To my PTRW readers:

This paper has been a work in progress for over a year now but has recently undergone very major revisions. Approximately half of the paper (specifically, the latter half) was written in the past few weeks and has involved new research and thinking. I appreciate commentary of any kind on all aspects of the paper, but I simply wished to flag what parts of the paper are more recent works-in-progress as I am especially concerned with the feasibility or quality of these sections.

While this paper is intended to be a stand-alone piece, it will also likely serve as the foundation for a dissertation chapter. I therefore do not think much external context is needed to read this paper, but “big picture” thoughts as to how this paper might lend to future lines of inquiry are nonetheless very much appreciated!

-Will

**Introduction**

Frantz Fanon’s relationship to the politics of recognition[[1]](#footnote-1) is an ambiguous one. Many commentators appeal to Fanon’s reformulation and critique of G.W.F. Hegel’s master-slave[[2]](#footnote-2) dialectic in order to suggest that Fanon rejects the recognition paradigm, whether it be due to the “fixing” quality of recognition (Chari 2004), the unrecognizable “subontological” status of the colonized subject (Ciccariello-Maher 2017, 70), or the inherent coloniality of Hegelian dialectics (Ogungbure 2018). Kelly Oliver (2001) captures this view when she argues that rather than “embrace a recognition model of identity and self-worth, or unproblematically endorse the struggle for recognition of oppressed people, Fanon suggests that active meaning making and self-creation are necessary to fight oppression and overcome the psychic damage of colonization” (29). Others suggest that while Fanon surely complicates Hegel’s account of mutual recognition, recognitive reciprocity lies at the foundation of his new humanism (Nayar 2013, 117–31; Onwuanibe 1983, 13–20; Villet 2011, 49). The corollary of this view is that Fanon understands colonial and racist oppression, at least in part, as a form of *misrecognition*, particularly through the colonizer’s freedom-disabling imposition of demeaning images and narratives upon the colonized (Gendzier 1973, 50; Taylor 1994, 65). Fanon’s critique of recognition, to the extent that it exists, could then be understood as being directed towards an incomplete, excessively abstract, or one-sided form of recognition, rather than towards recognition *as such* (Bird-Pollan 2015, 88–9; Pirsoul 2017, 76–8). Both of these readings capture an important feature of his thought. Fanon is deeply attentive to the ways that systematic misrecognition disfigures the psyche and undermines freedom. Yet, Fanon remains deeply skeptical of recognition-seeking in the face of dehumanizing misrecognition, and does not proceed, as many theorists of recognition do, to straightforwardly suggest that engaging in a “struggle for recognition” is the path forward.

Instead, Fanon captures a tension at the heart of recognitive politics: securing recognition from one’s fellow members of a political community is necessary for the full realization of dignified freedom and yet seeking such recognition under “non-ideal”[[3]](#footnote-3) circumstances—that is, the very circumstances that make a struggle for recognition necessary in the first place—can be equally damaging to this very freedom. Seeking recognition under such circumstances can thus appear as a very real *trap*. The solution, then, cannot rest at either pole of these co-existing tendencies or currents running through Fanon’s thought; it can neither consist in disavowing the hope of achieving recognitive reciprocity and a new humanity, nor solely seeking greater accommodations, tolerance, and respect. This article seeks to clarify the ways that Fanon attempts to negotiate this tension. I argue that Fanon does so by articulating a view of freedom as *self-constitution*, for which certain forms of recognition serve as a necessary but ultimately incomplete and insufficient role within a broader view of a free life.

The argument will be as follows. First, I will attempt to briefly outline what I take to be Fanon’s ambiguous relationship to the recognition paradigm. Here, I focus primarily on Fanon’s discussions of recognition in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he outlines what I call the “recognition trap”. On the one hand, the very real threat that misrecognition poses to freedom can be articulated as a form of *objectification* that becomes psychologically internalized. On the other hand, Fanon warns us of the ways that seeking the source of our self-worth through recognition can give us a false, superficial, or self-undermining sense of what it means to be free. The “trap”, in other words, is that we mistake one form or another of recognition for freedom itself. The paper then explores the ways that Fanon navigates and seeks to overcome this trap. I suggest that freedom, for Fanon, can be characterized as a radically open-ended process of self-constitution. To get a more concrete sense of the role and function that recognition plays for this self-constitution, I turn to one of Fanon’s sometimes overlooked practices of freedom and disalienation: his social therapeutic approach to psychiatry. Here, I argue that Fanon’s understanding of “authentic” culture becomes the key to understanding not only how we may reconcile the individual’s therapeutic process of disalienation and the irreducibly social nature of freedom, but the ways that mutual recognition figures into practices of freedom. Recognition will be reconceptualized as one feature among others of a free life. At the same time, I conclude that contextually dependent disavowals of recognition can be necessary. This “turning away” from the master, either figurative or literal, is only temporary, however; Fanon holds onto hope for a future of egalitarian cultural, and therefore recognitive, reciprocity.

**What’s Wrong with Misrecognition?**

Fanon begins his chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* titled “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” with the frightened exclamation of a French child: “Look! A Negro!” (*BS*, 89). Fanon elaborates: “I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am *an object among other objects*” (*BS*, 89, emphasis added). Fanon expresses here his disappointment—which followed him from his early experiences fighting for the Free French Forces in the Second World War[[4]](#footnote-4)—in the false promise of French universalism. “I wanted quite simply to be a man among men,” Fanon writes, “I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together” (*BS*, 92). Fanon describes himself as instead entering a deeply hostile world that at every opportunity racializes his body, inscribing it with countless histories, lore, stereotypes, prescriptions: “I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and ancestors” (*BS*, 92). The threats posed by such racialization of the body, however, are not merely *external* in nature (e.g., injustice, mistreatment, exclusion, etc.); they also have the power, according to Fanon, to alter the *self-understanding* of the subject: “My body was *returned to me* spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look a Negro” (*BS*, 93, emphasis added).

Fanon expresses here not only a harrowing portrayal of “the black man confronted with his race” (*BS*, xvii) but a commitment to a fundamental premise of the politics of recognition, that the “projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized” (Taylor 1994, 36). This projection—i.e., misrecognition—has the power to cause such harm because, for Fanon, the self and its constitutive identity is, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor, fundamentally “dialogical”.[[5]](#footnote-5) In contrast with an atomistic understanding of the subject, the dialogical understanding of the human being suggests that we “become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression” (Taylor 1994, 32), such that “I negotiate [my identity] through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others” (Taylor 1994, 34). One’s self-understanding, in other words, can only be made sense of within a network of culturally, politically, and linguistically mediated self-other relations. When Fanon describes the internalization of racist ideas in the form of inferiority complexes and related neuroses, he is essentially appealing to a view of the self as ontologically porous, wherein *external* norms or discourses shape what we typically view as *internal*: one’s subjective values, psychological constitution, and self-image.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The primary way that Fanon describes this psychically harmful racialization of the body is as a form of “thingifying”[[7]](#footnote-7) depersonalization: it is essentially the process of one self-conscious subject reducing an other to object, corporeality, and bare life. Much like Hegel’s master who seeks self-conscious freedom—i.e., being more than *mere being*, being a “pure *being-for-itself*” (*PhG*, ¶187, 111)—through the subjugