen something valuable, searches the slave's pockets, interrogates her: “At last I had been recognized; I was no longer a nothingness.”<sup>67</sup>

Just as Sorel's proletarian violence serves the dual function of mythically projecting proletarian identity (moment two of our counterdiscourse) while simultaneously, and through provocation, reinforcing bourgeois identity as well (moment three), the same can be said of Fanon's violence as self-assertion. If anything, in Fanon's case the two sides are more tightly bound to one another: while class identity could arguably exist prior to conflict, black self-assertion on the ontological level must coincide with it. Here tracking Hegel closely, Fanon finds in conflict the intermediate step between the subjective certainty of the individual self-consciousness and its imposition on the other as objective truth (in recognition). Resistance is part of the process, giving rise as it does to “*Desire*; the first stage on the road that leads to the

<sup>65</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 103-104; *Peau noire*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 106-107, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 108, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 104.

dignity of the spirit... It is through my Desire that I demand consideration.”<sup>68</sup> It is the chain-reaction set off by this desire—leading through the risk of one’s life in conflict with the Other—that leads self-consciousness beyond the mere existence of bare life: “Only conflict and the risk it implies can, therefore, make human reality, in-itself-for-itself, come true... a universally valid objective truth... I pursue something other than life, insofar as I am fighting for the birth of a human world, in other words, a world of reciprocal recognitions.”<sup>69</sup>

This mutual relation between the two sides which has the potential to set into motion a virtuous cycle of conflict with dialectical promise, as well as the danger constituted by its blockage, is visible as well in the poisoned gift of formal abolition:

“Say thank you to the nice man,” the mother tells her little boy... but we know that often the little boy dreams of shouting some other, more resounding expression....

When the black man happens to look fiercely upon the White man, the White man says to him: “My brother, there is no difference between us.” And yet the black man *knows* there is a difference. He *wants* it. He would like the White man to suddenly say to him: “Dirty nigger.” Then he would have that unique occasion—to “show them” [*leur montrer*]....

The former slave needs a challenge to his humanity, he wants a conflict, a riot. But it is too late....

Never certain whether the White man considers him as consciousness in-itself for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, contestation.<sup>70</sup>

The proactive action of the former master, like that of Sorel’s preachers of social harmony, short-circuits the dialectic. The gift of the universal (formal, legal recognition as equal) is fatal to motion; it halts historical progress. There is nothing inevitable about the dialectic; it must be driven from below; tomorrow is not promised.

And so here we have the broad strokes of Fanon’s theory of violence: for the racialized subject, self-consciousness *as human* requires counter-violence be deployed in opposition to ontological force, it requires the assertion of identity within a historical situation marked by the denial of reciprocity, and if necessary, the provocation of conflict through the assertion of alterity. It is only through this conflict that Fanon—in his updated Hegelian dialectic—can possibly foresee overcoming the barriers, both internal and external, that prevent black subjects from accessing the fullness of being, at the juncture of the in-itself and the for-itself. But how can merely “making oneself known” constitute a violent act? Here we turn again to Gordon:

the blackened lives the disaster of appearance where there is no room to appear nonviolently. Acceptable being is nonexistence, nonappearance, or submergence... To change things is to appear, but to appear is to be violent since that group’s appearance is illegitimate. Violence, in this sense, need not be a physical imposition. It need not be a consequence of guns and other weapons of destruction. It need simply be appearance.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 192-193, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 176-177.

<sup>69</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 193; *Peau noire*, 177.

<sup>70</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195-197, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 179-180. This situation, however, Fanon sees as peculiar to France (or perhaps Europe): “In the United States the black man fights and is fought,” and in Africa, many seek to “keep their alterity—alterity of rupture, of struggle, of combat” (196-197; 179-180).

<sup>71</sup> Gordon, “Through the Hellish Zone,” 12.

For racialized subjects, the very act of appearing, of making oneself known, is a violent act both for its ontological implications and for its inevitable reception.<sup>72</sup> That is, it constitutes a challenge to the prevailing structures of ontological violence—the walls of exclusion which divide being from non-being—and as a result of this disruption, black appearance historically appears as “violent” regardless of its content.<sup>73</sup> This violence responds, moreover, to Fanon’s twofold task, operating both internally (its disalienating function, prior to any physically “violent” act, as a turning away from the master) and externally (as appearance, which will be inevitably perceived as violent by the prevailing system, a perception which itself is necessary for the former master to turn toward the former slave for recognition).

To the *ontological* force of racialization, then, Fanon at least *seems to* respond in kind, but much as we have seen in Sorel and as we will see in a more explicit fashion in *Wretched of the Earth*, the radically anti-Jacobin content of this violence and its concomitant creativity render it utterly incommensurable with the force of the racist/colonizer. Rather than fixing and determining being through the exclusion of a part of humanity, this is a violence that undoes those very same exclusionary barriers, tearing down the ontological walls separating Being from mere beings and setting the two into dialectical motion. This is a violence, in other words, which operates toward the *decolonization of being*.<sup>74</sup>

Hence Fanon’s critique of the ontological presuppositions (i.e. unlimited reciprocity) of the Hegelian dialectic on the basis of black experience is more than mere supplement to his phenomenology. Rather, in demonstrating this lack of reciprocity, and in charting the disruption of dialectical conflict in the formal liberation of the slave, Fanon is debunking assumptions regarding the objective progress of the dialectic and its predictable universal outcome (i.e. that the basis for normative totality has already been descriptively established). Without black disalienation, without white recognition, the dialectic of history grinds to a halt, and the only way to avoid this stalling of the dialectic is to qualitatively transform it, emphasizing the dialectical moment of rupture, of separation and diremption, which precedes universal resolution and must become self-sufficient in and of itself. Put in terms of our broader project, any final reconciliation must be postponed, displaced to the fourth moment of the process of separation, a process which insistently foregrounds division, rupture, identity. However, this critique of

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<sup>72</sup> In other words, whereas Sorel would more openly flaunt a resignified violence, raising it as a banner, for Fanon this “violence” would be to a greater degree imposed upon him. And even when that content is nominally “violent,” this often masks its ontological function. Turning away from the master, in practice, often coincides with the realization that that most basic proof of human equality—vulnerability to death at the hands of another—also applies to whites. For this recognition to be put into practice often entails at least the *threat* of actual violence as the mechanism for enforced recognition.

<sup>73</sup> Here Gordon cites the civil rights struggle, but one could equally cite many other instances of black appearance—from the Black Panthers (armed, certainly, but not for offensive purposes) to hip-hop (often dismissed as violent by precisely those who admit no interest in understanding it), as well as the traditional anxiety about “uppity” blacks “getting ideas,” where merely conceiving of equality is associated with violence, and responded to in kind and preemptively. A recent Associated Press poll, carried out in conjunction with Stanford University, bears mentioning here: a full 20% of respondents *openly* admit to considering blacks “violent” (one could presume the prevalence of subtle associations to be much higher). Such perceptions inevitably serve as a preexisting filter for subsequently interpreting events. In a broader sense, one not limited to race, Enrique Dussel has charted through analysis of Biblical scripture the *incomprehensibility* of this “making oneself known,” whose “madness” filters through the lens of race to become “violence”: “The messianic proposal (of M. Hidalgo or Evo Morales) to confront the Power of the Imperial Law, and all its wisdom, is *madness* for the old system.” Enrique Dussel, “The Liberatory Event in Paul of Tarsus,” tr. G. Ciccariello-Maher, *Qui Parle* 18, n. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009), 111-180.

<sup>74</sup> See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *passim*.



determinism, this insistent postponement of the closure of the dialectic, will only emerge in all its severity in Fanon's response to Sartre, a thinker who, unlike Hegel, presumed (and was at one point presumed by Fanon) to recognize the ontological insufficiencies of the present and the need for a black response.

As we have said, the counterdiscourse of separation is broader than the "separatist" moment of violent self assertion. The peculiarity that places Fanon's framework within such a counterdiscourse is visible in his simultaneous critique of some members of the Negritude Movement (which we have touched upon above) and of Sartre, one which entails not only the subjective projection of a non-objective identity but also, and as a direct result, the refusal to enclose this process of identity-formation within a predetermined and totalizing form of dialectical progression, a refusal to subsume the moment of identitarian rupture to a broader process of closure within a longitudinal dialectic, a refusal, in Foucault's words, to allow that rupture to be "recolonized" by and reinscribed within a discourse of unity (our fourth moment). While the distinction between ontological (Jacobin) force and decolonial (anti-Jacobin) violence already hints toward the generativity and expressiveness of the latter, we must follow the path of this productivity. This path, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, leads to Negritude, but it also leads to an opening—an opening which is dialectical, but not in the closed, conservative sense—to a world beyond Negritude expressed in the aspiration of Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* "grow a new skin" and "create a new man."<sup>75</sup>

### Sartre's dialectical betrayal

It was no coincidence that we mentioned Sartre earlier, at the precise moment in which the condescending voice of white society subsumed blackness to a mere turn in the dialectic, a step toward the final perfection of a universal humanism which was by definition white. This was no coincidence because, Fanon's deep respect for Sartre notwithstanding—here, after all, was a French intellectual singing the praises of Negritude and later the Algerian Revolution—it was Fanon himself who would transition directly from the dialectic of white racism to Sartre's own version of dialectical progress. The occasion for this surprising transition was Sartre's "Black Orpheus," which appeared as a preface to a 1948 volume of Negritude poetry edited by Senghor, in which this giant among French intellectuals no doubt saw himself as stepping decisively into the fray in support of the Negritude Movement and the radical assertion of black identity it espoused. This was, for Sartre, a laudably "anti-racist racism" aimed not at domination, but rather "solidarity with the oppressed of all colors."<sup>76</sup> But Fanon saw something different.

The dialectical progression which links "anti-racist racism" to universal solidarity is, for Sartre, one in which the "subjective, existential, ethnic notion" of black identity "passes," giving way to the "objective, positive, exact notion of the *proletariat*."<sup>77</sup> Already we can sense something at odds with our task. While recognizing that class is a "methodical *construction*," Sartre nevertheless grants it an unquestioned objective status, which he maps predictably onto the "universal," and which he then contrasts directly to the subjectivity of ethnic identity.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 239, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 305.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Fanon, *Black Skin*, 111; *Peau noire*, 107.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Fanon, *Black Skin*, 111; *Peau noire*, 107.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112, my emphasis; *Peau noire*, 107.

These two concepts, these two identities that we hope in this project to draw together in the footsteps of C.L.R. James,<sup>79</sup> are for Sartre utterly incommensurable:

the notion of race does not intersect [*recoupe*] with the notion of class: the one is concrete and particular, the other is universal and abstract; one resorts to that which Jaspers names comprehension and the other to intellection; the first is the product of a psycho-biological syncretism and the other is a methodological construction emerging from experience. In fact, Negritude appears as the weak term [*le temps faible*] of a dialectical progression... But the negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the Blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to pave the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without race [*l'humain dans une société sans races*]. Thus Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction [*la Négritude est pour se détruire*], it is transition [*passage*] and not result [*aboutissement*], a means and not the ultimate goal [*moyen et non fin dernière*].<sup>80</sup>

That Sartre cites Césaire in his own defense already reveals some confusion: while certainly a devout Communist, Césaire nevertheless maintained a much more subtle view of the relationship between race and class than Sartre here suggests, insisting on the need to “particularize Communism” and “complete Marx” in an effort to accommodate black reality in the same way Fanon had sought to “complete Hegel” to accommodate black experience.<sup>81</sup>

Fanon feels robbed. Sartre here represents yet another iteration of an old, racist game: the denial of objectivity to black experience, which he ironically confuses with “race” in an effort to distinguish the trans-historical importance of class. While the proletariat achieves such objectivity—and thereby universal status—from the lived experience on which it is “constructed,” the “lived experience of the black” that Fanon charts is granted no such status and instead relegated to the level of “psycho-biological syncretism.” Fanon and other black poets<sup>82</sup> had been dealt a “fatal [or literally, unforgivable] blow”:

We had appealed to a friend of the colored peoples, and this friend had found nothing better to do than demonstrate the relativity of their action. For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that *consciousness needs to lose itself in the night of the absolute* [*la nuit de l'absolu*], the only condition for attaining self-consciousness. To counter rationalism he recalled the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its value from an *almost substantive absoluteness*. Consciousness committed to experience knows nothing, has to know nothing, of the essence and determination of its being. *Black*

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<sup>79</sup> See my “Introduction,” and C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 107-108.

<sup>81</sup> These passages appear in a 1967 interview, reprinted in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. J. Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 85-86. Elsewhere, Césaire adds the following in his 1957 *Letter to Maurice Thorez*: “I’m not going to confine myself to some narrow particularism. But I don’t intend either to become lost in a disembodied universalism... I have a different idea of a universal. It is a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all.” Cited in Robin D.G. Kelley, “A Poetics of Anticolonialism,” in Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 25-26.

<sup>82</sup> It is crucial that Fanon feels slighted here as a poet, and that the Negritude Movement largely emerged in the realm of the poetic. Sartre himself, in “Black Orpheus,” refers to the coincidence of poetic élan with revolutionary élan (113), and the parallels to Sorel’s early celebration of the heroic élan of ancient Greek warrior-poets against Socratic intellectualization of their “absoluteness” are tangible.

*Orpheus* marks a date in the intellectualization<sup>83</sup> of black *existence*. And Sartre's mistake was not only to seek the source of the spring, but in a certain way to drain the spring dry.<sup>84</sup>

Rather than envisioning two dialectics of identity moving in parallel according to similar (but not strictly identical) parameters, Sartre had instead *inscribed* blackness within a broader, world-historical dialectic, *subsuming* it to the superior term of class, a term which in its objectivity embodies the completion of the dialectical progression, the end of history.

Fanon's critique here consists of two intertwined elements: firstly, Fanon's implication that *no* dialectic (Sartrean, Hegelian, or otherwise) can operate in a preordained manner. It is not that blackness is claiming objectivity or universality (as the essentialists would claim), but rather that for *any* universal to be predicted beforehand is undialectical and short-circuits the very process itself. Sartre's formulation simultaneously implies the importance of black identity while denigrating it, and one is left to wonder—as Fanon does in no uncertain terms—*how* identity can operate on the basis of anything but absoluteness.

And *voilà!* I did not create a meaning for myself; the meaning was already there, waiting. It is not as the wretched nigger, it is not with my nigger's teeth, it is not as the hungry nigger that I fashion a torch to set the world alight; the torch was already there, waiting for this historic chance.

In terms of consciousness, black consciousness claims to be an absolute density, full of itself, a stage prior to any rupture, to any abolition of the self by desire. In his essay Jean-Paul Sartre has destroyed black zeal/fervor [*l'enthousiasme noir*]. Against historical becoming [*devenir*], there necessarily stands the unforeseeable. I needed to lose myself absolutely in negritude... I *needed* not to know. This struggle... should have taken on the appearance of completion. There is nothing more disagreeable than to hear: "You'll change, my boy; I was like that too when I was young.... You'll see, you'll get over it."<sup>85</sup>

Here, Sartre appears as the condescending parent lecturing to the representatives of the "childhood of the world," and this lecture bears clear echoes of Fanon's indictment of the poisoned gift of formal freedom, one which prevents a successful reorientation of the master-slave dialectic. Sartre's longitudinal totality destroys its own foundations.

And it is here that the second element of the critique enters the picture, one centered as well on Fanon's critique of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and diagnosis of the sub-ontological realm of non-being. Here, blackness for Sartre remains subjective (as experience and identity) whereas only class—the relevant category for European identity—attains universal status. Our radical, Jamesian comparative task disintegrates: race and class, we are told, are not and cannot be analogous, since race *leads to* and finds its categorical perfection in class. That this is class and not whiteness or European culture is all that distinguishes Sartre's dialectic from the dialectical subsumption of the racist. To be clear: it is *not* that Fanon claims black identity as a universal (as would some essentialist members of the Negritude movement), but it strikes him

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<sup>83</sup> Here again Sorel's critique of Socratic intellectualization rings true: heroism cannot be intellectualized without being destroyed in the process.

<sup>84</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112-113, my emphasis (with the exception of Fanon's emphasis of "existence"), translation modified; *Peau noire*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 113-114, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 109.

as a bit ironic that Sartre claims to be able to see the future of a dialectic whose progress is far from promised.<sup>86</sup> And more than merely ironic: it produces and reinforces the very sort of ontological blockage that Fanon had sought to overcome, preventing black access to being:

The dialectic that introduces necessity at the fulcrum of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflective position... black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. *I do not have to look for the universal*. There's no room for probability<sup>87</sup> inside me [*En mon sein nulle probabilité ne prend place*]. My black consciousness does not put itself forth as a lack. It *is*. It adheres to itself.<sup>88</sup>

Black consciousness projects itself as Being as the only path to achieving that Being, and it is only on the basis of the absoluteness of this projection of identity that Fanon's black subject can *be*, can overcome the existing ontological barriers and rush forth into the sunshine of Being as a for-itself-in-itself, and thereby into the full intersubjectivity that is the world. But Sartre had neglected the need for this process of separation to not be limited and circumscribed to the conflict of identity, the imperative that it remain open-ended, with little more than gestures toward the universal.

In so doing, he had closed off the process of separation in a manner akin to black essentialism, but had done so from the opposite direction: whereas black essentialism imposed an objective (biological, historical) starting point which itself constituted the end of the dialectic as well—a conceptually perfect totality, an inversion of white society masquerading as “separatism”—Sartre had similarly foreclosed on the future progress of the dialectic through an insistence of the objective universality of class. For both, there is a fundamental relationship between the first and fourth moments of the process of separation, between the subjective projection of a non-objective identity and the open-endedness of the revolutionary dialectic. It was in regard to radical unpredictability of this fourth moment of the counterdiscourse of separation, which reaches its highest clarity in the critique of Sartre, that Fanon had suggested that his work was “grounded in temporality,” adding both that he is a man of his time and that the present always serves to build the future as “something to be overtaken.” Here the subjective emphasis of Fanon's dialectic is visible: to be of one's time is to build the future, and despite his universal predilections, that future is never complete, always “something to be overtaken.”<sup>89</sup>

Fanon's response would be to situate blackness within that process, between the already-perfectness of black essentialism and the enclosed future of dialectical recolonization: yes to blackness as dialectical, and no to blackness as objective substance, but not because objectivity belonged in some sense to the proletariat.

at the very moment when I attempted to *seize my being*, Sartre, who *remains the Other*, by *naming* me shattered my last illusion... I sensed my shoulders slipping from the

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<sup>86</sup> Sartre very nearly recognizes this in the claim that “this is easier to say than to think.” Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 107. While Sartre had, in his *Search for a Method*, accused “lazy Marxists” of using a progressive method to merely constitute an *a priori* or to argue in a Hegelian manner that things had to turn out as they did, Fanon's accusation would entail that Sartre himself had fallen into what he accused “lazy Marxists” of doing. William L. McBride, “Sartre and Marxism,” in W. McBride, ed., *Existentialist Politics and Political Theory* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1997), 28. The quote is from *Search for a Method*, 53.

<sup>87</sup> Here, we could mention similarities to Sorel's critique of probabilism.

<sup>88</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 114, first emphasis mine, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 109.

<sup>89</sup> *Black Skin*, xvi-xvii; *Peau noire*, 10.

structure of the world, my feet no longer felt the caress of the ground. Without a black past, without a black future, it was impossible for me to live my blackness. Not yet white, no longer black, I was *damned* [*j'étais un damné*]. Jean-Paul Sartre forgets that the black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man.<sup>90</sup>

In this astounding passage, we see that it is Sartre's undialectical betrayal provides Fanon with the concept for which he would become most famous: that of the *damné*, the damned, the condemned, or the "wretched" of his last book (by now as unavoidable as it is badly translated). By not recognizing his position as Other—and not merely Hegelian Other, but an Other situated across the chasm of racialization dividing the ontological from the sub-ontological—Sartre had himself participated in Fanon's damnation.<sup>91</sup>

In his intellectualization and dialectical subsumption of blackness, Sartre had unwittingly thrust Fanon into the role of the Negro in his own play, *The Respectful Prostitute*, who suffers immobility, incapable through a neurotic paralysis of harming a white man. "A feeling of inferiority?" Fanon asks himself, probing the depths of the betrayal. "No, a feeling of nonexistence."<sup>92</sup> The message is slyly ironic: with all Sartre's insight, he who had cast a critical eye on this very immobility cannot see beyond it. Sartre had stolen more than black identity, he had stolen away the autonomy of the liberatory, counter-ontological, and anti-Jacobin violence which creates it. Standing "at the crossroads [*à cheval*] between Nothingness [sub-ontological racialization] and Infinity [black essentialism], I begin to weep."<sup>93</sup> But these are not tears of defeat so much as tears of pain from so many betrayals, and tears of anticipation of a much longer process than Fanon had initially hoped to confront. But having recognized his position between the non-being of Nothingness and the perfection-of-being that is Infinity was the first step to escaping, and Fanon had already identified counter-ontological violence as the mechanism that would carry him forward.

And I take this negritude and with tears in my eyes I piece the mechanism together again. That which had been shattered is by my hands—these intuitive vines—rebuilt, reconstructed [but as *édifié*, implying improvement]. My shout rings out more violently: I am a nigger, I am a nigger, I am a nigger.<sup>94</sup>

Since Sartre was unable to reach beyond his own critique of the Negro's immobility, Fanon gives us that beyond in the form of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, who "acts," and in so doing "answers the world's expectations [*l'attente*]... in order to break the infernal circle, he explodes."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 116-117, my emphasis, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 111-112.

<sup>91</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, Sartre's later texts—and especially his preface to *Wretched*, where he insists that decolonization constitutes "the last stage of the dialectic" (Ixii)—demonstrate that he had fully accepted the validity of Fanon's critique. See George Ciccariello-Maher, "The Internal Limits of the European Gaze."

<sup>92</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 118, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 112.

<sup>93</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 119; *Peau noire*, 114. The suggestion of being situated between Nothingness (itself a Sartrean concept) and Infinity (a concept we would identify more directly with Emmanuel Levinas) will be the subject of our last pair of chapters. For a work which discusses Fanon and Enrique Dussel with explicit reference to Levinas, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*.

<sup>94</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 117, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 112.

<sup>95</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 118-119, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 113. See Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989 [1940]).

## Toward *Wretched*

It is in Fanon's critique of Sartre that his kinship with Sorel and position within the counterdiscourse of separation becomes clearest, most fully-crystallized, and this is far from coincidental, since it is in critiquing a formulation which appears on the surface to be so similar to his own that Fanon is able to express with the utmost clarity the nuances of his own view. Unlike the racial-essentialist wing of Negritude (under Senghor), Fanon refuses to endorse black identity either as an objective-biological starting point (moment one in our dialectical counterdiscourse of separation) or as a notion of history which would simultaneously predetermine the future universal, limiting it to black perfection (moment four). But while endorsing a dialectical view, his phenomenology of racism forces Fanon to identify an ontological "flaw," a lack of reciprocity which necessarily transforms that dialectic. Against Hegel's smooth view of the inevitable progress toward universal self-consciousness, Fanon sees the need to project blackness subjectively (moment one), to do so "violently" in a way that shakes both (black) slave (moment two) and (white) master (moment three) from their respective undialectical slumbers.

But finally, and largely as a result, Fanon—like Sorel—lacking an objective basis for identity and relying only on the unpredictability of "black zeal" and white reaction, *displaces* the end of the dialectic beyond the realm of possible prediction (moment four), and this is the fundamental importance of his critique of Sartre. Any future reconciliation—any reconstitution of the normative totality of universal humanity which stands broken by racism—requires for Fanon a recognition of the descriptive ontological basis for this rupture as well as a process of radical *identification* which sets out precisely according to this ontological distinction in an effort to overcome it and clear the way for a future humanism, as yet to be determined. Put differently, this is a progression which privileges the moment of the rupture of totality with an eye to revolutionary transformation of all identities involved, and indeed of the world itself.

Against those who would attempt to divide Fanon's *oeuvre*, I will insist in the following chapter that this is precisely this same, radically-transformed dialectical framework that Fanon will later deploy in his seminal *Wretched of the Earth*. But the Algerian context would be different, as would the historical moment in which he wrote. As we will see, the Negritude Movement will have passed—partly through geopolitical developments and partly through its own vicissitudes—to constitute a conservative force in African political life. In its place, Fanon would turn to national consciousness, but despite the unifying or totalizing significance many attribute to the concept of "the nation," Fanon's new decolonial dialectic—like the dialectic of black identity formulated almost a decade earlier in *Black Skin, White Masks*—would maintain the elements of our counterdiscourse of separation, with the privileging of rupture and anxiety toward totality that this entails.

*Black Skin* was, at least according to its author, a book largely preoccupied with the alienation of middle-class racialized subjects in the metropole.<sup>96</sup> It is with this recognition that he begins his conclusion of that work, conceding that this relatively privileged subject suffers his alienation quite differently than does a colonized worker:

... the motivations for disalienating a physician from Guadeloupe are essentially different from those for the African construction worker in the port at Abidjan. For the former,

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<sup>96</sup> Chapter Four, on "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized" is an outlier in this sense.

alienation is almost intellectual in nature. It develops because he takes European culture as a means of detaching himself [*se déprendre*] from his own race. For the latter, it develops because he is victim of a system based on the exploitation of one race by another... For the black working in the sugarcane plantations in Le Robert, there is only one solution: the struggle [*la lutte*]... because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger.<sup>97</sup>

If much of *Black Skin* was devoted to convincing the relatively privileged subject that, class position notwithstanding, racial overdetermination was inescapable, then here too we sense a similar tone of inescapability. But here, in contrast, the inescapable is more than Negrophobia: it is a certain exploitative constellation which fuses race to class, and both—through struggle—to a future nation. For *Wretched* as for *Black Skin*, therefore, the blockage of escapism does not block the path to action (these are very different paths), but whereas the dialectical object of this “combat” has been shifted—from black identity to national consciousness—we will see that Fanon’s radical transposition of race, class, and nation does not obscure the underlying structural similarities drawing *Black Skin* and *Wretched* together under the aegis of the counterdiscourse of separation.

While the passage above constituted at the time a sort of tacit admission of ignorance toward the colonized, a recognition that this first book had emerged from *his own reality* (the “physician from Guadeloupe” was, no doubt, a not-so-subtle reference to himself), it would not be long before Fanon would come into more direct contact with the reality of the poor colonized classes. In late 1953—less than two full years after the publication of *Black Skin*—Fanon would find himself working as the medical director at the Psychiatric Hospital of Blida-Joinville in colonial Algeria. But his own philosophy would soon drive him to resign, and his 1956 letter of resignation stands as a testament to his theory of sociogeny and the insufficiency of psychoanalysis:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger [*sentir étranger à*] to his environment, it is my duty [*je me dois*] to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization... The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile [*s’opposait*] to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged [*remettre l’individu à sa place*]... The function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man’s needs [*traverse par le souci de l’homme*]. A society that corners [*accule*] its members into desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced.<sup>98</sup>

It was this moment above all others that marked Fanon’s transition from philosopher to revolutionary, but paradoxically, this occurred as a sort of slingshot effect of his philosophy itself: a philosophy which privileges the generative effects of social structures can only remain in the contemplative mode for so long before it must transcend itself. And in this transition from philosopher to revolutionary, moreover, Fanon hurdled the barrier that he had so self-critically posed at the conclusion of *Black Skin*: from intellectual alienation he hurled himself into the

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<sup>97</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 198-199, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 181-182.

<sup>98</sup> Frantz Fanon, “Letter to the Resident Minister (1956),” in *Toward the African Revolution*, tr. H. Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1988 [1964]), 53, translation modified.

struggle, to combat.<sup>99</sup> This leap would entail, furthermore, a series of transformations—some necessary, some unpredictable—of the way in which Fanon had previously formulated his version of the counterdiscourse of separation.

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<sup>99</sup> I have elsewhere noted how such a slingshot effect is frequently aided by the existential agony of middle-class disillusionment, drawing on evidence from W.E.B. Du Bois and contemporary hip hop. See George Ciccariello-Maher, “A Critique of Du Boisian Reason.”



## Chapter 4 – Separation beyond the Decolonial Turn: Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*

If we have rejected Arendt’s erroneous unification of Sorel and Fanon around the limited and misconceived conceptual axis of what she calls “violence”—one which was, by and large, a projection of Arendt’s own Aristotelian understanding rather than a substantive interpretation of what each thinker *meant* by the term—this does not mean that her suggestion is of no historical importance. After all, Sorel and Fanon do indeed constitute preeminent—if not *the* preeminent—theorists of violence in the Francophone world, and arguably elsewhere as well. And while “violence” is an altogether too limited optic through which to view their relationship, it almost certainly contributed to drawing them into the theoretical relationship that I am deeming a counterdiscourse in the first place. Fanon, after arriving in France in 1946 and penning *Black Skin, White Masks* several years later, would become increasingly interested in the subject of violence, toward which, as we have seen, this early work gestured, and for which Sorel constituted the seminal French analyst.<sup>1</sup> It is this centrality of Sorel as a reference-point that Fanon playfully suggests when referring to the first chapter of *Wretched of the Earth* as his own “réflexions sur la violence.”<sup>2</sup> As this gesture indicates, Sorel’s presence would become increasingly palpable in this later work, and while Fanon may or may not have read *Reflections on Violence* prior to 1952—in which case we have seen that he had clearly *anticipated* Sorel’s formulation of class separation—he had certainly done so by 1960. But while Fanon’s later formulation of the counterdiscourse of separation would bear more surface similarity to Sorel’s, an exaggerated focus on such similarities would run the risk of neglecting both the deep continuities uniting Fanon’s theoretical work as well as his challenge to and eventual transcendence of the Sorelian framework through his displacement of the unit of analysis—the relevant totality—to the global level.

On its surface, Fanon’s formulation of the counterdiscourse of separation in *Wretched* constitutes an optimistic simplification of the complex desperation that had characterized *Black Skin*. Optimistic because, in this later work, Fanon had apparently unearthed a revolutionary subject located amid a dialectical progression which was—if not already in motion—then to some degree self-starting. But as we will see, this subject itself was only the product of complexity, in reality constituted by an intricate chain of intra-dialectically produced subjectivities. Put differently, faced with ontological blockage, the Fanon of *Black Skin* found the dialectic to be in need of a good push, to be provided through the projection of black identity as a radical division of the social totality.

By contrast, the dialectical rupture which was still a project to be undertaken and projected in *Black Skin* was in the colonial context a lived reality, a clear and undeniable Manichean division which, at least on the surface of things, held out the promise of some dialectical

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<sup>1</sup> Macey admits that Fanon had read Sorel’s *Réflexions*, but adds that “there is little evidence that he was influenced by it” (*Frantz Fanon*, 465). Here, as with his previous effort to deny that Sartre was influenced by Fanon, a lack of tangible evidence is marshaled to deny theoretical influence (452). In both cases, however, Macey fails to recognize the reasons that the authors involved might conceal these influences. Moreover, rather than describing this lack of evidence in detail, however, Macey merely marshals the standard list of reasons that the two were in fact incommensurable, but in doing so falls into absurdity: i.e. for two theorists of violence, how is the fact that one discusses the syndicalist general strike any sort of proof of the incompatibility of their thought? In attempting to distinguish the two, like so many others, he misunderstands both.

<sup>2</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 63; *Les damnés*, 145.

movement. This Manicheanism which undergirds Fanon's optimism also provides the basis for the ostensible simplicity of his formulation, in which the two stages of decolonization map elegantly onto the moments constituting our counterdiscourse of separation: the Manicheanism of the anti-colonial struggle (moments two and three) lays the groundwork for the transformation of the identities constituted in that division and their eventual dissolution—in a second stage beginning with formal liberation—into a new and truly universal, if unforeseeable revolutionary humanism (moment four).

This optimism and simplicity, however, is misleading, resulting arguably from the simultaneous registers—historical, analytical, exhortative, propagandistic, prophetic, cautionary—that *Wretched* assumes. The optimism of a self-starting and self-propelling dialectical progression, whereby the radical constitution of conflicting identities (Manicheanism) incessantly drives revolutionary transformation, disguises the very precise dangers (or “pitfalls”) threatening the dialectical movement of the counterdiscourse of separation. These dual dangers constitute the central theoretical challenges—which above all threaten the continuity of dialectical motion—which Fanon must overcome. Firstly, the pre-existing Manicheanism of the colonial world—the initial igniter and motor of the struggle—in the motionless perfection of its hermetic opposition, itself constitutes a very real threat to dialectical motion. Secondly, the promise of formal liberation that nominally divides Fanon's first and second stages—like the poisoned gift of formal freedom in *Black Skin*—similarly threatens a fatal stalling of forward motion by hypostatizing not perfect division, but a false, formal unity.

If this illusion of optimism that *Wretched* maintains is woefully deceptive, so too with its parsimonious simplicity, but if the result is a harder fight with far less certainty of victory, it is only in this way that Fanon's formulation achieves the fullest depth of its radicalism. The stages whereby Manicheanism creates the momentum necessary to slingshot the revolution beyond a purely formal liberation themselves disintegrate almost immediately, disrupting Manicheanism first from within (in a Manicheanism-within-a-Manicheanism dividing the embryonic nation) and then from without (in a crumbling of this Manicheanism *prior* to formal liberation). Neither the Manichean *division* of the colonial world nor the *unity* of the decolonial nation achieve perfection, and it is in this shifting space between perfect rupture and perfect unity that Fanon's radical dialectic emerges, confounding the charges of totalization frequently leveled against him.

Both complications, as we will see, reinforce rather than undermining our counterdiscourse of separation, but in ways which are not immediately apparent, i.e. through a process of critical enrichment rather than mere repetition of what we have seen formulated in *Réflexions* and in *Black Skin*. Firstly, in overcoming his optimistic register, Fanon provides a more systematic critique of the Manicheanism underlying the counterdiscourse of separation. The Manichean moment remains as necessary for Fanon as in *Black Skin*, but the dangers of such a division falling into an Aristotelian logic of mutual superfluity (of, e.g. brute exclusion on the one hand and essentialist separatism on the other) must be actively confronted. As we will see below, in confronting this danger Fanon makes a clearer and more systematic case for the distinction between force and violence that has been central to the counterdiscourse of separation since Sorel. Secondly, in overcoming the nominal simplicity of his stageist formulation, Fanon further complicates and enriches the fourth (universal) moment of the counterdiscourse of separation, simultaneously drawing the anti-Manichean, universalizing gesture closer (indeed, *into* the revolutionary war), while nevertheless pushing the horizon of a fully reconciled humanism even further off into the future than had been the case in *Black Skin*, *White Masks*. We

will consider these two moments—and Fanon’s two contributions that they contain—in what follows.

But perhaps the most significant contribution that *Wretched* offers to the enrichment of the counterdiscourse we have been tracking involves Fanon’s radical transposition of our prior unit of analysis (or relevant totality) onto the global level. As we will see at the end of this chapter, this transposition is a reflection of what we have already deemed in methodological terms the Jamesian task of radical comparative political theorizing, one which takes into account the precise historical structures of our global world rather than merely juxtaposing different perspectives or leaping to the uncritical universalism of a plane of immanence (both approaches seem to be currently in vogue, and are in fact complementary). As we will see, Fanon’s controversial reconstruction of the class constellation prevailing in colonial Africa represents the internal manifestation of this leap to the global, therefore functioning in parallel to the more explicit critique of Eurocentric mimicry and appeal to Third World autonomy that permeate his conclusion. Ironically, our counterdiscourse only comes together through the supercession of one of its elements: the “decolonial turn” Fanon introduces in his leap to the global is not one which can any longer coexist with Sorel’s explicitly national “reflections” on a “violence” in which colonialism does not feature. The totality to be divided and dialectically recomposed is now irreversibly global, as is the fascism or liberation that will dictate its future transformation.

### **A world cut in two**

That Fanon’s view of universalism had changed between 1952 and 1961 is evident in the very structure of *Wretched of the Earth*, which in the absence of an introduction lacks the sort of universal bookends that had framed and balanced *Black Skin, White Masks*. Certainly, a displaced form of the universal (the fourth moment of our counterdiscourse) would find a presence in the book’s conclusion as we will see, but explicit discussions of this reconciled humanism are few and far between. While this seemingly absence might seem doubly strange and even ironic given that progress *toward* this universal is more visible in *Wretched* than it had been in *Black Skin*, it is not difficult to explain. This displaced universal, after all, was far distant from the world Fanon himself confronted in 1961, when he lay dying of leukemia, dictating much of *Wretched of the Earth* to his wife Josie as a sort of tortured but stubbornly optimistic last will and testament. If we rewind from the conclusion to the first pages, we find Fanon taking his prior self to task for the naïve universalism and rationalism of which he was disabused in *Black Skin*: “Calling into question the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. *It is not a discourse on the universal*, but the frenzied affirmation of an originality asserted as absolute [*l’affirmation échevelée d’une originalité posée comme absolue*]. The colonial world is a Manichean world.”<sup>3</sup> While he had eventually recognized the weight of Manicheism in *Black Skin*, here he moves further and with astonishing speed and certainty by abandoning entirely the anguished existential-phenomenological account by which he had discovered the true contours of the Manichean world through disillusionment, rebuffed in the present from his universal dreams. One cannot argue one’s way out of colonialism—Fanon now insisted to himself and to the world—and nor do celestial dreams of universal love on earth dissolve the heavy concrete walls dividing colonized from colonizer.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 6, translation modified, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 71.

The colonial world is marked by division and separation on all levels, and it is this segregated geography that Fanon immediately sets out to trace and sketch. It is “compartmentalized,” “a world cut in two,” its border marked by police stations and barracks, its division embodied by police officer and soldier, guaranteed by “rifle butts and napalm.”<sup>4</sup> The phenomenology of these two worlds, moreover, yields two drastically opposed visions: one of well-lit streets, strong walls, paved roads, sturdy shoes, and sated residents; the other tightly-packed, starving, “a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate.”<sup>5</sup> Here there is no symmetrical interaction, and discrete quantities are transformed as though alchemically when viewed through this Manichean veil: what is garbage in the one appears as tempting as food to the other.<sup>6</sup> And nor does humanity transcend these walls, since the only relationship here operates according to the non-ethics of Manicheanism, whereby the colonized is effectively dehumanized through her characterization as “not only the absence of values but also the negation of values... absolute evil.”<sup>7</sup> This Manichean logic in the ethical realm both gives rise to and is, in a circular fashion, justified by a concomitant *political* logic of fear and containment (by the colonizer) and envy and replacement (by the colonized).

The residents of these zones, in short, constitute “two species,” but while this choice of terminology might suggest the sort of identitarian essentialism which we have previously seen short-circuiting the counterdiscourse of separation, Fanon presses immediately outward with both hands, in a surprisingly deft two-sided critique of both vulgar Marxism and essentialist understandings of race:

In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue.<sup>8</sup>

Here begins the dialectical play of simplicity and complexity that will characterize much of *Wretched* (and which would later be transposed onto the realms of tactics and strategy, respectively): if, on the one hand, distinguishing who resides on either side of the Manichean division couldn’t be easier—since “the ruling species is first and foremost that which comes from elsewhere, that which does not resemble the indigenous population, ‘the others’”<sup>9</sup>—in another sense it could scarcely be more complex. If Fanon is here insisting that race matters (richness depends on whiteness)—that under colonialism “economic reality... never manage[s] to mask the [lived] human reality”—he is also simultaneously insisting on an anti-essentialist

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<sup>4</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 3-4, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 68.

<sup>5</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 4-5; *Les damnés*, 69-70.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the materiality of the veil in the work of Du Bois, see Ciccariello-Maher, “A Critique of Du Boisian Reason,” 379-384.

<sup>7</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 6; *Les damnés*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 5; *Les damnés*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 5, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 70. Here “the Other” as a hostile entity which steals the world from me acquires a historical materiality that was lacking in Sartre’s account in *Being and Nothingness*, in which *all* others were hostile, thereby excluding the possibility of collective action (*with* others) against colonialism (*against* others). For Fanon’s critique of Sartre on this very point, see *Black Skin*, 117; *Peau noire*, 112. For a discussion of the critique and Sartre’s eventual adoption of it, see Ciccariello-Maher, “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze.”

understanding of race, one co-determined by class (whiteness depends on richness) and further complicated by the global geography of “the others... from elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup>

But this Manichean division characteristic of the colonial world—which Fanon had originally derived from Sartre’s analysis of anti-Semitism—while clearly lamentable in an abstract sense, is much more than an occasion for retrospectively mourning the loss of an idealized totality.<sup>11</sup> If part of the task in *Black Skin* was to take up and project black identity as a foothold for dialectical development, so too in *Wretched* does the Manicheanism that divides the present also provide the parameters for struggle, gesturing toward a future that will remain divided for a long time to come. As Fanon puts it in an oft-overlooked passage, to understand the “lines of force” comprising the Manichean world is not only to know the enemy, but also to learn something of ourselves, revealing “the backbone according to which decolonized society will be reorganized.”<sup>12</sup> For Fanon, in other words, there is something to this divided structure, something to this Manichean world, that will be extended and projected into the foreseeable future. Colonialism bears within itself not merely contradictions and the seeds of its own destruction, not merely its own gravediggers, but something else as well which prefigures the dialectical form that this destruction and its eventual replacement will take.

In the philosophical register with which we have framed this project, we could say that Fanon’s analysis of colonial Manicheanism portrays a totality which is divided in descriptive terms (i.e. at present), but in which this division is also projected into the future, thereby robbing Fanon’s previous emphasis on normative and longitudinal totality of much of its weight, as the normative becomes complicit with neglecting the divided present (think again of our early discussion of Obama as well as Fanon’s own progression in *Black Skin*). Fanon’s view has changed, certainly, but so has the reality with which he is confronted: if in *Black Skin*, Fanon faced stalemate and blockage whereby equality was insisted upon in the present (formal rights) in order to conceal its absence, where claims to descriptive totality embodied their own contradiction, and in which ontological counter-violence needed to be deployed in an effort to *create* division and forge identity in the present in the hopes of overcoming it in the future, he here finds himself in a dialectically more advanced position. Division *already* exists and *is undeniable*: it is embedded in the architectural markers of everyday life in the colony. To act in a colonial context therefore means to enter the circuit of Manicheanism at a different moment, and

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<sup>10</sup> As we will see, this intricate constellation of race-class-geography will achieve a higher—if never perfect—degree of consistency once Fanon transposes it onto the global stage. It is this complexity—itsself a legacy of *Black Skin*, *White Masks*—that will constantly threaten to devour from within Fanon’s own simplistic, two-stage framework for decolonization, rendering his view more politically radical and generative in the process. To gesture toward our next chapter, this causal indeterminacy prefigures Enrique Dussel’s correction of both Althusser’s materialism and liberal formalism: it is not merely that “the lonely hour of the final instance [be it economic or political] never comes,” but that there is no such thing to begin with. See Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, tr. G. Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008 [2006]), 8; 59 fig. 7.

<sup>11</sup> There is an interesting double-gesture here: the Fanon of *Wretched* cites his own account of racism as Manichean in *Black Skin* (6n1; 71n1), while the Fanon of *Black Skin* cites (158-160; 146-248) Sartre’s account of anti-Semitism as Manicheanism (*Anti-Semite and Jew*, 40). On the question of Manicheanism, Sartre’s text embodies an immobility akin to *Black Skin*, insisting as he does that “we are not Manicheans” (*Anti-Semite and Jew*, 59), but in his both his call for Jewish authenticity and his critique of the “feeble protector” of the Jews that is the democrat, he nevertheless gestures toward Fanon’s critique of the universal and eventual harnessing of Manichean identity: “If the democrat were to put some warmth into pleading the cause of the Jew, he would have to be a Manichean too, and equate the Jew with the principle of the Good” (73).

<sup>12</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 3, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 68.

rather than cultivating and projecting division one need only consolidate the identity of the oppressed in the face of that division, harnessing Manicheanism and tethering its energy to the drive toward national liberation.<sup>13</sup>

But if colonial Manicheanism represents a more advanced position in one sense, it also entails one serious challenge in particular, which threatens to undermine Fanon's optimism. If the sheer dividedness of the colonial world avoids one blockage, another subtly creeps up, since a divided totality bears within it its very own logic of immobility preventing the Hegelian dialectic from gaining any traction to move forward:

The zone inhabited by the colonized is not complementary to that inhabited by the colonizers. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they respond to the principle of mutual exclusion: there is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous [*de trop*].<sup>14</sup>

Not only does mere division lead to a petrification and lack of forward motion, but this "Aristotelian logic" is exacerbated in the colonial context by the very fact of colonialism, that primary simplicity dividing those "from here" from those "from elsewhere." We are no longer in the realm of the dialectic of recognition that had characterized *Black Skin*, but rather a revolutionary decolonial dialectic of expulsion and elimination:

To explode the colonial world... does not mean that once the borders have been eliminated there will be a right of way between the two sectors. To destroy the colonial world means no more and no less than abolishing one of the zones, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Fanon's call to "explode" or "abolish" the colonial world is not the genocidal appeal that some critics might like to believe, but instead indicates the degree to which universal reconciliation is impossible without a leap to the global level. We will discuss this later, but remaining for a moment on the domestic level, Fanon confronts the question of how to set this frozen Aristotelian world into dialectical motion once again.

Put differently, if the present is Manichean, and if Manicheanism—for Fanon as in traditional definitions of the term—is explicitly *anti*-dialectical, then how does this unabashedly dialectical thinker propose that we move forward? It is worth recalling briefly that coursing throughout the counterdiscourse of separation is a recognition that nothing is automatic: this is precisely Sorel's critique of Marxism and Fanon's critique of Hegel and Sartre. As a

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<sup>13</sup> For more discussion of the different circuits of Manicheanism present in *Black Skin* and *Wretched*, see George Ciccariello-Maher, "Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine."

<sup>14</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 4, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 69. Bernasconi highlights "the apparently similar logic" of colonizer and colonized, insisting despite Fanon's ostensible claims that when Fanon characterizes the colonizer's though as undialectical and Aristotelian, he is in fact suggesting the manner in which the colonized will respond. "It is through the dialectic that the new humanism avoids reduplicating the logic of the old humanism. Fanon did not identify all of the features of the dialectic. He made his point by concentrating on the 'It's them or us' principle which the colonizer imposes on the colonized." Robert Bernasconi, "Casting the Slough: Fanon's Humanism for a New Humanity," in L.R. Gordon, T.D. Sharpley-Whiting, and R.T. White, eds., *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 118. But Bernasconi does not indicate the precise mechanism through which this leap from Aristotelian to dialectical logic occurs.

<sup>15</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 6, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 71. Alternatively, as Fanon puts it at the outset of *Wretched*, "decolonization is quite simply the replacement of one 'species' of mankind by another 'species.' With no transitional period, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution" (1, translation modified; 65).

subjectively-driven dialectic, the counterdiscourse of separation entails the projection of identity in the face of unity as the best means to initiate forward movement, and it was precisely this that we saw in *Black Skin* as Fanon sought to counteract what he perceived as a situation of blockage and stalemate, of non-being masquerading as formal equality. But if it is true that both Sorel and Fanon have sought to initiate progress from a perceived standstill, it is in *Wretched*—with its clear opposition between the Aristotelian and the dialectical—that we gain what is perhaps the most lucid description of how one moves from petrified stasis to motion, from Aristotelian Manicheanism to dialectical progression. The key, as we will see, lies in what it is precisely that Fanon means by “violence.”

### Colonial force and the violence of the colonized

We have insisted throughout that one identifying element of this counterdiscourse of separation, to be found in both Sorel and Fanon, is a distinction between two violences: in Sorelian language, between the (bourgeois) force that sustains the state as a structure of minority rule, and the (proletarian) violence that destroys it; for the Fanon of *Black Skin* the segregationist violence of sub-ontological difference and the counter-violence that grants access to being. Recall also that while the implications of this distinction exceed the bounds of the counterdiscourse of separation, the generativity it ascribes to a certain form of violence against totality is fundamental for the constitution of this counterdiscourse (particularly in its first two moments) as a subjectively-driven dialectic. It must however be admitted from the outset that, on the surface, *Wretched of the Earth* confounds this distinction through Fanon’s failure to distinguish force from violence (on the level of the interplay between signifiers and referents), and moreover his nominal insistence on strict Manichean homology (in the progression of the revolutionary decolonial dialectic, or moments two and three of the counterdiscourse of separation).

As to the first, Fanon apparently does not discriminate in his usage of the terms “force” and “violence,” applying the term “force” to colonized and colonizer alike in a manner that Sorel would not. But once we look a bit more closely, some tendencies arise. “Force” appears most frequently with reference to the ontological lines of force dividing the two sides of the Manichean world, the (Jacobin) “forces of order” that maintain those lines, and the “force of the bayonet” by which colonialism was originally constituted.<sup>16</sup> Hence when the colonized assumes Manicheanism as her own, she is also taking up her position in a “struggle of forces” [*rapport de forces*], but in so doing notably “discovers that only *violence* pays.”<sup>17</sup> In a different formulation, which reveals the qualitative distance between force and violence, Fanon characterizes the colonizer-colonized relationship ambiguously as one of “mass” [*rapports de masse*], but this ambiguity is intentional, since he continues: “Against the greater number the colonist pits his force [*Au nombre, le colon oppose sa force*].”<sup>18</sup> Mass then appears as an intermediary category, one which simultaneously recognizes the “mass” of weaponry (“force”) that maintains colonialism and the “masses” who engage in “violence” to undermine it.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, if we can say that “force,” for Fanon, tends to be a mute phenomenon, one which embodies the static

<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *Wretched* 4, translation modified, 43; *Les damnés*, 68, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 23, translation modified, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 17; *Les damnés*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> This, too, skirts a technologically reductive view of force/violence like that which Fanon attributes to Engels. We will clarify the class function of “masses” toward the end of the chapter.

petrification characteristic of colonialism (and which bears some resemblance to what Arendt terms “violence”), then violence similarly stands in for motion, rupture, and shaking (as implied in his decision to use “violence” in the title of his first chapter).

But even if Fanon can be said to maintain to some degree the Sorelian association of force with Manicheism and violence with the resistance of the oppressed, such a terminological tendency does not eliminate our more serious problem, one near to the heart of his dialectic itself. As Fanon puts it, “the violence which governed the ordering [*a présidé à l’arrangement*] of the colonial world... *this same violence* will be vindicated and appropriated [*assumée*]” by the colonized.<sup>20</sup> And not only is this the “same violence,” but Fanon is at pains to emphasize that “the violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an *extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity*.”<sup>21</sup> Fanon seems to be doing his best to confound our claims through direct refutation, for it matters less what he calls this phenomenon than the fact that he insists it is directly assumed and taken up as “homogeneous” by the colonized. How is this insistence that the colonized assumes the force of the colonizer in any way compatible with Sorel’s force-violence distinction? What, if anything, distinguishes in a qualitative manner what Fanon here calls “violence” from “counter-violence”?

If we recall, Sorel’s distinction of violence from force rested upon a privileging of *content* over *form*, or more precisely, the function of violence and its generativity. Put differently, violence distinguishes itself from force insofar as it no longer reinforces the Jacobin status quo, instead giving rise to that revolutionary separationist identity capable of dialectically surpassing it.<sup>22</sup> To some degree, then, this judgment can only come after the fact, late like the Owl of Minerva (an owl whose anti-totality implications are nevertheless quite contrary to Hegel’s implication). Hence to some degree Fanon’s distinction between violence and force can only be justified retroactively by what it produces within the framework of his revolutionary dialectic of decolonization. But here, nevertheless, we can set out some fundamental preconditions for this generativity, which from Fanon’s practical vantage point from *within* that dialectic already testify to the first stages of this alchemical transformation from reactionary force to liberatory violence, and thereby to the qualitative leap from the “Aristotelian” logic of colonial Manicheism to the revolutionary dialectic of decolonization.

If the colonized are to overcome the limits of Manichean force, a force which upholds the total ontological and material division of the colonial world, and which moreover attempts to render that Manichean division permanent, transforming that force into a liberatory violence that destroys those divisions, then three elements appear to be necessary. Firstly, there must be resistance to colonization and its Manichean division of the world. To some degree this resistance finds its original kernel in the traditions of the peasantry which remain relatively

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<sup>20</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 5-6, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 71. As he adds elsewhere: “The very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force. In fact the colonist has always shown them the path they should follow [*lui a signifié le chemin qui devait être le sien*] to liberation. The argument chosen by the colonized was conveyed to them by the colonist, and by an ironic twist of fate it is now the colonized who state that it is the colonizer who only understands the language of force” (Fanon, *Wretched*, 42; *Les damnés*, 116).

<sup>21</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 46, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 122.

<sup>22</sup> In other words, when violence ceases to be “violence” in Arendtian terms.



unpenetrated by colonial ideology.<sup>23</sup> But this original kernel is then reinforced by the Manichean division itself: certainly, colonialism makes use of ideology (as we will further see below), in e.g. efforts to convince the colonized of her less-than-human status, but to some degree the colonial architecture—itsself a result of the justified guilt-fear complex of the *pied noir*—gives lie to the transparency of such efforts, and “the colonized... roar with laughter every time they hear themselves called an animal by the other.”<sup>24</sup>

Here we find an ambiguity similar to that of Sorel (but arguably more justifiable given the colonial context), in which both thinkers simultaneously maintain a recognition of the effectiveness and dangers of ideology while rendering their chosen historical subjects to some degree immune from its effects. Ideology, while effective on the Eurocentric urban elites, simply finds no traction in the populations that will begin the rebellion (in part through the immunization by force), and every effort to use brute force only heightens tensions, reminding the colonized of where to direct her enmity:

this smell of gunpowder which now fills the atmosphere do not intimidate the people. These bayonets and heavy gunfire strengthen their aggressiveness. A dramatic atmosphere sets in where everyone wants to prove he is ready for anything. It is under these circumstances that the gun goes off on its own for nerves are on edge, fear has set in, and everyone is trigger-happy. A trivial incident and the machine-gunning begins: you have a Sétif.<sup>25</sup>

It is this revolutionary reservoir that is the peasantry and the dynamic of conflict that colonial Manicheanism unwittingly contributes to which explains the more optimistic moments in Fanon’s analysis. But while such revolts already exceed the mere force of the colonizer and arguably prefigure liberation, if doomed to failure from the outset they merely serve to reinforce the prevailing Manicheanism of the system while falling short of that profound generativity proper to what we have called “violence.”

This resistance therefore, and this is the second point, must be *effective*, and this element is intrinsically tied to the generativity of violence. In his seething critique of those political parties which—like Sorel’s socialist parliamentarians—deploy violent language as but a ploy to increase their power as moderators, Fanon focuses in on their defeatist “preoccupation with objectivity” when it comes to turning that violence toward the liberation struggle. “Because in their minds, the colonizer’s tanks and fighter planes occupy an enormous space... They are losers from the start [*Ils partent perdant*],” in Fanon’s estimation, effectively maintaining the “puerile position” that Engels had adopted against “that mountain of puerility” Dühring.<sup>26</sup> Fanon’s target here is Engels’ suggestion, in the discussion of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, that since “the revolver triumphs over the sword... that the producer of more perfect instruments of force, *vulgo* arms, vanquishes the producer of the less perfect instrument,” that then as a result “force is no mere act of the will.”<sup>27</sup> The will of the colonized for liberation, according to such a view, bears little promise against the far greater force of the colonizer, and this hopelessness is

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<sup>23</sup> In Dussel’s terms, this would be something like Paul Ricoeur’s “ethico-mythical nucleus,” capable of resisting in the long term and providing a position of “relative exteriority” (*Twenty Theses*, 48).

<sup>24</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 8; *Les damnés*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 32; *Les damnés*, 103.

<sup>26</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 25, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 94.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, tr. E. Burns (New York: International Publishers), 184. Engels’ position is arguably much more complex than Fanon here allows.

all the greater since the colonized literally produces *no* instruments of warfare, procuring all but the most rudimentary from the colonizer himself.

With a mixture of sarcasm and seriousness, Fanon asks: “What aberration of the mind drives these famished, enfeebled men lacking technology and organizational resources to think that only violence can liberate them faced with the occupier’s military and economic might? How can they hope to triumph?”<sup>28</sup> Fanon’s response to such a restrictive and closed understanding of force consists of three short words which had by his time assumed the status of a decolonial mantra: *Dien Bien Phu*. From the more predictable and objective *rapport de forces* we move onto the more ambiguous and subjective terrain of *rapports de masse*—with “mass” here comprising the strategic relationship between the colonizer’s weaponry and the sheer numbers of the colonized—opening the way to a generative view of violence, one cognizant of its capacity to surpass the concrete and “objective” limitations imposed upon it: its capacity, in short, to transcend the cold, sterile, and mute limitations of mere force (Arendt’s “violence”). Mass, anti-Jacobin, decolonial violence then emerges as potentially creative, capable of generating excess and immeasurable surplus effect, which is both ideological *and* material, and beyond both, ontological. Violence, in this formulation, is inherently guerrilla, the two are coterminous, exuding politics like an expanding cycle from a hard, Manichean center.<sup>29</sup>

It is therefore Fanon’s resistance to what he sees as Engels’ (and in our analysis, Arendt’s) excessively “objective” view of violence—one which reduces it to mere force and forecloses on its generative potential—that gives rise to the third element in the transition from force to violence. Once taken up by the colonized, colonial “force” (objective) is filtered through the numerical capacity of the “masses” (subjective-objective), to then clear the way for the violent creation of consciousness (subjective). Force, subjectivized by the rebellious, anti-Jacobin/anti-colonial masses, becomes violence.<sup>30</sup> Thus, despite the fact that the Manichean division of colonialism seems to place us already in the center of the counterdiscourse of separation, with rupture already achieved, this is slightly misleading, since the rupture that is achieved lacks the radically mythical anti-Jacobin content necessary to move the dialectic. It is therefore the inverse of Sorel’s early formulation in *The Trial*: whereas in his nostalgia for ancient virtue Sorel elaborated an anti-Jacobin myth in the absence of rupture, Fanon’s description of colonial Manicheanism is one in which the latter prevails without the former. This it is only with this last step and the transformation of force into violence that the first moment of our counterdiscourse of separation is complete. It is this violent creation of consciousness as separationist identity that then renders possible the leap from the Aristotelian-Manichean logic of colonialism to a properly dialectical logic of radically-productive oppositions, generating not merely the identitarian rupture of the prevailing totality, opposition, and motion, but eventually an unforeseeable process of open-ended transformation toward a new universal.

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<sup>28</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 33; *Les damnés*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> For the classic if exaggerated statement of the *foquista* approach to guerrilla warfare and its capacity to produce political relations, see Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, tr. Bobbye Ortiz (New York: Monthly Review, 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Here, it would be difficult to overlook parallels to Lenin’s formulation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the pages of *State and Revolution*, where “force” is similarly taken up by the proletariat as a strategic necessity only to begin an immediate process of transformation (“withering away”).

Looking backward (and arguably forward as well<sup>31</sup>), Fanon turns to a lyrical expression of this central thread of the counterdiscourse of separation by citing Césaire's 1956 poem, "And the Dogs Fell Silent":

**Rebel:** My family name: offended; my given name: humiliated; my profession: rebel; my age: the stone age.

**Mother:** My race: the human race. My religion: fraternity...

**Rebel:** My race: the fallen race. My religion... but it is not you who will prepare it with your disarmament... it is I with my revolt and my poor clenched fists and my bushy head...

The mother, as stand in for the universal, is wrong to insist that humanity and fraternity are possible at present, through "disarmament" in the face of force. Only the violent revolt ("clenched fists") of the fallen holds this possibility (here the religious origins of diremption ring true), and the generativity of this violence emerges in its fullest clarity after the rebel kills his master:

**Rebel:** Killed... I killed him with my own hands... Yes: a *fecund and copious death*...

**Mother:** ... O my son... an evil and pernicious death.

**Rebel:** Mother, an enduring and sumptuous death.

**Mother:** From too much hate.

**Rebel:** From too much love.<sup>32</sup>

Here, force and violence speak directly to one another, which is to say that they speak past one another. The mother's eyes see only force, and therefore only evil and hatred, where the rebel's violent optic yields fecundity and love.<sup>33</sup> But it is worth noting that this generativity, this fecundity of violence, is not guaranteed by the act in itself as the rebel seems to think<sup>34</sup> (or perhaps foresee): the rebel's rebellion is but a first, "spontaneous" stage in what is a long battle for national consciousness, and it is only to the degree that the latter is built and consolidated—generalized in Sorel's description of the myth of the general strike—that we can say that repressive force has truly become liberatory violence.

In other words, if Sorel's violence is compatible with Fanon's on one level—both serve to shake the foundations of structures of minority rule—this compatibility is tested on another level. Specifically, for Sorel violence constituted the means of generating a separatist moment of class identity, generating the division of the illusory harmony of the social totality. But as we

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<sup>31</sup> Macey claims that the citation of Césaire was inserted at the last minute as an indication that, as Edouard Glissant had reported—with the Algerian Revolution nearing its conclusion—Fanon's sights were beginning to turn back to his native Antilles (*Frantz Fanon*, 425-426; 462). But this should not mitigate the organic suitability of the quotation. Furthermore, the fact that this same piece was quoted in *Black Skin*—albeit in a slightly different sense and toward a different end—indicates again the striking continuity of the two works (what is most revealing, arguably, is that, whereas the citation appears on pages 174-175 of *Black Skin*, it has been promoted—according to Fanon's own transformation—to pages 44-46 of *Wretched*).

<sup>32</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 45-46, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 118-120.

<sup>33</sup> It is useful here to consider to what degree we might see the mother as Arendt and the rebel as Sorel/Fanon.

<sup>34</sup> This, I think, is why Sartre's often attacked claim that "killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed" (*Wretched*, lv; *Les damnés*, 52) is too simplistic as an account of Fanon's text.

have seen, Fanon's description of colonial reality is one in which the totality is already divided, and this division, this rupture is palpably and viscerally present to all involved. If anti-colonial resistance enters the circuit of Manicheanism at a different moment—at which division has already been established—then what could possibly be the function of violence? As we will see, mere division does not entail antagonism, and certainly does not mean that antagonism will reach the level of open conflict necessary for the radical *reconsolidation* of identities. Yes, there is hatred, but there is not yet nation, and national consciousness is a long and arduous process, and one which for Fanon requires an entire chain of identities and intra-dialectical twists and turns in order to appear. But more important even than this is the role of violence in creating the conditions whereby this national consciousness transcends hatred and division, launching itself toward the universal.

### **A dialectic within a dialectic**

As we have said, on the surface of things, Fanon views decolonization as a fairly simplistic process: in a first stage, the colonized uncritically assumes this inverted Manicheanism in the struggle against the colonizer, before turning her energies *inward*, during a second stage in which Manicheanism gives way to a more subtle form of consciousness in the process of social transformation. Put simply, there is a “national” stage which precedes a subsequent “social” (or socialist) stage, and this process—which the transition from force to violence binds together—transposes neatly onto our counterdiscourse of separation. This elegant simplicity is visible, too, in the structure of *Wretched of the Earth*: from violence and spontaneity, we move to national culture and national consciousness, opening out onto the universal in the conclusion. But even here we find hints that all is not so simple. Spontaneity has its “weakness” and national consciousness its “pitfalls.” The progression of the dialectic appears littered with obstacles, makeshift barriers strewn across our path. Much like Sorel confronted the danger of ideological immobilization of the dialectical motion, so too would Fanon find this ostensibly simple progression of stages threatened and eventually devoured both from within and from without.

The first of these is evident almost from the outset, and manifests above all geographically. Whereas Fanon had in his first few pages described the simplicity of the Manichean world, a world whose topographical contours skillfully divide colonized from colonizer, those “from here” from those “from elsewhere,” the disconcerting first moments of the decolonial struggle immediately test this simplicity. At the outset of the struggle, Fanon discovers a mutual suspicion which divides the component parts of the future nation, a Manicheanism within a Manicheanism that requires an intra-dialectical dialectic in response. Now it is no longer a question of colonized versus colonizer, but rural versus urban, and there exists within the colonized territory a fundamental division which must be overcome before the colonizer can be successfully confronted. Put differently, while it had appeared as though Manicheanism was an accomplished fact, divisions crop up within the colonized population reminding us that this division remains to be consolidated. Urban dwellers from the colonized group have imported both their beliefs and methods from Europe, attempting to impose these on an unaccommodating reality, and therefore see the peasantry in essentially the same terms as had Marx, i.e. as fundamentally reactionary “brake on the revolution.”<sup>35</sup> The existential reaction of

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<sup>35</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 66, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 149. Fanon himself is quick to reject this characterization as more the result of imported assumptions than practical reality: the colonized peasantry, unlike its European

the peasantry to these Europeanized, urban elites is the correspondent inverse: they are perceived as essentially European and therefore as inherently suspicious, always-already suspected of treason to the future nation. “Dressed like a European, speaking his language,” the rural masses see the urban elite as “a renegade [*transfuge*, deserter] who has given up everything which has constituted the national heritage,” and attempts to reap the benefits of colonialism.<sup>36</sup>

This intra-Manichean Manicheanism bears within it the same threat as does the broader geography of colonial division: namely, the “Aristotelian logic” tends toward frozenness, precluding any transcendence of division, any eventual unification, or indeed any movement at all. Fanon even goes so far as to map these philosophically into different spaces of historical development, arguing that “each side evolves according to its own dialectic.”<sup>37</sup> But like the broader dialectic, the embryonic national consciousness of the peasantry bears within itself the kernel for overcoming this division, one which subsumes this intra-national dialectic to the imperatives of the broader anti-colonial dialectic: “This is not the traditional opposition between town and country. It is the opposition between the colonized excluded from the benefits of colonialism and their counterparts who manage to turn the colonial system to their advantage.”<sup>38</sup> In their anti-colonial traditions, the rural masses carry the future nation embryonically within themselves as bearers of “the gestation [*maturation*] of the national consciousness.”<sup>39</sup>

The first stage of decolonization depends fundamentally on overcoming this apparent division between town and country, and the degree to which this is successful will have serious impacts on the post-liberation nation. But this geographical Manicheanism within a Manicheanism is not to be overcome simply through conversion, whereby the Europeanized elites and the rural masses come to some sort of agreement to suspend hostilities in the face of a common enemy. Rather, this division is overcome through an intra-dialectical dialectic which centers on the concept of nation itself (one not reducible or even comparable to geographical territory). In brief and necessarily schematic terms, the progression is this: the splintering of urban-based nationalist parties drives the more radical and uncompromising militants underground, and these militants are then driven toward the interior by the colonial forces of repression. It is there, in the interior, that these militants retreat “deep into the rural masses”—which “wraps him in a mantle of unimagined tenderness and vitality”—and with this fusion, these rural “masses” enter into struggle, thereby constituting a “coherent people” ready to “sharpen their weapons.”<sup>40</sup> By themselves transforming into a “people,” these revolutionaries simultaneously—and in their lived realities and self-conceptions—create “the nation” wherever they go.

But while the nation is thereby brought into being, it is only the invasion of the cities—through Fanon’s equally controversial claim that the semi-urban ex-peasant lumpenproletariat constitutes the “urban spearhead” of national liberation—that “completes [*consacre*] the

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counterpart, constitutes a bastion of traditional collectivism, whereas it is the colonized proletariat—which Fanon controversially dismisses as a “pampered [*choyé*]” and “privileged” sector, that displays the individualism commonly associated with the peasantry (Fanon, *Wretched*, 64; *Les damnés*, 146). We will discuss the implications of this later.

<sup>36</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 67; *Les damnés*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 71; *Les damnés*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 67; *Les damnés*, 150.

<sup>39</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 68; *Les damnés*, 152.

<sup>40</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 78-79; *Les damnés*, 164. This gesture, whereby “the people” is explicitly a category of struggle, will be the subject of chapter six.

dialectic” by overcoming the Manicheanism within a Manicheanism that had geographically divided the colonized portion.<sup>41</sup> Put differently, the Westernized elites are not convinced to rejoin the nation *en masse*, but instead subjected to a dialectical reconquest of sorts, which then serves the even higher dialectic of national liberation. Moreover, these complementary dialectics effectively coincide, as the “completion” of the rural-urban dialectic engendered in the *political* unification of the nation occurs simultaneously to the *geographical* unification of the country and the expulsion of the colonizer.

### **The expanding circle of the nation**

If we have seen how the simplicity of the Manichean stage disintegrates under pressure from within the future nation, dividing into component parts which must then be dialectically reassembled in the early stages of the struggle as national identity, the progression of that struggle then leads to a similar disintegration of that Manicheanism outward, toward the universal, but which occurs as a drawn-out process which begins *prior* to the stage of formal liberation. To grasp this disintegration—and the heterogeneity it entails—we must pause on this peculiarly flexible, mobile, and expansive concept of the “nation,” Fanon’s relevant revolutionary identity at this point, one which has transcended (while coinciding at moments with) that of blackness or negritude. It is worth quoting at length from some of Fanon’s more breathtaking pages:

The rash of revolts born in the interior testify, everywhere they break out, to the nation’s ubiquitous and generally dense presence. Every colonized subject in arms represents a piece [*morceau*] of the nation which is from now on alive [*désormais vivante*]... They obey a simple doctrine: make the nation exist. There is no plan, no speeches, no resolutions, no factions. The problem is clear-cut: the foreigners must leave. Let us build a common front against the oppressor and let us reinforce it with armed struggle... Initiative is localized. On every hilltop a government in miniature is constituted and assumes power. In the valleys and in the forests, in the jungle and in the villages, everywhere, one encounters a national authority. In their actions, everyone makes the nation exist... If the nation is present everywhere, it must then be here. One step further and it is present only here. Tactics and strategy merge [*se confondent*].<sup>42</sup>

The nation here assumes the function of absolute identity, the outgrowth of having assumed the colonizer’s Manicheanism. But here we see as well the prodigious impact of transforming force into violence: the problem may seem “clear-cut,” but this is no merely essentialist nationalism wherein a preexisting quantity is held up as an identity to be revered at the expense of all others. Rather than such a gesture of force, the violent—which is to say generative, creative—task that Fanon identifies here is to “make the nation exist,” to construct and project that nation as something which does not already exist in either ethnic or territorial terms.

The circle of the nation, its Manichean circuit, is therefore expansive from the very outset. From its initial localization in sovereign hilltops, the newly-expansive nation—formerly petrified—assumes a new motion and rhythm: old enmities are overcome, inter-tribal communications are re-established, and the imperatives of guerrilla warfare force a

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<sup>41</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 81, 80; *Les damnés*, 167, 166.

<sup>42</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 82-83, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 169-170.

transformation of this rooted and impetuous localism. “The national circle widens and every new ambush signals the entry of new tribes. Every village becomes both an absolute agent and an intermediary/relay point [*se découvre agent absolu et relais*]... Every new group that is constituted, every new volley of cannon fire signals that everybody is hunting the enemy, everybody is taking a stand [*fait face*].”<sup>43</sup> Here as in Sorel, the firmness of identity is crafted subjectively, projected mythically in the struggle (the second moment of our counterdiscourse of separation) in a way that unifies initially spontaneous “revolt” into “revolution.”

But if the nation embodies the expansion of the revolutionary process and the unification of the rural and the urban, it is also expansive in a second sense as well, disintegrating Manicheism from within in a manner that undermines the nominal simplicity of Fanon’s stages. The very fact that the “merging” of tactics and strategy in the passage cited above is posed as “*se confondent*,” as a confused blending of two very different quantities, is suggestive of the immediate transitions to be made in the struggle. The simplicity of unmitigated war on an absolute enemy cannot survive if the struggle is to be victorious in the long run. Tactics must give way to a strategy of “pragmatic realism” which entails the transition from local self-defense to the hyper-mobility of guerrilla war, in which the sovereign hilltop has been transcended and “every fighter carries the the homeland to war between his bare toes.”<sup>44</sup> This is a transition as well from rebellious upsurge to revolutionary war, one which requires that the leadership overcome their own hostility to the politics of the cities and “rediscover politics,” a new politics of revolutionary organization and strategy suitable to the liberation war, “no longer as a sleep-inducing technique or a means of mystification, but as the sole means for intensifying the struggle and preparing the people to lead the country lucidly.”<sup>45</sup>

But this rediscovery of politics, of strategy, is also a rediscovery of education, of consciousness, which is simultaneously a rediscovery of nuance, multiplicity, and complexity. In part as a result of the efforts of the colonizer to divide the nation by manipulating the unreflective simplicity of its consciousness, this simplicity now becomes a liability:

This spectacular voluntarism which was to bring the colonized people to absolute sovereignty in a single blow, the certainty one had of being able to carry together all the pieces of the nation at the same pace and according to the same perspective, and the strength grounded in this hope, have proved in the light of experience to be a very great weakness... as long as he believed in the mirage of the immediacy of his physical strength [*ses muscles*], the colonized achieved no real progress along the road of knowledge. His consciousness remained rudimentary.<sup>46</sup>

We find ourselves at the tipping-point between the “grandeur” and “weakness” of spontaneity from the chapter’s title, the point at which spontaneity has run its dialectical course and must give way to something else. The stages of the revolutionary struggle (and indeed, of our counterdiscourse) begin to seem—as a result of the strategic necessities of the struggle—overly simplistic except as approximate guide posts. This transition from simplicity to complexity—which crucially both *predates* and *cuts across* the moment of formal liberation that nominally marked its threshold—represents the true moment at which we begin to move from one stage of

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<sup>43</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 84, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 171.

<sup>44</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 85, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 172-173.

<sup>45</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 86, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 173.

<sup>46</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 88, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 176.

revolution to the next. The most fundamental facet of this transformation in consciousness has precisely to do with identity, with surpassing the Manicheanism of colonial identity and spreading outward toward a broader and more substantive radical identity that we would more readily recognize as universal.

Explicitly evoking Sartre's characterization of negritude in *Orphée Noir*, Fanon here assumes a lyricism arguably more characteristic of *Black Skin*:

Antiracist racism, the determination to defend one's skin which characterizes the response by the colonized to colonial oppression, clearly represent sufficient reasons to engage in the struggle... Racism, hatred, resentment, and "the legitimate desire for revenge" cannot sustain [*alimenter*] a war of liberation. These flashes in consciousness which hurl the body down tumultuous paths, which launch it into a quasi-pathological dreamlike state where the face of the other induces me to vertigo, where my blood calls for the blood of the other, where my death through mere inertia calls for the death of the other, this powerful passion of the first hours [of the struggle], disintegrates if it is left to feed on itself.<sup>47</sup>

There is no better proof than this that Fanon understood his task in *Wretched* as a repetition of his earlier dialectical argument vis-à-vis black identity, its accommodation and application to the context of a decolonial war. While it is clear why Sartre would be invoked to describe this moment whereby the absoluteness of Manicheanism is dialectically surpassed in the outward move toward the universal, what is far less clear is whether Fanon's own view has changed. But given that Fanon sees this initial "racist" stage to be fundamental, given that identification with it is framed as an absolute, subjective projection of identity, and given that it is only transcended during the course of the practical demands imposed by struggle (bearing in mind that Fanon was writing toward the *end* of this struggle), we would be inclined to argue that the formulation remains essentially the same.

Thus the recognition that "hatred does not constitute a plan of action" introduces a new torsion into the dialectic of decolonization, one which undermines Fanon's own best efforts at a coherent stageism, giving rise to an intra-dialectical helix. The nation, while requiring an initial Manicheanism, is here borne of the constant pressure toward universalizing its scope. Contrary to his nominal emphasis on *de jure* independence (the dangers of which we will discuss below), the birth of the nation coincides instead with a *de facto* independence of spirit, one which is more substantive than formal and requires a more immediate transition toward the universal. While seemingly peculiar, this complexity is in reality a repetition of the fine dialectical line that Fanon had previously walked between uncritical universalism and racial essentialism, an *anti-essentialist Manicheanism*.

As formal, *de jure* independence approaches on the heels of the *de facto* expansion of the nation from the interior toward the towns, and driven in part by the shifting tactics of a desperate colonial regime, the liberation forces are forced to adopt a different politics of identity, one which exchanges nationalism for a more substantive and complex view of the social life of the nation. As Fanon describes it:

The people then realize that national independence brings to light multiple realities which in some cases are divergent and antagonistic. At this exact moment in the struggle

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<sup>47</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 89, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 177.



clarification is crucial as it leads the people to *replace a total and undifferentiated nationalism with social and economic consciousness*. The people, who had at the outset of the struggle adopted the primitive Manichaeism of the colonizer—Blacks and Whites, Arabs and *Roumis*—realize en route that some blacks can be whiter than the whites, and that the possibility of a national flag and national independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population renouncing their privileges and their interests.<sup>48</sup>

The discovery that this simplistic Manicheism into which they had thrown themselves as an absolute identity will no longer suffice, that there are those among their own ranks who seek to profit from a new system of exploitation, of Jacobin revolutionary continuity, is deeply traumatic for the popular sectors:

It was once all so simple with the bad on one side and the good on the other. The idyllic, unreal clarity of the early days is replaced by a penumbra which dislocates the consciousness. The people discover that the iniquitous phenomenon of exploitation can assume a black or Arab appearance. They cry treason, but need to correct this cry. *The treason is not national, it is a social treason*, and they need to be taught to cry thief.<sup>49</sup>

The species-distinction that had constituted the colonial system and structured the early period of resistance to it begins to disintegrate [*se morcelle*]: “The racial and racist level is transcended on both sides [*les deux sens*]... One no longer grabs a gun or a machete anytime a colonist appears. Consciousness stumbles [*débouche laborieusement*] upon partial, limited, and unstable truths. All this is, one can guess, extremely difficult.”<sup>50</sup>

The difficulty of this transition from the Manichean to the universal results in part from the centrifugal inertia generated by the dialectical power of identity itself, but for Fanon, the creative violence driving this dialectical progression also points the way out:

Violence alone, perpetrated by the people... allows the masses to decipher social reality, only it provides the key. Without this struggle, without this knowledge-in-praxis there is nothing but a carnival parade and a lot of hot air [*flons-flons*]. A minimal readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag, and down at the bottom the undivided and still medieval mass continues its perpetual movement.<sup>51</sup>

Violence, the generative Rosetta Stone of the decolonial struggle, by creating self-confident consciousness in the masses, provides the most trustworthy vaccine against both remaining trapped within Manicheism and, as we will see next, the Jacobin continuity of neocolonialism.

### **Blocking the National Bourgeoisie**

But if the danger of the poisoned gift of formal rights in France (or the formal equality of the slave, in Hegelian terms) is not yet a reality for the colonized subject (there is, after all, little pretense of equality, as Manicheism is both formal *and* substantive), Fanon nevertheless foresees its dangers on the horizon, as formal liberation (which he associates with the

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<sup>48</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 93, translation modified, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 182-183.

<sup>49</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 94, translation modified, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 183.

<sup>50</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 95, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 184.

<sup>51</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 96, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 186.

Eurocentric colonized national bourgeoisie) threatens to undermine the young nation. This is a danger, moreover, which operates simultaneously on two levels, threatening to trap the nation within Manicheism as nationalism and harnessing it into a neocolonial continuity of the Jacobin world-system. If the class constellation that defined the stage of decolonial struggle was marked by the central role of the peasantry, its “spontaneity,” and the dialectical completion by the semi-urban lumpenproletariat, then this stage of formal liberation is equally marked—albeit in a much more negative and pernicious manner—by the specter of the national bourgeoisie.

The fundamental danger the national bourgeois poses is derived from the peculiar economic situation in which it finds itself. Faced with insurmountable economic barriers, it cannot accumulate capital but is instead limited to the role of intermediary; it cannot create industry that will push the nation forward technologically or generate a large proletarian class; it cannot, in short, perform the historic function of a bourgeoisie, and thereby embodies the motionless petrification that its actions threaten to introduce into the dialectic. It is bourgeois but not-bourgeois, national but not-national, and is therefore confronted with a choice, or better put, a challenge, one which requires that it abandon a full half of itself:

In an underdeveloped country, the imperative duty of an authentic national bourgeoisie [i.e. as *national*] is to betray the vocation to which it is destined, to learn from the people [*de se mettre à l'école du peuple*].... We will see, unfortunately, that the national bourgeoisie often turns away from this heroic and positive path, which is both productive [*féconde*] and just, and unabashedly opts [*s'enfoncer, l'âme en paix*] for the antinational, and therefore abhorrent, path of a classical bourgeoisie, a bourgeois bourgeoisie that is dismally, inanely [*platement, bêtement*], and cynically bourgeois.<sup>52</sup>

The challenge and the demand, then, is to commit class suicide and throw one's lot in with the nation.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, this appears as a modification and complication of Fanon's famous remark that “each generation must discover its mission, fulfill or betray it,” since things are not so simple for the national bourgeoisie, who must in fact betray their “historical mission as intermediary... its vocation... not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism.”<sup>54</sup> Conversely, to opt for the double-determination of a “bourgeois bourgeoisie” is to commit national (and social) suicide, to willfully exclude oneself from the nation, and to do so, moreover, in a desperate and futile gamble for inclusion in a class that one does not possess the economic basis to join. As Fanon's unit of analysis rises to the global, class and nation, much like class and race, become co-determining factors: the authentically national carries with it class implications, as does the authentically working-class. One can be bourgeois by birth and abandon her class function, just as one can be national by birth and abandon the independence struggle.

This, too, reminds us of Sorel, whose most dreaded fear was that he was to see the collective suicide of the working class through its imbibing of the (in some ways anti-)bourgeois ideology of harmony. But for Sorel, speaking in the European context, the constellation was markedly different, and in his Marxism he could hold out at least some hope of a reinvigorated bourgeoisie confronting a reinvigorated proletariat, the two driving history forward by the

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<sup>52</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 99, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 191.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of Amílcar Cabral's development of the concept of class suicide, see Tom Meisenhelder, “Amílcar Cabral's Theory of Class Suicide and Revolutionary Socialism,” *Monthly Review* 45 (November 1993).

<sup>54</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 100; *Les damnés*, 193.

violence of their enmity. For Sorel, it is not the bourgeois proper—the “bourgeois bourgeoisie,” in Fanon’s words—that functions as a brake on the dialectic, but only those members of the bourgeoisie who, alongside parliamentary socialists and imbued with the ideology of humanitarianism, attempt to destroy both classes in a mutual suicide which leaves only the “democratic marsh.” There is no such balance in Fanon’s account: bourgeoisie and proletariat can choose to stand on the sidelines of the national struggle or to join it, but in neither case do they constitute leading classes. In terms of our counterdiscourse, it is not proletariat and bourgeoisie that stand face off at the intersection of our third and fourth moments, their identities entering into a self-reinforcing dynamic of mutual consolidation.

The proletariat, as we know, is “pampered,” and thereby prevented from leading the revolution. The national bourgeoisie is utterly lacking in that “dynamic, pioneering aspect, the inventive, discoverer-of-new-worlds aspect” that characterized the early stage of the European bourgeoisie’s existence, since it enters the Viconian cycle of *corsi-ricorsi* at a different stage:

It follows the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspect without having accomplished the initial stages of exploration and invention... At its outset the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies with the last stages of the Western bourgeoisie. Don’t believe it is skipping stages. In fact it starts at the end. It is already senile, having experienced neither the petulance, the intrepidity, nor the voluntarism of youth and adolescence.<sup>55</sup>

If the functions of the metropolitan bourgeoisie of Sorel and the colonized bourgeoisie of Fanon are strictly incompatible due to economic circumstance, the fact that both find a lack of bourgeois vigor “lamentable” is surely noteworthy. And equally noteworthy is the fact that Fanon’s condemnation of the national bourgeoisie appears in terms of “stages”: this constitutes his response to what he certainly foresaw as a serious critique of his own work.<sup>56</sup> To the accusation that, in his dismissal of the potential for the national bourgeoisie (and in contradiction to the alliance advocated by the Comintern), Fanon was voluntaristically skipping stages and willing away the need for historical development, his reply was simple: it is not I but this very same national bourgeoisie who would like to leapfrog the stages of historical development, and since this is not possible, we must look for something different.<sup>57</sup>

For Fanon, then, the national bourgeoisie must be actively blocked, prevented from exerting its impact—destructive in both dialectical and practical terms—on the newly-born nation. Crucially, however, this condemnation of the national bourgeoisie is rooted not in the

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<sup>55</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 101, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 194.

<sup>56</sup> See the various critiques, including that of Vietnamese communist Nguyen Nghe, summarized in Immanuel Wallerstein, “Fanon and the Revolutionary Class.”

<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, coupled with the decolonial critique that the presumption of stages is a Eurocentric imposition itself. But we should bear in mind that this critique is complex and the questions of Eurocentrism and stages are fully intertwined: Fanon certainly assumes the need for bourgeois economic development *if* such stages are to occur as they did in Europe, but insists that the structure of the global capitalist world-system renders this bourgeois function—and consequently the stages themselves—utterly impossible. “The theoretical question... whether the bourgeois phase can be effectively skipped, must be resolved through revolutionary action and not through reasoning. The bourgeois phase in the underdeveloped countries is only justified if the national bourgeoisie is sufficiently powerful, economically and technically, to build a bourgeois society, to create the conditions for developing a sizeable proletariat, to mechanize agriculture, and finally pave the way for a genuine national culture.” This is not possible, and the national bourgeoisie “subtly transforms itself not into a replica of Europe but rather its caricature” (*Wretched*, 119; *Les damnés*, 216-217).

paradigm of totality. This is a class that is dangerous *not* because it “threatens to curb the overall, harmonious development of the nation,” not because it threatens to *divide* the national unity, but rather “because literally it serves no [dialectical] purpose... the bourgeois phase in the history of the underdeveloped countries is a useless phase.”<sup>58</sup> Its lack of divisiveness is precisely the problem, since it lacks the “homogeneity of caste” as either a class-for-itself or class-in-itself necessary to diremptively divide the national totality, construct an ideology, and drive society forward. Its way, as a result, must be blocked if the “nation” is to be rescued as a revolutionary concept.<sup>59</sup>

It is only if and when the national bourgeoisie is blocked that the process of building the nation can continue, and this above all else testifies to the conceptual relationship that exists for Fanon between “masses,” people, and “nation.” In an anti-Jacobin vein, the politicization and education of the masses prevents any new leadership from pulling the wool over the eyes of the people. This process of educating the masses then guarantees the forward motion of the dialectic in resisting the call of the national bourgeoisie to be content with a merely formal liberation, and it is in this forward motion that the nation as a political identity and a political project survives and avoids deteriorating into a mere nationalism. “To politicize the masses,” according to Fanon,

is to make the nation in its totality a reality for every citizen... and can lead to the truth of the nation and the world. Just as every fighter clung to the nation during the period of armed struggle, so during the period of nation building every citizen must continue in his everyday, concrete action to link up with the nation as a whole [*ensemble*], to embody the constantly dialectical truth of the nation, and to will here and now the triumph of the total man... Then, and only then, is everything possible.<sup>60</sup>

And as if to hammer the dialectical point home, Fanon insists that social consciousness—the transition from separatist identity toward universal humanism—can come neither too soon nor too late. If it arrives prematurely, that is, prior to the national phase, then tribalism can result. But the particular threat of the national bourgeoisie is that social consciousness will arrive late, or not at all:

If nationalism is not clarified, enriched, and deepened, if it is not transformed very quickly into social and political consciousness, into humanism [i.e. the universal], then it leads to a dead end [*impasse*]. Bourgeois leadership of underdeveloped countries confines national consciousness to a sterile formalism... The living expression of the nation is the collective consciousness in motion of the entire people. It is the enlightened and coherent praxis of men and women.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 120; *Les damnés*, 217-218.

<sup>59</sup> “Barring the way to the national bourgeoisie is a sure way of avoiding the dramatic pitfalls of independence, the misadventures of national unity, the degradation of morals, the assault on the nation by corruption, an economic downturn and, in the short term, an antidemocratic regime relying on force and intimidation. But it also means choosing the only way to move forward.” Fanon, *Wretched*, 121, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 219. Needless to say, the Sorelian echoes in this passage—in Fanon’s invocation of morals threatened by corruption—are astounding, but assume here a practical guise in the actual corruption of African leadership. Few are willing to believe that “there is no bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped countries. What makes a bourgeoisie is not its attitude, taste, or manners. It is not even its aspirations. The bourgeoisie is above all the direct product of precise economic realities” (*Wretched*, 122; *Les damnés*, 220).

<sup>60</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 140-141, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 242-243.

<sup>61</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 144, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 247.

In either case, we find ourselves in the same predicament marked by the formal emancipation of the slave: trapped in the “sterile formalism” of a descriptive totality which has yet to transcend its own built-in inequalities, permanently cut-off from the universal. Social consciousness, the opening-outward of absolute identity (the transition toward the fourth moment of our counterdiscourse) can only come at the correct dialectical moment: directly on the heels of the struggle, or better put, as a result of the strategic requirements and the momentum emanating from *within* that struggle.

### A global unit of analysis

If the national bourgeoisie will almost inevitably fail to engage the transition from national to social consciousness, opting for a “sterile formalism” rather than filling the eyes of the nation with “human things” to “develop a human landscape,” and if we have seen that the task of creating a universal world falls instead to the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat (although more as dialectical instigators than universal subjects), then we are left to wonder both about the constellation of class and identity concepts present in Fanon’s account and about how these map—in terms of our Jamesian radical comparative task—onto both *Black Skin* and Sorel.

Of the two authors considered in depth here, only Fanon engages in the sort of meta-comparison that characterized James’ *Black Jacobins*. As we have discussed above, in this seminal text James draws out an explicit analogy between the different class constellations present in revolutionary France and pre-independence Haiti: white colonists are to the metropolitan aristocracy as Haitian mulattoes to the French bourgeoisie and Haitian ex-slaves to the radical French “masses.” The Jacobins, as we have also seen, were described by James as somewhere in between the latter two groups: driven by the masses in an initial phase and caving to their own, very bourgeois, class tendencies, in a later and more conservative phase. While Sorel, again, did not engage the comparative task per se, it is worth noting some similarity between James’ account of the Jacobins and Sorel’s own account of parliamentary socialists, and Sorel’s own self-professed anti-Jacobinism follows from just such a similarity.<sup>62</sup>

*Wretched of the Earth*, however, takes up this comparative challenge quite self-consciously, doing so in many ways as a direct response to Sorel and other class-centric European radicals. The colonized working class, according to Fanon’s controversial claim, is “pampered” and “bourgeois,” the colonizer stands in as a sort of rigid and bloodthirsty national aristocracy, and the Eurocentric national bourgeoisie—incapable of being a truly “bourgeois bourgeoisie” (which within the colonized space would mean to align with aristocracy rather than the “bourgeois” working class)—floats in the uncomfortable de-nationalized and classless space between the two. It is only, for Fanon, the rural peasantry and the ex-peasant lumpenproletariat as their “urban spearhead” who have the potential to overturn the “Jacobin” system of colonial rule.<sup>63</sup> Further, as we have seen, these categories are far from static, and enter almost

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<sup>62</sup> This is also related to both James’s and Sorel’s emphasis on culture and ideology, as well as their views of revolutionary continuity (although James’ account of this continuity, as we discussed, is more sophisticated than Sorel’s).

<sup>63</sup> This repositioning of the class constellation, as Immanuel Wallerstein puts it in a seminal essay on Fanon: “He simply said, let us look again to see who has how many chains, and which are the groups who, having the fewest privileges, may be the most ready to become a ‘revolutionary class.’” Immanuel Wallerstein, “Fanon and the Revolutionary Class,” in *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 26. Wallerstein’s key

immediately into a complex dialectical transformation: when the peasant and ex-peasant (lumpen) “masses” enter into motion, they become the “people,” who then carry and distribute a mobile and expansive conception of “nation” wherever the struggle leads them.<sup>64</sup>

But this domestic repositioning is only half of the story, as should be clear from the complex relationship existing between “masses,” “people,” and “nation,” since the last of these is frequently viewed as a totalizing and essentialist concept. Fanon’s insistence that “national consciousness... is not nationalism”—in the language of our counterdiscourse, separation is not separatism—points us in the right direction.<sup>65</sup> But if we have seen that the decolonial struggle does indeed operate in an initial stage according to an “Aristotelian” logic of superfluity (whereby the colonizer must leave rather than be integrated into a higher unity), and if that struggle does seek to eventually dialectically reunify town and country, then how can Fanon’s concept of “nation” be *anything* but totalizing? The charge is leveled directly by Ernesto Laclau, who insists that, in Fanon’s nation, “heterogeneity has simply disappeared as the result of the full return to a dialectical reversal,” adding—in an inadvertent nod to the red thread uniting our project—“Jacobinism is just around the corner.”<sup>66</sup>

The centrality of this challenge Laclau poses to our project should be clear: if what marks one’s contribution to the counterdiscourse of separation is a view which privileges the division of the prevailing totality and the displacement of dialectical unity into an unforeseen future, then what claim can the Fanon of *Wretched* have to such a view? Further, and more perilously, if we have seen that it is precisely this separationist division of the totality that shields Sorel from the frequent accusations of fascism (which, as we have seen, relies heavily on the notion of the unity of the social totality), then how can Fanon avoid such charges himself? The answer to this question comes in two parts, the first of which is a textual refutation of Laclau’s claim that “heterogeneity has simply disappeared,” one which emerges in what we have already said.<sup>67</sup> But what remains is a more serious challenge to the unity of our counterdiscourse: how is Fanon’s nation, however internally heterogeneous it may be, in any way compatible with Sorel’s class as a binary division of the social totality? As we will see below, the answer to these questions lies in Fanon’s leap to the global level, to a global unit of analysis—one rooted, moreover, in the history of colonialism as a global rather than a merely national system—which then represents the prevailing totality to be subjected to radical, dialectical division.

The first indication we might have of such a leap to the global lies in his distinction between ideology and domination, and this appears precisely as a specific torsion that Fanon introduces into the Sorelian framework. If we have seen in Sorel an early and perspicacious analyst and critic of the effects of ideology in maintaining European capitalism, insightfully prefiguring Antonio Gramsci’s later shift of focus from domination to hegemony, then we see in Fanon’s colonial writings an interrogation of the validity and importance of ideology—at least as

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contribution in this essay is to show that many who attack Fanon’s repositioning of the class constellation in fact misunderstand what he meant by concepts like “working class,” “peasant,” and “lumpenproletariat.”

<sup>64</sup> In the next chapter, we will discuss these concepts in more depth through a contemporary Latin American lens.

<sup>65</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 179; *Les damnés*, 295.

<sup>66</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 152.

<sup>67</sup> While this is no place to fully enter into the errors involved in Laclau’s analysis, several merit brief mention. Firstly, Laclau exaggerates the importance of the lumpenproletariat in Fanon’s analysis to the detriment of the peasantry. The effect of this is, secondly, to neglect the particular claims the peasantry puts forward (which Laclau insists do not exist). Thirdly, then, against Laclau there indeed exists something to be articulated in the struggle, and this is what we have discussed above under the heading of “a dialectic within a dialectic.”

Sorel understands the term—in the colonial context. Fanon’s description of the function of ideology in creating harmony under (European) capitalism echoes almost verbatim Sorel’s view:

In capitalist-type societies, education... the fostering of love for harmony... instill in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of the forces of order. In capitalist countries a multitude of sermonizers [*professeurs de morale*], counselors, and “confusion-mongers” [*désorientateurs*] intervene between the exploited and the authorities [*pouvoir*, established power].<sup>68</sup>

In a colonized society, on the other hand, things could not be more different, as

the colonized are kept under close scrutiny [*conseillent*], and contained by rifle butts and napalm... the government’s intermediary uses a language of pure violence. The agent does not alleviate [*allège*] oppression or mask [*voile*] domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the forces of order. The intermediary carries violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject.<sup>69</sup>

But lest we assume that Fanon’s ideology-domination distinction overlaps cleanly with colonizer-colonized, thereby essentially repeating Gramsci’s overlapping binary of West/civil society/war of position versus East/the state/war of maneuver,<sup>70</sup> Fanon is at pains to emphasize both that mere domination fails to fully capture the colonial situation, and that such domination is itself not foreign to Europe.

As to the first, we can already sense the breakdown of Gramsci’s binary in the passage above, since bringing violence into the *homes* of the colonized is insufficient: it must also be deposited in their *minds*.<sup>71</sup> But if colonization requires ideology, it also *exceeds* domination:

We must remember in any case that a colonized people is *not just a dominated people*. Under the German occupation the French remained human beings. Under the French occupation the Germans remained human beings. In Algeria there is not simply domination but the decision, literally, to occupy nothing else but a territory. The Algerians, the women dressed in “haiks,” the palm groves, and the camels form the landscape, the *natural* backdrop for the human presence of the French.<sup>72</sup>

If what is present in this passage is suggestive, even more suggestive is what is absent. While not mentioning European Jews explicitly, Fanon is tacitly suggesting that anti-Semitism is more than mere domination, and therefore more akin to a racist-colonial relation.<sup>73</sup> Colonial relations are

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<sup>68</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 3-4, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 68. Compare to Sorel’s attacks on the professors of ethics and the preachers of social peace, so patently similar as to suggest direct influence.

<sup>69</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 4, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 68-69.

<sup>70</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and tr. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 207.

<sup>71</sup> That violence enters not only homes but also minds further undermines the hegemony/domination distinction, and demonstrates the generative function of violence in its negative sense.

<sup>72</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 182, translation modified, my emphasis; *Les damnés*, 300. On the importance of the colonized as backdrop, see Gil Anidjar’s analysis of the Palestinian in Zionist literature: *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Here, Fanon follows Césaire in insisting that the Jewish holocaust represented the return of colonial racism and colonial methods to the European continent (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 36). A necessary difference entailed by the scapegoat function of European Jews was that the geography of Manicheism was of a much more lopsided nature: rather than being the minority, those who murdered the Jews were a powerful majority. Rather than taking refuge in urban enclaves, they sought ever more *Lebensraum* while it was the Jews who were interned in camps.

premised upon racial disqualification of the type already discussed in *Black Skin*, but as in his previous work, this racism is not reducible—as in many contemporary accounts—to the ideological superstructure, but instead has *sub*-structural, which is to say, ontological implications.<sup>74</sup> “In the colonies,” Fanon insists, “the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.”<sup>75</sup>

In viewing anti-Semitism as a return to Europe of racial-colonial relations, Fanon has already irreversibly transcended the national as a unit of analysis. Europe and the Third World are not separable units, and nor are individual nations, be they colonized or colonizer. All are deeply imbricated in a global system, what some have called the modern/colonial world-system, and the relations between them must be understood first and foremost as relations which take place across the “colonial difference.”<sup>76</sup> But as should be already apparent, Fanon’s shift to the global as a unit of analysis is not the immediate transition to the universal. Rather, he leaps to the global level at the very same time that he displaces the universal even further into the future, thereby deepening the fourth moment of our counterdiscourse. This modern/colonial world-system, rather than representing a reconciled universal totality, is in fact a Jacobin structure of inequality much like Sorel’s state or Fanon’s previous formulation of racist ontology.

This is not, as a result, a shift to what Hardt and Negri would call the “plane of immanence” characterizing Empire as a global order.<sup>77</sup> In their view, the shift to the global entails a concomitant shift in resistance, but one which differs entirely from Fanon’s view. Dialectics has come to an end, the distinction between interiority evaporate, and there remains nothing but Empire as “a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality.”<sup>78</sup> While it would be misleading to suggest that this Imperial “totality” entails complete unity, what is clear is that, for Hardt and Negri, those dispersed resistances arrayed against the totality that is Empire (as “Multitude”) are immanent to it: “The struggles to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to construct a real alternative, will thus take place on the Imperial terrain itself.”<sup>79</sup>

In Fanon’s view, the leap to the global must not occur at the expense of forgetting historical relations of colonization and the long-term impact of these relations. It is precisely this sort of forgetting—with which Hardt and Negri are arguably complicit—that allows Empire to

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<sup>74</sup> Slavoj Žižek seems to begin to grasp this in his endorsement of Simone de Beauvoir’s insistence that, by virtue of the ontological function of racism, U.S. blacks *actually were inferior* (as opposed to being merely *seen as inferior by racists*). However, he missteps in arguing against the term “inferiorization,” since in negating racialization as a *process* and granting whites a too complete symbolic power, he effectively places any symbolic-ontological resistance beyond the grasp of the racialized. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 71-73. This is related to Žižek’s broader error: the utter failure to envision any generativity at all in violence, and the subsequent insistence that almost all violence is borne of desperation, as an admission of failure.

<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 5; *Les damnés*, 70.

<sup>76</sup> As a pioneer of “world-systems theory,” Immanuel Wallerstein was among the first to insist on this shift in unit of analysis, and it is of little surprise that Wallerstein—an Africanist by trade—was heavily influenced by Fanon (as were segments of the dependency theory that Wallerstein set out to modify, and which we will discuss in the next chapter. The addendum of “colonial” to Wallerstein’s “modern world-system” is the result of a set of insistent critiques originating in decolonial thought. The phrase “colonial difference” is from Walter Mignolo, himself a contributor to these critiques of the world-systems school. See Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, n. 1 (Winter 2002), 57-96.”

<sup>77</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 65.

<sup>78</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xiv.

<sup>79</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xv.



come into being in the first place, since it is by denying the possibility of dialectical oppositions on the global level that one renders such oppositions ineffective. While we will deepen this critique of Hardt and Negri in our final chapter, here we will instead formulate the precise mechanism that this immobilization of the dialectic would take on the global scale, one which would see the disintegration of the fundamentally antagonistic opposition standing at the center of our counterdiscourse: what Fanon would decry as “mimicry.”

### “We have better things to do...”

To some, it may seem as though Fanon’s concluding remarks in *Wretched of the Earth* take a surprising and unpredictable turn. From detailing the mental disorders arising sociogenically from the context of a total colonial war and from debunking the psychoanalytic naturalization of such disorders and pathologically violent reactions they engender, we enter a new literary register. Yes, we are addressed repeatedly as comrades and exhorted to join in the construction of a new and universal humanism, “to walk in the company of man, every man.”<sup>80</sup> But this much is familiar from *Black Skin, White Masks*. What is peculiar is what had changed since 1952. For if we are still speaking of the universal love of humanism, here Fanon’s focus—in line with much of the volume that precedes it—is on *how* to get there. This is no longer the anguished simultaneous lament-appeal with which he had drawn *Black Skin* to a close, but rather an exhortative plea to change course in the present.

Yes, it is a call to shake off the old night for the new day, but the preparation of this dawn has a very practical aspect and entails the assertion of a very real rupture: old friendships are to be broken, old beliefs abandoned, and above all, mimicry of past efforts is to be rejected. These calls are, in fact, one and the same: the old friendships are Old World ties, the old beliefs Eurocentric, and what is being opposed is that the Third World continue to follow the unilinear path cleared by Europe. “We have better things to do,” Fanon insists, “than follow in that Europe’s footsteps,” adding:

Come, comrades, the European game is finally over, we must find something else. We can do anything today provided we do not ape [*singer*] Europe, provided we are not obsessed with catching up with Europe... When I look for man in European lifestyles and technology [*dans la technique et dans le style*], I see a series of denials of man, an avalanche of murders.<sup>81</sup>

European thought emerged parched, its withering roots desperately seeking an impossible sustenance in arid spaces where man is not to be found.<sup>82</sup> We also find here, in Fanon’s explanation of this peculiarly barren space that is Europe, a critique of the European-Marxist dialectic of class struggle: the working class had the unique opportunity to smash the narcissistic

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<sup>80</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 238; *Les damnés*, 375.

<sup>81</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 236, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 372-373.

<sup>82</sup> Perhaps here, too, we find some compatibility with Foucault, for whom the European landscape similarly lacked in man’s presence, but who unlike Fanon failed to look elsewhere in search of a different humanism. While Foucault repeatedly insisted on the particularity of his conclusions, he nevertheless failed to recognize that *as a European philosopher*, universal conclusions would nevertheless be drawn from them. He failed, in other words, to recognize the *materiality* of his colonial privilege. As one “Foucaultian” describes it: “ignoring the imperial context of his own theories, Foucault seems actually to represent an irresistible colonizing movement.” Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 336. For a discussion of this tendency in relation to the question of humanism, see Ciccariello-Maher, “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze.”

dialogue of European thought, but it refused to step forward, instead demanding inclusion in the “European Spirit.” Speaking dialectically, then, this failure of the class struggle has left Europe in a situation of stasis, the very same sort of blockage that Sorel himself had recognized as the looming danger of social democracy, and one structurally similar to that which Fanon himself had confronted in *Black Skin*, which demanded that the dialectic be forcibly jumpstarted.

But jumpstarting the dialectic from *within* Europe appears to be less and less plausible as an option for Fanon: “Comrades, let us flee this motionless movement where the dialectic has gradually metamorphosed a logic of equilibrium. Let us reexamine the question of man.”<sup>83</sup> Here we find again an echo of Foucault’s critique of dialectics, for Fanon dismisses in similarly scathing terms those dialectics which have reached an insurmountable situation of totalizing stasis, for which the very idea of the dialectic then operates as a conservative and conservatizing mechanism.

The European dialectic of class struggle, Fanon is here insisting in the most stringent of terms, must be displaced, much as he has already displaced his own unit of analysis from the national to the global level. We must flee rather than staying to fight it out on national or continental (i.e. European) terrain. But this is neither a flight to pure exteriority nor a resignation to pure immanence. This is not a question intra-Third-World dialectical development stepping in to offer an alternative to the failure of the European dialectic (although we *have* seen a dialectic-within-a-dialectic that must first be overcome). This is neither the separatist history of a newly-birthing Third World, nor a mere repetition of the linear history of European development in the developmentalist tradition of modernization theory (thereby subsuming the future to the progressive notion of longitudinal totality). “No,” Fanon insists, “we do not want to catch up with anyone.”<sup>84</sup> This is a dialectic which walks the fine line between essentialism and the universal, one which takes into account both European accomplishments and crimes, “the most odious of which,” as we have seen, was “the crumbling of [human] unity,” both within Europe (class) and across humanity more generally (racism, colonialism, and slavery).<sup>85</sup>

But as Fanon’s shifting unit of analysis has demonstrated, these are not on equal footing. When confronted with the division of humanity on a global scale, other divisions take priority over a strict class viewpoint, and there are other identities which set the dialectic of global revolution into motion. Humanism—the new, future universal—requires that the Third World engage in more than a grotesque and caricatured emulation of the failed European past. To mimic that past would be to short-circuit the dialectic, petrifying the divisions that constitute it. We return in a sense to where we began: Fanon’s insistence that the task standing before the Third World is to “grow a new skin [*faire peau neuve*], develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create [*mettre sur pied*] a new man.”<sup>86</sup> That this process is undertaken “for Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity” is a succinct summary of its dialectical aims: with Europe standing as antithesis and humanity marking a distant universal horizon, the only path forward is that of “ourselves,” of the revolutionary assertion of identity that sets our counterdiscourse into

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<sup>83</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 237, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 374.

<sup>84</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 238; *Les damnés*, 375.

<sup>85</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 238, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 375.

<sup>86</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 239, translation modified; *Les damnés*, 376.

motion.<sup>87</sup> Hence as we have said, in *Wretched of the Earth* the universal is simultaneously closer and more distant: closer because it already appears in the very constitution of the decolonial nation, in the disintegration of stages whereby national consciousness becomes social; more distant because the consolidation of this nation merely sets into motion yet another dialectical opposition on the global scale, one whose resolution remains far beyond the horizon.

Fanon's critique of mimicry in the final pages of *Wretched of the Earth* may seem peculiar to some, but it nevertheless plays a double-role vis-à-vis our analysis: simultaneously marking a moment of similarity with Sorel and a clear transcendence of the latter's framework of analysis. As to the former, both Sorel and Fanon explicitly oppose mimicry on the part of the revolutionary subject they hope to call subjectively into being.<sup>88</sup> The function of mimicry, for Sorel as for Fanon, is to short-circuit the dialectical progression of the counterdiscourse of separation by weakening the opposition that stands at its center: an effort to copy those in a position of domination, for the slave to "turn toward the master" rather than the object, undermines the propensity toward an identity- and alterity-driven conflict necessary to transcend that domination. To encourage such mimicry is for both thinkers precisely the role of bourgeois, racist, and Eurocentric ideology, respectively. But Fanon's critique of mimicry, in emphasizing the transcendence of the national framework and identifying an ideological division to be cultivated between the Third World and Europe, also shows the impossibility of going back, of reversing the decolonial turn.

This very critique of mimicry, while marking a certain similarity, therefore underlines Fanon's conceptual-categorical divergence from Sorel, doing so along the lines suggested by C.L.R. James' radically comparative example. Sorel's counterdiscourse of separation was above all a *class* discourse, whereby the working class asserted its identity against the bourgeoisie, thereby dividing the "harmony" of the domestic social totality. In *Black Skin*, Fanon, taking the totality of racist ontology as his target, assumes Negritude as an identity capable of jumpstarting dialectical motion through its opposition to French racism. In *Wretched*, by contrast, and as we have seen, the totality in question shifts dramatically to the global level of the modern/colonial world-system, with national identity operating against the colonizer on the domestic level, but doing so always within the broader colonial context which pits the Third World against Europe. And in all three visions, universal aspirations—social harmony, universal anti-racist love, and global humanism—are insistently displaced to the distant developments of an unforeseeable and unpredictable dialectical progression.

Fanon's framework, then, is not merely *complementary* to that of Sorel, but rather replaces it entirely by way of a "decolonial turn"<sup>89</sup>: the national is no longer sufficient as a unit of analysis (while remaining central as a unit of struggle *against*, in a gesture of separation, the broader global-colonial totality of the world-system). Framed within the dialectical terms of the counterdiscourse of separation, Fanon's notion of "nation" resides in the middle of the dialectic,

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<sup>87</sup> In his preface, Sartre describes to a European the scene of a group of Third World revolutionaries speaking around a fire: "They might see you, but they go on talking among themselves without even lowering their voices" (*Wretched*, xlviii; *Les damnés*, 43).

<sup>88</sup> This, in a sense, is also the subject of the first three chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which document efforts to flee racism through assimilationist strategies rather than confront it.

<sup>89</sup> See, e.g., Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*; S. Castro-Gómez and R. Grosfoguel, eds., *El giro decolonial: reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá: Siglo de Hombres Editores, 2007).

as a separationist identity to be cultivated which divides the broader structure of global colonialism, whereas for Sorel the national would have been situated more toward the end of the class struggle dialectic which divided it. Herein lies the peculiar compatibility between first-world anarcho-syndicalism and third-world “nationalism” (while neither Sorel nor Fanon would accept these labels unreservedly), one which reproduces the same separationist gesture according to two different units of analysis. It is only when this framework is applied to a unit of analysis that is broader than the nation that this very nation can adopt the necessary transformative fluidity to avoid falling into fascism.<sup>90</sup>

When the national constitutes rupture and not totality, it cannot be fascist. Just as the relevant totality against which antagonism is to be directed is the Jacobin structure of global minority rule, so too is the relevant fascism to be guarded against a global one: Empire and those who oppose it on the basis of pure immanence are complicit in this view, and Césaire’s and Fanon’s insistence on the historical homology of colonialism and fascism acquires here a new relevance. Sorel’s anti-statism and class-centrism therefore become compatible with not only a radical conception of race, but also identities like the people and even nation. But the counterdiscourse of separation can only accommodate such concepts without essentialist-fascist temptations of totality by effectively rendering Sorel obsolete, a useful vestige of a quaint past when the horizon seemingly stopped at the borders of Europe. To paraphrase James’ seminal description of the Haitian Revolution while peculiarly inverting the location of the actors involved, we could say that, in Fanon’s decolonial turn, whereby he transcends Sorel’s formulation of the counterdiscourse of separation, “the European workers begin... and the colonized masses complete.”

But Fanon’s critique of mimicry does more than illustrate his shifting unit of analysis: it also marks the parameters whereby Fanon’s influence would be felt among an entire generation of Third World thinkers. It is this legacy—and the invocation and radicalization of concepts like “the people” and “the nation,” which Fanon introduced but did not survive to discuss systematically—to which we will turn in our final chapters.

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<sup>90</sup> Some among Sorel’s followers attempted to infuse his class war vision with nationalism in an uncritical way that maintained the nation as final reference-point and unit of analysis (see, for example, the fascist claims surrounding the invasion of Eritrea). Fanon’s cautions here regarding authoritarian African leaders is instructive, while it would be erroneous to consider these “fascist” in the strictest of terms.

## Chapter 5 – Exteriority against Totality: Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation*

We have seen in previous chapters how what we are calling the counterdiscourse of separation was progressively developed and deployed both theoretically and politically by Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon, and how this progressive development took the form of a shift in the particular mode of political identity standing at its center: from class to race to nation. But we have also seen that Fanon's formulation of the decolonial nation—in contrast to prevailing interpretations both of the concept in general and its role in Fanon's thought in particular—was not a totalizing conception. Rather, Fanon's nation was one which simultaneously entailed a rupture on the domestic level as well as the transposition of the entire framework of the counterdiscourse of separation onto the transnational stage of Third World versus Europe and the West, of colonized versus colonizer. For Fanon, at least, this gesture toward the global contains a certain irreversibility: while national identity is the fundamental and essential building-block of decolonial identity, the national unit of analysis is nevertheless insufficient in and of itself, and hence we cannot move backward to Sorel, for whom class identity was prioritized as a moment of rupture within the national framework. By situating nations and nationalisms within the broader colonial framework, in other words, Fanon renders Sorel's class-centrism untenable even at the heart of Europe: after all, turn-of-the-century France was nothing if not colonial, through and through.<sup>1</sup>

Instead, we must move forward irrepressibly into the global, while recognizing that this is not the result of the inevitable and linear progress of the universal, but that the Sorelian view was never sufficient to begin with, that it concealed as much as it could hope to reveal.<sup>2</sup> In this final chapter pairing, we turn in a number of particular ways—toward the political philosophy of Enrique Dussel, toward the concept of the people, and finally toward Latin America and Venezuela in particular—but crucially, we do so without abandoning the global. Rather, as we will see, Dussel's formulation of the concept and identity that is “the people”—while maintaining the de-totalizing, conflictive, heterogeneous, and transformative character Fanon had attributed to the nation—bears a unique potential for allowing us to draw together the various political identities discussed thus far (class, race, and nation) in ways that reflect Fanon's transnational formulations while in some ways broadening their scope.

In this chapter, we will begin to move toward the concept of the people by first establishing Dussel's philosophical groundwork in a reformulated dialectic which bears certain resemblance to while moving clearly beyond Sorel and Fanon. Inspired in part by Emmanuel Levinas, Dussel's critique of the paradigm of totality will on the one hand become more direct and literal than was the case for our previous thinkers. On the other hand, however, his emphasis on the category of exteriority—that which lies *beyond* the bounds of totality—will nominally

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre would draw out this tension between French leftism and colonization masterfully in his preface to *Wretched of the Earth*.

<sup>2</sup> This, if anything, constitutes the availability of Sorel's thought for later fascists, who would transpose working-class categories uncritically onto the global stage (e.g. in support for colonialism). We have been clear that Sorel himself did not engage in this gesture himself in any significant sense, and the entire structure of his mature thought was arrayed in opposition to the embrace of totality that a turn to French nationalism would entail. However, as Sorel himself said of Socrates, his sin was one of omission rather than commission: by maintaining the centrality of class as a separatist identity within the national unit of analysis, Sorel's theory, by neglecting race and colonization, would not guard sufficiently against the slide toward nationalism as the totalizing identity proper to the national unit.

draw him far beyond the parameters of Sorel's and Fanon's philosophies, providing the basis for a fusion of dialectics with analectics, what he calls an "analectic" or "ana-dialectic" in which the "ana" refers to the realm of the "beyond." In our final chapter, we will then track how this *philosophical* formulation translates into Dussel's mature *political* theory, by examining how this relationship between the internal rupture of totality and an external openness to exteriority effectively embeds itself within his central political subject: "the people." Through an engagement with, first, Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's terse dismissal of the category of the people, and then with revolutionary Venezuelan folk singer Alí Primera's celebration of the same category, one which would deeply influence recent developments in Venezuela, we will attempt to present Dussel's conception of the people as a category of rupture through the lens of contemporary Venezuelan political dynamics.

Here, Dussel's political theory—as well as the entirety of what we have been discussing under the rubric of a "counterdiscourse of separation"—gains an additional and revealing concreteness, enriching our understanding of political dynamics as it itself is enriched. In the end, then, we find in our counterdiscourse of separation, in which Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel can to varying degrees and in varying manners be located, not only a historical tendency to be grasped *post festum*, but also a potentially potent tool for thinking contemporary dynamics and realities. But this is not to dismiss the importance of the historical account we have developed up to this point, an account which inevitable informs the concepts we have tracked and deployed. First, then, we will briefly continue this account, drawing some admittedly tenuous and schematic linkages between the thinkers discussed previously and the contemporary Latin American intellectual currents and political concerns that frame Dussel's contribution.

### **Mariátegui, Fanon, Dependency**

Fanon's transposition, his leap to the global that we discussed in the previous chapter, would mark much of his later reception, and here we refer not only to the obvious reference points: African revolutionaries like Steve Biko or U.S. black power advocates like those with whom we began our discussion. Rather, we refer to the more radical proponents of what came to be known as "dependency theory" emerging out of the CEPAL/ECLA in Santiago de Chile in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, Fanon did not influence the *origins* of the *Cepalistas* in any serious way—after all, Raúl Prebisch had laid the early foundations for dependency theory as early as 1950—but what Fanon did indeed influence, and in a decisive manner, was the later *development* and radicalization of the *dependentistas* (especially in figures like André Gunder Frank). Fanon was not, however, the only source of the insights that dependency theory brought to the table, and one other merits mention here: the Peruvian socialist José Carlos Mariátegui.

Mariátegui—himself not coincidentally a Sorel devotee—could be considered the veritable founder of a properly Latin American Marxism, i.e. one not imposed unilaterally by the Soviet Comintern, but instead developed on the basis of an analysis of local conditions. In line with Fanon's insistence on colonial particularities, Mariátegui would ruthlessly critique those elements of Marxism that he found incompatible with Latin American, and specifically Peruvian, realities. Hence the title of his masterpiece: *Seven Essays on Peruvian Reality*. Fighting a two-

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Gunder Frank's *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review, 1970); *Lumpenbourgeoisie, Lumpendevelopment: Dependence, Class, and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review, 1972).

sided battle against the anti-imperialist social democracy of Victor Haya de la Torre on the one hand and Comintern orthodoxy on the other, Mariátegui would in effect find in both a similar argument: that capitalism and imperialism can have a progressive effect in modernizing the class structures prevalent in so-called “underdeveloped” countries.

Yes, this was a question of stages, but not in the obvious sense, and here the necessary theoretical inversion was provided by none other than Fanon himself: to the accusation that, in his terse dismissal of *both* colonized bourgeoisie (as “useless”) and colonized proletariat (as “pampered”), he is attempting to skip stages, he turns the tables on the accuser. A certain degree of linearity could be justified if these classes were capable of playing the function reserved for them in orthodox Marxism. But unlike Sorel, for whom action by one side (the proletariat) could effectively reactivate the other (the bourgeoisie), awakening in them a sense of their historical task, such a reestablishment of objective progress is impossible in the Fanonian account. The national bourgeoisie is already decadent: “Don’t believe it is skipping stages. In fact it starts at the end.”<sup>4</sup> And the miniscule proletariat is both too weak and too central to the colonial system to change this. Here we can see that the question was not for Fanon—as it had to some degree been in the Russian Revolution—one of whether or not it was possible or desirable to “skip” stages of historical development: it was a more radical rejection of the very idea of stages to begin with. And the origin of this rejection lay in the very structures of the global capitalist world-system, itself responsible for the nominally “deviant” development of the colonial economy.

Against this linear and Eurocentric view of development (or developmentalism) and the politics of stages that it entailed (in which the Comintern would endorse alliances with the nascent national bourgeoisie), Mariátegui would adopt what we could interpret as a proto-Fanonian line: for underdeveloped nations, *development is essentially impossible*, because capitalism operates *not* on the national level—thereby allowing linear development along previously established national paths—but instead as a global system of inequality which *prevents* rather than *facilitates* development in exploited zones and countries. Like Fanon would later do, Mariátegui immersed himself in the study of the colonized and post-colonial class structure in an effort to discover what developmental “deviations” had been established through the process of colonization and what the political impacts of these deviations would be.

Specifically, having ruled out as potential revolutionary subjects both the middle classes (privileged by Haya) and the traditional proletariat alone (which Mariátegui viewed in similar terms to Fanon), Mariátegui would seek to reinfuse Peruvian socialism with a view of classes and indeed of class struggle which was not purely economically-determined, but which specifically incorporated the cultural, political, and economic legacy of indigenous societies (“Incan communism”) into a revolutionary formulation that he deemed “Indo-American Socialism.” Hence we find both similarity and difference vis-à-vis Marx’s position in the 1881 letter to Zasulich, in which the Russian communes, or *obshchina*, could serve as the basis for a skipping of stages. For Marx, the stages remain intact; for Mariátegui as for Fanon, these stages themselves disintegrate (as do the latter’s “stages” of decolonization).

If there is something familiar about this emphasis on class struggle and privileging of the ideological over the strictly economic, this is no mistake: it is often overlooked that Mariátegui was himself a devotee of a peculiarly Sorelian Marxism.<sup>5</sup> Having limited access to Marx’s own

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<sup>4</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 101; *Les damnés*, 194.

<sup>5</sup> Huo García Salvatecci, *Sorel y Mariátegui* (Lima: Enrique Delgado Valenzuela, 1979).

texts, Mariátegui would derive his heterodox Marxism directly from reading Sorel (who, along with Gramsci, Croce, and D'Annunzio, Mariátegui met at the crucial 1921 Congress of Italian Socialists in Livorno<sup>6</sup>), and whose influence is particularly pronounced in Mariátegui's 1928 *Defense of Marxism*. Salvatecci even suggests that the latter text would be more aptly named a "defense of Sorel," but does so for all the wrong reasons. Like Arendt's unification of Sorel and Fanon around a predetermined framework of what constitutes "violence," Salvatecci similarly unites Sorel and Mariátegui in an attempt to dismiss both, but this time according to the pre-established metric of Marxist orthodoxy: Mariátegui, like Sorel, is not sufficiently "Marxist." As should by now be clear, our effort is to draw these thinkers together in a more productive fashion, distilling what is common in their work rather than imposing commonality upon them.

The influence of this arguably Sorel-inspired decolonial couplet—Mariátegui and Fanon—on Latin American thought would be significant, with their most pronounced and influential heirs emerging, as we have said, within the radical wing of dependency theory. Like both Fanon and Mariátegui, dependency theorists like André Gunder Frank would insistently view capitalism as a global structure with severe implications for regnant class constellations in colonized or formerly-colonized countries. And here too, the question of transposing our unit of analysis to the global level came as a challenge to prevailing stageist views, be they linear (as in Modernization Theory) or purportedly dialectical (in Stalinist orthodoxy). Ramón Grosfoguel summarizes this part of the critique by later *dependentistas* in the following terms:

*Dependentistas* consider incorrect the assumption that equates development to passing through the same "stages" of the so-called advanced societies. Since historical time is not—as the modernization theories presuppose—chronological and unilinear, the experience of the metropolitan societies cannot be repeated. Underdevelopment is a specific experience that needs to be analyzed as a historical and structural process. Development and underdevelopment coexist simultaneously in historical time. The coevalness of both processes is overtly recognized.<sup>7</sup>

Outside of Latin America, this view—and the rejection of the national unit of analysis it implied—would be in some ways systematized in the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, among others. But within Latin America, its implications would be felt in a number of sectors, including liberation theology, as liberation theologians made use of dependency theory to mount a critique of a similarly orthodox the operations of the Church in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> As Nelson Maldonado-Torres insists, liberation theology should not to be reduced to a merely theological intervention, since it marked a critique of "not only the *theological* difference but also the *colonial* difference," and that as a result, the phenomenon "cannot be accounted for completely with reference to European theologies of integralism."<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on colonialism

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Garrels, commentary in editorial notes of José Carlos Mariátegui, 7 *Ensayos Sobre la Realidad Peruana* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007), 326. In the same volume Aníbal Quijano disagrees with some accounts of how little Marx Mariátegui read ("José Carlos Mariátegui: Reencuentro y Debate").

<sup>7</sup> But, Grosfoguel adds, some *dependentistas* did not manage in the end to overcome the very developmentalist tendencies they critiqued. Ramón Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, n. 2 (2000), 360.

<sup>8</sup> See Jung Mo Sung, *Economía: Tema Ausente en la Teología de la Liberación* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1994; Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), ch. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Liberation Theology and the Search for the Lost Paradigm: From Radical Orthodoxy to Radical Diversity," in I. Petrella, ed., *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 46.



as a global system and one which requires as a response a process of global rupture, an assertion of radical difference within a broader, overarching unit of analysis, contains echoes of much of what we have been discussing thus far. It would be from this Latin American crucible—heated in equal part by dependency theory, liberation theology, and Mariátegui’s indigenous Marxism—that Enrique Dussel’s philosophy of liberation would emerge.

## **Totality recentered**

Dussel marks both an explicit turn to the concept of totality and its critique (both admittedly latent in Sorel and Fanon), as well as a more explicit endorsement of the rupture of that totality than we had seen at least in the early Fanon. Put differently, Dussel is and has been a far more willing participant in the counterdiscourse of separation than was the case for Fanon, for whom the price of deferring the universal was far too high at first.<sup>10</sup> The first of these elements—the refocusing of explicit attention on totality as a framework—resulted in large part from the fact that Dussel, unlike Sorel and Fanon, is first and foremost a philosopher, although as we will see, the importance of this fact should not be overstated. The second—a willingness to embrace rupture—emerges from the peculiar way in which that philosophy developed in conversation with, and indeed driven by, radical political practices. And this because, for Dussel, this rupture never stood in opposition to a universal ethics, but was rather—as Sorel and Fanon both ultimately discovered—the only path open to such an ethic. However, the manner in which Dussel approaches the process of dialectical rupture, complementing it with a focus on “analectical” exteriority that was absent in Sorel and at least nominally in Fanon, marks both his singular contribution to the counterdiscourse of separation as well as a theoretical challenge with which we must grapple, and one which—like Fanon’s transposition to the global level—clarifies our counterdiscourse in the process of rendering certain of its elements obsolete.

While we will see below that the differences between Dussel and Fanon are far less severe than this initial suggestion would entail, it is worth noting that these are largely explained by the distinct philosophical frameworks the two bring to the table. Fanon sets out from Hegel, from whom a love for the universal, and “aspiration toward totality,” and a concomitant anxiety toward rupture, or diremption, often follows. But in his effort to grasp the realities of racialization, Fanon would come to critique the ontological assumptions of the Hegelian framework, assumptions which entailed a universal access to the preconditions for recognition. Dussel, on the other hand, would sink his roots first into the universal ground of Heideggerian ontology, before seeking out Hegelian dialectics *not* as a theory of totality but one of internal rupture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> While never claiming a direct lineage from Fanon, Dussel in many way sets out from the same subjects that motivated Fanon: colonization, decolonization, and Being. Direct references are present nevertheless, as in the preface to his *Philosophy of Liberation*, when he describes this philosophy as an expression of “the oppressed of the earth, the condemned of world history” (“condemned” here being the “condenado” by which Fanon’s *Wretched* is translated into Spanish). Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, tr. A. Martinez and C. Morkovsky (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), viii; *Filosofía de la Liberación* (Bogota: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1980 [1976]), 9. On 13; 24, he further cites Fanon as the origin, however incomplete, of a philosophy of liberation.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 26: “Dussel discovers two valuable aspects of the dialectic: it denies the security and obviousness of everyday life, and it opens out on encompassing ontological structures, which are never exhaustively known.”

Furthermore, this dialectical phase would later be superseded by (or infused with) Emanuel Levinas' ethics of alterity, a shift which Dussel claims to have awoken him from his "ontological slumber," and which entailed both an overt critique of the paradigm of totality and a new process of rupture oriented outwardly, toward the realm of exteriority.<sup>12</sup> As I will argue below, this fusion of Levinas with Hegelian and later Marxian dialectics—in what Dussel terms the analectical or ana-dialectical method, which combines internal rupture with an outward-oriented rupture—enriches Fanon's formulations, but does so without explicitly contradicting Fanon, since many of the same Levinasian themes (Being, the Other, totality, and exteriority) are present in a latent form within Fanon's framework. It is this ana-dialectics, moreover, that Dussel would later translate into political terms, positioning it at the very heart of the concept of the people.

Both thinkers, to put it in a way, have similarly complex assessments of Hegel, but they arrive at these from different directions: Fanon's critique of the ontological sub-structure of the master-slave dialectic reveals an anxiety toward false universalism, whereas Dussel's Levinas-inspired critique is aimed (in a Foucaultian vein) at the conservative, colonizing potential of Hegelian dialectics itself. Both, as a result, seek through these respective critiques to *preserve* something of the power they attribute to the Hegelian dialectic, a power rooted in the radical motion that this dialectic, if given a good push, is able to engender. That a push is required is in part what draws Dussel and Fanon together, and toward Sorel as well, despite the fact that the latter's dialectic is more Marxist than Hegelian and that his critique thereof operates more on the level of ideology and determinism than that of racialization and exteriority.

By the publication of Dussel's 1976 *Philosophy of Liberation*—the seminal statement of the perspective he has advocated during the last three decades, and which will be our focus in this chapter—Dussel had been fully awakened from slumbers of a variety of types, and not only by interventions of a philosophical sort. In 1973, Dussel's house in Argentina was bombed by the far right, and within two years he would be expelled from his university and exiled to Mexico.<sup>13</sup> Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation* is uncharacteristically terse, in part due to the fact

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<sup>12</sup> Somewhere between 1969 and 1972, Dussel would come up hard against the wall of Heideggerian ontology, but while he himself credits his discovery of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* in 1971, it is possible that he is merely being generous, since the break appears to have already begun prior to that moment. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, "Introduction," in L.M. Alcoff and E. Mendieta, eds., *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 20-21. The authors clearly demonstrate, however, that much of Dussel's 1969 work was more clearly Heideggerian and that his 1973 *Para una ética de liberación*, v. I, contains a "very noticeable and disconcerting shift" between Heideggerian and Levinasian registers. As Dussel explains it: "I had discovered the subject of totality long before reading Levinas (in Paris as early as 1962, with Yves Jolif). The idea of overcoming totality was clarified by Levinas, although Sartre had suggested it. We read Levinas as a group (with Scannone) by the end of 1969, in the context of my classes on Hegel... in which Levinas did not appear, but we had begun to read him. The concept of exteriority and the overcoming of the totality is Levinasian" (personal communication, October 11<sup>th</sup> 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Alcoff and Mendieta, "Introduction," 21. While we might expect such a fate to have befallen a professor of revolutionary Marxism during that wave of rightist repression in the Southern Cone, but it is worth noting that Dussel was not at this point a Marxist. Rather, he was a philosopher and theologian whose work was emerging as foundational to the nascent liberation theology movement, one which would increasingly draw upon the concept of the poor as a category of exteriority from which progressive politics were seen to flow. It would only be after he had sketched the basic contours of a philosophy of liberation and its ana-dialectical method that Dussel would turn to a serious study of Marx. Hence unlike Sorel, his critique of totality and endorsement of rupture would not be a specifically Marxist one, and unlike Fanon, it would not be a specifically Hegelian one, but in its final formulation, as we will see, it would accommodate both.

that this bomb blast destroyed his library (his books, as he recalls, were literally left fluttering in the breeze<sup>14</sup>). While admittedly aporetic at moments, evincing a certain perceptible vagueness which requires redoubled and careful effort by the reader, *Philosophy of Liberation* nevertheless remains far from aphoristic, constituting instead a systematic statement of his philosophical approach. And the central plank of this structure—the load-bearing beam upon which it rests—is a critique of the very same paradigm of totality whose interrogation drives our own project, and the ontological epistemology and political colonization that it entails. But for Dussel, as we have said, this critique of totality finds its philosophical origins in Levinas.

Hence we begin as does Dussel, and Dussel begins as does Levinas: with Totality. Totality is, for Dussel as for Levinas, a category which is openly hostile to alterity and difference, always attempting to incorporate the Other within the self under the category of the same. As a result and according to its own inherent dynamics, totality is always tinged with the threat of totalitarianism, and this is a totalitarianism under which the Other suffers disproportionately:

Totality, the system, tends to totalize itself, to center upon itself [*autocentrarse*], and to attempt—temporally—to eternalize its present structure. Spatially, it attempts to include intra-systemically all possible exteriority. As the bearer of an infinite hunger, the fetish attempts to install itself forever in an insatiable cannibalism [*antropofagía*]. The proximity of the face-to-face disappears because the fetish devours its mother, its children, its siblings... Totalized totality, Cyclops or the Leviathan on earth, kills as many alien faces as question it until finally, after a long and frightful agony, it sadly disappears from history, not without first sealing its final days with innumerable injustices.<sup>15</sup>

The appearance of “alien faces,” those barbarians who inhabit only the realm of non-Being against the only Being that counts—that of the totality—provokes an inevitable massacre, the elimination of alterity that constitutes the only path to relaxation for the logic of totality. The totality cannot admit the Other as other. Rather she *is not*, and if she speaks, she is the expression of non-Being. This non-Being, moreover, is not something which can be ignored in silence, but instead constitutes a dangerous and alien non-sense that must be actively silenced through reduction to the same and incorporation within the totality.

And lest we lose ourselves in the philosophical ether, as this abstract Levinasian language might encourage us to do, Dussel reminds us immediately and acidly of both his own condition as exile and the stakes of this project of exteriority:

To speak non-Being is falsehood. Before the other can continue her task of falsification and demoralization of the system, the hero throws himself upon the enemy, the other, and annihilates her, kills her. Thus it was with the SS in fascist Germany, and thus it is with the CIA—the lawfully armed representative of the transnational corporations—.<sup>16</sup>

Against the untruth, or rather the non-truth, of the Other, there stands the truth of the system, a truth to be enforced practically by Dussel’s sarcastically-rendered “hero,” whose physical destruction of the other is simultaneously an epistemological act. Here, Dussel’s indictment

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<sup>14</sup> Enrique Dussel, “From Critical Theory to the Philosophy of Liberation,” tr. G. Ciccariello-Maher.

<sup>15</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 49, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 65-66.

<sup>16</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 51; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 67.

extends from totality to its theoretical counterpart, on whose behalf the “hero” operates: ontology. Ontology, for Dussel, represents that form of thinking proper to the category of totality, “the ideology of ideologies, the foundation of the ideologies of empires, of the [global] core,” and in a more self-critical vein, this former Heideggerian adds that, “classical philosophy of all epochs constitutes the theoretical consummation of the practical oppression of peripheries.”<sup>17</sup> Ontology, the study of a universal foundation of Being, is by its very definition bound-up in the enterprise of colonization: it is a logic of the same, an ideology which subsumes all that is different to a universal view whose origin is, not coincidentally, European.

While on one level, this formulation bears a striking similarity to Levinas’ critique in *Totality and Infinity* of ontological philosophy—specifically, that of Heidegger and Husserl—we can already sense here, alongside this clear debt to Levinas, a tension which rebels stubbornly against the Levinasian formulation. The Cyclopean cannibal of totality emerges *within* before disappearing *from* history, and this history becomes even more concrete in the linkage between Nazism (and philosophy) and the U.S. imperialism (and colonialism more generally) which more directly frame Dussel’s own context. Further, it is no mistake that these are “alien faces [*rostros ajenos*]” in contrast to the abstract “face of the Other” [*la cara del Otro*] that we would find in Levinas: *ajeno* as simultaneously collective and foreign, and *rostro* as physical visage more than the abstract representativity of the face as *cara*.<sup>18</sup> While Nazism clearly constituted the political backdrop to Levinas’ theoretical project and his hostility to Heideggerian ontology, it remains for the most part in the background of his philosophy. What is foregrounded instead is the attempt to make of ethics and the encounter with the other a “first philosophy.”

Dussel’s approach is at once more concrete and more ruthlessly subjected to political demands. As we see in the above references to totality—and as we will see as well in Dussel’s understanding of exteriority—his philosophical categories always entail a very concrete and very specific content. As Fanon concretizes the Hegelian (and Sartrean) encounters with alterity—this concretization of the other providing the basis for his critique of the assumed reciprocity of the master-slave dialectic and for his own reformulation of the same—so too does Dussel concretize Levinas’ encounter with the Other, providing it with a historical and political content which, in turn, allows him to transcend the Eurocentric limitations of Levinasian philosophy. While the encounter with the Other maintains, in Dussel, the Levinasian function of grounding subjectivity, this subject is for Dussel always already situated within broader economic and (geo)political structures that reproduce the relationship with the prevailing totality (in other words, Dussel’s intersubjectivity is both less abstract and, as a result, more collective than Levinas’ version).

Hence in an explicit rejection of Levinasian ethics as “first philosophy,” Dussel’s ethics responds more directly to sociopolitical exigencies, here reflecting his origins in liberation theology. Just as liberation theology had expressed a “preferential option for the poor,” in which concern for the needs of the oppressed operated as a foothold for the development of radical

<sup>17</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 6, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Rostro* as a beak, the front of a ship, or as a stylized mask representing a face; *cara* as the face as an expressive presence, something whose emotiveness is covered by a mask (RAE). I don’t think this distinction is lost on Dussel, who deploys such metaphors openly in his discussion of alienation, under the heading “The Mask that Becomes a Face [*Rostro*]” (*Philosophy of Liberation*, 62-63, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 80-81). While it might seem strange that *rostro* is here contrasted with the mask, Dussel is referring explicitly to the concrete, “historical-biographical” face of the other. Not coincidentally, Dussel here gestures at a critique of Sartre’s formulation of the abstract and threatening gaze of the other in *Being and Nothingness* which shows some similarity to Fanon’s own critique. See George Ciccariello-Maher, “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze.”

theology,<sup>19</sup> Dussel would now assume a similar stance, in which concrete liberation of the global exteriority serves as the precondition and foothold for thought itself. The task, as he sees it, is to build both ethic and philosophy on a preferential “option” for decolonization, for the liberation of the global Other, or in other words, to

rethink everything that has been thought until now. And, what is more, it is necessary to think what has never been thought before: the very process of the liberation of dependent and peripheral countries. This subject is the praxis of liberation itself. The option for this praxis is the beginning of a philosophical protodiscourse. *Politics introduces ethics, which in turn introduces philosophy.*<sup>20</sup>

This explicit subjection of not only philosophy, but ethics as well, to politics, and specifically to the political demands of the Other as a concrete, historical exteriority, will have serious implications for Dussel’s political theory, and his translation of Levinasian ethics into political terms—while arguably necessary—will in the end contribute to the occasional difficulties and vagaries of his own formulations.<sup>21</sup>

Against the logic of totality and the ontology which supports it, Dussel proposes—here continuing to manifest both Levinas’ influence and limitations—an opposing logic of exteriority and the metaphysical embrace of transcendence. Here, Dussel’s understanding of exteriority is something quite different from what Levinas meant by the term, and we will later come to terms with the difficulties that this entails.<sup>22</sup> But while certainly related to his formulation of the Other as a concrete historical victim of European capitalist modernity, Dussel’s exteriority is not reducible to merely the “Third World” or “the poor” in a simplistic sense, but rather cuts across the various levels of subjectivity. Dussel is quick to insist that his is not a purist or fetishist understanding of exteriority (a sort of exoticist primitivism which insists on the substantive fullness of an “outside” and the substantive outsideness of the Other). Rather, exteriority at its most basic (and perhaps closest to the Levinasian version) is an “*interior transcendentality*” which is determined largely in terms of consciousness.<sup>23</sup> On an individual level, exteriority means the internal capacity for transcendence that each human enjoys (we could think of this as the ability we all have to imagine a different social order). On the level of society as a whole, exteriority refers to those groups excluded from the various systems that constitute that totality (economic exclusion, political exclusion, gendered exclusions, etc). Finally, on the global level, Dussel speaks of the “cultural exteriority” of colonized and formerly colonized spaces, where collective practices predate or coexist with those constituting the global world-system, and it is only here that Dussel’s exteriority maps, however imperfectly, onto prevailing geopolitical categories.

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<sup>19</sup> See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973 [1971]).

<sup>20</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 173, translation modified, my emphasis; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 206.

<sup>21</sup> See Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> See Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 181.

<sup>23</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 39; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 55. While he speaks frequently in terms of “absolute” or “total” exteriority, he admits that this “spatial metaphor... can lead to more than one equivocation,” and is better understood as a “beyond.” He adds that “Exteriority and interior transcendentality have the same signification in this philosophical discourse” (40). But even here, he seems to sense a conceptual division that he will later establish between the two terms, arguing instead that they are complementary, and establishing a distinction between abstract and concrete exteriority (the latter as alienated “surplus-labor”) (135).

But if the celebration of this concrete other as exteriority certainly stands against ontology as the exclusivity of Being, the position of dialectical thought is far more complex, since the precise relationship between the category of exteriority and dialectics as internal rupture is a complex one. Dialectics, after all, is not necessarily ontological and is far from ontology proper, as both Sorel's and Fanon's reformulations make clear. Rather, the initial dialectical moment constitutes a sort of internal rupture within totality (*Diremption*, in Hegelian and Sorelian parlance<sup>24</sup>) which can, as we have been insisting from the outset of this project, serve one of two purposes: a "dialectical" recomposition of that totality which transcends rupture as quickly as possible (as is arguably Hegel's entire purpose, and the source of Foucault's anxiety toward dialectics), or a privileging of rupture as transformative both within and at the very bounds of that totality (in Sorel, Fanon, and as we will see, Dussel).<sup>25</sup> It is this latter view of dialectics that Dussel seeks to maintain, and he does so precisely by subjecting dialectics, in an initial moment, to exteriority, to the face of the Other.

As should be clear, but is worth emphasizing, this means that this exteriority—unlike Levinas' version—is never absolute, and this in part because of its concreteness. For Nelson Maldonado-Torres, this concretization of the Other marks *not* Dussel's surpassing of Levinas, but rather a very problematic gesture vis-à-vis both Levinas and Dussel's own politics and ethics. In transposing Levinas' categories into directly political terms and in rejecting phenomenology, Dussel becomes "radically anti-Levinasian" since, in its very concreteness, the Other is robbed of its radical and inextinguishable alterity, transposed onto the Latin American (and Dussel's own) self as a source of legitimacy and authority.<sup>26</sup> A second error, for Maldonado-Torres, lies in applying ethical categories to non-ethical, racialized contexts (and here, the insight is more Fanonian): "Dussel (con)fuses... the 'beyond Being' with the non-being... Dussel fuses the trans-ontological with the sub-ontological difference."<sup>27</sup> But it should be noted that Dussel's transcendence of Levinas' limitations is not unrelated to this concretizing gesture: in drawing attention to the long *durée* implications of colonialism, Dussel "articulate[es] a genealogical view that helps to explain better the links between modernity and war."<sup>28</sup> The question remains of whether the latter advance is possible without the ostensible errors and dangers that it entails.

To the claim that the transposition of Levinasian categories onto the global scale—one which very much parallels what we have seen in Fanon—constitutes a dangerous reduction in the very alterity that defines the other, Dussel has at least one defense. As we have seen, Dussel's understanding of exteriority is one which is always relative and generative of multifaceted subjects, individuals who are each to varying degrees *outside* the system, as we will see even more concretely in the next chapter. Put differently, to be "outside" is—at least to some degree—to grasp one's ontological exclusion and to orient oneself in an absolute sense *against* that

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<sup>24</sup> Like Sorel, Dussel grants some importance to the concept of *diremption*. See Dussel, *El último Marx*, 346, 356n61; *Método para una filosofía de la liberación*, 18 and appendix.

<sup>25</sup> As Levinas notes in his critique of Hegelian dialectics, "If the same were to establish its identity by *simple opposition to the other*, it would already be part of a totality encompassing the same and the other." Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague: Kluwer, 1969), 38. Certainly, this is true of dialectics understood as simple opposition, but as Fanon has shown us already, and as Dussel will show below—in his insistence on the necessity of a reconstituted dialectic—one must seek instead to understand the *relationship* between simple opposition (Fanon's Manichaeism) and dynamic motion.

<sup>26</sup> Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 183.

<sup>27</sup> Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 225.

system of exclusion. The “alien faces” find themselves annihilated not only for their preordained alterity, but also for their interrogation of the system, their “questioning” of the totality.

This is not to deny some considerable and problematic slippage in Dussel’s account: in an effort to transpose Levinas’ absolute and abstract categories onto a political world considerably less abstract and absolute, Dussel attempts to finesse the conceptual trauma of such a gesture while insisting on various levels and degrees of exteriority, all of which are deeply interrelated. Hence while it is of course easier to identify and recognize the exteriority of pre-colonial societies that had yet to be incorporated into the Atlantic circuit and thereby into the modern/colonial world-system, Dussel’s formulation does not fetishize this sort of exteriority.<sup>29</sup> Instead, he insists that a lesser degree of exteriority persists both in colonized and nominally post-colonial societies, and even within Euro-American societies, but that this collective and geopolitical relationship inevitably impacts the individual’s “internal transcendental.”<sup>30</sup> Any critical sentiment toward an aspect of a prevailing social totality, insofar as this sentiment points *beyond* that totality, could be considered to some degree to have at least one foot in exteriority. In other words, Dussel only escapes Maldonado-Torres’ concern to the degree that he places this very slippage between individual, collective, and global at the heart of his conception of exteriority, and as with the move toward the concretization of Levinasian categories in the first place, it remains to be seen whether or not this slippage is a necessary and politically productive step.

More important for our task, however, is grasping the relationship between this notion of rupture—interior and exterior—and the concept of totality, and to what degree we can find here something akin to the reformulated dialectic of the counterdiscourse of separation as formulated by Sorel and Fanon. In terms of this task, Dussel’s emphasis on exteriority would seem to pose a challenge: if Sorel and Fanon formulated processes of identity formation premised upon the *internal* rupture or antagonistic division of the social totality and the political division of social unity, how could this in any way be squared with Dussel’s insistence on an *outward*-oriented rupture of the very borders of the system itself? And if both Sorel and Fanon explicitly viewed these processes as “dialectical”—as composed of and driven by conflictive opposition at the heart of the social totality—then what are we to make of Dussel’s critique of dialectics and embrace of an *analectics* beholden to exteriority, which turns to some degree away from internal conflict within the system to face the other?

Recall that, for Fanon, the constitution of black identity was a process of “violently” confronting the master, but also recall that in its separatist moment it had an inward aspect as well. Recall, too, that Fanon’s critique of Hegel was in part premised upon a lack of reciprocity whereby the slave is unable to turn away from the master to lose himself in the object, but instead—due to internalized, colonial self-hatred—“the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.”<sup>31</sup> And recall, finally, that once Fanon had transposed this view onto the global stage, this effort to turn away from the master and lose oneself in the object would acquire transnational significance in the process of forgetting the “European game” and turning instead toward the consolidation of a revolutionary Third World identity which is the only guarantor of eventual human universalism. Hence it would seem that whereas the separatist moment in Fanon

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<sup>29</sup> In terms of this pre-colonial exteriority and its legacies in the present, Dussel draws frequently upon Mariátegui. See, for example, *Política de la Liberación*, vol. I: *Historia mundial y crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 145; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 176-177.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195fn10; *Peau noire*, 179n9.

urges the facing of oneself and the facing of one's own people, Dussel's analectical imperative counsels instead the facing of an "other" as exteriority. But two things happen when Dussel transposes Levinasian categories onto concrete geopolitical relations. Firstly, whereas for Levinas the Other was always absolute, for Dussel this Other and the exteriority she marks is instead always relative, and thus the chasm between self and other begins to close. Secondly, this gap vanishes altogether once we realize that, for Dussel, this other refers on the broadest collective level to a Third World to which he himself belongs.<sup>32</sup> In other words, it is in the most problematic aspects of Dussel's concretization of Levinas that we can locate his proximity to Fanon on the question of dialectics and totality.

In terms of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, moreover, Dussel—like Fanon—insists that there is no reciprocity, and that such a dialectic as such "is no longer possible," but adds an additional aspect to this observation, one which derives directly from his own experience: "the slave disappears from the horizon—by death. The periphery knows so many deaths—Patrice Lumumba, Ben Barka, Elieser Gaetán, Oscar Romero..."<sup>33</sup> If their critiques of Hegel are strikingly similar, what remains to be seen is whether or not Dussel will respond as did Fanon—with a projection of internal rupture which jumpstarts a reformulated dialectical progression—or whether his emphasis on exteriority and analectics would result in a de-emphasizing of the moment of internal rupture and conflict in favor of an ethical stance. But this question cannot be properly grasped without first understanding how Dussel views the relationship between dialectics and analectics.

## Dialectics and analectics

As we saw, Dussel's initial break with Heideggerian ontology occurred via Hegelian dialectics as a process of internal rupture of what he perceived as a smooth and flat ontology, but we also saw that Dussel's nascent Hegelianism was to be short-lived, and he almost immediately undertook a critique of Hegel from the perspective of a Levinasian ethics of the other, seeking not only internal division of the totality but the external rupture of its borders.<sup>34</sup> This critique of Hegelian dialectics is evident from Dussel's explicit alignment of dialectics, here following Levinas closely, with both ontology and totality. As he puts it: "The proper sphere of the dialectic is the ontological... The category proper to the dialectical method is that of totality. Its

<sup>32</sup> More problematically, however, is the fact that in Maldonado-Torres' words, Dussel "portray[s] the role of the other himself" (*Against War*, 183).

<sup>33</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 51; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 67. According to Barber (*Ethical Hermeneutics*, 26), what Dussel dislikes about Hegel is the lack of an Other and the sacralization of the existing in the valuing of the Absolute over "other particular peoples."

<sup>34</sup> While some consider Levinas to be fundamentally Hegelian, the ambiguity between this assertion and Levinas' own critique of Hegel can be seen as a doubling of the difficulty we have faced from the outset: the distance that separates dialectics conservatively understood as totalizing, perfect division of the totality, and the unity of opposites, versus dialectics as a generative and open-ended motion whose effects are largely unpredictable. This, too, will mark both Dussel's terminological distance from Sorel and Fanon and his conceptual proximity. Robert Bernasconi insists that "Levinas is not simply opposed to Hegel" and to insist so is "wrong and self-defeating," in "Hegel and Levinas: The Possibility of Reconciliation and Forgiveness," *Archivio di Filosofia* 54 (1986), 325-346, here: 325; see also "Levinas Face to Face – with Hegel," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 13/3 (October 1982), 267-276. See also Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: a Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 265. Hodgson makes the necessary argument that Hegelianism has been portrayed—by Levinas and others—as something far more totalizing than it actually was meant to be.



principle is that of identity and difference.”<sup>35</sup> Difference, put differently, is always a category of the same, internal to the system and pointing always toward resolution *within* that system. Dialectics thus understood as a philosophy of difference, the conservative dialectics which we have been confronting from the outset, represents what Dussel terms “the ontological method of philosophy.”<sup>36</sup> Here, Dussel like Levinas relies on an arguably oversimplified and certainly selective understanding of dialectics, one limited to and contained within the bounds of the totality, one whose two parts perfectly divide that totality without remainder or overlap, and one whose motion—rather than incessant, open-ended, and unpredictable—is rather stale and mechanical, reaffirming rather than radically transforming the totality from which it sets out.<sup>37</sup> For the moment, though, it is more productive to accept the caricature and to focus on what the extremity of this arguably distorted image of dialectics teaches us.

Against this sort of totality-bound dialectical method, Dussel erects what he calls “analectics,” in which the “ano” refers to the realm of the beyond, to exteriority, to the Other.<sup>38</sup> But crucially given our concern to parse Dussel’s understanding of the dialectic, analectics appears not as a *method* per se—i.e. as a *replacement* for dialectics—but rather as a “moment.” Given both the totalitarian threat of ontology and its violent hostility to alterity, as well as the reality of exteriority promised by our freedom and transcendence and the concrete oppression of colonized and formerly colonized spaces, “the negative dialectic is no longer enough.”<sup>39</sup> As negative (which for Dussel does not mean merely open-ended), a strictly dialectical rupture which is in all aspects contained within the totality can neither gesture toward its transcendence nor accommodate our own transcendent desires, and much less can it accommodate the “cultural exteriority” that Dussel grants the Third World. Rather, “the analectical moment is the foothold for new unfoldings,” for a politics of transformation not confined to immanence.<sup>40</sup> Whereas dialectics proper, for Dussel, constitutes an ontological reference to totality via identity/difference, “the analectical moment opens us up to the metaphysical sphere... Its proper category is that of exteriority... Its principle is not that of identity but rather that of separation, distinction.”<sup>41</sup>

Dussel’s alignment of categories is therefore the following:

	<u>(negative) dialectics</u>	<u>(positive) analectics</u>
Sphere:	ontological	metaphysical
Category:	totality	exteriority
Principle:	identity/difference	separation/distinction

<sup>35</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 157, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 189.

<sup>36</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 190.

<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, Dussel on several occasions gestures toward such an understanding of dialectics, for example, when he refers positively to the idea of “relaunching the system as a whole in a dialectical motion that leaves persons free” (*Philosophy of Liberation*, 62, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 80).

<sup>38</sup> Here, the etymology is ambiguous, since an-/ana-/ano- are generally held to mean “up, upward; back, backward, against; again, anew.”

<sup>39</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 190. He adds: “The negative dialectical method of someone like Marcuse, Adorno, or even Bloch is naïve with respect to the positive criticality of the utopia of political exteriority offered by peripheral peoples, the working-class woman, the oppressed youth, and the dependent societies” (159-160, modified; 191).

<sup>40</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158-159, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 190-191.

Here we confront an apparent challenge to terminology guiding our project, if not a fundamental conflict within our framework of analysis as a whole. In Dussel's formulation, identity stands *alongside* totality and against separation, and not *against* totality and alongside separation as even our title suggests. But as we will see below, this seeming tension emerges directly from the fact that the thinkers in question—Sorel and Fanon—both understood their theories primarily in dialectical terms (for understandable reasons of context) and allowed their confrontation with the paradigm of totality to remain largely on the implicit level (a clear outgrowth of the first). Both, moreover, faced with the ambiguity at the heart of dialectical thinking and the manifest presence of *two dialectics*, choose a politics of reformulation rather than one of replacement, opting to maintain what is revolutionary in the dialectic while subjecting it incessantly to revolutionary pressure. If Dussel re-centers our attention directly on totality, it is only to be expected that certain terminological resignifications and even reconceptualizations occur.

But the dialectics-analectics binary is not so simple even within Dussel's own work, as he is quick to note that the analectical *moment* is part of a “metaphysical dialectical *method*.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, *despite* Dussel's harsh and arguably caricatured picture of dialectics—one derived from Levinas and which in many ways echoes Foucault's anxieties expressed in his lectures of the same year—he is nevertheless unwilling to fully jettison the idea of dialectical motion *in toto* (and his choice here is superior to Foucault's in both philosophical and political terms). Much like our own counterdiscourse, Dussel envisions here a “sequence” of moments, of which, to speak more precisely, the analectic moment is the first, in which “totality is called into question by the provocative (apocalyptic) appeal [*interpelación*] of the other.”<sup>43</sup> But as is perhaps clear, this is more than a merely internal and negative critique of the totality, more than merely dialectical rupture. While not a contradiction or denial of dialectics—but rather its consummation—the analectical moment provides a sort of positive and substantive stepping-stone from which dialectic can then operate,<sup>44</sup> and this stepping-stone is no more and no less than

the *affirmation* of exteriority: it is not only the denial of the denial of the system on the basis of the affirmation of the totality [i.e. a dialectical “negation of the negation”]. It is the overcoming of the totality but not merely as the actuality of what is present in the system as potential [*en potencia*, immanence]. It is the overcoming of totality on the basis of internal transcendentality or exteriority, that which has never been within [or subsumed]. To affirm exteriority is to realize what is impossible for the system... it is to realize the *new*, that which is unforeseeable from the perspective of the totality, that which emerged from an unconditioned, revolutionary, and innovative freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Here we find both the centrality of the category of exteriority to Dussel's thought as well as some of its deep ambiguities. That he speaks of “internal transcendentality *or* exteriority” alerts

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<sup>42</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 159, my emphasis; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 191.

<sup>43</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 159, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 191. This implies, a la Fanonian sociogenesis, that “theory is not sufficient in analectics,” and that responding to the other is a necessarily praxical task (it is politics rather than political science).

<sup>44</sup> See Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 26-27: Hence despite submitting it to analectics and the Other, after this “conversion... Philosophy then proceeds dialectically, borne along by the word of the Other.” *Like Fanon and Sorel, there is a sort of sub-dialectical movement.*

<sup>45</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 160, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 192.

us to the not insignificant tension between the individual and the collective levels, and between exteriority as transcendental creativity or as the product of colonial domination (the final rendering as “freedom” sits uneasily with his concretization of the Other as colonized).

But these ambiguities aside, the fundamentals of Dussel’s emphasis on the analectic here emerge: it is through an initial reference to an outside—whether individual, collective, or geopolitical—that we can most readily break out of the limitations of the conservative dialectic, beholden to totality and marked by the assimilation of the other to the logic of the same. While the practical significance of this turn toward analectics is not immediately clear (we will deal with this more directly in the next chapter), here it is worth noting that Dussel’s point is simply that the overcoming of various systems of oppression cannot emerge from what is immanent within them, at least not solely on that basis, and that moreover, there are systems of oppression whose *precise basis* is not internalized oppression but rather exclusion. Thus to overcome capitalism, we must recognize firstly that the immanent perfection of the (European) proletariat as revolutionary subject is to be immediately suspect, and moreover that “capitalism” itself must be interrogated as the object of our analysis to accommodate race, gender, colonialism, etc.

Dussel reformulates this broader process, that which sets out from the steady footing of analectical positivity as a reference to exteriority as an “ana-dialectic,” a sort of *positive* dialectic (but certainly one which bears little resemblance to that which Marcuse, Adorno, *et al* deemed the “positive” object of their negative critique, one marked by precisely the cannibalistic fetishization of totality that Dussel is attacking).<sup>46</sup> Whereas for Sorel and Fanon, the stepping-stone to dialectical motion was provided by an internal process of what I have deemed the counterdiscourse of separation—dividing the social totality through the mythical projection of identity—Dussel formulates this point of departure in explicitly external terms. But as we have seen, this nominally external relation—as internal transcendence—is not *geographically* or *historically* external as its caricature might suggest, but rather politically and philosophically external in the sense of the transcendent “new” that cannot be accommodated by the existing, by the plane of pure immanence.

As should be clear by now, however, analectics alone is insufficient. In other words, both sides of the equation—situated as moments in a process—are necessary, since dialectics offers both a lens through which to view rupture internal to the totality, as well as an understanding of the process that such rupture (be it internal or analectical-external) sets into motion.<sup>47</sup> Dussel, however, insists that “the pure negativity of [dialectical] contradiction is neither the source nor the resolution of dialectics.”<sup>48</sup> If the totality, as a result of its own internal logic, tends to reify

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<sup>46</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 160; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 192. Interesting here is Dussel’s insistence that this method is that of politics rather than of political science. Further, it is precisely the analectical moment that allows the transcendence of science, and thereby the dangers of a vulgar scientism which hypostatizes the merely existing (and which Dussel would doubtless associate—alongside most critical theorists—with the dangers of the Soviet experience, see figure 5.9.1 in *Filosofía de Liberación*, 203, which is inexplicably and like many of the original figures left out of the English translation, and which portrays fascist ideology as a circle partially occluded by scientism). For Dussel, the Eurocentric opposition between ideology and science is itself ideological (167).

<sup>47</sup> “In this model, one must introduce the dialectical moment to know how to situate each fact in its context or conditioning totality, and the analectical moment to know how to detect the dysfunctional appeals [*interpelaciones*] that the oppressed continually launch from the exteriority of the constituted system” (*Philosophy of Liberation*, 166, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 198).

<sup>48</sup> He continues: “Dialectical change is the passage to a new totality. It takes place by the overcoming of a contradiction. Contradiction appears in the emergence of a historical subject—an unemployed class, with untapped

itself as a perfect unity—in other words, if it *fetishizes* itself—then the response which detotalizes the reified walls of the totality is, for Dussel, necessarily understood as an anti-fetishist process:

Antifetishism, a negative notion that deliberately tries to veil its infinite metaphysical affirmation, is the guarantee of the *perennial dialectic of history*, of the detotalization that liberation produced in all fossilized systems. Atheism vis-à-vis the present system is a prerequisite for innovative, procreative, liberatory praxis.<sup>49</sup>

Like Sorel, for whom subjective activity stands as precondition for world-historical objectivity, Dussel here speaks in similarly paradoxical terms: it is only the anti-fetishistic praxis of breaking down the walls of the totality—in which we must ourselves engage and the parameters of which we must formulate—that can “guarantee” something so “perennial” as the dialectic of history, here understood as a process setting out from exteriority.

Dussel has a very precise name for this process, this ana-dialectical progression which initiates revolutionary motion according to a logic other than the logic of the same, an anti-colonial dialectic which seeks to avoid the colonization of dialectics: he calls it quite simply “liberation,” and it serves as the basis for his own “philosophy of liberation,” whose name is an explicit reference to his origins in the theology of liberation. A specter haunts the Global South, he insists, and its name is philosophy of liberation, a form of thought which reflects upon and responds to European philosophy from a position of “total exteriority” (recalling that such a position is itself a political question, a question of one’s own self-orientation of total opposition).<sup>50</sup> Here Dussel simultaneously echoes W.E.B. Du Bois and Marx: it is this very same position of exteriority that grants peripheral philosophy such as his own a sort of “second sight”—as Dussel puts it: “these are the ones who have a clear mind for pondering reality. They have nothing to hide”—and an inherent freedom from the ideological chains that binds its European counterpart: “Philosophical intelligence is never so truthful, pure, and precise as when it starts from oppression and does not have any privileges to defend, because it has none at all.”<sup>51</sup>

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productive potential. When the other one in the system emerges—as other with both exteriority and internal transcendental (deeper consciousness of a class capable of greater productivity, and consciousness of a longer history of prior to the dominating system) contradiction crystallizes. Opposition is real when, in view of [against?] a dominant class, there emerges a dominated class as a rebellious class, a nonconforming class, an *other* class. Neither passive negativity or contradiction (one class is not another class) nor active negativity (one class struggles against another class) originates and resolves itself in pure negativity. Negativity, passive as well as active, originates in the exteriority of internal transcendental, in the analectical affirmation of the alterity of an emergent class, emerging as distinct. It is inevitable, dreadful, new. Its positive irruption founds opposition and struggle. The system enters into crisis. [this is what he means by “surplus work” as internal transcendental, untapped resources] The dialectical process as passage to a new totality cannot support itself only in the negative thrust of negation... It is because of this that the analectical moment of dialectical movement is the origin and resolution of that same dialectics and its negativity.” Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 136-137, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 165-166.

<sup>49</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 96, translation modified, my emphasis; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 3; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 4, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 14. Maldonado-Torres has noted how such formulations serve as a self-authorization of Dussel’s own thought, and in light of this passage in particular, we could note more specifically the fact that Dussel, as a middle-class, white, well-educated Argentine professor, certainly enjoys some “privileges” that such sweeping claims can serve to obscure.

Peripheral philosophy, insofar as it is a philosophy of liberation, has nothing to lose but its chains, and a world to gain.<sup>52</sup>

Against the classic ontology of the center, from Hegel to Marcuse, just to name the most lucid that Europe has to offer, a philosophy of liberation is rising from the periphery, from the oppressed, from the shadow that the light of Being has not been able to illuminate. From non-Being, nothingness, the Other, exteriority, the mystery of non-sense, it is from here that our thought will set out. It is, then, a “barbarian philosophy.”<sup>53</sup>

Here we could note a shared if ambiguous affirmation of barbarism that runs throughout our project. Once in the realm of history and politics—once Dussel has transposed Levinasian categories onto the concrete world, thereby (in)fusing them with dialectical motion—not only does philosophy gain additional content, but so to do all other categories deployed in Dussel’s work. The abstract Levinasian notion whereby the prevailing totality expands, colonizing exteriority and reducing alterity to the logic of the same becomes instead a “huge dialectico-ontological process of human history,” and more precisely, the history of a very literal colonization:

Clothed in noble, warlike, healthy, Nietzschean virtues, white-skinned and blond-haired like the Aryans, Europe throws itself onto the periphery, onto the geopolitical exteriority... In the name of Being... it annihilates the alterity of Others... violently expands the frontiers of its world... The conquest of Latin America, the enslavement of Africa and its colonization, as well as that of Asia, constitute the dominating dialectical expansion of “the same” that murders “the other,” totalizing it in “the same”... Tautology takes possession of everything: “the eternal return of the same.”<sup>54</sup>

Hence the totality is far from a static and self-contained organic sphere, but is instead one which expands “tautologically,” incorporating non-Being into sameness.

In contrast to this steady expansion of the same through the extension of the borders which establish and determine its sameness, ana-dialectical liberation, “the passage from ontology to the transontological,” is according to Dussel, very literally an-archy in the sense of moving “beyond the principle”<sup>55</sup> structuring the present, rupturing as it does the very boundaries that distinguish Being from its opposite: “Liberation is the very metaphysical or transontological movement itself by which the horizon of the world is pierced. It is the act that opens the breach,<sup>56</sup> perforates the wall, and penetrates deeply into an unsuspected, future, and truly new

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<sup>52</sup> But the second sight of peripheral thought should not be understood as a simplistic valorization, but is contingent upon its orientation toward liberation. There is a perennial temptation for peripheral thought to look toward the core, toward Europe, and doing so constitutes “its death as philosophy; it is its birth as completed ontology and as ideology. Thought that takes refuge in the core ends up thinking it to be the only reality. Beyond its borders is non-Being, nothingness, barbarism, non-sense.” Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 4, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 14, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 52-53, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 68-69. This is a Manichean geography of colonization which parallels on the global scale Fanon’s geography of colonized society in *Wretched*. Both, moreover, will give way to a similar geography of liberation. For a similarly geographical project, see George Ciccariello-Maher, “Toward a Racial Geography of Caracas: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Fear of Penetration,” *Qui Parle* 16, n. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), 39-72.

<sup>55</sup> Here, again, Dussel chooses to translate “ana” as “beyond” rather than the standard “without.”

<sup>56</sup> See the discussion of Alí Primera’s *Abrebrecha* (or “Open the Breach”) in the next chapter.

exteriority.”<sup>57</sup> This process, as should be clear, is a violent one vis-à-vis the borders that police Being and exclude the barbarians. It is “a real criticism of the system; it is rupture; it is destruction. Goodness, *diffusivum sui*, reveals itself in detotalizing the system and annihilating repressive frontiers.”<sup>58</sup> Hence liberation is a process whereby the totality is ruptured, whereby the apartheid walls of Being—in seemingly Fanonian fashion—come crashing down. “Thus philosophy is death—death to everydayness, to the secure naïveté of the system,” and one which, returning to its analectical source, fully opens the doorway to exteriority as an “unfathomable spring of wisdom.”<sup>59</sup> But as a process which both *begins* from exteriority before then rupturing totality and *returning* to that exteriority, there remains a certain ambiguity as to whether this rupture is fully internal (as with Sorel and Fanon), fully external, or both, an ambiguity which would only gain clarification on the *political* level in Dussel’s concept of the people, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

On the basis of what we have just seen, however, a number of outstanding points seem relevant to our discussion. Firstly, it is clear that we must not overstate the opposition between exteriority and internal rupture in Dussel’s work, as the former is not geographically simplistic. Rather, as a category which moves from “internal transcendentality” to the geopolitics of the Third World, Dussel’s formulation of exteriority is one that cross-cuts all levels, from the individual to the global, gaining in relevance to the degree that it sacrifices internal coherence. Hence Fanon’s turn to first black and later decolonial/national identity as the basis for transcendence does not constitute a clear contradiction of the Dusselian view. If anything, the fact that both thinkers turn to Third World and anti-colonial liberation, we can see even more clearly that Fanon’s intellectual trajectory draws him through the different levels of Dussel’s understanding of exteriority: from individual/group identity and revolt (in *Black Skin, White Masks*) to the consolidation of the foundations for the revolutionary struggle of a united periphery (in *Wretched of the Earth*).<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, this compatibility seems especially clear once we note the centrality of such categories as Being and non-Being—and the implicit critique of totality that these suggest—in Fanon’s work. Here, moreover, a shared critique of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic clearly draws the two thinkers together, and despite Dussel’s nominal subjection of dialectics to analectics, we would still characterize his philosophy as a reformulation of the former with the tools of the latter. Certainly, this reformulation is more significant in some ways than in Fanon’s case: with Fanon, we reject the simplistic view of dialectics as totalizing, but this does not deny the very real transformation that the category of exteriority introduces, pushing the notion of rupture from the center of the totality to its external borders. After all, was not Fanon’s description of the Manichaeism of the colonial world—by virtue of the very absoluteness of the

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<sup>57</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 58, 61-62, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 75, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Here echoing Fanon and Lewis Gordon, this ontological violence toward the system will always be perceived as such (even if it entails little “violence” in the everyday sense), and as such is inevitably “illegal.” Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 66, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 178-180, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 212-215. Dussel illustrates the position of philosophy of liberation vis-à-vis the people in yet another figure inexplicably left out of the English translation, in which philosophy of liberation draws upon elements of both “ambiguous [i.e. traditional, Eurocentric] philosophy” (embedded within political bureaucracy) and the “fictitious [i.e. equally Eurocentric] left” (situated between the people and the scientism of the dominant classes) [both of these achieving liberatory status by “turning toward” the people], but which is itself nestled fully within the bosom of the people. *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 203, Esquema 5.9.1.

<sup>60</sup> For a contemporary effort to draw Dussel and Fanon together, see Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*.

division between good and evil that it entailed—not also one of exteriority and exclusion? Was it not defined by the “decision to occupy nothing else but a territory”? And is it not likely that, from the perspective of the colonizer, the native is fully reduced to non-Being, to an ontological outsider?

If we have seen that Dussel’s conception of exteriority overlaps with Fanon’s Third World when transposed into geopolitical terms, and that like Fanon this formulation frames a global conflict in which forces both internal (dialectical) and external (analectical) to the prevailing totality rupture the ontological barriers which on the global level separate Being from non-Being, it still remains to formulate this anadialectical political subject in concrete political terms. Put differently, is Dussel’s subject simply all members of colonized societies, and his project therefore one compatible with the most straightforward of Third World nationalisms? Or is his understanding of this global rupture a more complex one which, like Fanon’s, entails a much more complicated understanding of “nation” that is inflected with multiple variables (class, race, education, culture, etc.), one which rather than merely *existing* must be formulated as a political *project*, to be *project-ed* (moment one of our counterdiscourse) as an identity against empire?

While the identity of this political subject would only find its fullest formulation thirty years later in Dussel’s *Twenty Theses on Politics* (the subject of our next chapter), already in *Philosophy of Liberation* we see the kernel of its development in Dussel’s distinction between *two nationalisms*: that of Atatürk, Gandhi, Sukarno, Nasser, Cárdenas, Perón, and (notably) Senghor on the one hand, versus that of Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Lumumba, Neto, Castro, Sandino, Allende, and (equally notably) Fanon on the other. Much like Sorel’s and Fanon’s distinction between two “violences,” Dussel’s distinction between two nationalisms focuses on the distinguishing *content* underlying a seemingly shared *form*. This content of the nation—which already contains both a fundamental compatibility with Fanon as well as a categorical divergence—Dussel locates cryptically in “the very idea of a people within a nation.”<sup>61</sup> The radical nationalism with which he plainly identifies depends precisely on this concept of “a people,” one which tends toward the same vagaries of nation, but which Dussel immediately identifies with “the perspective of the oppressed classes,” classes which include *campesinos* as well as the underdeveloped working class and marginal sectors, classes which stand in opposition to dominant classes and middle classes.<sup>62</sup>

Such enigmatic references would later be fleshed out in Dussel’s understanding of the people as a radical identity and as a historical subject which constitutes itself—much like those identities discussed in prior chapters—through the self-activity of rupturing the prevailing totality. This will be an identity which, while notably variegated and multiple, gains a basic distinction in its internal structure from what we have just seen, from Dussel’s ana-dialectic: in the concept of the people, exteriority as exclusion (the analectical division of the system from what lies *beyond* it) and internal oppression (the dialectical division *within* that totality) combine to constitute a potent historical subject. It is in the further concretization that is the people, too,

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<sup>61</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 70, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 89. This occurs within the shift from a discussion of “global political exteriority” to “national social exteriority.” Keally McBride might disagree with Dussel here on Ho Chi Minh: See “Self-Determination Reconsidered: Revolutions of Decolonization and Postcolonial Citizenship,” in Margaret Kohn and Keally McBride, *Colonial Critique and Postcolonial Power: Political Theory at the End of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 70-71, translation modified; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 89.

that Dussel's position within our counterdiscourse will come into focus: as a non-“substantialist” (that is, non-objective) identity, “the people” must be projected (moment one), and this projection takes the form of a division of the totality (moment two), but not only that, since it cuts as well into the realm of exteriority. Nevertheless, the moment of antagonistic consolidation *within* that totality (moment three) remains, and is arguably more directed against that totality itself—or at least its governing logic—than was the case with the other thinkers we have discussed. Finally, it is this projection of antagonism which has the effect of opening the way to a radically indeterminate future (moment four), and it is arguably the case that Dussel's emphasis on exteriority renders this future even less determinate than it had been in Fanon and Sorel.

But as we will see below, this understanding of the concept of the people will draw Dussel into conflict with much of the European political and theoretical tradition, as well as its self-proclaimed standard-bearers in the present. As we move forward thirty years to Dussel's more recently formulated *politics* of liberation, the practical complement to his *philosophy*, we will see to what degree the dissonance he poses to such traditional views marks his compatibility with the counterdiscourse of separation we have been tracking throughout this project. But first, we must consider one peculiarly potent contemporary formulation of the idea of the people, one which aligns that concept precisely with the paradigm of totality that our project, and Dussel's, is committed to destabilize.



## Chapter 6 – The People is Not One: Dussel’s *Twenty Theses on Politics*

In this chapter, we turn to the final of four identities: popular identity, or “the people.” Like class identity for Sorel and black and later decolonial-national identity for Fanon, Enrique Dussel will formulate the concept of the people as one of a rupture which sets into motion a progression that we have termed the counterdiscourse of separation, in which the moment of projected conflict in the present is privileged as the path toward a displaced universal. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, this conflict and rupture will assume in Dussel’s work a dual character: as internal, dialectical rupture, and as outward-oriented rupture located at the borderlands of the totality, at the frontiers of Being itself. It is the fusion of these two moments of rupture—embodied as the categories of the oppressed, on the one hand, and the excluded, on the other—that Dussel will transpose politically onto his conception of the people. While this transposition to the concrete will not resolve entirely the tensions we identified in Dussel’s appropriation of the Levinasian framework, we will see that this new concreteness grants Dussel’s category of the people a *political* relevance and utility which is undeniable.

Finally, as a perhaps insufficient but nevertheless illuminating gesture toward the concretization of our project, we will turn briefly to contemporary Latin America, and Venezuela more specifically. Arriving via the opposing theorizations of the people offered by Venezuelan founding father Rómulo Betancourt and revolutionary folk singer Alí Primera, we will discuss the contemporary deployment of the concept of the people in the Chavista phenomenon and the Bolivarian Revolution more generally. As we will see, not only is it the case that the category of the people operates in Venezuela much as does our counterdiscourse of separation, but moreover that it serves the function not merely of another in the series of identities that we have considered, but instead of a multifaceted and collective identity which is capable of gathering these identities into a historical subject without impinging (at least in theory) upon their autonomous dynamics.

But if we are here going to turn to the concept of the people as an identity which—in line with our counterdiscourse of separation—serves to divide society into antagonistic parties engaged in a reformulated (ana-)dialectical progression, then we must first come to terms with an immediate challenge. I refer to the frequent insistence on the people as a totalizing concept, an expression of social unity that is hostile to difference, seeking to reduce that difference to the same, an insistence that we will consider below as formulated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. If Dussel is to both engage in a head-on assault on the concept of totality as a framework for homogenization and colonization, then how is it that he comes to celebrate the people as a radically disruptive and ruptural identity?

### “The *Multitude* against the *People*”<sup>1</sup>

In their series of jointly-authored books, American cultural theorist Michael Hardt and former Italian radical Antonio Negri have taken up the twofold project of diagnosing a new form of global governance—what they call, in a volume of the same name, “*Empire*”—and throwing their lot in with the new historical subject standing against Empire, namely “*Multitude*,” whose

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ch. XXII, viii.

parameters they sketch in a similarly eponymous text.<sup>2</sup> Drawing inspiration from the anxieties tormenting the unitary dreams of Thomas Hobbes, Hardt and Negri (as well as Italian theorist Paolo Virno, whose Hobbesian derivation of the Multitude directly inspired them) grant this Multitude all the aspects of multiplicity and radical irreducibility that they so value.<sup>3</sup> The Multitude, for Hardt and Negri, is no more and no less than *the* revolutionary identity *par excellence* of our moment, a moment marked by the global saturation of information technologies and the dissolution of both the traditional working class and the nation-state as an autonomous and sovereign unit. The Multitude is, moreover and in terms of our project, an identity constituted *not* by rupture of the totality, but rather one derived directly from the global totality itself, and which stands as the mode of opposition immanent to Empire itself.

This much is perhaps well-known, but less commented upon is the ground-clearing exercise Hardt and Negri undertake in order to make the centrality of the Multitude a *necessity* rather than a mere possibility. Put differently, the argument for the Multitude as not merely *one*, but *the* revolutionary political subject of our contemporary moment, requires that these authors critically engage with and discard a number of other political identities, and for these purposes, they have a particularly serious bone to pick when it comes to the idea of the people. As they describe it,

*The people* has traditionally been a unitary conception. The population, of course, is characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the population a single identity: “the people” is one. The multitude, in contrast, is many.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the idea of the people, in Hardt and Negri’s view, erases all social distinction in what they term an “undifferentiated unity.”<sup>5</sup>

Already in this passage, we have two elements of a critique of the concept of the people, and these are fundamentally relevant to our project as a whole. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, I will summarize these two interlocking claims (to which we will add a third) as:

- 1.) The people, as a substitution for the population, is itself singular and coincides with the society in question as a totality, and

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); to these we could add the most recent and purportedly final contribution to the trilogy, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between people and multitude first appears in developed form in Paolo Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus,” in P. Virno and M. Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), especially 200-202. Negri’s contribution to this volume, by contrast, is notably pre-empire in its formulations, and even suggests the need to redefine “the people” in a way suited to our post-Fordist era. Antonio Negri, “Constituent Republic,” in P. Virno and M. Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy*, 215.

<sup>4</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, xiv. For Hardt and Negri, “the masses” constitutes a distinct and non-unified concept, but one which, they claim, erases all difference. While they later admit that the people serves as a term mediating between the population and sovereignty (*Multitude*, 79), they effectively reduce the people to a cynical ploy of that sovereignty. As a result, the continuous reappearance of forms of domination within resistance movements is not an inevitable result of political dynamics, but rather the effect of an imperfect concept of revolutionary subject.

<sup>5</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 99. The authors later root this conception in the work of Rousseau’s fetishization of popular unity in the general will (242-243), but their Eurocentric vision occludes very real practical departures from such canonical formulations.

- 2.) the people is a unity which is also *unifying*, functioning to gather together its constituent parts into a substantive unity.

Put more simply, the people, in this view, is both totalizing and unifying, colonizing all space within a totality and demanding from those inhabiting it a sort of total and unified allegiance. Virno describes this gathering effect he attributes to the people as “centripetal,” one which furthermore creates unity through a reinforcement of the distinction between self and other, inside and outside.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Fanonian progression in which the decolonial struggle transforms the masses into a people, thereby creating and spreading the nation with every hillside occupied, Hardt and Negri insist on an inverted view in which “every nation must make the multitude into a people.”<sup>7</sup> The people here figures as the creator of barriers—as the vehicle of a self-totalizing totality, to borrow Dussel’s description—rather than the knock-down of walls.

Put more generally in terms of the concepts that shape this project, Hardt, Negri, and Virno view the people as a conception which both coincides with and reinforces the prevailing totality: as, in short, something we should oppose in no uncertain terms.

To these two elements of an understanding of the people, these authors add a third whose implications are even more stark in political terms than the previous two:

- 3.) The people, as a retroactive construction which obscures the machinations of sovereignty is—like the nation—fundamentally complicit with the state.

As Virno describes it, the people is merely a “reverberation” or even a “reflection” of the state: “If there is a State, then there are people. In the absence of the State, there are no people... Before the State, there were many; after the establishment of the State, there is the One-people, endowed with a single will.”<sup>8</sup> Virno, in adopting his formulation of the people so directly from Hobbes, remains trapped within the latter’s categories. Whether it be in Virno’s description of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century debates surrounding the establishment of a properly modern nation-state,<sup>9</sup> or Hardt and Negri’s description of the drama (and “trauma”) of the French Revolution,<sup>10</sup> the story

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<sup>6</sup> Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, tr. I. Bertoletti, J. Cascaito, and A. Casson (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2001]), 21. In Hardt and Negri’s words, this slightly Schmittian description of the people is one which “tends toward identity and homogeneity internally while posing its difference from and excluding what remains outside of it.” Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103. The Schmittian echoes here are no mistake, and reflect the error that this counterdiscourse of separation hopes to remedy: namely, Schmitt’s naturalization of the location of these borders, this separation of inside from outside, and his anxiety toward Sorel’s (and Lenin’s) formulations in which the antagonistic frontier is pushed *within* the social totality. See also Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103. Of course, were the people here understood differently, this would not be the inverse of Fanon’s view, but merely a formulation which puts the precondition (the people) prior to the result (the nation).

<sup>8</sup> Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> For Virno, the idea of the multitude constituted the pre-history of that state, a threat and specter that Hobbes fought insistently to exorcise, doing so through a rigid counterposition of multitude and people, the undisciplined and multivocal many to the single and potentially sovereign singularity. The people, according to Virno, won that debate.

<sup>10</sup> For Hardt and Negri, the nation initially appeared in the work of Sièyes as a concept of rupture, associated with the Third Estate, the bourgeoisie, a part rather than the whole. But this same concept would be quickly recentered as a concept of totality, trapped by sovereignty once bourgeois hegemony was established, and “consigned to all the Thermidors” (*Empire*, 101). But while the unification of nation with people that grounded the “Jacobin sensibility” appeared to some in those historical moments to have slipped the yoke of sovereignty, this was “really nothing more than another turn of the screw”: “just as the concept of nation completes the notion of sovereignty by claiming to

is essentially the same: the people is inevitably a unifying ruse of power, inevitably reactionary, inevitably Jacobin. The people, as the legitimator of violence toward the seizure of power, is by definition the embodiment of an unjust “usurpation.”<sup>11</sup> This view shared by and among the multitudinists, which binds the state so tightly and irreversibly to the people and the people to the state, would—if sustainable—constitute a possibly insurmountable challenge to the claiming of any notion of the people for an “anti-Jacobin” project like our own.

The multitude, by contrast, since it is incapable of transferring its individual wills to a sovereign center, is anti-state by virtue of being anti-people, and anti-people by virtue of being anti-state; it is, in Virno’s words, “identified with the risks which weigh upon stateness.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas the people is a “constituted synthesis that is prepared for sovereignty,” the multitude is by contrast a “constituent relation.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, for Hobbes as for his latter-day opponent-supporters, any rebellion against the state cannot take the form of the people since it is in fact its opposite: “the *Citizens* against the *City*, that is to say, the *Multitude* against the *People*.”<sup>14</sup>

Before turning to Dussel’s alternative formulation of the people—one which challenges these three claims in a direct manner—we must briefly speak to Hardt and Negri’s rearguard attempt to slam the door shut to such alternatives, alternatives which find their basis in the very different realities of colonized spaces. This attempt emerges with regard to the precise operations of the second, centripetal effect that they attribute to the concept of the people. This effect comprises, for Hardt and Negri, two operations, one external (to Europe) and one internal: the first takes the form of the dialectic of colonial racism which defined Europeans in opposition to their colonized subjects, and the latter emerges through the representation of the whole by the part, by a hegemonic class.<sup>15</sup> The latter refers for its historical content to Thermidor, the moment at which the people as a concept of rupture by a particular class fails to maintain the openness of that rupture as a political wound, becoming instead, in our Foucaultian register, “centered” through an alignment with sovereignty.<sup>16</sup>

What is key, however, is the one-sidedness of this formulation: from the engagement with colonialism we rapidly move to an intra-European development which, despite its specificity, is nevertheless granted the status of a “decisive shift in the concept of sovereignty” whereby the latter became a practice of unity rather than a management of conflict.<sup>17</sup> Not *a* concept of sovereignty, but *the* concept of sovereignty, and here they wear their Eurocentrism quite proudly and shamelessly:

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precede it, so too the concept of the people completes that of nation through another feigned logical regression. Each logical step back functions to solidify the power of sovereignty by mystifying its basis, that is, by resting on the naturalness of the concept” (*Empire*, 102). And neither the people or the nation, according to Hardt and Negri, can or should be seen as natural, but both are successive inventions by the nation-state, flailing efforts to discover the foundations of its own sovereignty.

<sup>11</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103. Previously, constituent power had been defined by Virno and Hardt as: “a form of power that continually creates and animates a set of juridical and political frameworks. Its perpetually open processes should be contrasted with the static and closed character of constituted power.” *Radical Thought in Italy*, 261. See also Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, tr. M. Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999 [1992]).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, ch. XII, viii.

<sup>15</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 103-104.

<sup>16</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 101.

<sup>17</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 105.

The *entire tradition* of political theory seems to agree on one basic principle: only “the one” can rule... Only the one can be sovereign, *the tradition* tells us, and there can be no politics without sovereignty... The choice is absolute: either sovereignty or anarchy! ...Someone must rule, someone must decide.<sup>18</sup>

As we will see, this “entire tradition” is one from which Fanon, Dussel, and many others are evidently excluded *a priori*. Where has the colonial side of the equation disappeared to? After first insisting on *both* the colonial dialectic *and* the European “centering” of the people that Thermidor represented, the latter suddenly leaps to the foreground and effaces the former. Thermidor becomes *the* turning point in the history of sovereignty, eclipsing the colonial question, and both of these gestures point us in the same direction. By overturning the latter, we can simultaneously overturn the former, and we do so in the form of a question: why not emphasize the other side? Why not emphasize the importance of colonialism and its implications for the concept of sovereignty, one which cannot be so rigidly fixed to its Thermidorean content. Once we do so, the “colonial difference” offers the key to grasping *different* nationalisms and *different* peoples, and it is here that Dussel’s contribution lies.

This question becomes clearer—drawing us back toward Fanon—as Hardt and Negri are immediately at pains to tip their hats to the venerable history of Third World nationalisms. In such nationalisms, they observe, the nation—but notably not the people—“has often functioned very differently... *whereas the concept of nation promotes stasis and restoration in the hands of the dominant, it is a weapon for change and revolution in the hands of the subordinated.*”<sup>19</sup> But again, lest we mistake this emphatic and highlighted statement as their own position, they immediately insist that this purportedly progressive function of subaltern nationalism itself contains two functions, each “highly ambiguous.” Again viewing the nation through the lens of the inside/outside binary, they argue that, firstly and externally, the nation provides a barrier to imperialist intervention while also empowering its bearers to engage in internal repression, and secondly and internally, that the nation while offering the ability to imagine a potential community insists that it be imagined as one, as singular. In both of its faces, “the unifying power of the subaltern nation is a double-edged sword, at once progressive and reactionary.”<sup>20</sup>

While such a statement might at first glance seem capable of accommodating a framework of “two nationalisms”—be it Fanonian or Dusselian—or indeed Sorel’s and Fanon’s “two violences,” we nevertheless find in both these faces of the subaltern nation the same caricature, the same simplistic representation that the fine dialectical line of our counterdiscourse of separation seeks to call into question: Hardt and Negri present the even defensive face of subaltern nationalism in absolutist and separatist terms—as “a right to secession”—while refusing to even consider the possibility of internal relations of diversity and pluralism (and this is not to mention their imposition of the internal/external binary, one which rules out *a priori* the potential for a transnational response to imperialism). While much could be said here with regard to what we have already seen in Fanon—who would no doubt sneer at such observations—we

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<sup>18</sup> This is followed by a symbolic hat-tip to the non-West when, after hundreds of pages devoted almost entirely to exporting European conceptions to the global stage, the authors clumsily add: “This insistence on the rule of one, however, is certainly not limited to the European tradition. The history of Chinese philosophy too, for example, is dominated by notions of immutable unity and a dictating center.” Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 328-329, my emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 106, authors’ emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 107.

will leave it for Dussel to answer below. One wonders, however, how we moved from the suggestion of a “different” nationalism operative in the Third World to the dismissal of this nationalism as essentially the same: the same inside/outside dialectic, the same unitarian-totalitarian effects.

My sense is that this is little more than the application of that revealing slip of the pen mentioned above: that after discovering *the* turning point in *the* concept of sovereignty, what comes after is but mere application. This intuition is confirmed when the authors turn to the very subject with which we began this project: the history of black nationalism in the United States. Here again, the “defensive position of *separation*”—the same separation from which our counterdiscourse gains its name—and the “*autonomous power* of the unified community, the power of the people” that the nation provides, are precisely the same mechanisms that oppress the black community, rendering its promised liberation utterly chimerical.<sup>21</sup> Rather than recognizing the crucial distinction between an absolutist, static, and essentialist *separatism* and a dynamic, dialectical, and anti-essentialist process of separation—between the early Malcolm and the late Malcolm, between Senghor and Fanon—rather than distinguishing these very different *practices*, Hardt and Negri choose instead the path of unilateral dismissal and impossible nationhood: it is “precisely the structures” that help to protect a subaltern people from imperialism that are guilty of smuggling in the now-universal content of (European) sovereignty.

Such unilateral dismissal—if still tacit in their account of subaltern *resistance*—becomes obvious when they block the path entirely: after liberation, in Hardt and Negri’s account, after nationhood is accomplished, “all of the oppressive functions of modern sovereignty *inevitably* blossom in full force.”<sup>22</sup> Fanon’s entire effort, his intricate and meticulous account of the “pitfalls of national consciousness,” of the very real dangers on the horizon (which proved justified) and all his suggestions for how to avoid them, in short, his *monumental effort to produce a nationalism not in the mold of Europe*, to forget the “European game” forever: these are all dismissed as mere fantasy with the stroke of a pen and the slip of a category across the colonial difference.<sup>23</sup> In their defense, the authors cite Jean Genet’s claim that “The day the Palestinians become a nation like the other nations, I will no longer be there,” conspicuously neglecting the conditionality implied in the statement, one which only holds *if* Palestine becomes a nation *like the other nations*. All national resistance, all black nationalisms, and all subaltern nation-states are collapsed into the same: thus spoke Europe.

As we will see, this Eurocentric dictum whereby national struggles, by virtue of having the people at their very heart, are doomed to a sovereign fate whereby the constituent is sacrificed to the constituted, would be nonsense for Dussel, and this not merely as a practical observation. Rather, from a theoretical perspective, we will see that it is precisely the position of the people in a national liberation or anti-imperial struggle—the *centrality* of a “people” with very different characteristics than Hardt and Negri’s exported variety—that institutes a bifurcation within the concept of nation, and which can guarantee (or at least encourage, support, facilitate) the emergence of a progressive and radically diverse subaltern nation, one which—like Fanon’s conception—is in turn radically transformative and which gestures toward the universal as an ever-displaced aspiration.

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<sup>21</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 109, my emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 109.

After having dismissed the categorical basis—whether popular or national—for most Third World struggles, Hardt and Negri are nevertheless at pains to recuperate and rechannel the energies that such struggles release. To do so, they must block any dialectical path to radical transformation, and it is therefore of little surprise that they set out precisely from a central moment of our own analysis: namely, Sartre’s critique of negritude. Citing Sartre’s formulation of a negative dialectic in *Black Orpheus* while not coincidentally skirting Fanon’s critique (in *Black Skin*) of this formulation as *not nearly negative enough* (too objective, too deterministic, and too neglectful of the dialectics of identity), Hardt and Negri err in formulating this negative dialectic purely in cultural terms and dismissing it as an illusion. Insisting that the identities produced by colonialism are themselves illusions masquerading as necessity, Hardt and Negri insist starkly that “*reality is not dialectical, colonialism is.*”<sup>24</sup> This jarring assertion makes us immediately wonder what exactly they mean by “reality” if colonialism, that monstrous generator of not just wealth but Being itself, cannot create it. Moreover, what of Fanon’s inverse insistence that colonialism—as Manichean—is precisely *not* dialectical? Have our authors reversed the terms of the (de)colonial equation, placing the categorical horse before the cart by granting dialectical—which is to say, dynamic—status to the very same phenomenon that Fanon so thoroughly indicted for having *frozen* all dialectical motion?

But then things get even more peculiar: one expects this critique of subaltern nationalism to be extended to Fanon as well, who as we have seen is an unapologetically dialectical thinker, but he is instead—alongside Malcolm X—lauded for having successfully broken out of the colonial dialectic:

For both Fanon and Malcolm X, however, this negative moment, this violent reciprocity, does not lead to any dialectical synthesis; it is not the upbeat that will be resolved in a future harmony. This open negativity is merely the healthy expression of a real antagonism, a direct relation of force. Because this is not the means to a final synthesis, this negativity is not a politics in itself; rather, it merely poses a separation from colonialist domination and opens the field for politics. The real political process of constitution will have to take place on this open terrain of forces with a positive logic, separate from the dialectics of colonial sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

At first sight, this counterintuitive passage seems *almost* to have grasped something fundamental about Fanon and Malcolm’s counter-violences, and thereby something central to this anti-Jacobin project as a whole. But upon second glance, glaring dissonances appear.

Firstly, Hardt and Negri put forth a straw-man dialectics (“future harmony... final synthesis”) in order to recuperate Fanon as an anti-dialectical thinker, when in reality he insists on precisely the sort of transformed dialectic they oppose (recall here that, in the colonial context, he claims that colonialism is precisely *not* dialectical, but rather Aristotelian, and that it is counter-violence that generates dialectical motion). By failing to grasp the nuances of his critique of Sartre they repeat their error regarding black nationalism more generally: whereas Fanon displaces resolution and “future harmony,” this not a dismissal of dialectical movement *tout court*, but is rather its very *condition*.<sup>26</sup> Their erasure of Fanon’s dialectical orientation is

<sup>24</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 128-129, authors’ emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 132.

<sup>26</sup> This is exacerbated by the claim that Fanon rejected Negritude as a cultural form (*Empire*, 131). As we have seen, what he rejected in a certain form of Negritude—that of Senghor rather than Césaire, who Hardt and Negri also collapse into one category—was not that it had a cultural element (anti-colonial culture being absolutely

facilitated, and this is the second point, by their insistence that this counter-violence is “not the means,” but merely an opening, a sort of ground-clearing exercise, preparation for the properly political. This of course neglects almost everything Fanon says about violence, about its generativity, about its opposition to colonial force (the latter being Aristotelian, the former dialectical), about its cathartic effect on subjectivity, in short, about its inherently political nature. Fanon’s violence doesn’t merely open a non-dialectical field, but rather transforms the Manichean-Aristotelian, dead dialectic into a living, open one, and it is this transformation that grants violence an anti-Jacobin political content.

Finally, and most seriously, as we have seen and as should be a rather obvious concern with Hardt and Negri’s appropriation of Fanonian violence, Fanon was clearly no opponent of the nation, of the people, or even of a certain strategic use of constituted power. These three elements are intimately linked, as it is by way of violence that a dialectical progression is jumpstarted, shaking colonial society out of its Manichean stasis and politically generating the identities necessary to destroy it: namely, the people and the nation, whose refuge in the state—if entailing certain undeniable dangers—is nevertheless inevitable. If there is a thinker who has in recent years insisted—in a Fanonian fashion—on the relevance of such categories for the Third World, it has been Dussel, and what remains is to present his reformulated understanding of the people, one which—while maintaining what Hardt and Negri deem a “positive logic”—nevertheless insists that this logic is not merely ana-lectical but also dia-lectical.<sup>27</sup>

### **The people as a category of rupture**

The proponents of the multitude—Virno, Hardt, and Negri among others—are correct to seek out the concept they wish to revive in the formulations of its fiercest of enemies: “The best way to understand the significance of a concept,” Virno argues provocatively, “is to examine it with the eyes of one who has fought it tenaciously.”<sup>28</sup> However, they conspicuously neglect the danger that this same methodological approach entails for their understanding of “the people,” a danger which is the inverse of their efforts to reclaim the multitude. For Hobbes is more than a *detractor* of the multitude; he is also a *celebrant* of the people, or to be more precise, the people-as-state (indeed, it is the rapid passage between the two in Hobbes and the brevity of his discussion of the people that allows the proponents of multitude to so easily dismiss the concept). To properly understand the people, according to Virno’s own method, one ought to approach the concept through the eyes of a reactionary opponent (or at the very least, a radical sympathizer) as opposed to the reactionary *proponent* who was Hobbes. In what follows, I will do both, moving from the nominally-radical opposition to the people found in Hardt, Negri, and Virno to the work of a radical sympathizer and proponent of the people in Dussel’s later political work. I will then

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fundamental for Fanon), but rather its essentialism (which frequently assumed cultural form, but also racial, national-istic, etc).

<sup>27</sup> Hardt and Negri’s utter inability to see anything less than total opposition between dialectics and positivity owes in large part to their obsession with ontology, one derived in large part from Spinoza (and this despite the fact that they identify the problematic of sovereignty with the prevalence of Platonic ontology: *Multitude*, 329). See Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, where the question of Being remains uninterrogated. While they certainly seem to agree with Dussel in arguing that, “What is totalitarian is the organic foundation and the unified source of society and the state” (*Empire*, 113), they fail to recognize the role of totality as a category and ontology as the form of knowing that category in maintaining such a view.

<sup>28</sup> Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 22.



repeat this gesture to some degree in my approximation to contemporary Venezuelan reality, moving between Rómulo Betancourt, a reactionary critic of the people, and Alí Primera, one of the concept's most radical supporters.

Nearly three decades after the appearance of his seminal *Philosophy of Liberation*, Dussel released the Spanish edition of his *Twenty Theses on Politics*, itself a condensed version of his massive, three-volume *Politics of Liberation*.<sup>29</sup> In this concise and clear work, three decades of theoretical development give rise to a newly-clarified formulation of three intertwined elements: the philosophical concepts discussed above (totality, exteriority), their respective methods (dialectics, analectics), and the material bearer of the ana-dialectical project that is the philosophy-politics of liberation (the people). Writing from a Latin American context, from across the “colonial difference” that so marked Fanon’s thought as well, Dussel will formulate an understanding of the people that has little to nothing to do with the Hobbesian-Virnian vision, and which rather than viewing the people as a concept of totalizing unity which is coterminous with the state sees it as the very definition of the radical disruption of and rupture within that totality.

In moving toward this view, we can already find some signposts in etymology. According to the Royal Spanish Academy, *pueblo*—which literally but imperfectly translates as “people”—bears within it all of the concept’s fundamental ambiguities: while four of the five definitions offered by the Academy refer rather flatly and concretely to a given space and its inhabitants, to a city, country, population, or group of people, the last definition is subtly subversive. It refers to the *pueblo* as “the common or humble members of a population,” and with this simple phrase that refers to not all, but only a part, contradicts and undermines all of the other definitions, and the unifying view of the people put forth by Hardt, Negri, and Virno.<sup>30</sup> This view, to repeat, is one in which the people is coextensive with society as a whole, functions centripetally to gather together and unify that society, and in so doing functions to uphold the state. In what follows, I will sketch the basic contours of Dussel’s understanding of the people through a discussion of how he would respond to this tripartite critique posed by Hardt, Negri, and Virno.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Enrique Dussel, *20 Tesis de la Política* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2006); *Twenty Theses on Politics*; *Política de la Liberación*, vol. I; *Política de la Liberación*, vol. II: *Arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009); *Política de la Liberación*, vol. III: *La Crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Rancière has an arguably similar formulation of the people as rupture. This is not to imply that a similar ambiguity is lacking in the English derivation: whereas the idea of a people as a unity seems to appear at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, an alternate meaning emerges only a few short years later, in which “people” refers exclusively to the common people and distinguishes the masses from the nobility. Perhaps it is this very specificity—the identification in popular parlance of the nobility as enemy of the people—that makes the term available for the bourgeois reappropriation and recoding that Hardt and Negri associate with Thermidor. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, provides a more sophisticated and subtle understanding of the very real struggles that occurred between constituted and constituent power in the months and years leading up to Thermidor, all the while placing this French struggle in the context of a global colonial system, as we will see in our conclusion.

<sup>31</sup> To this etymology, we could add, on the one hand, the long history of struggles associated with the term—including but not limited to “populism” in its radical and conservative senses—but more importantly, and departing from the etymological straitjacket, the very different history of community organization that could be brought to bear on the term, infusing it with a new, and peculiarly Latin American content. Like Mariátegui before him—whose rediscovery of “Incan Communism” would provide the content for his own “Indo-American socialism”—Dussel sets out from the relative “exteriority” of Indigenous tradition. To the question of the relevance of this pre-colonial history, which flourished until the 15<sup>th</sup> century and remains only in vestigial form, for contemporary

Firstly, to the claim that the people is a unity comprising the entire population, Dussel would respond that this is precisely the sort of static and unitary view he opposes. Instead, his view of the people is one which is both *dynamic* and *divisive* of unity. It is dynamic because it only comes into existence at the outset of and in the process of engaging in political struggle. The people, in this view, is not something which *exists*, but something which *comes into being* when members of society contest and question the conditions of their existence (be they economic, political, etc.) As a result, the category of the people is neither sociological nor economic, but instead, as he puts it, “strictly political.”<sup>32</sup> This is the people to which Fidel Castro referred to with the now-famous qualifier “*si de lucha se trata*”: the people, in other words, comes into existence “when it is a question of struggle,” when they themselves rise up (the structure here being parallel to his determination of exteriority in terms of consciousness).<sup>33</sup>

The *form*—or, better put, the *geography*—this struggle assumes is what gives the people its particular content and conflictive quality. If, as we have seen, Dussel had previously fused Hegelian dialectics with Levinasian “analectics,” the resulting “ana-dialectical” method is embodied practically in the people itself. Dussel illustrates the totality of society and the exteriority which lies beyond it as tangentially connected circles, across which the people figures as a third circle which overlaps both. Here, the dialectical rupture *internal* to the totality gives rise to the category of the oppressed, whereas the analectical openness to *exteriority* gives rise to the excluded.

As Dussel describes it, “The *pueblo* establishes an internal frontier or fracture within the political community,” standing as it does “in opposition to the elites, to the oligarchs, to the ruling classes of a political order.”<sup>34</sup> This rupture or division at the heart of the social totality releases the oppressed to unite with the excluded, in an alliance which straddles the very bounds of the system. Here, for Dussel, Marx “completes” Levinas:

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conceptions of the people, we would respond by shifting the burden of proof, and asking: Why Hobbes? Indigenous social organization had only recently been stamped out as a public force by the time that Hobbes, from his study in Paris, penned *De Cive*, and remained very much a presence in private and concealed forms. Why would Hobbes be more relevant to Latin American posteriority than than, say, Felipe Guaman Poma (or Waman Puma) de Ayala, an Incan noble who only a generation prior to Hobbes’ text had published his own massive work of political theory and critique: *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*? Evidently, thinkers like Poma and Dussel fall outside “the entire tradition of political theory.”

<sup>32</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 73. Given Hardt and Negri’s efforts to genealogically de-naturalize such concepts, they would do well to read Dussel’s formulation.

<sup>33</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 74. See Fidel Castro Ruz, *History Will Absolve Me*, the famous speech given at his 1953 trial in the aftermath of the failed attack on the Moncada barracks. Fidel Castro Ruz, *History Will Absolve Me*, tr. C. González Díaz (Havana: Editorial José Martí, 1998 [1953]), 56. Many translations butcher the meaning of this sentence. After listing the various groups that compose this struggling mass in Cuba, Castro adds: “This is the people, the one who knows misfortune and is therefore capable of fighting with boundless courage!” (57-58).

<sup>34</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 74-75. In order to emphasize this antagonistic relationship, Dussel terms this people-as-rupture *plebs*, which etymologically bears this very sort of relationship in less ambiguous form. That the people-as-*plebs* does not represent the totality then emerges clearly in the *plebs-populus* opposition, in which the latter stands for the totality of inhabitants (and which when conflated with *plebs* in “people” give rise to the etymological ambiguities above). Against Negri, then, Dussel argues that the people is not a “substantialist” concept either as naturalized or as a totality: “In this reformulation, the *people* is transformed into a *collective political actor* rather than being merely a substantial and fetishized ‘historical subject.’” Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 75. Strangely, however, Dussel agrees with Negri’s earlier demand for the reformulation of the people, a demand which he would then abandon himself in favor of the multitude. Antonio Negri, “Constituent Republic,” in P. Virno and M. Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy*, 215.

Levinas... describes this process of the totalitarian totalization of the Totality “as the exclusion of the Other,” which Marx completes by adding those oppressed by the system. The *people* therefore maintains a complex position. On the one hand, they are the [Gramscian] “social bloc of the oppressed” within the system (for example, the working class), but they simultaneously comprise the excluded (for example, the marginalized, the indigenous peoples who survive through self-sufficient production and consumption, etc.)<sup>35</sup>

The people constitutes not only the (dialectical) rupture of the totality embodied in those oppressed by it, but also the (analectical) penetration into the exteriority of non-Being that the totality excludes. This barbarian people occupies the borderlands of Being,<sup>36</sup> straddling those Jacobin apartheid walls which exclude some from the fullness of humanity, and as the doorway to alterity embody as well the promise of a dialectically-better future. And the dynamic motion that the struggle of the people engenders is represented as an arrow which begins within the totality and gestures toward the exteriority, toward a new and transformed society. It is these allied categories of oppressed and excluded that constitute what Dussel means by the people, and by virtue of the *rupture* the concept thereby entails, it could not constitute—as in Hardt and Negri’s claim—the basis for a unification of the population of the society in question.<sup>37</sup>

*Secondly*, to the claim that the people exerts a “centripetal effect,” gathering together its constituent elements through a process of abolishing difference, Dussel responds by first *complicating* those elements themselves and secondly by insisting on the particular mode by which they are to relate to one another. If we have seen that the people breaks down roughly into oppressed and excluded, these sub-categories themselves proliferate internally a vast number of possible subject-positions which overlap both with one another and with the broader categories. For example, women as white can be included ethnically within the totality while being oppressed according to strict gender norms, and excluded economically as domestic laborers (which despite its clear centrality to capitalist production nevertheless takes the form of an exclusion, as does unemployment, simple circulation, etc.). “Productive” workers can be included-as-exploited by capital but simultaneously excluded as non-Being due to their ethnicity. The possible combinations are many, and the question Dussel confronts is one of how to articulate and link the many different hypothetical individuals resulting from the structures of exclusion and oppression that blanket and texture the colonized and formerly colonized worlds.

For Dussel, such a vast variety of political identities can only come together as a people through a process of dialogue and translation, in which they themselves are transformed without

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<sup>35</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 78.

<sup>36</sup> Here, I consciously use the language of, among others, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> This formulation of people-as-rupture is prefigured in Dussel’s early work in the following terms: “The peripheral nation as a totality is not a people, except by reason of its oppressed classes.” Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 71; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 90. In a figure not included in the English translation, Dussel illustrates this relationship with a series of overlapping circles, in which the peripheral national state (the basis for a literal “nationalism”) does indeed enjoy a specific form of exteriority (“peripheral national political exteriority”), but in which those oppressed within that very same national space enjoy a qualitatively distinct form of exteriority, one altogether more far-reaching and profound (“popular exteriority”). *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 86, Esquema 3.1. It is worth noting that this concretization of the people helps Dussel to escape some of Maldonado-Torres’ damning critiques of the category of exteriority: by reformulating the people as exclusion and oppression, it becomes more difficult for Dussel to present himself unambiguously as “the other” (see my previous chapter).

their differences dissolving into, as Hardt and Negri put it, “an undifferentiated unity.” Such a process seeks to craft

an understanding between movements that nonetheless never represents an encompassing universal. Critical postmodernism [here taking aim at Hardt and Negri, no doubt] gives rise to an open dialogical hermeneutic... through mutual information, dialogue, translation of proposals, and shared militant praxis, these movements slowly and progressively constitute an *analogical hegemon*.<sup>38</sup>

Here we find a resistance to totality which, as for Fanon, assumes the form of a displaced universal which is only accessible via the hard work of movement-building and the movement of the ana-dialectical progression. It is only through such a process of translation that, according to Dussel, such a hegemon can plausibly be constructed while “maintain[ing] the distinctiveness of each movement.”<sup>39</sup> Hence in an example that Dussel himself frequently provides, mainstream feminism responds to the critique offered by women of color *not* merely with the respectful acceptance of difference, but with a self-transformative process of internalizing that critique.

Here, Dussel’s conception of the people, aside from belying Hardt and Negri’s terse dismissal, also constitutes a notable advance over the history of Latin American theology of liberation, a field to which he himself contributed significantly in the past. According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, through its exclusive focus on a sociological conception of “the poor,” liberation theology (like the dependency theory with which it allied itself) “failed to realize the complexity of the colonality of power, in particular, the situation of *colonial heterogeneity*.”<sup>40</sup> This is to say, the structures of exclusion and oppression that blanket and texture the colonized and formerly colonized worlds give rise, as we see above, to a number of possible subject positions. While part of the danger is already avoided by Dussel’s framing of the people in terms of struggle (i.e. non-sociologically), facilitating the recognition of all those who make a claim within and against the system, it is only with the insistence of internal dialogue, and more importantly of translation, that Dussel manages to inject this necessary heterogeneity within this collective historical subject. It is, moreover, through precisely this same embrace and incorporation of heterogeneity that Dussel’s understanding of the people provides us with a conceptual and practical vehicle through which to draw together the identities discussed in previous chapters.

*Thirdly*, and finally, to Hardt, Negri, and Virno’s claim that the people as a category functions to reinforce and buttress state power, we must insist again that Dussel’s view is quite the opposite. Like those authors, Dussel employs a distinction between the Latin terms *potentia* and *potestas*, between power as radical constituent potential and power as constituted in the institutions of the state. But whereas Hardt and Negri tend toward an absolute opposition

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<sup>38</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> “The struggles and demands of certain groups of women and black and indigenous peoples remained in the periphery [i.e. peripheralized by theorists of the core-periphery relation] of their concerns. In this way liberation theology became complicit with an elite mestizo Latin American consciousness that gave only partial expression to the needs for liberation in the region. Liberation theologians’ epistemological breakthrough was thus limited from the very beginning.” Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Liberation Theology and the Search for the Lost Paradigm: From Radical Orthodoxy to Radical Diversity,” in I. Petrella, ed., *Latin American Liberation Theology*, 55.

between these two powers,<sup>41</sup> Dussel insists on the necessity of institutions if constituent power is ever to enter into real existence.

Dussel assumes these same parameters, diagnosing the poisoned gift of “Eurocentric Modernity” as being, in part, a negative understanding of “*power as domination*,” but whereas he shares with Hardt and Negri the effort to begin from a different, *positive* form of power, this does not take the form of an opposition.<sup>42</sup> Like Hardt and Negri, his starting point is the concept of *potentia*, of power as potential, but conspicuously unlike them, this power is rooted in the political community as “sovereign.” Furthermore, rather than standing opposed to *potestas*, this *potentia*, “while representing the ultimate foundation of *all* power—still lacks real, objective, empirical existence. The merely feasible consensual will of the community remains initially *indeterminate* and *in-itself*.”<sup>43</sup> Mere *potentia*, power in potential form, necessarily undergoes an “originary (ontological) disjunction” which gives rise to *potestas* as institutionalized power: “If *potentia* is power *in-itself*, then *potestas* is power *outside-itself*.”<sup>44</sup> This process of externalization of power in institutions, which represents pure danger in Hardt and Negri’s formulation, is for Dussel two-sided:

This split—with regard to which we agree with Spinoza and Negri, but simultaneously move beyond them—is necessary, and it marks the pristine appearance of politics while representing at the same time the supreme danger to politics and the origin of all injustice and domination.<sup>45</sup>

In other words, were power-as-potential not institutionalized, it could do no harm, but this would be only because it could do *nothing at all*. So whereas Hardt and Negri remain allergic to all institutionalization, then, Dussel is able to formulate a more precise understanding of the dialectical relationship between the people and the state (rendered all the less possible by Hardt and Negri’s attack on a straw-man dialectics).

Recall that the people emerges in struggle as a bloc comprising the excluded and the oppressed. Institutions are neither perfect nor perennial, and therefore oppression and exclusion will inevitably characterize all institutional arrangements. Dussel’s response is not, on this basis, to oppose these institutions *qua* institutions, but instead to subject them permanently and ruthlessly to popular pressure from below, to the demands of this tenuous, variegated multiplicity that is the people. And here the category of exteriority gains an additional concreteness which undermines Hardt and Negri’s claims, since it is in the relative exteriority of Latin American indigenous tradition that Dussel locates both his alternative understanding of the people as well as the radical practice which undergirds its relationship to constituted power. Centuries of popular practices, embodied in indigenous concepts of community like the Aztec *altepetl* and the Mayan *Amaq’* have given the *pueblo* a peculiarly radical resonance, such that, as he puts it, “the

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<sup>41</sup> Within their framework, this opposition is conceptually represented in the overlapping binaries of constituted vs. constituent power and their Spinozan counterparts, *potestas* vs. *potentia* (or, in Italian, *potere* vs. *potenza*). From Dussel’s perspective, the error is present from the outset, from the sheer extremity with which the two terms are opposed. Michael Hardt attempts to deny the absoluteness of such oppositions in his *Savage Anomaly*.

<sup>42</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 20.

word *pueblo* means something more profound than merely “the *people*” in romance languages.”<sup>46</sup>

Here, however, Here we find some reason to worry: whereas Dussel’s previous work had distinguished *two* nationalisms—thereby reproducing to some degree the Sorelian and Fanonian distinction of *two* violences, as well as Fanon’s more explicit discussion of nationalism—here he attempts instead to fix the concept of the people as singular rather than accepting its discursive polyvalence. This decision strikes us as problematic both conceptually and politically: in the former sense it is unsustainable, in the latter, it is dangerous in its blinkered exclusion of the people as a concept capable of being mobilized for reactionary purposes. Further, to not extend his distinction of nationalisms into his concept of the people is inconsistent with his earlier work, since the distinction of two nationalisms served also to indict the both Perón and Cárdenas, prime examples of reactionary populism in Latin America.

But again, this emphasis on indigeneity is not reducible to a mere nativist celebration of the primitive Other, since Dussel’s interest lies in neither pre-colonial history nor the mere speculation of its contemporary significance. Rather, he places one central element of indigenous politics at the very center of his analysis, one practiced hemispherically by indigenous communities today, and recently popularized by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas and by Bolivian President Evo Morales, and one which furthermore upends Hardt and Negri’s most basic assumptions regarding sovereignty. This is the practice of *obediential power*, derived from the Zapatista slogan that “those who command must command by obeying,” or *mandar obediciendo*, to which he devotes the fourth of his twenty theses. Obediential power is *not*, for Dussel (and as the name suggests), one in which the people serves as a sort of lifeless substrate supporting the state, or standing as its “reverberation” in Virno’s words. *Mandar obediciendo* is, instead, a formulation of the relationship between constituent and constituted power in which the people constantly demands the *obedience* of those delegated to occupy positions of institutional power and resists the perennial temptation that Dussel refers to as power’s “fetishization” (to which his fifth thesis is devoted).

The formulation of the people in Hardt, Negri, and Virno—blinkered by Eurocentrism and a propensity toward grand claims—is incapable of allowing these authors to grasp either the general relationship between constituted and constituent power, the power of the state versus the power of the popular masses, and nor does it allow them to understand those radical moments of upsurge in which an irruption of popular identity fuels the transformation of political institutions. This moment, which Dussel terms *hyperpotentia*, demonstrates with the utmost clarity the challenge his formulation poses for the Western notions of sovereignty which undergird Hardt, Negri, and Virno’s critique of the people. If Carl Schmitt famously insisted—against liberal fetishization of the law—that there exists a sovereign will capable of suspending that law in the state of emergency, Dussel responds by—as he describes it—pushing this argument to its conclusion in the following terms.

Drawing perhaps optimistically on the recent upsurge experienced among Latin American social movements and particularly on the rebellions by which the Argentinean population resisted an imposed state of emergency to depose a series of leaders in a matter of mere weeks from December 2001 to January 2002, Dussel insists that this *hyperpotentia* of the people manifests in a “state of rebellion” capable of subverting and resisting even the sovereign

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<sup>46</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 74.

state of emergency. In this peculiar neologism, Dussel adds “hyper” to the Latin “potentia” in a way which drives home his relevance to the counterdiscourse of separation. If *potentia* refers to the power of the political community as a whole in opposition to institutional power as *potestas*, the *hyperpotentia* of the state of rebellion is that “new power that lies below the praxis of anti-hegemonic liberation.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, as “anti-hegemonic,” this power is peculiar to the people as a category of rupture, as a radical intervention by those oppressed within and excluded from the political community.

Unlike the rigid anti-institutionalism of the theorists of Multitude, Dussel’s popular identity is thereby what he terms “an-archy” in the most literal of senses (with “an” again translated as “beyond”): a transcendence of *arche* as the principle governing the present, an anadialectical transformation rooted in the appeal to the exteriority beyond the borders of the prevailing system. By drawing together in alliance a broad and variegated force comprising all those oppressed by and excluded from the prevailing system, the people, in Dussel’s words, “tears down the walls of Totality and opens a space at the limits of the system through which Exteriority bursts into history.”<sup>48</sup> But, despite the additional concreteness provided by Dussel’s political turn in the *Twenty Theses* (and in his massive *Politics of Liberation* from which it is drawn), we are still left with some open questions. What, for example, does it mean to “tear down the walls of totality”? What does it look like when “Exteriority bursts into history”? And perhaps more critically, what reason do we have to believe that Dussel’s people as an internally-articulated and dialogical hegemon can exist and function as he describes it? Has his occasionally unbounded optimism become willful myopia in the concept of the people?

### “El pueblo está bravo”

As a first approximation of the function of the concept of the people in the contemporary Venezuelan political context, we could do no better than to refer to the formulation of former Venezuelan President and putative “founder” of Venezuelan democracy, Rómulo Betancourt. This concept of the people, whose relevance derives from the material weight of its proponent, is as surprising in what it shares with the hostile view put forth by Hardt and Negri as it is revealing in what it does not. In the early 1960s, Betancourt would—from the balcony of the constituted power of the state—dismiss the concept of the people in scathing terms, insisting that “the people in the abstract is an entelechy which professional demagogues use in seeking to upset the social order. The people in the abstract does not exist.”<sup>49</sup> In contrast to and against this allegedly “abstract” people, Betancourt—unwilling and unable to dispense with such a historically-weighty concept entirely—would offer a different understanding, one that constituted the very basis of his corporatist governing doctrine. “The people,” he would argue, “is the political parties, the unions, the organized economic sectors, professional societies, university groups.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 79, see also Figure 9. The relationship between Dussel’s formulation and Ernesto Laclau’s similar formulation merits extended discussion that we cannot undertake here. See Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

<sup>49</sup> Rómulo Betancourt, *Tres Años de Gobierno Democrático*, v. II (Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 1962), 245

<sup>50</sup> Betancourt, *Tres Años de Gobierno Democrático*, 245.

What is most surprising about this juxtaposition of right (Betancourt)<sup>51</sup> and left (Hardt and Negri)—if all too common—is that the view from the right is more intuitive and revealing in its anxieties than is the view from the left in its sweeping assertions. What Betancourt grasped in his hostility to the political organizations which sought to confront his new regime with a vision of a new and better society was the radically “entelechic” or teleological transformative potential that the people carried at its heart. If Betancourt insisted that “the people in the abstract does not exist,” he was nevertheless acutely aware of the concrete effects of this abstract, nonexistent specter, whose simultaneous danger and nonexistence evokes the mythical function of the subjective dialectic of a Sorel or a Fanon. The people, for Betancourt, despite its fictive nature, is nevertheless capable of pushing into motion a radically-destabilizing dialectical progression.

This diachronic view of the *pueblo* as a disruptive force, I argue, already bears within it the idea of the people as a category of radically transformative rupture, and this disruptive view of the people as a threat attests to a definition which diverges sharply from that of Hardt and Negri, for whom the people is cold unity at best and the repressive infiltration of sovereignty at worst. Betancourt’s overt hostility to the concept of the people, then, conceals a fundamental interpretive similarity to his arch-foe, Fidel Castro, who would modify *pueblo* with the curious phrase “*si de lucha se trata*,” if it is a question of struggle.<sup>52</sup> Implied in this briefest of phrases is all the complexity of the people which seems to escape Hardt and Negri while striking fear into the heart of Betancourt, entailing as it does both radical rupture and conflict as well as the ultimate transformation of the existing political system. And there was good reason for Betancourt’s anxiety toward the people, which was provoked by the near state-of-rebellion he confronted shortly after taking power, one which, as in Dussel’s formulation, stubbornly challenged the purported sovereignty of the state of exception.<sup>53</sup> In practice, this view of the people would constitute the basis upon which Betancourt would attempt—not without some success—to construct a regime of single-party dominance by his own Democratic Action (AD) party. While this dominance would assume the formal guise of a two-party power-sharing agreement which effectively dominated Venezuelan politics until 1993 (and to some degree, until Chávez’s election in 1998), the vision was nevertheless the same: the people could not speak directly, but only through the party-dominated mediating institutions of social life.

Therefore, much as Sorel and Fanon would distinguish two “violences”—one antagonistic and liberatory, the other unitary and reactionary (Sorel’s “force”)—and much as Dussel would distinguish two nationalisms on similar grounds, Betancourt here offers us a fruitful distinction between two “peoples”: on the one side, totality, on the other, rupture. While it is worth wondering why Dussel skirts such a distinction (we would suspect sheer overzealousness in the effort to snatch the term from the fangs of constituted power), it is not difficult to square his political theory with such a view. On the other hand, Negri’s early suggestion to the contrary notwithstanding, the same cannot be said of the proponents of the multitude. We could summarize Betancourt’s superiority thus: Hardt and Negri reject the concept of the people because they fear that it represents and engenders unity; Betancourt feared the people because he knew this *not* to be the case, and he knew this because it was his job to

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<sup>51</sup> While it may surprise some to see Betancourt, a nominal social democrat, characterized as right-wing, such a characterization is accurate both from the perspective of this project and in light of the contemporary Venezuelan conjuncture (where the former president is openly referred to in such terms).

<sup>52</sup> Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*, 56.

<sup>53</sup> Indeed, most of Betancourt’s presidency was spent under a state of exception.



send out the tanks to repress some “people” in the name of other “people.” Hence both in its subversive nature and entelechic quality—as the radical *telos* rather than the substantial form of the political community—*el pueblo* is indeed as Betancourt perceived it: protean and amorphous, as divided in itself as it is divisive of society, in short, radically dangerous to men like himself who sought only to control and channel its energies.

The conflictive rupture that we have found at the heart of “the people” is in many ways reflected in Venezuela’s national anthem itself: “Gloria Al Bravo Pueblo,” which at its most literal means “Glory to the Brave People,” but whose openness to a multiplicity of contrasting significations has rendered it uniquely available to both the constituted power of the state and those constituent upsurges which would challenge and ultimately transform it. When first penned by Vicente Salias in 1810, Venezuela’s national anthem most likely sought to evoke a sense of *bravura* as a bravery or valor more easily corralled within a national framework. From the very first stanza, however, the tensions are immediate:

Glory to the brave people, which threw off the yoke,  
the Law respecting, virtue and honor.  
“Down with chains!” Cried out the Lord;  
and the poor man in his hovel for freedom implored.

Here, the second line of the anthem already presents an ambiguity which has plagued its translation ever since: who is the subject? In some, more conservative translations, the people becomes the subject, and is thereby bound within the imperative to “respect the law.” But equally plausible is the law personified as subject—as rendered above—and thereby itself bound to respect more substantive notions (such as those represented by, e.g., the “poor man in his hovel”). Regardless, by the time we reach the second stanza, the radicalism of the anthem is patent:

Let us shout zealously: Death to oppression!  
Faithful countrymen, strength lies in union;  
and from heaven, the supreme Creator  
breathed a sublime spirit into the people.

Perhaps wariness of this radicalism has led to the consciously-misleading translations of this stanza, in which “death to” becomes “down with,” “union” is rendered as “unity” (and thereby substantialized), and most egregious of all for our purposes, “people” is rendered as “nation.”

In the history of the Venezuelan national anthem, as is common, conservative intentions would seek out conservative interpretations, and these conservative interpretations would feed into and legitimate conservative politics. Betancourt, who we already saw reformulating the concept of the people to suit his own political ends, would be but one of many to deploy the national anthem in such a way. But whether through intrinsically radical content, or through the legacy of Simón Bolívar, or through the particular history of Venezuelan radical struggles, but most likely through a combination of the three, the Venezuelan national anthem would prove continuously available for radical reappropriation and resignification, in part through the sort of radical reconceptualization of the people that we have seen above. And this reappropriation of “Gloria al Bravo Pueblo” and the radical reappropriation of the concept of the people which

provoked such anxiety in Betancourt would be embodied by none better than revolutionary folk singer Alí Primera, himself among those young radicals who confronted Betancourt's repressive "democracy" in the streets.

Best known as "the singer-songwriter of the people," Primera would formulate in his music a very different understanding of the people to that celebrated by Betancourt, one rooted in the millennial resistance to colonization and the ubiquity of repression, and one which shares much with our counterdiscourse of separation in its mythical, conflictive, and radically dialectical aspects. Through his songs of resistance and songs of struggle, through his many homages to fallen martyrs, Alí Primera would best embody the call the double-valence of the people, one which in its second formulation opens up a radically transformed future. This reconceptualization of the people, I argue, bears many a similarity Dussel's formulation, and this despite the fact that Primera's reply to abstract thought might be summarized in the following lyric: "You'll have to pardon me, sir, I do not know how to philosophize. *Yo soy quien levanta*, I am the one who rises up."<sup>54</sup> But the anti-intellectual slant of this statement should not obscure the very real theorizing that Primera is himself engaged in, and this very statement already embodies a kernel of the concept of people-as-struggle we discussed above, and which would be developed throughout his body of work.

Primera's songwriting sets out from the very basic fact (not coincidentally, also Dussel's) that "my people are suffering," but it does not stop there, choosing instead to track the long history of radical resistance to that suffering.<sup>55</sup> To repeat Dussel's words: "politics introduces ethics, which in turn introduces philosophy."<sup>56</sup> In this case, however, we find a mediating moment between ethics and philosophy which marks Primera's own medium: song. In a brief letter aimed toward the preservation of his songs as irreducibly political, Primera demonstrates the connection between his work and the people as a notion of combat:

Song by song, struggle by struggle, we will develop the song to sing to that people which has always sung to us. In the meantime, let us lend our hands and voices so that the hearts of those on their own search not fall along the path toward the definitive barricade... "To not sing is to become lost," thus wrote a poet and friend, millions of bullets ago... We must "arm" our songs with our own conduct, not with *empty phrases*... [and] pretentious poeticization.<sup>57</sup>

Primera's militant songwriting thus emerges in intimate conversation with a combative people, and this radical reconceptualization of the people against the likes of Betancourt sets out from the national anthem itself, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo." But the peculiar double-valence that we have seen in the *pueblo* extends as well to the history of the word which, as a result of that anthem, most frequently modifies it in Venezuelan discourse: *bravo*.

As the 1970s oil boom waned and as deep structural crisis set in, the division that we have been tracking at the heart of the concept of the people became increasingly evident. As social benefits were gutted and the poverty rate skyrocketed to some 60 percent, it became obvious to many that, to again quote Salas' epic words, the law had lost all deference to "virtue

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<sup>54</sup> "Yo no sé filosofar," *Volumen 2*.

<sup>55</sup> "Yo vengo de donde usted no ha ido," *Lo Primero de Alí Primera*. This phrase recurs repeatedly, e.g. in "Ruperto," *Adios en dolor mayor*.

<sup>56</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 173; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 206.

<sup>57</sup> Alí Primera, *Que Mi Canto No Se Pierda* (Caracas: Fundarte, 2006).

and honor,” and “the vile selfishness that once had triumphed” had returned with a vengeance. And in the process, *bravo* has assumed more and more the radical content of the *pueblo* itself, *si de lucha se trata*, conceived in terms of struggle. Here, *bravo*, rather than modifying the people as “brave,” comes to mean angry or even “pissed-off,” “fed up” with a state of affairs. And in this context, the anthem itself served to embody this division between those wielding power and its victims. As Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski put it:

Invoked in official contexts, such as the state ceremonial occasion and the school salute to the flag, the hymn embalmed the *bravo pueblo* in the distant past; to sing it spontaneously in a popular assault on the street was to resuscitate it as a living critique, not a ratification of authority.<sup>58</sup>

This inversion is best expressed by the simple inversion in which we move from “Gloria al Bravo Pueblo” (Glory to the Brave People) to “El pueblo está bravo!” (The people are fed-up), a reconceptualization which appeared not infrequently scrawled in graffiti as crisis neared.

This radical re-appropriation and inversion was epitomized by Primera himself who, despite being a radical communist, was known to have frequently sung this purportedly “nationalist” hymn in his public performances during the 1970s and 80s. During one such performance, recorded in Barquisimeto shortly before his suspicious death in 1985, Primera introduced the anthem with the following rousing declaration:

To purify it, to purify it among ourselves, to purify it in our hands, in our hearts, in our eyes, in our soul. To purify it for the times they have stained it. Our people’s highest song, the song forged in the paths and the battles that gave us the name of Venezuelans, of the homeland. The song of always, the song of the birds, of the children, the song of Venezuelan unity, the song of future combat.<sup>59</sup>

Here, in the simultaneous appeal to unity and combat, we find the same ambiguity at the heart of the people that makes the concept so incomprehensible to Hardt and Negri and so dangerous for Betancourt, and which drives our counterdiscourse as a radically-combative dialectic. What may seem a contradiction is resolved through the struggle that defines the people itself: there can be no unity until after combat, and it is in the assertion of the need for such combat (moments two and three) that a future unity is displaced (moment four of our counterdiscourse).

But if the contradictory uses to which the concept of the people can be put do not, however, make it a necessarily contradictory concept, Primera was also acutely aware of the similar ambiguity entailed by his use of the national anthem—an ambiguity that escapes Dussel in his optimism toward the people—one simultaneously put into the service of corrupt constituted power. In one song, he sings the following:

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<sup>58</sup> Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, “Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela,” in J.-M. Burt and P. Mauceri, eds., *Politics in the Andes: Identity, Conflict, and Reform* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 96.

<sup>59</sup> Alí Primera, “Gloria al Bravo Pueblo,” *Alí ¡En Vivo!*. The collected lyrics of Primera’s song’s are available as Primera, *Que Mi Canto No Se Pierda*. See also Lil Rodríguez on Primera’s history: <http://encontrarte.aporrea.org/teoria/perfiles/13/a8548.html>. Primera was a young Communist, joining the urban guerrilla struggle against the Betancourt regime in 1958, for which he would be imprisoned in the late 1960s. In 1968, Primera won a Communist Party (PCV) scholarship to continue studies in Romania, and upon his return to Venezuela, he would follow the dissidents who left the party to form the Movement toward Socialism (MAS). After a steadily increasing wave of assassination attempts, Primera would die in a suspicious car accident in 1985.

I'm going to tell you a story which I have just heard, which was told to me by the people, but which the people has never written, because [the people] do not know how to write... our best president sang the national anthem, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo," and the gringo said: *yes!* Why do they call the people brave if they sell them out; why do they say 'bravo pueblo' if they sheath [*envainan*] it.<sup>60</sup>

Here, in a metaphorical gesture toward our counterdiscourse, the people figures as a weapon, whose intrinsic sharpness means that those in power must "sheath it" if they are to avoid it cutting them as well. Elsewhere, Primera is more direct in comparing both the people and the songs it inspires to a weapon: "the people is a rifle about to fire,"<sup>61</sup> to which he adds elsewhere: "Sing, sing, *compañero*, let your voice be a gunshot, in the hands of the people no song will be unarmed."<sup>62</sup> But this poetic arming of the people is always carried out with an eye to the insistently dual nature of violence, which as in Sorel and Fanon, is distinguished by its revolutionary or reactionary content. "The verses of the people can be flowers or bullets," Primera sings, but more important than this distinction is the distinction *within* violence (as "bullets"): "the bullet that defends [the people], or the bullet that kills [the people]."<sup>63</sup>

If the people as a category of combat and a weapon speaks to the radical antagonism at the heart of our counterdiscourse of separation, what indication do we have of its mythical, projected nature (i.e. moment one)? Here, the vision is comparable to Dussel's: the people is not a substantialist thing which merely exists, but something to be created. Hence the fury of the people, its history and its heart, appears in Primera's songs as a durable wood which must be worked prior to combat, and that working is a process of unification. As he puts it, "we will make of this wood a hand to strike powerfully at those who have always struck and struck, struck at us."<sup>64</sup> As in Dussel, then, Primera's concept of the people is one of projection and of radical rupture and antagonism, which within Primera's work is perhaps best summarized by a single, exhortative word after which he named an entire album: *Abrebrecha*, open the breach, entailing both the rupture of the existing and the space through which the new is allowed to emerge. Here, Primera closely echoes Dussel's description of liberation as "the act that opens the breach,"

<sup>60</sup> "Me lo contó Canelón," *Adios en dolor mayor*.

<sup>61</sup> "Piraña con diente de oro," *Con el sol a medio cielo*.

<sup>62</sup> "Los que mueren por la vida," *Canción mansa para un pueblo bravo*.

<sup>63</sup> "El que cantó con Zamora," *Abrebrecha*. This differentiation of violences is doubled by a common, if nevertheless crucial, differentiation within the concept of death, which Primera similarly formulates in terms of content: "Those who die for life cannot be called dead, and from now on mourning them is prohibited," "Los que mueren por la vida," *Canción mansa para un pueblo bravo*.

<sup>64</sup> "Tin Marín," *Abrebrecha*. The historical and even natural undertones of this understanding of the people, one intimately tied up with its unpredictably wild nature (much like Dussel's *hyperpotentia*) emerges as well in the multitude of metaphors that Primera deploys to describe the people, whether it be as a "bolting colt" or in adjectives like *manso* and *montaraz* which are generally reserved for animals. These two seeming-opposites, which in a horse would mean more or less "docile" and "fierce" or "undomesticated," respectively, nevertheless come together when in his "Canción mansa para un pueblo bravo" (or, "Docile song for an angry people"), Primera claims that "this docile people is now fierce." "Canción mansa para un pueblo bravo," *Canción Mansa Para Un Pueblo Bravo*. Elsewhere, he adds, "My only force is a simple wind, but with the wind of the people I will have the fury of a hurricane." "Tía Juana," *Al pueblo lo que es de César*. The implication is clear when he adds that "the docile goat is always corralled, but this doesn't happen if it is *montaraz*," wild or fierce. The political lesson of this seemingly contradictory description is that the force of the people must not be domesticated, must always maintain some of that wild fury that Dussel describes as *hyperpotentia*, if it is to avoid being corralled into the halls of constituted state power.

although it remains unclear whether this breach is limited to dialectical struggle or seeks to penetrate the very bounds of the totality.<sup>65</sup>

And it is from the song of the same name that the people emerges in its fullest lyricism, embodying the relationship of struggle which distinguishes the people from the prevailing social totality:

The people is a collection of refrains sung with its own prayer, although a rosary of sorrow hangs on its chest. We need to sharpen our aim [*tino*], which is to say, our target practice, and although they use rude words [*groserías*], the people have the right. And I don't get angry, but it's the pure truth: there is no ruder word than this very same society.<sup>66</sup>

The people as refrain and prayer here testifies to its mythically-projected character, as something repeated like a mantra in order to invoke (as a calling-together) its very existence (moment one of our counterdiscourse). That these are collected testifies to the people's multiplicity. And rude words and the right to use them here constitutes an ethical division of the social totality ("this very same society"), as we saw most notably in Sorel, one which grants access to "pure truth" to the side of the people. The two peoples, two violences, and radically transformative twofold division within society that Alí Primera lyrically theorizes, despite explicit efforts to censor his voice, would be massively influential in Venezuelan popular sectors, framing a powerful popular identity whose fruits would be borne only later.

### **From the Caracazo to Chávez**

The anger of his contemporaries that Primera channeled and theorized lyrically would only increase after his death, and the apex of this *bravura* was without a doubt the 1989 Caracazo, a massive rebellion against the neoliberal reform package enacted by Carlos Andrés Pérez, one in which "the people are hungry" (*el pueblo tiene hambre*) and "the people are angry" (the inverted and resignified form of the national anthem, *el pueblo está bravo*) served as dual slogans (slogans which, moreover, link the critique of the existing social totality with the rebellion which looks toward the creation of a new society). In the insurrection—where anger was only matched by bravery against the most uneven of odds—the Venezuelan national anthem would again prove prophetic, as Venezuelans and the world would, in the words of the national anthem, "follow the example given by Caracas" in its moment of fury and the political process that the Caracazo inaugurated.

Alí Primera, as we saw, resignified the concept of the people through a radical inversion of the significance of the Venezuelan national anthem, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo" ("Glory to the Brave People"). But Primera's was simply the first in a long line of radical resignifications that the people would undergo in the decades leading up to Hugo Chávez's formal ascent to the presidency in 1998. In fact, the process whereby Chávez gained power itself draws together the many strands of this analysis, both theoretical and practical. But this process, against prevailing

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<sup>65</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 62; *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 79. Primera's lyrics do, however, indicate toward the importance of exteriority. See, e.g., "Yo vengo de donde usted no ha ido," *Lo Primero de Alí Primera*, where Primera gestures powerfully toward a fundamental division of the social totality which is at the same time exclusion, in which the wealthy are simply incapable of seeing the truth of the system. This division persists today.

<sup>66</sup> "Abrebrecha," *Abrebrecha*.

interpretations, was far from simply electoral. The radical *hyperpotentia* unleashed during the Caracazo was on the one hand *fueled* by the concept of the people (as cultivated and popularized by Primera, among others). On the other, it *embodied* the Dusselian view of the function of the people, constituting a vast rupture and antagonism within society through an alliance between those oppressed by and excluded from the (systematically-exclusionary) system that Betancourt helped to inaugurate and whose eventual downfall was presaged in his anxiety toward the people. But in line with the question of Dussel's relation to the rest of our counterdiscourse, the question of dialectics and analectics (or ana-dialectics), we must ask of the Caracazo: was this an explosion of internal rupture or of exteriority? Was this the "oppressed" or the "excluded"?

The answer, unsurprisingly—and one which reflects Dussel's concept of the people and the complexities of his understanding of exteriority—is *both*. And much as Virno insists with regard to concepts like the people, we can derive an understanding of the rupture that is the people, the degree to which it is inward- or outward-oriented, from those that most fear this rupture. This I have done elsewhere at more length, but what matters in this context is the fact that appearance of the people as a radically conflictive force during the Caracazo rebellion simultaneously *ruptured* a prevailing understanding of the harmony of Venezuelan society, while simultaneously *demonstrating* that harmony to have been a myth.<sup>67</sup> While this might seem a patent contradiction, it resides nevertheless at the heart of an entire social scientific literature dedicated to both diagnosing and mourning the decline in Venezuelan harmony.<sup>68</sup>

In other words, for privileged Venezuelans, this was a very real myth, and one whose function constituted a very real process of exclusion. Yes, poor Venezuelans were and continue to be the "oppressed" in Dussel's formulation, but this oppression is not as far from "exclusion" as we might initially think, and like Dussel's formulation more generally, cuts across individual subjects. Hence an Afro-Venezuelan can be excluded on the basis of race and included-as-oppressed as a worker; an informal worker can be included ethnically within the image of Venezuelan-ness and simultaneously excluded from the aboveground functioning of the economy; and anyone not simultaneously white, wealthy, and in possession of a certain culture would likely find herself excluded from the twin pillars—the media and the political system—that upheld the old system of the Venezuelan "Fourth Republic."<sup>69</sup> If the Caracazo could be interpreted by some of its participants as a moment of radical rupture *internal* to the social totality—they were, after all, Venezuelan citizens—it nevertheless appeared to those threatened by it as a rupture at the furthest reaches of the totality, through which previously non-existent

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<sup>67</sup> See Ciccariello-Maher, "Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine."

<sup>68</sup> See especially Ramón Piñango, "Muerte de la armonía," in Patricia Márquez y Ramón Piñango, eds., *En esta Venezuela: Realidades y nuevos caminos* (Caracas: Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Administración, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> This exclusion was more or less pronounced depending on the particular aspect in question. For example, the appearance of Afro-Venezuelans on television was nearly nil for many years, and any "inclusion" was heavily stereotyped (i.e. as Dussel's "oppression"). See Jun Ishibashi, "Hacia una apertura del debate sobre el racismo en Venezuela: Exclusión y inclusión estereotipada de personas 'negras' en los medios de comunicación," in *Políticas de identidades y diferencias sociales*, ed. D. Mato (Caracas: Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, 2003), 33-63.

Moreover, political exclusion of the poor often took very concrete forms, such as the lack of access to identification cards, rendering even political participation an impossibility.

poor and racialized subjects poured into the social body. Harmony had only existed previously, albeit as an illusion, on the basis of their exclusion.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, if the direct and unmediated explosion of the Caracazo can to some degree be rendered compatible with Hardt and Negri's multitude, the same cannot be said for what has emerged since 1989, and it is in the deepening of the constituent elements of popular identity since the Caracazo that we find the superiority of Dussel's formulation. In other words, if "exteriority burst into history" through the rupture of totality that was the Caracazo, then that same exteriority burst into Venezuelan political life through two events inspired by the Caracazo itself. First, in 1992, Hugo Chávez Frías led a failed coup against the neoliberal government of Carlos Andrés Pérez, before then winning the presidency six years later. The coalition that propelled Chávez to power was in many ways the same that had taken violently to the streets as *hyperpotentia* nearly ten years earlier.<sup>71</sup> And lest we imply that the Caracazo was mere unorganized rebellion (as a romantic celebration of the multitude might suggest), it is worth insisting that the rebellion itself was in many ways the result of decades of organizing in the aftermath of a failed guerrilla struggle for which opposition to Betancourt was a point of departure (and for which Alí Primera's songwriting served as a permanent inspiration).<sup>72</sup>

Since Chávez's ascent to the presidency in the name of the people as *hyperpotentia*, the movements which put him in power have both developed on their own terms and have developed their dialogical relationships with the other movements constituting the contemporary Venezuelan people. These simultaneous processes both shed light on and help to expand and extend our formulation of a counterdiscourse of separation, while drawing our attention as well to some of its dangers. If we have seen that this counterdiscourse is one in which the projection of a non-objective identity as a rupture of the social totality generates a deepening of conflict, polarization, and radical development toward an unspecified future universal, it has been the people in the case of Venezuela that has most directly performed this function in recent years. The people, in this context, and against Hardt and Negri's formulation of the concept, shares with our previous discussions of class, race, and nation in that it lacks an objective basis precisely to the degree that it both divides society (is non-totalizing) and constitutes a Dusselian analogical hegemon, a bundle of linked struggles.

What is peculiar in the case of the people, however, and what distinguishes it from class identity in Sorel and ethnic identity in Fanon, is the interaction of these two elements: radical identity and internal differentiation.<sup>73</sup> If we have seen, particularly in the case of Fanon's nation, that the separatist moment which divides the social totality need not be understood as Manichean or hermetic, entailing as it does internal heterogeneity in the breakdown of the stages of decolonization, in the case of the people this heterogeneity proliferates to an even higher degree. The people, as deployed in contemporary Venezuela, is many things at the same time: it is poor,

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<sup>70</sup> For a similar account of the breakdown of a myth of national harmony, albeit one driven by neoliberalism more than revolt, and tracked via literature, see Ryan F. Long, *Fictions of Totality: The Mexican Novel, 1968, and the National-Popular State* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Chávez and other mid-level officers had formed a radical "Bolivarian Pact" years before the Caracazo, but it was the shock of the government repression of the poor *barrio* residents, slaughtered at the hands of the armed forces, ordered to fire on their own people, that would force the coup (which was originally scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of the Caracazo).

<sup>72</sup> I track this history in more detail in a book-length project entitled *We Created Him: A People's History of the Bolivarian Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, in preparation).

<sup>73</sup> We have seen to some degree that Fanon's nation is similarly composite and heterogeneous.

it is African-descended, it is indigenous, it is women, it is students, it is the informal sector, it is the *lumpen*. And each of these constituent elements of the *pueblo*, in their struggles and their development, maintain to some degree their own dynamic which operates as a sort of sub-dialectic in conjunction with the counterdiscourse of separation.

If the identity of the people, in line with the moments we have identified as constituting the counterdiscourse of separation, entails firstly the subjective projection of an identity and secondly the binary opposition of that identity to an enemy (what we have deemed the moment of rupture), the subsequent third moment of the counterdiscourse of separation has additional implications for the people that it lacked in the other cases discussed in previous chapters. It is not a mere act of will that holds the Venezuelan people together as an “analogical hegemon,” as it occasionally appears in Dussel’s analysis. Instead, the very conflictive nature of the counterdiscourse functions to consolidate popular identity. Put differently, when the variegated and heterogeneous bloc that is the people comes into antagonistic conflict with its enemies, those enemies—in their antagonistic fervor—do not always recognize this very heterogeneity. The third moment of our counterdiscourse (the consolidation of identities in conflict with an enemy) here plays two role: not only have we seen that it is in part the relationship with the enemy that draws the lines between exclusion and oppression, but in so doing, the enemy also plays the role of uniting the people to an even higher degree than its interests might justify.

While this may seem vague and complex, we will clarify and concretize it through an example, perhaps the most illustrative in contemporary Venezuela: that of race and racialization. In contemporary Venezuela, Afro-Venezuelan movements are flourishing under the aegis of the people and generally in support of Chávez. In their own development, racism (as Fanon’s “overdetermination from without”) plays a major role in consolidating such movements, by rendering oppositions in society clear and making obvious the need for organizing around race. The more Afro-Venezuelans organize, the more they are opposed, and this opposition feeds into a virtuous cycle which develops and radicalizes both consciousness and organizing in a dialectical manner. But in this third moment of identitarian consolidation, this racist overdetermination which imposes identities does not limit itself to the ethnic or phenotypic. Due in part to the particularities of racialization in Latin America and Venezuela more specifically—and both reflecting and contributing in practice to the relevance of the people in Latin America—those who oppose themselves to Afro-Venezuelans inadvertently contribute to consolidating popular identity by overdetermining *all* Chavistas as racially inferior (this being especially powerful in the racialization of Chávez himself). This function of overdetermination expands in direct proportion to the vagueness of the categories deployed: as the Chavistas are dismissed as “rabble,” as “mob,” and even as “scum,” the simultaneously racial, class, and cultural elements of these categories serve to only strengthen the internal bonds that holds the people together. In other words, those standing against the people, by reducing their enemies to the same, have the paradoxical impact of strengthening the internal heterogeneity that Dussel identifies in the concept.<sup>74</sup>

But both the basis of those individual identities and the outcome of the process they collectively set into motion raises the question of Dussel’s ana-dialectic, with which we will conclude. On the one hand, we can see immediately the concrete importance of exteriority as

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<sup>74</sup> I discuss the function of overdetermination in unifying Venezuelan categories of race and class in Ciccariello-Maher, “Toward a Racial Geography of Caracas.” See also Jesús María Herrera Salas, “Ethnicity and Revolution: The Political Economy of Racism in Venezuela,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32, n. 2 (March, 2005), 72-91.



exclusion: blacks, the poor, the media, etc. The previous Venezuelan system—now scathingly dismissed as the “Fourth Republic”—was one rife with exclusion (all the more so since, given the structure of its dependent-colonial economic structure, there was little space for active economic oppression). Alf Primera himself embodies both this exclusion and the importance of the “internal transcendental” with which one questions it: despite being systematically excluded from television and radio, Primera nevertheless managed to develop a massive popular following, due in no small part to his critiques of both contemporary oppressions and exclusions and his insistent envisioning of an alternative, popular order. Finally, moreover, in a peculiar sort of feedback loop, this re-entry of the excluded into Venezuelan political life via Chávez’s election would have vast implications for the constituents of the people themselves. Again, Primera is the purest embodiment of this process: from a massively popular folk singer who was nevertheless systematically excluded from radio and television, the rupture that he himself helped to initiate has allowed for his return in memorialized form: his work is now publicly celebrated, his image emblazoned on official documents, and his name even recently given to a Metro station.

On the other hand, we wonder how deeply this separates Dussel from Sorel and Fanon. After all, Fanon’s dialectic of sub-ontological difference is simultaneously one of exclusion from Being. In part, this is a question that relates to the question of the tightness of the dialectic and its colonization of the other into the same. We could debate this in Hegel, but once reformulated subjectively as projection, there seems little basis for the distinction. If we reject the objective bases for the identities in question, then what constitutes the distinction between oppressed and excluded? Perhaps this contributes to the vagueness of Dussel’s own formulation: to what degree is the global periphery an exteriority rather than an internally oppressed segment of a broader totality? While Dussel alerts us to different *dynamics*, of exclusion versus oppression, we remain less convinced that we can establish these as different *spheres* or *categories* without fixing them to an unnecessary and problematic degree. Hence, while exteriority can be maintained as a concept tied to dynamics of exclusion, we should refrain, as Dussel sometimes does not, from referring to individuals, groups, or geopolitical units, as pertaining to some concrete “exteriority.”

## Conclusion: Toward an Anti-Jacobin Dialectics

If we have shown to what degree each of the thinkers considered above—Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel—can be seen as contributing to the counterdiscourse of separation, one in which the moment of identity is privileged over that of unity, and in which the process of separation is privileged at the expense of totality, this does not leave us without residual questions or uneasiness. One concern stands out in particular on the level of method: if each of these thinkers, as we have seen, speaks of their project in openly dialectical terms—that is, if each proposes a radical reformulation of dialectics which seeks to slough off the totalizing and conservative implications that the term “dialectics” has come to carry—then why does this project speak instead of a “counterdiscourse” in Foucault’s words? How can we account for, as I believe we must do before concluding, this glaring gap between the language of this project and the language of the thinkers it includes, in a manner which neither uncritically subsumes these thinkers under a concept of our own invention or does theoretical violence to their subject matter?

This is yet again to approach the challenge posed by Foucault in the introduction: namely, is a truly radical dialectics possible or even thinkable? Foucault’s answer in the 1976 lectures and elsewhere seems to be “no,” but as should be clear by this point, there is much more to be dissected in his rejection of dialectics. If Foucault himself allows a productive space for conflict, opposition, and even social war, if he allows such “tactical” moments to link on the “strategic” level in a way that gives rise to a line of force cutting across society as a whole, and if such divisions are not static but instead profoundly generative, then how does this view differ from what we have seen in the work of Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel? Is the Foucaultian opposition between discourse and counterdiscourse itself one that could be interpreted as dialectical, or does the terminological difference here reflect a much more fundamental conceptual difference which cannot be bridged by even the most radical resignification of dialectics? Before confronting such questions head-on, we must take an obligatory detour, one which rather than taking us far afield instead draws us toward a richer understanding of the relationship between our counterdiscourse and dialectics.

With Enrique Dussel’s critique of Hardt and Negri, and with his reformulation of the relationship between *potentia* as constituent power and *potestas* as the constituted power of the state, we come full circle, albeit in a rather asymmetrical, indirect, and circuitous fashion (full helix, perhaps). But in order to see how and why this is the case, it is necessary to first briefly restate this project as a whole in those same terms. As will become clear, this is not an effort to subsume our analysis under the heading of the discussions of constituent and constituted power currently in vogue, but to equally and more importantly chart, in an exact manner, how it is that we diverge from those very discussions.<sup>1</sup>

If we have seen a consistent distinction within the central conceptual *vehicles* of the thinkers included in this project—that is, violence, nationalism, and the people—on the basis of a privileging of content over form, then this division to a large degree maps onto the distinction between constituent and constituted power. This emerges clearly in Sorel’s distinction of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies*. This distinction is further rooted in the etymological bifurcation present in many languages (for Negri and other Italians, that between *potere* and *potenza*). See M. Hardt, ed., *Radical Thought in Italy*, 263.

proletarian violence from its categorical opposite—the bourgeois force of the state—one which similarly cuts across Fanon’s understanding of both violence and nationalism, and across Dussel’s understanding of nationalism as well (but conspicuously not his understanding of the people). Viewed thus, the identities we have discussed throughout this project—class, race, nation, and people—can similarly be understood as expressions of a constituent power, as imbued with a power from below that stands against a categorically distinct constituted power that is expressed in the repressive, minoritarian, and Jacobin state. It is precisely such a distinction which marks the parameters of the rupture that each identity we have discussed reflects and consolidates: each can be usefully thought of as a radically constituent energy rebelling against a constituted apparatus (although as we have seen, this exceeds the state properly speaking). Finally, the process of separation that comprises our counterdiscourse can be analogously viewed as a particular formulation of the relationship between constituent and constituted powers, in which these powers enter into a generative confrontation which drives them beyond themselves, beyond one another, and indeed beyond the prevailing totality within which their existence as opposition emerges.

The question remains, however, of what is the precise *status* of this relationship in the thinkers we have considered here, and what this can tell us about the question of constituent power more generally. As should be clear by this point, this is to pose again the question of the relationship between our counterdiscourse of separation and dialectics, a question that could be put provocatively as follows: is the relationship between the constituent power of the masses and the constituted power of the state—both broadly understood—a *dialectical* one, a *Manichean* one, or of an entirely different nature altogether? But this is already to put things far too generally. In what follows, we will approach this question by returning to the question of the “black Jacobins” of the Haitian Revolution from which we set out, and the comparative theoretical imperative posed by C.L.R. James, before then, on the basis of this radically comparative task, returning to the question of a dialectics of constituent power.

## **Black Anti-Jacobins Reconsidered**

We move from mere restatement to full circle once we return to the question posed indirectly by C.L.R. James in our introduction, namely, the relationship between the “black Jacobins” of his seminal tome and the “anti-Jacobinism” of our own project, one which is in large part concerned with the very same questions of race and decolonization as were the followers of Toussaint L’Overture. Is James celebrating a Jacobinism comparable to the Sorelian concept, one defined by abstract absolutism and the hierarchy of scientific knowledge, and one which has been the target of so much venom throughout this project? If so, does this set James in opposition to a thinker as ostensibly similar in concerns and methods as was Frantz Fanon? As I will argue briefly, James’ *Black Jacobins*, like the six texts discussed above, can also be understood in terms of the distinction between constituent and constituted power, and thus understood, is much more amenable to an anti-Jacobin interpretation than its title might seem at first glance to suggest.

This latent anti-Jacobinism in *The Black Jacobins* emerges in a series of gaps, distances, or interstitial spaces that we can identify in James’ seminal simultaneous accounts of the French and Haitian Revolutions, the effect of which is to complicate both Sorel’s rather simplistic and homogeneous rendering of the French Revolution and the “Jacobinism” it expressed as well as

James' own ostensible Jacobinism. It is in this mutual complication of both Jacobinism and its opposite that intriguing spaces for compatibility emerge. The gaps in James' text which make possible such compatibility are (at least) three: that between the Girondins (whom Marat had scornfully dismissed, in a Sorelian fashion, as "the men of the state") and Montagnards; that between the latter—Robespierre in particular—and the mass base which James sees as the driving force behind the Revolution; and, moving across the colonial divide, that between the "Black Consul" Toussaint L'Overture and his constituency of black ex-slaves in the colony.

Tracking this series of interstitial spaces or gaps, I argue, opens up room for such congruence by way of opening up an interpretive space around the French Revolution itself. In the space between Girondins and Montagnards, we find a dissonance *within* the term "Jacobin," opening gaps spanning left to right and accommodating a variety of positions toward slavery; in the space between the Montagnard leadership and its base, we find a gap (in Sorel's terms) between Jacobinism as constituted "force" and as constituent "violence," which for James proved decisive; and finally, in the third space—that intra-colonial space separating Toussaint from his own base (a parallel constituent-constituted chasm)—we discover finally a gap between James' own title and wholehearted endorsement, allowing for his ultimate compatibility with Fanon's view. As we will see, this last gap has implications spanning the colonial divide, as it allows us to see that, despite James' peculiar and salutary emphasis on the cultural elements of class—i.e. the fact that both Robespierre and Toussaint are, to some degree, bourgeois (and thereby, for James, aristocratic)—these cultural elements prove unable to explain their very different courses of action. Rather, for this explanation, we are led to what has been termed the "colonial difference,"<sup>2</sup> and specifically the condition—neither purely one of class or race—of being *always-potentially enslaveable*. It is this latter condition which constitutes a historical linkage running in parallel to our project as a whole, connecting a domestic dialectic of constituted and constituent power to a broader, global dialectic spanning the colonial divide.

### *Girondins vs. Montagnards*

In more carefully parsing both "Jacobins" and "Jacobinism," James clearly surpasses Sorel's blanket denunciations, and his interest in this question—and perhaps Sorel's *lack* of interest in the same—results from his object of study itself: the system of slavery and its relationship to the colonial condition. It is from this focus as well that James' sympathies derive: when the Girondins, the right-wing of the Jacobin club, held power for an extended period in 1793, they did little to end slavery: "As long as Brissot and the Girondins remained in power no word would be said about the slaves."<sup>3</sup> Their conservatism was not limited to slavery, either, as James argues that the general tenor of the Girondin regime was anti-poor, pro-commercial, and tacitly pro-feudal in their federalism.<sup>4</sup> If James' concerns emerge from questions of slavery (and

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Walter Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference."

<sup>3</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 137. Furthermore, James' retelling of the history of the French Revolution emphasizes the fact that many of the earliest schisms of the Jacobin club were in reality the result of opposing positions on the question of slavery and the colonies (81). A *caveat* is in order: we are more concerned here with James' retelling of the story of the French and Haitian Revolutions than with the histories themselves and the massive literatures they have spawned.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of the last point, James' contribution is significant, and superior to Sorel's, as his emphasis on the class interests of the "maritime bourgeoisie"—a class utterly inseparable from the slave trade—allows us to interpret centralization versus federalism in a more complex light, beyond Sorel's simplistic Jacobinism whereby all

class), they extend as well to Sorel's own preoccupations with the evidence of what he calls a "Jacobin" use of the state apparatus, but here the division of Girondins from Montagnards has serious implications:

They it was [the Girondins], and not Robespierre and the Mountain, who instituted the revolutionary tribunals aimed, not against the counter-revolution, but against all who proposed any "agrarian law or any other law subversive of territorial, commercial or industrial prosperity."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, it is in the Girondin administration (as in that earlier Jacobin splinter, Barnave and the Lameths or Feuillants), rather than in "Jacobinism" as a whole, that James locates the key continuities with the *Ancien Régime*, continuities which, as we have seen, Sorel extended to *all* Jacobins: bourgeois inexperience, James argues, allowed royalists to remain in positions of administrative influence.<sup>6</sup> But mere "inexperience" seems altogether too generous, as it was James himself who would demonstrate, on the one hand, the close cultural affinities binding the bourgeoisie to the aristocracy—"a good bourgeois," he notes, maintains "an immense respect for royal and noble blood"<sup>7</sup>—and on the other hand, the bourgeois tendency to fear the masses.<sup>8</sup> In neither case were Robespierre or the left Jacobins immune entirely, and if Robespierre would successfully harness the masses for a time, his neglect of them would prove his downfall.<sup>9</sup>

### *Robespierre and the Masses*

As we have seen above, Sorel defines Jacobinism as a form of minority governance which is all the more violent in proportion to its diminishing numbers. To this, he adds a sort of class determinism or imputed consciousness, arguing that the Jacobins, and the Montagnards specifically, by virtue of being lawyers by trade—and thereby a sort of distillation of the rising bourgeoisie—were for Sorel in many ways destined to behave as they did: as the dispensers of an absolute, terroristic justice oriented toward the "cult of the state."<sup>10</sup> Considered on its own merits, internally, there is little to complain about in this view, but it becomes clearly insufficient once we adopt the distinction that James brings into the picture between the constituted power of

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centralism is terroristic class warfare (further, one is left to wonder: if all Jacobins are merely statist, then why did so many of the right Jacobins join the provincial counter-revolution?). On the relationship between the maritime bourgeoisie, federalism, the Girondins of Bordeaux, and the question of slavery, see James, *Black Jacobins*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 138.

<sup>6</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 78. Here citing Sorel's nemesis, Jaurès.

<sup>7</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Speaking of the Lameths, "The bourgeoisie had had enough of the masses in politics," and James goes on to argue that much of the Revolutionary repressive apparatus in that early period was directed not toward royalists, but toward the masses. James, *Black Jacobins*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> While critical of Robespierre's increasingly terroristic rule as we will see below (particularly his last months, which James would see as a "late" terror), James was no friend of those "worse enemies" who overthrew him, his description of which matches nearly word-for-word Sorel's conception of a Jacobin political class. Enemies of the monarchy and professors of equality and the Rights of Men, they "were determined to keep the masses in their place and willing to ally themselves with the old bourgeoisie, and even some of the aristocracy, in a joint exploitation of the new opportunities created by the revolution." James, *Black Jacobins*, 178. See also p. 223, where James describes "the very dregs of human civilization and moral standards."

<sup>10</sup> Sorel, *Reflections*, 106.

the state and its institutions and the rowdy constituent power of the masses.<sup>11</sup> This distinction between constituent and constituted power—and James’ clear preference for and emphasis on the former rather than the latter—appears most transparently as a distinction between formal versus substantive understandings of what constitutes a revolution: as he puts it, “phases of a revolution are not decided in parliaments, they are only registered there.”<sup>12</sup>

It is this distinction above all others—between insurgent power in the streets and the established power of the state—which leads James to maintain a positive valorization of one period of Jacobinism and one period of the Terror: “where to this day reaction can only see a few thousand people who fell under the guillotine, Paris between March 1793 and July 1794 was one of the supreme epochs of political history.”<sup>13</sup> Yes, because the government was strengthened, yes, because laws were reformed, but above all for this reason: this period constituted, in James’ view, the “nearest approach to power” that the masses had ever enjoyed.<sup>14</sup> When the patience of the Parisian masses toward the Girondins finally ran out, they turned to the left and to Robespierre’s government, which “took the people into its confidence,” doing so not out of any deep love for the masses (James is emphatic that they opposed and feared the nascent Communism), but because the Montagnards “had nobody else to depend upon.”<sup>15</sup>

Left Jacobinism relied on the masses without loving them, just as it relied on France’s colonial subjects while loving them even less. Even amid the height of what James would see as a heroic Terror, emotional frenzies could not mask the class anxieties of these leaders of the masses: when in January of 1794 the Convention finally tackled head-on the “aristocracy of the skin,” swept up in energetic speeches that many would eventually regret, Robespierre and others were dismayed.<sup>16</sup> This growing disconnect between the Montagnard leadership and its constituent base in the Parisian masses would, according to James, prove Robespierre’s ultimate downfall, revealing more about his class than his background as a lawyer possibly could:

The Terror had saved France, but long before July Robespierre had gone far enough and was now lagging behind the revolutionary masses... revolutionary as he was, [Robespierre] remained bourgeois and had reached the extreme limit of the bourgeois revolution. He persecuted the workers—far more workingmen than aristocrats perished in this phase of the Terror.<sup>17</sup>

After the French victory in Belgium, the terror came to be seen more as “factional ferocity and not a revolutionary necessity.”<sup>18</sup> It was Robespierre himself who had killed the “revolutionary ardour” of France, and when he called upon the masses to save him from his enemies, they did not respond. Having “destroyed his own Left-wing [he] thereby sealed his own doom.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Through either a sheer irony whereby he himself suffered a blinkered focus on the state or an *a priori* dismissal of the very possibility that Jacobinism could have any base at all, this distinction—which we can also see as a numerical question of leaders versus mass support—is absent in Sorel’s account, as is the complication it introduces to Sorel’s simplistic class view of a revolution of lawyers in which *sansculottes* are strangely absent.

<sup>12</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 80.

<sup>13</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 138.

<sup>14</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 139.

<sup>15</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 138.

<sup>16</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 141-142.

<sup>17</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 177.

<sup>18</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 177.

<sup>19</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 177.

Here, we should not allow a seeming agreement with Sorel on the importance of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Prairial and the onset of *La Grande Terreur* to obscure the very real disagreements this passage reveals, on both the strategic level (“The Terror had saved France”) but more importantly on the level of the masses. The distinction from Sorel is perhaps best expressed in the peculiar description in the passage above of Robespierre as revolutionary *and* bourgeois. What for Sorel would be oxymoronic gibberish here becomes the linchpin to James’ entire analysis, as the distinction between constituent and constituted power allows a loosening of class determinism and imputed consciousness. Robespierre had—for a period and of sheer necessity (as well as principles of equality)—done the work of the masses, but by early 1794 had hit a class wall, coming up hard against the limits of his own bourgeois nature, and by becoming a reactionary and destroying his mass base had sealed his own fate. Whereas Sorel aligns the reactionary actions of Jacobinism with the phenomenon of “force” in opposition to liberatory “violence,” James here shows how at least the early part of the Terror could be considered as the latter, as the revolutionary violence of the constituent base, only becoming “force” when the very finite elasticity of the class of those in power ran out.<sup>20</sup> Thus while the bifurcated framework each brings to the table is similar—distinguishing, in effect, two “violences” and two “terrors,” one constituent and one constituted—they disagree profoundly in its application to the French Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

### *Toussaint and the Slaves*

If Toussaint’s *similarities* with Robespierre can be explained largely in cultural-ideological terms, what we are more interested to explain are the *divergences* separating the two—their policies, constituencies, and ultimate fates—and it is these divergences that push us irretrievably across the colonial divide. To deal first with the similarities, the suggestion may seem initially surprising, for what could a bourgeois French lawyer and an ex-slave have in common? The answer is both a position of relative privilege (largely educational) and an imbue with the abstract principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that the Revolution had promised. While Toussaint referred to his own troops as *sansculottes* (a description which was more literally true in the colony than the metropole), this in and of itself had two meanings which cut against the grain of the assertion, showing both his affinity with France and his class distinction from his troops. Toussaint, according to James, had “the habit and manner of a born aristocrat” (bearing in mind here that, for James, this is the hallmark of the bourgeoisie).<sup>22</sup> As a result, rather than throwing himself headlong into the first slave rebellions, he decided to wait them out, and only later “brought his superior knowledge and the political vices which usually accompany it.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Lenin’s *State and Revolution*. One is tempted to think in a similar way about the revolutionary process underway in Venezuela, but under notably non-bourgeois leadership.

<sup>21</sup> Certainly, there are normative differences which divide Sorel’s from James’ account (regarding, e.g., centralization and the power of the state), as well as historical-analytical differences (James doesn’t recognize the model of the Inquisition for Jacobin continuity), but these are ultimately secondary to the question of the masses, and it is here arguably more than anywhere else that James so thoroughly demonstrates the naïve simplicity of Sorel’s account.

<sup>22</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 147.

<sup>23</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 95.

This cultural/class gap between Toussaint and his masses would, in the end, dovetail with his devotion to the principles of the French Revolution in one central question: that of race. A son of the French Revolution and its principles, especially that of equality (as was Fanon), Toussaint was a firm opponent of racial discrimination and of antagonizing local whites. But frequently, this openness to whites bled from principles to culture, from friendliness to favoritism, severely undermining his support among the black masses for which whites made their contempt clear. James is clear on the position of the principles of the Revolution here: “These anti-white feelings of the blacks were no infringement of liberty and equality, but were in reality the soundest revolutionary policy. It was fear of the counter-revolution.”<sup>24</sup> For Toussaint, here neglecting the materiality of social categories in favor of the formalism of the Rights of Man, race was a false construct, and we will discuss the implications of this error in more detail below. Moreover, and more disastrously, he made the mistake of attempting to deal with it as such, rather than accepting its dialectical nature, a dialectic rooted in the colonial difference itself and the differences it establishes. His simultaneously cultural and political fidelity to the French would in many ways prove his undoing.

Whereas Toussaint’s influence and effectiveness derived both from the army he built and the masses that served as its foundation, like Robespierre he would misjudge this support, assume the loyalty of the masses (which was, for a time, unquestioning), and allow his politics to fall behind events to such a point that, eventually, “the black revolution had passed him by.”<sup>25</sup> As his support dissipated, he erred by turning even more toward local whites for support.<sup>26</sup> This decline in mass support was embodied by Toussaint’s own nephew, the more pro-black and mass-supported Moïse, whose insurrectionary activities sought to overthrow Toussaint, whose final error was to execute the insurgent.<sup>27</sup> “And to shoot Moïse, the black, for the sake of the whites was more than an error, it was a crime. It was almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.”<sup>28</sup> Toussaint’s class, cultural affinities, and political principles had all blinded him to an undeniable fact of his own experience as well as that of revolutions in general: mass support is what mattered, and if Toussaint had to massacre whites to get it, “so much the worse for the whites.”<sup>29</sup> While James is quick to insist that Toussaint had no illusions about the whites, he is equally quick to add that “Toussaint’s error sprang from the very qualities that made him what he was,” and here the contrast is Dessalines, whose position of exteriority vis-à-vis French civilization had remained more fully preserved: “He saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint’s failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 261.

<sup>25</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 321.

<sup>26</sup> “Losing sight of his mass support, taking it for granted, he sought only to conciliate the whites at home and abroad.” James, *Black Jacobins*, 262.

<sup>27</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 278.

<sup>28</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 284.

<sup>29</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 286. Here, a footnote leaves us with no confusion as to James’ position: whereas the Jacobins were “enlightened despots” who sought to govern for the masses but soon forgot this promise, the sansculottes were “extreme democrats: they wanted the direct government of the people by the people,” and “forced upon an unwilling Robespierre the great policies which saved the revolution.” For James, “this was pretty much the position” of their black counterparts in the colony (276fn6).

<sup>30</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 288. Toussaint as paternalistic autocrat, but loved his people (152). Called “the savior of constituted authority” and “the black Spartacus” (171).



Like Robespierre, then, “Toussaint had burnt his boats... His error was his neglect of his own people.”<sup>31</sup> But again, this similarity is less interesting than the differences inscribed within it, differences always just below the surface. For example, James tells us that “black leaders were not so permeated by the ideas of the ruling class as a French worker or peasant would have been. Mass support had elevated them.”<sup>32</sup> But we must immediately wonder, firstly, how it was that Toussaint had become so permeated with such ideas on the one hand, and how “mass support” had failed to “elevate” Robespierre to a similar degree. After all, the gap between the two manifest historically if in no other way, in the eight years separating their downfalls, in the sheer amount of time that Toussaint had managed to retain the support of the masses in the face of adversity arguably greater than that faced by Robespierre. To answer the question of what distinguished the two, we move necessarily across the colonial divide, one which pushes these two leaders inexorably apart, establishing a fertile distance between Sorel’s terse dismissal of Jacobinism and James’ more subtle and nuanced view (one found as well in Fanon after him).

### *The Colonial Difference*

Despite his insistence on the similarities between Robespierre and his “Jacobin” counterpart in San Domingo, James equally insistent on the precise parameters that set them against one another:

Toussaint, like Robespierre, destroyed his own Left-wing, and with it sealed his doom. The tragedy was that there was no need for it. Robespierre struck at the masses because he was bourgeois and they were communist. That clash was inevitable, and regrets over it are vain. But between Toussaint and his people there was no fundamental difference of outlook or of aim.<sup>33</sup>

They suffered the same fate, but only in one case was it a necessary one, dictated by the class wall of Robespierre’s bourgeois status. While Toussaint would in the end make the same mistake vis-à-vis the constituent masses, this was in reality not the same, but merely similar, and this similarity has implications for the task of comparative political theorizing. But what was it precisely that drove Toussaint away from Robespierre and, at least for a time, toward the masses? As Toussaint himself would explain in his letter of November 1797 to the Directory with reference to the efforts to reestablish slavery:

Do they think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery... the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew... *I declare to you that it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it.*<sup>34</sup>

“Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation,” and his letter reflects this rare “single-mindedness.”<sup>35</sup> In a word, this was the difference between Robespierre and

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<sup>31</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 240.

<sup>32</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 258.

<sup>33</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 286.

<sup>34</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 196-197, Toussaint’s emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 198.

Toussaint: slavery. Or better, put, enslaveability as a permanent condition and perpetual risk. It was the experience both of slavery and of escaping it that constituted the ideological basis for the Haitian Revolution, and in a sense, it was this experience that provided the foundation for the consciousness of the masses that James is so intent on placing at center stage. Moreover, despite the emphatic nature of the passage quoted above, it was popular consciousness that many wanted the return of slavery—manifested as racial feeling—from which Toussaint, aided in no small part by his devotion to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, would become progressively alienated, undermining his support among the masses.<sup>36</sup>

Specifically, what Toussaint failed to recognize was the possibility that the concrete freedom of the slaves—again, far more concrete than imagined by the Frenchmen who formulated the Rights of Man—might enter into conflict with permanent attachment to the mother country. Circling back around to Sorel, we could say that Toussaint failed to recognize that there is no such thing as “abstract man,” and that humans are free or unfree, colonized or colonizers. And as Fanon would later argue, abstract principles of equality are but a horizon of possibility and the arrival point of a long, dialectical process, not a point of departure. It was precisely the differences between Toussaint and his masses—a gap that was simultaneously economic, educational, cultural, and political—that would prevent him fully recognizing the colonial difference, prevent his grasping that slavery and colonialism went hand-in-hand, and that devotion to France was not compatible with abolition.

But it was the condition marked by the condition of being always enslaveable, a condition marking Toussaint himself as it marked the masses upon which he depended, that explains the degree to which he was able to surpass the colonial/class limitations of a figure like Robespierre. It was this condition, too, that allows us to loosen the category of “Jacobin” as we loosen James’ own endorsement of the term. To return to the question posed above: not only is James’ endorsement of the category itself limited and conditional—suggesting as it does in France as in the colonies a tendential separation of constituted from constituent power—but here the qualifier “black” adds an additional complexity that creates even more room for congruence between James and Fanon. By virtue of being “black,” one’s Jacobinism assumes a qualitatively different character that Sorel’s Eurocentric and class-centric anxieties could not address, and one which has very different political effects. Much as we have attempted to show that Fanon’s anti-Jacobinism derives not so much from literal opposition to the state as from a recognition of the global colonial structure as a structure of minority rule, something similar can be said here of James. This question of a complex anti-Jacobinism in relation to constituent power pries open vistas for further study, specifically regarding the role of institutions, which is another way of saying the need for a dialectical understanding of constituent and constituted.

Thus when framed in terms of the opposition between constituent and constituted powers, we find a revealing and counterintuitive space for congruence in which in varying degrees the mass base of Parisian Jacobinism, the black slaves of San Domingo, and even to a degree Toussaint himself come into dialogue with our anti-Jacobin project. And it his varying degrees of endorsement of all three, James himself becomes something of an anti-Jacobin, and one who himself sits astride the colonial difference, spanning the range of the identities represented in our three different thinkers. But this is not to argue for a full consonance between James and the

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<sup>36</sup> Echoing Sorel, James notes that the black masses were lucky not to have parliamentary representatives “weakening their will.” *Black Jacobins*, 84.

thinkers discussed at length above: rather than give in to the inevitable voluntarism of a subjectively-driven dialectic, James will generally attempt instead to read objectivity into the willful activity of the masses, identifying as the central task “to recognize the new society, align ourselves with it, and record the facts of this existence.”<sup>37</sup>

## Haiti beyond Hegel

The question of James and *The Black Jacobinism* which has framed our study is not our only mention of the Haitian Revolution, and we must seek out the root of this persistent surfacing of a seemingly unrelated political event. This persistence is in fact no coincidence at all, for what was the Haitian Revolution if not a dialectical explosion occurring in the last place master dialecticians would ever have looked? And what is its historical erasure, which Fischer deems a “disavowal,”<sup>38</sup> if not both a retroactive recognition of the radical potential of the world’s first successful anti-colonial revolution and a retroactive admonishment of the impudence of the slaves for having decided to act not merely as men, but as standard-bearers of the revolutionary dialectic. If Sartre openly scolded Sorel for his own impudence, we have seen that he tacitly did the same to the Negritude movement through subsuming the latter to class, and this gesture tells us even more of the disavowal of Haiti, whose inhabitants—while James rightly deems them a “class”—did not act as such, but instead acted as a nation, and in their most violently Manichaeian moments, as a race as well. From the point of view of a traditional, conservative, and class-based dialectic, such mischief is not to be tolerated.

As the example of Sartre demonstrates, such scolding occasionally issues from the mouths of even the closest allies, and this is to some degree the case as well with Susan Buck-Morss’ recent analysis of the relationship between Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and the Haitian Revolution. While Buck-Morss’ text has much to recommend in it—both as her original article “Hegel and Haiti” and as the more recent volume entitled *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*<sup>39</sup>—a certain schizophrenia nevertheless penetrates its reception, if not the text itself. A brief glance at the blurbs on the book’s back cover is revealing: decolonial theorist Walter D.M.ignolo credits Buck-Morss with revealing the fact that “Hegel’s spirit is tainted with the blood and suffering of enslaved Africans,” whereas cultural theorist Timothy Brennan celebrates the book’s revelation that “the young Hegel wrote *The Phenomenology* in a passionate defense of freedom” and that, in so doing, his philosophy “took its cues from colonial wars of liberation.” Were these two even reading the same book, or is there something altogether more complex going on here?

The answer lies, perhaps, in Buck-Morss’ own admission of the uncomfortable in-betweenness of her intervention: “It pleased the academic critics of Eurocentrism [e.g. Mignolo], but not entirely,” and this due to the “less popular goal of salvaging modernity’s universal intent.”<sup>40</sup> Which is another way of saying that, the qualified character of this universal

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<sup>37</sup> C.L.R. James and Grace C. Lee, with Cornelius Castoriadis, *Facing Reality: The New Society, Where to Look for it and How to Bring it Closer* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2005 [1958]), 128.

<sup>38</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*.

<sup>39</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000), 821-865; Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, ix.

notwithstanding, she both critiques and salvages Hegel himself.<sup>41</sup> Is such an in-betweenness toward Hegel tenable? Certainly, to some degree those involved in this study would say so, in the various debts each owes to a dialectics whose origins are to be found, if indirectly, in the *Phenomenology*. But on the more specific point of the master-slave dialectic, this is less clear, as should be evident from our preceding analysis of Fanon's critique of the ontological errors of Hegel's formulation, errors which we have every reason to expect would extend to the Haitian Revolution itself. As we will see, while Buck-Morss certainly slips the yoke of what she deems Hegelian synthesis, she remains in many senses—from the perspective of our counterdiscourse of separation and the subjective dialectic it embodies—very much beholden to the paradigm of totality and the temptations toward false universality that it entails.

Both the virtues and the vices of Buck-Morss' analysis emerge in a powerfully-distilled form as follows:

For almost a decade, before the violent elimination of whites signalled their deliberate retreat from universalist principles, the black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications.<sup>42</sup>

Here there is much to unpack, so we will go slowly. During a brief period, for Buck-Morss, the Haitian Revolution “surpassed the metropole,” but both the parameters of this surpassing and its historical limitations are revealing. While the claim that the Haitian Revolution surpassed the metropole should be familiar from James' account, Buck-Morss seems to want to immediately reinscribe and limit the importance of this fact. Firstly, whereas James emphasizes that the black revolutionaries actively *prefigured* and even *pushed* the French Revolution itself, Buck-Morss insistently reads the Haitian experience through the lenses of both the French Revolution and, more surprisingly still, the European Enlightenment. Hence the colony surpasses the metropole, but only according to the criteria of the latter, and thus it is the French Revolution—in Buck-Morss' account—and not the Haitian Revolution, that is “world-historical in its implications.” This betrays not only a lingering Eurocentrism (though perhaps she would admit as much), but more fundamentally an anti-dialectical formalism which we will discuss in more detail below.

Secondly, and arguably more worrying, is the historical limitation of Buck-Morss' analysis: her decision as to the “almost a decade” that counts, the centrality of Toussaint's 1801 constitution.<sup>43</sup> Or, as she puts it within the framework of her project for a universal history: “Toussaint L'Ouverture's constitution of 1801, without a doubt, took universal history to the farthest point of progress by extending the principle of Liberty to all residents regardless of race.”<sup>44</sup> This speaks—ironically, given her concern with breaking the historical silence surrounding Hegel and Haiti—to a serious silencing in its own right: of Toussaint's successor Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the black and national identity that he represented. Here we return

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<sup>41</sup> Here is the key qualification, to which we will return below: “There is no anticipation of unity in this task... Th[is] understanding of universal history... is distinct from Hegel's systematized comprehension of the past... Universal history refers more to method than content” (Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, x).

<sup>42</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Here the dangers of her universal history as a method which privileges the particular and the “conceptual ordering” of “concrete material” become clear, since this method does not account for the seemingly contingent decision to privilege one particular over another (Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, x).

<sup>44</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 94.

again to James, and to what we have seen above, namely, his emphasis on the *errors* of Toussaint, errors which Buck-Morss transforms into virtues. These errors are two-sided and interlocking: on the one hand, an exaggerated and unwarranted fidelity to France, due in part to Toussaint's similarly unwarranted fidelity to the abstract principles of the French Revolution. On the other hand, and relatedly, Toussaint made the serious error of demonstrating this double fidelity—to France and to its abstract principles of human equality—by what was perceived as an over-friendliness to local whites. This error operates on a number of levels, but on the strategic level, it proved fatal, contributing decisively to Toussaint's own distancing from his constituent that we discussed above.

This was a failure that Dessalines would remedy, and what is surprising in Buck-Morss' account is that, her critique of Fischer's formulation notwithstanding, in her simultaneous recognition and dismissal, Buck-Morss clearly "disavows" Dessalines.<sup>45</sup> As with our previous deployment of the concept, this is not meant in the strict psychoanalytic sense, as her recognition of Dessalines is clear enough: as an afterthought that reveals a deeper doubt, Buck-Morss admits at the end of her original essay that "even Dessalines" is important, since "for all his brutality and revenge against whites, Dessalines saw the realities of European racism most clearly."<sup>46</sup> But surely this is the point! As James had recognized, Toussaint came up hard against the barrier that was his fidelity to France and the abstract formalism of his fidelity to the Rights of Man, and only his potential enslaveability allowed him to even, however partially and momentarily, cross this line.<sup>47</sup> As a result, he lost contact with the black masses, for whom hatred and fear toward the colonizer was still a primary and generative emotion, one which Dessalines would harness most successfully. Hence while Toussaint is not exactly a Jacobin, as we have seen above, his Jacobin tendencies—both his distance from the masses and his fidelity to France that would prompt it—were his Achilles' heel.

This silencing of Dessalines, one which strikes at the heart of Buck-Morss' project for a "universal history," is further reflected in her privileging of Toussaint's 1801 constitution which she sees as a powerful expression of that universality, and concomitant silencing of the already-invisibilized Haitian Declaration of Independence, penned in 1804 by none other than Dessalines himself.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the distinction between the two documents turns heavily upon the question of fidelity to France and its principles and the precise *form*—universal or identitarian—that the Haitian struggle was to assume. The language of constituent and constituted, moreover, draws out this ostensible contradiction: how can a radical moment of rupture, of fleeting liberation for the constituent, be simultaneously the literal "constitution" of the state? Unlike the 1801 constitution, the 1804 declaration speaks directly to the failures of Toussaint and the imperatives driving total liberation. It openly critiques the formalism of the Rights of Man—"the specter of

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<sup>45</sup> Whereas Buck-Morss sidesteps Fischer's concept of disavowal by methodologically tying it to psychoanalysis, it is clear that this need not be the case (as we have seen in chapter three).

<sup>46</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Toussaint's error was that he "thought that he had won his cause and that he was still a free man... he thought that he had established his people's independence without dooming their future by a rash and total break with France. Hence his professions of loyalty to France were not without some truth. They were a mark, to be shared by many future black leaders, of his own supreme tragedy." David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 563.

<sup>48</sup> The Haitian government has long been searching for the lost original copies of this document, which was only recently discovered in the British Library. See, e.g., Damien Cave, "Haiti's Founding Document Found in London," *The New York Times* (April 1<sup>st</sup> 2010), A12.

liberty that France dangled before you”—as utterly insufficient, insisting that they had been “defeated not by French armies, but by the pathetic eloquence of their agents’ proclamations.”<sup>49</sup> This critique of formal principles is complemented, moreover, by a prescient critique of the drawbacks of any merely formal liberation, since “our laws, our habits, our towns, everything still carries the stamp of the French.” This critique of formalism reflects Fanon’s critique of Hegel, to which we will turn in a moment, since such rights did not apply to the non-Beings of the colonies, who were characterized by a fundamental and primal enslaveability, one expressed at the time in Napoleon’s very real efforts to re-establish slavery.<sup>50</sup>

Certainly, this is a Manichean text, one which derides the French as a “barbarous people,” but the operative question seems to be whether or not this is the caricatured brutality that Buck-Morss evokes in her brief references to Dessalines. Certain passages might suggest so: “... when will we tire of breathing the air that they breathe? What do we have in common with this nation of executioners?... they are not our brothers... they never will be.” Here was a displaced universal if there ever was one, but is this a self-perpetuating binary that merely feeds the “recurring cycle of victim and aggressor”?<sup>51</sup> Is the only option when it comes to Dessalines outright rejection on the one hand or the celebration of the “eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth logic of political Jihad” on the other, as Buck-Morss seems to suggest?<sup>52</sup> Or are both of these characterizations mere caricatures, and thereby indicative of a problem both more intractable and more essential than Buck-Morss’ notion of the universal is able to accommodate?

Returning to the 1804 declaration, we find that even the most seemingly-bloodthirsty and vengeful passages cannot be read in this manner except by willfully silencing their stated intent. One passage in particular bears all these tensions:

And you, precious men, intrepid generals... have done nothing if you do not give the nations a terrible, but just example of the vengeance that must be wrought by a people proud to have recovered its liberty and jealous to maintain it let us frighten all those who would dare try to take it from us again.

Whereas Buck-Morss seems unwilling to see in this anything more than brutality-for-brutality’s sake, to reduce it in this way is again to err by formalism, but this time reducing to an inexcusable degree the distinction between what we have deemed the “force” of the oppressor and the “violence” of the oppressed. Rather than brutality, Dessalines’ words should instead be read as a threat against “all those who would dare try to take it from us again.” Even in the Manichean denunciation of the French quoted above, in which *fraternité* with the former colonizer is forever displaced, we find a similar qualification in the claim that, “if they find refuge among us, they will plot again to trouble and divide us.”

Of course the oppressed are capable of re-deploying Jacobin force against those weaker than they, and of course Dessalines and others did nothing if not to continue the repressive elements of the pre-revolutionary state in its economic and racial aspects, but while Buck-Morss would cite the compatibility of racial identity with racial hierarchy as proof of the ultimate harm

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<sup>49</sup> Text from Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006). <http://news.duke.edu/haiteclaration/declarationtext.html>.

<sup>50</sup> “... we must take any hope of re-enslaving us away from the inhuman government that for so long kept us in the most humiliating torpor.”

<sup>51</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 150.

<sup>52</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 143.

of the former, this is insufficient.<sup>53</sup> Central in this regard is Dessalines' rejection in the 1804 declaration of the "missionary spirit" according to which the new Haitians might be tempted to, "as revolutionary firebrands, declare ourselves the lawgivers of the Caribbean." Such an anti-Jacobin sentiment was no doubt inspired by aversion to Napoleon's own progressive intra-European imperialism, and in its very defensive nature drives a wedge between Buck-Morss' attempted complicity of Dessalines with Bin Laden, of Lenin with Bush II.<sup>54</sup> In fact, if Buck-Morss' stated concern is that we might fall into a cycle of mutual enslavement rather than overthrowing the binary of slavery itself, then she could find no better a collaborator than Dessalines himself, who insists in a Hegelian-Césairean-Fanonian dialectical vein: "Enslaved?... Let us leave this description for the French; they have conquered but are no longer free."

This invisibilization of Dessalines and his 1804 declaration, its exclusion from the project of universal history, coincides with another exclusion: that of Fanon and his powerful critique of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic that we discussed in our third chapter. Despite the fact that Buck-Morss' subject is this very same dialectic of master and slave, and that her analysis of it is situated consciously within the ambit of race, slavery, and colonization, one would expect more of an engagement with Fanon's critique of the dialectic's suitability for dealing with such subjects.<sup>55</sup> Recall Fanon's insistence that "but any ontology is rendered impossible in a colonized and civilized society" due to the presence of "an impurity or a flaw that *prohibits any ontological explanation*."<sup>56</sup> Recall also the fact that this "flaw" was identified as an absence of "ontological resistance," in which racialized subjects, as sub/non-Beings, simply do not appear on the plane of reciprocity which is the precondition of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.<sup>57</sup> The implications for the Hegelian formulation are as severe as they are two-sided:

For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master scorns the consciousness of the slave.  
What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. Likewise, the slave here can in

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<sup>53</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 138. Let us not forget that Dessalines was himself a general, and not immune to losing contact with the constituent masses. Fick has shown, following James, that Dessalines was driven by the self-activity of the formerly enslaved masses from below. See Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: the Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 248-249.

<sup>54</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> Fanon is mentioned a single time, in a footnote, and even this mention manages to distort his thought: for Buck-Morss, Fanon "uses European philosophy as a weapon against European (white) hegemony, interpreting the master-slave dialectic both socially (using Marx) and psychoanalytically (using Freud) in order to theorize the necessity of violent struggle by Third World nations to overcome colonial status and to reject the hypocritical humanism of Europe, attaining equal recognition in terms of their own cultural values" (Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 56fn102). Here Fanon appears as a faithful interpreter of the European theoretical tradition, rather than someone who moved *beyond* Marxism and psychoanalysis as he moved beyond European thought entirely, and thus the implication of this reading is that he was faithful to Hegel as well, which we have seen to be far from true. Moreover, only a wildly reductive reading of *Wretched* would see "equal recognition in terms of their own cultural values" as its objective, which seems as mild as it is essentialist, neither of which adjectives seem to apply very well to Fanon. More surprising still is the fact that the text in which Fanon's critique of the master-slave dialectic appears—namely, *Black Skin, White Masks*—is not once mentioned and does not feature in Buck-Morss' list of references. Whereas Fischer too limits discussion of the "fundamental issues" raised by Fanon's critique to a footnote (Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 302n73), the question is both better treated and less central to her analysis than in Buck-Morss. This is not the only exclusion marked by this footnote, either, which also contains reference to David Brion Davis and W.E.B. Du Bois, raising the question of the very status of the "silence" Buck-Morss seeks to diagnose and counteract: that this "silence" is limited to "Hegel scholars" suggests that none of these thinkers fall into that category.

<sup>56</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 90, translation modified, my emphasis; *Peau noire*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 90, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 97.

no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work. The black slave wants to be like his master. Therefore he is less independent than the Hegelian slave. For Hegel, the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.<sup>58</sup>

In this view, the master-slave relation lacks the very basis for reciprocity and recognition that is presupposed in the Hegelian formulation, and the practical implications of this absence, as we saw in Fanon, are quite serious: it is this ontological “flaw” that requires subjective, autonomous, and “violent” action on the part of the slave as the only path to creating a foundation for the master-slave dialectic to then take hold.<sup>59</sup> Put differently, in light of this lack of fundamental equality to begin with, black identity becomes a practical necessity, and we shall see below what implications Buck-Morss’ neglect of this Fanonian insight has for her analysis.

But first, it is worth noting that the erasures and silences we have tracked above—of Dessalines, of his 1804 declaration, and of Fanon’s critique—stand in sharp contrast to the supreme *generosity* Buck-Morss grants to Hegel the man. After skillfully detailing all of the contemporary exposure Hegel would have had to the events in Haiti, she concludes:

Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe... or Hegel knew—knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters, and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context.<sup>60</sup>

Given what she has demonstrated, it seems almost a tautology to say that Hegel *knew* about the revolts, but what isn’t clear is why this logically entails what immediately follows, namely that his dialectic is to be situated in this context. Does not “knowing” about Haiti open up a broad range of possibilities for interpretations of the dialectic? That it is, e.g., a spirited support of the Revolution, a moment of resistance to it, or most plausibly, that the events in Haiti provided the basis for an abstraction of the master-slave relation from this context entirely, an emptying of its content that undermines Buck-Morss’ implications? Is it not the case that the abstraction of the master-slave dialectic from literal reference to slavery—an effect she attributes to later Marxists—was not already clearly executed by Hegel himself?<sup>61</sup> This is a conclusion Buck-Morss resists, instead—counterintuitively and arguably paradoxically—crediting Hegel with “bringing into his text the present, historical realities that surrounded it like invisible ink.”<sup>62</sup> But surely it matters that, for Hegel, this ink remained invisible, and if the Haitian experience entered into his dialectic it was only after being drained by abstraction, incorporated and concealed within the very totality that makes Hegel blind to or resistant to Fanon’s ontological challenge. Why so much effort to read the invisible ink left by Hegel if doing so requires erasing much that

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<sup>58</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195n10; *Peau noire*, 179n9.

<sup>59</sup> Buck-Morss does recognize this enforced recognition in her discussion of the Haitian example: “The self-liberation of the African slaves in Saint-Domingue gained for them, by force, the recognition of European and American whites—if only in the form of fear” (*Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 39). The function of fear in facilitating recognition was something that Fanon had learned as well from Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew*. However, when it comes to Buck-Morss’ normative conclusions and her concept of “universal history” this dialectical insight is lamentably absent.

<sup>60</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 56.

<sup>62</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 52.



was written clear as day? Why such generosity toward a giant of the European tradition when thinkers like Fanon and actors like Dessalines are caricatured?

This generosity is manifested in several ways, from the benign insistence that Hegel's everyday concerns prevented him from explicitly mentioning the Haitian Revolution,<sup>63</sup> to a more ambitious attempt to divide Hegel's *oeuvre* between early and late. After finding early inspiration in the Haitian Revolution (or, we should say, the rebellion, since what both Hegel and Buck-Morss seem to oppose is precisely the Revolution) as the key to the "universal realization of freedom," Buck-Morss claims that Hegel quickly retreated from this excitement to the halls of academia, the comforts of political opinions, and the insularity of universal concepts:<sup>64</sup>

In an effort to become more erudite in African studies during the 1820s, Hegel was in fact becoming dumber... the more faithfully his lectures reflected Europe's conventional scholarly wisdom on African society, the less enlightened and more bigoted they became.<sup>65</sup>

Here a sharp word against Hegel seems to stand in as an excuse for unwarranted generosity, serving as well to conceal a tension that cuts right to the heart of Buck-Morss' project of universal history: if Hegel's increasing fidelity to the "conventional scholarly wisdom" of the European Enlightenment made him "less enlightened," then where in this gap does "universal history" lie? This she does not answer directly, but suffice it to say that the very effort to rescue Hegel, the generosity she affords him, says a great deal.<sup>66</sup>

What is erased with Dessalines returns as the "dilemma of the insurgent" that frames Buck-Morss' own project of universal history: Hegel's text falls silent at the moment of action, and yet action can be its only result. The dilemma is this: action thereby threatens humanity, since the enemies of humanity are justifiably targets of brutality. "What dialectical understanding," she asks, "what political struggle will provide liberation from *this* contradiction?"<sup>67</sup> What will be noteworthy in this demand for a specifically dialectical solution will be the foreclosure of the same. For Fanon, as we have seen, this is no contradiction at all, which is not to say that he endorsed brutality: he did not.<sup>68</sup> Rather, he endorsed the imperative to action, to pushing beyond where Hegel's text (and indeed, Buck-Morss' as well) leaves off, and he insisted that to do so, rather than undermining dialectical progress, is the *only* possible dialectical path. This emerges in the Fanonian concept of sociogeny discussed above, one best

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<sup>63</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 67-74.

<sup>65</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 73-74.

<sup>66</sup> Such generosity often has the (unintended) effect of recreating or paralleling racist and Eurocentric lines of division. A perhaps unfair but unavoidable example: when transit police recently shot a young black man in the back, killing him on the train platform, much ink was spent wondering aloud whether or not the officer had meant to use his Taser, whether his gun discharged accidentally, etc. The very generosity afforded to the officer, however, would never have been granted to the victim had their roles been reversed. See George Ciccariello-Maher, "Oakland's Not for Burning? Popular Fury at Yet Another Police Murder," *Counterpunch* (January 9<sup>th</sup> 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 134.

<sup>68</sup> Fanon himself observed, stationed as a psychiatrist in Blida-Joinville in colonial Algeria, far more brutality than most. In *Wretched of the Earth*, he characteristically distinguishes between a "revolutionary" and a "counter-revolutionary" brutality (95). In *Toward the African Revolution*, he analyzes torture in depth (67-69). In *A Dying Colonialism*, he "condemns" brutality by the colonized, but does so in an anguished manner, recognizing his inability to either excuse or reject such counter-brutality. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, tr. H. Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965 [1959]), 25.

summarized as the imperative to transform those social relations which are responsible for inhuman distortions, and one best performed by Fanon's own resignation as a psychiatrist to immerse himself in the revolutionary struggle.<sup>69</sup>

Buck-Morss, by contrast immediately identifies her task as an intellectual one, and locates it within the walls of academia. To remain faithful to universal history, she insists, is not to be blinkered by systematicity, but instead to celebrate moments of rupture and historical anomaly.<sup>70</sup> Breaking out of Hegelian historicity means as well breaking out of predetermined collectivities, and universal history is a realm where identity is shunned and syncretism reigns in the "porosity" of concepts as well as identities.<sup>71</sup> "Liberation from the exclusionary loyalties of collective identities is precisely what makes progress possible in history"... "liberation... not across national boundaries but without them."<sup>72</sup> Historical progress, for this self-professed dialectician, seems to proceed *not* through rupture and diremptive conflict, but rather through the immediate and unconditional assertion of universality as fact. Given what we have seen throughout this project, in the various efforts our thinkers have undertaken to restart dialectical progress in the face of blockage by false totalities and false universals, we would be justified in wondering what on earth remains dialectical in Buck-Morss' universal history. What use is an ostensible commitment to the porosity of concepts if all identities are already overdetermined as repressive barriers to the universal—leading only and inevitably to a "recurring cycle of victim and aggressor"<sup>73</sup>—rather than the only vehicle capable of leading us there? We have seen in Fanon's discussion of Manicheanism, and will return below, to the undialectical and simplistic view implied by this "cycle of violence" logic.

Thus we have seen that, perhaps without meaning to do so, Buck-Morss' effort to place Haiti at the center of modernity by demonstrating its importance for Hegelian philosophy unfortunately and ironically—given her desire to break historical silences—reproduces a series of silences. Her formulation invisibilizes Dessalines, his 1804 declaration, and a powerful theoretical expression of what both represent—the importance of black (and national) identity against their immediate subsumption to a (false) universal—which we have seen in Fanon's critique of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Furthermore, these silences we have seen to be far from coincidental, as Buck-Morss' project of universal history is one which explicitly shuns the diremptive, conflictive moment that stands at the heart of our counterdiscourse of separation. Hence her betrayal is arguably more galling than was Sartre's: whereas Sartre had at least recognized the dialectical importance of black identity but subsumed it to a later transcendence by class as universal, Buck-Morss subsumes all such ruptural identities—"liberation from the exclusionary loyalties of collective identities"<sup>74</sup>—immediately and unconditionally to her universal viewpoint.

Hence rather than shedding the worst elements of the Hegelian legacy—rather than abandoning its "anticipation of unity"—she in fact reaffirms some of those negative elements

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<sup>69</sup> Fanon, "Letter to the Resident Minister (1956)," in *Toward the African Revolution*, 52-54.

<sup>70</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 147-148.

<sup>71</sup> For a classic critique of syncretism as residually colonial, see Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 36-44.

<sup>72</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 149-151.

<sup>73</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 150.

<sup>74</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 149.

while neglecting some of the best, and it is with regard to the latter that Fanon's words, once launched against Sartre, here apply quite well:

We had appealed to a friend of the colored peoples, and this friend had found nothing better to do than demonstrate the relativity of their action. For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that *consciousness needs to lose itself in the night of the absolute* [*la nuit de l'absolu*], the only condition for attaining self-consciousness... Consciousness committed to experience knows nothing, has to know nothing, of the essence and determination of its being.<sup>75</sup>

Much as Sartre subsumed the particular that was Negritude and black identity more generally as a "minor term" in a broader dialectical progression whose outcome was the universality of class, so too does Buck-Morss similarly subsume black and national identity (or *any* identity, really), and the resistance they engender, to the broader universal that is her "new humanism." Were this truly a new humanism, however, this subsumption would not be necessary and nor would it be predefined according to European criteria.<sup>76</sup> Hence the significance of the Haitian Revolution would not be, as Buck-Morss would have it, to prove the universality of the French Revolution, but rather to—as is the case with Fanon in his conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*—simultaneously recognizing the virtues of Europe while nevertheless insisting on the need to "flee this stagnation where dialectics has gradually turned into a logic of the status quo."<sup>77</sup>

Buck-Morss' erasure of the Fanonian critique of Hegel's master-slave dialectic is of no small importance to our own project, as should be more than evident at this point. In its insistent reclaiming of the term "dialectical," our counterdiscourse of separation rejects the Hegelian privileging of the moment of synthesis, the "aspiration to totality" that so clearly imbues Buck-Morss' project of universal history as well. We have seen above how her formulation loses something of its dialectical content by rejecting rupture and demanding the universal now, thereby proving incapable of responding to Fanon's powerful critique, one which would instead see in the Haitian example the radical subjectivization of the dialectic and displacement of the universal to beyond a still-distant anti-colonial horizon.

All of this is not even to mention the most obvious linkage between our project of a reformulated dialectic and the Haitian Revolution, namely, the fact that it was but ten short years after first writing *The Black Jacobins* (and ten years prior to *Facing Reality*) that James would turn in an equally systematic manner to an in-depth analysis of both Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Lenin's response, which would be published as *Notes on Dialectics*.<sup>78</sup> Rather than turn to an exhaustive study of this seminal text, however, what remains is to consider briefly and in more general terms how our own project relates to the question of dialectics, and to do so, we could have no better point of departure than Fredric Jameson's recent text, *Valences of the Dialectic*.

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<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112-113, my emphasis, translation modified; *Peau noire*, 108.

<sup>76</sup> While Buck-Morss cites Aimé Césaire's excitement at Hegel's incorporation of the particular (16), she apparently neglects the torsions that Césaire himself would later introduce into the Hegelian dialectic, one which would effectively privilege a "universal rich with all that is particular." Cited in Robin D.G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism," in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 25-26. For Césaire's and Fanon's formulation of a "new humanism" which exceeds the European limits that Buck-Morss arguably maintains, see George Ciccariello-Maher, "The Internal Limits of the European Gaze."

<sup>77</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 237; *Les Damnés*, 374.

<sup>78</sup> C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (London: Allison & Busby, 1948).

## Two, Three, Many Dialectics!

While the encyclopedic nature of Jameson's text and the sheer breadth of his analysis requires that he be more ambivalent and complete in his treatment of dialectics—to the degree that he recognizes the virtues of even the most conservative form of a singular, unified, and overarching dialectic-as-science—we have had the luxury of being more partial and insistent on a very specific tendency within his analysis as our point of departure. This is the second grammatical form of dialectics that Jameson identifies, the form modified by the indefinite article in contrast to the definite article which defines “the dialectic” as necessarily singular, and one which thereby accommodates a multiplicity of different “local” dialectics.<sup>79</sup> This idea of a local dialectic, one whose form does not necessarily reflect perfectly that of the traditional and conservative dialectics we have—following Foucault—diagnosed throughout, is one which accommodates not only the spatial scope of the respective dialectics we have considered thus far, but also the diverse contents their respective identities (class, race, nation, people) bring to the table.

But before turning to the question of a multiplicity of dialectics, we must briefly note four moments in which Jameson helps us to overcome the shortcomings of Buck-Morss' analysis that we diagnosed above. The first and arguably least important of these is nevertheless not without its consequences, as we have seen above, and has to do with what Jameson identifies as the two traditional (and discredited) ways of viewing dialectics as a singularity: either as a system (generally associated with Hegel) or as a method (generally associated with Marx).<sup>80</sup> Whereas Buck-Morss divides Hegel's career in an effort to rescue the young Hegel *politically*, and to suggest that he was a closet supporter of Haitian independence, Jameson's distinction is much less ambitious, and more plausible as a result. Rather than a political apologia, his apologia is merely philosophical: Jameson spares the *Phenomenology* from the pretensions and dangers of dialectics as a system by insisting that it was only later that Hegel himself—playing the role of his own Engels—sought to turn his philosophy into a coherent system.<sup>81</sup> Thus the *Phenomenology* is spared as a potentially radical work without the need to grant Hegel the man any of the arguably undue historical generosity that we find in Buck-Morss.

Secondly, and related to the danger of dialectics as either a singular system or a singular method, it is worth noting that it is precisely as the latter that Buck-Morss describes her own project of universal history.<sup>82</sup> For Jameson, however, dialectics as method is “no less disgraced by its obvious instrumentalization and by the radical opposition it necessarily carries within itself between means and ends.”<sup>83</sup> Jameson himself does not reject these discredited views of dialectics out of hand, instead maintaining them as both temptations and warnings, and given what we have seen above in Buck-Morss' uncritical slide to an undialectical assertion of universality, she might do well to heed such warnings with regard to dialectics-as-method.

This danger is then related to the third moment of warning that Jameson provides, one which is closer to the concerns that we have been expressing throughout this project with regard to the paradigm of totality, and one closely associated with dialectics as a system. Here, Jameson

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<sup>79</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 15.

<sup>80</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, x.

<sup>83</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 3.

insists that “totality is not something one ends with, but something one begins with.”<sup>84</sup> In the language of our project, this view entails an endorsement of descriptive totality as a starting point, but a degree of anxiety toward the “aspiration to totality” that runs throughout this project and which, like the anxiety toward method above, might serve as a useful vaccine to Buck-Morss’ occasionally uncritical universal history. While we have seen that each of our thinkers discussed above breaks in different ways with even this descriptive notion of totality as a point of departure, it is nevertheless true that anxiety toward totality’s normative weight is often what prompts such a break.

Fourthly, and moving more directly into the shortcomings analyzed above, Jameson directly confronts the purported permanence of the “cycle of violence” argument by demonstrating how even the most powerful of oppositions fail to maintain a balanced relation, and effectively dissect themselves from within. As we saw in our fourth chapter, this challenge to the opposition=dialectic equation assumes its most powerful and problematic form in Manicheanism, in the perfection of absolute opposition, or what Jameson terms a “metaphysical dualism.”<sup>85</sup> While we have seen that the key to Fanon’s alchemical transformation of Manichean opposition into dialectical motion was his conception of decolonial violence as fundamentally generative, Jameson takes the more general path—one laudable in its ambitiousness—of attempting to deconstruct Manicheanism from within.

Thus he attempts to show what we saw more locally in Fanon: namely, how even the firmest of Manicheanisms can, as though thrown off balance by the slightest impurity, enter into dialectical motion. The best example, for Jameson, is the most powerful, one as obvious as it is paradigmatic, serving as it does as the very basis for all Manicheanisms: the opposition between Good and Evil. Jameson merely reminds us here of the obvious: that while for the prophet Mani, these were originally equals, the same cannot be maintained at the present (due in no small part to the imbalances of Judeo-Christian myth), as the “sorry fate of Evil” is that it has now become but a poor reflection of the essential purity that is Good.<sup>86</sup> While this view is as retrospective—with the generality of its scope resulting only from the importance of the example—this does not necessarily set it apart from Fanon’s more prospective view, in which revolutionary violence can intervene as an act of will to first reestablish the balance before then tipping it decisively in favor of the colonized.<sup>87</sup>

The importance of dissecting the purported permanence of oppositions is central, and opens upon Jameson’s effort—however tentative—to theorize dialectics as a multiplicity in a way that is profoundly useful for reflecting upon our project of a counterdiscourse of separation, a counterdiscourse which, as we have seen, draws together self-described dialectical process which nevertheless are oriented around very different identities. In developing a framework for the analysis of a multiplicity of local dialectics, “our only presupposition will be the assumption

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<sup>84</sup> He adds: “the philosophical claim of unity turns out to be a symptomatic transformation of the deeper claim or aspiration to totality itself, about which a number of misconceptions must be addressed.” Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 19.

<sup>87</sup> Jameson’s retrospective approach, in which oppositions are deconstructed as if by the Owl of Minerva, is a reflection of his caution, one which similarly emerges in his hesitance to endorse an overthrow of the traditional subjection of superstructure to base, an inversion which he fears would threaten Marxism (*Valences of the Dialectic*, 44). As we have seen, none of the thinkers considered here would be nearly so cautious.

that *any opposition can be the starting point for a dialectic in its own right*.”<sup>88</sup> This is a controversial claim indeed, given what we have seen above regarding the dangers of blockage and stalemate that some oppositions can pose against dialectical movement, oppositions which, while providing the precondition for such motion, also tend toward freezing such motion in a hypostatization of the present as a false totality or false universal, and hence the importance of the dissection of Manicheanism. But the operative term here is “can,” and what our counterdiscourse of separation seeks to do is to confront this moment of indeterminate possibility with the subjective intervention of radical will in the form of identity.

What seem to be absolute oppositions in each of our thinkers are therefore transformed by virtue of their absoluteness into dialectical motion, and Jameson allows us to see how it is that this occurs, thereby allowing us to return critically to contemporary theories of constituent power. For example, Sorel certainly seems to establish an absolute opposition between worker and boss, one which emerges most powerfully in his ethic of producers. How does this absolute enmity enter into motion? As Jameson shows, it is precisely the perfection of one side—here, the workers—that throws off the balance, with the result that, as we have seen above, working-class action is capable of effecting *both* sides of the binary, consolidating their oppositions and pushing the dialectic forward. This stands in opposition to those who would attempt to maintain such oppositions as absolute through an overzealous rejection of dialectics in the latter’s caricatured form, not only privileging constituent power over its constituted opposite (this much being necessary), but moreover rejecting that the two enter into any sort of mutual relationship at all.<sup>89</sup>

Thus rather than “universal history” we have “many dialectics,” and as a description of our own project of a counterdiscourse of separation—in its multiplicity and flexibility—this seems an accurate descriptor. But these are a multiplicity of dialectics which, in their shunning of totality, notably reverse the Hegelian adage which views division (here appearing in Hegel’s first text as *Entzweiung* rather than *Diremption*) as resolution’s *raison d’être*:

Dichotomy is the source of the need of philosophy... Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest pitch of living energy is only possible through its own reestablishment out of the deepest fission. What Reason opposes, rather, is just the absolute fixity which the intellect gives to the dichotomy; and it does so all the more if the absolute oppositions themselves originated in Reason.<sup>90</sup>

From our perspective, dichotomy (or diremption) is the source of anxiety toward philosophy as a centralizing scientific instance. Life eternally springs up oppositions, and totality’s reestablishment often does violence to the radical energies that such oppositions represent. Diremptive “Reason”—though ours would no doubt be best rendered in the lowercase—seeks to do something different, not by celebrating dichotomy as “absolute fixity,” but instead by recognizing what Hegel’s own anxieties too often mask: the dialectical effects that such dichotomies can embody when not immediately reinscribed into the totality. It is not division which creates the need for resolution, but just the opposite: resolution, the threatening specter of a stifling unity which so often takes the name of “totality,” demands a constant process of

<sup>88</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 19, my emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> I include Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, among others, under this category, for the reasons discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>90</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977), 89. Cited in Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 16-17fn12.

division and the generation of dialectical movement if we are not going to be perpetually trapped in a reification of the existing order.

Here, too, Jameson is useful in allowing us to return to the question posed by the opposition of counterdiscourse to dialectics. He compares deconstruction to dialectics in the following terms:

For it is as though the dialectic moves jerkily from moment to moment like a slide show, where deconstruction dizzily fast-forwards... both work to bring up into the light the structural incoherences of the “idea” or conceptual “positions” or interpretations which are their object of critique. But where the dialectic pauses, waiting for the new “dialectical” solution to freeze over in its turn and become an idea or an ideology to which the dialectic can again be “applied” (as it were from the outside of the newly reformed system), deconstruction races forward.<sup>91</sup>

Jameson sees this as a critique of both the hesitancy of a dialectic that seems only to feed on ideology and the ravenous appetite of a deconstruction which, in the absence of sustenance, is content to feed on itself: deconstruction “devours its own tail, and thus itself in the process. One of the outcomes thus devoured and unraveled is of course the dialectic itself, which paused too long, and became an ideology in its own right, yet another object of deconstruction.”<sup>92</sup> This is not to suggest that what Jameson says of Derridean deconstruction applies to Foucaultian counterdiscourse, but rather that Jameson opens a productive space in which, by critiquing both the dialectic and its critics, we can draw the two toward one another.

More specific to our discussion here, it can be said that Foucault’s critique of dialectics—which is simultaneously the basis for the reformulated dialectics of Sorel, Fanon, and Dussel—centers on precisely this moment of pausing, of “freezing over” in which the system reforms and in which dialectics itself risks becoming an ideology itself (and here the great virtue of Jameson’s account is to show that dialectics is threatened *both* by moving too quickly and too slowly). This is the moment of totalization, the moment of unity that purportedly rests at the “end” of the dialectic, but which serves instead to empower that new, Jacobin minority capable of pronouncing such an “end” in the first place. Dialectical energies then pass into other hands, to begin the process anew with a new diremption, a new division, and the establishment of a new moment of productive conflict.

It is this moment precisely that has been so central for the thinkers considered here, and which constituted the starting point for the counterdiscourse of separation. We have seen that each thinker in this study has been confronted with an assertion of unity or universality (or, in a philosophical register, “totality”) which threatens to halt progressive transformation (Jameson’s “freezing over”). For Sorel, this is “social harmony,” for Fanon it is formal equality and later formal liberation, and for Dussel, it is the weighty claim of the totality itself, one which incorporates difference only under the heading of the same. And for each, these claims of political unity issued from ostensible critics of the system, coming as they did from parliamentary socialists (for Sorel), Negritude thinkers and even Sartre (for Fanon), and Third World nationalists (for Dussel). Confronted with this situation, each thinker sought to reactivate radical critique as a dialectical process, but one which did not contain the conservatism of the dialectics that each confronted: resting somewhere between Jameson’s account of dialectics and

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<sup>91</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 26-27.

<sup>92</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 27.

his account of deconstruction, each thinker sought to set into motion a progression which was both continuous (like deconstruction) and productive (like dialectics).

In so doing, each thinker takes extreme liberties with the concept of dialectics itself, as we have seen, unhesitatingly transforming dialectics through a radical resignification that is apparently fearless of whatever conservative residues the term might contain. Each in their own way, against their own enemies, and toward their own particular ends, deploys a reformulated dialectic which refuses to take refuge in essentialist counterdiscourse (which would thereby freeze the dialectic before it even begins) (moment one), which privileges the moment of conflict (at the expense of the moment of resolution) (moments two and three), and which insists that such resolution lies far beyond our horizon of action, offering only glimpses of a future universal (moment four). That each thinker does so in his own way and according to the identity deemed relevant to his context is what draws us away from what Jameson deems “the dialectic” as a singular system or method, and toward a “multiplicity” of dialectics which emerge out of a multiplicity of generative conflicts.

In the rejection of both the (temporal) moment of systematic synthesis or “freezing over” and the (spatial) singularity of the idea of a single, overarching dialectic (which therefore threatens as well a more singular and ominous “freezing over”), I want to argue that the thinkers discussed above go a long way toward assuaging Foucault’s fears about the necessarily pernicious nature of any and all dialectics. Both the temporal and the spatial gesture also move toward Foucault in clear complicity with one another, since in their simultaneity they entail a series of overlaps: if there is not moment of “freezing over” then dialectical conflicts are freed up to overlap in time, and this overlap is multiplied in a multiplicity of dialectics, each interacting and preventing closure of the other (this is a dynamic which we have seen emerge schematically in the concept of the dynamic interplay of identities that constitutes the Venezuelan people).

That Foucault saw contrasting possibilities in Marxism is clear, his many critiques of his Marxist contemporaries notwithstanding, and in closing it would be worth suggesting that these opposing possibilities be made available as well for the dialectical motion or lack thereof that Marxism so clearly signified for him. In a 1978 conversation, Foucault spoke of Marxism in the following terms which are so evocative of not only the Sorelian myth but the powerfully projected identities (black, national, and popular) discussed by Fanon and Dussel as well:

... everyone was drawn into Marxism with radical violence and intensity and with a staggeringly powerful thrust. For those young people, Marxism did not represent merely a way of analyzing reality; it was also a kind of moral force... And that led me to believe that without a doubt the role of political ideology, or of a political perception of the world, was indispensable to the goal of setting off the struggle.<sup>93</sup>

Violence, ideology, and the subjective intervention in “setting off the struggle”: all seem to explicitly echo elements of our counterdiscourse of separation. But this does not mean that the potentially radical function of Marxism excluded the conservative and totalizing possibility of Marxism-as-science, as Foucault immediately adds that, “I could see that the precision of theory,

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<sup>93</sup> Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, tr. R. J. Goldstein and J. Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991 [1978/1981]), 134; 137.



its scientific character, was an entirely secondary question that functioned in the debates more as a means of deception than as a truthful, correct, and proper criterion of conduct.”<sup>94</sup>

But what is key here is that Foucault is not speaking of his contemporary France, and indeed his distaste for Marxism derived almost exclusively from the role that the term played in the France of the French Communist Party. No, he is speaking instead of his time in Tunisia, in the north of Africa, and given our subject matter this seems to be no coincidence. Stepping across the “colonial difference”—that interpretive gap across which Fanon forced us with the “decolonial turn” he introduced into the counterdiscourse of separation—is what allowed Foucault to introduce a complexity into his understanding of Marxism (and here his “two Marxisms” could be seen in parallel to our “two violences,” “two nationalisms,” etc.). If this is true, then we would be justified in wondering whether or not he would admit the possibility that a decolonized dialectic, one which picks up the already-radicalized Sorelian dialectic and projects it into even further radicalization by projecting it onto the global stage and into a multiplicity of spheres, might still hold out some hope for revolutionary transformation.

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<sup>94</sup> Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 137.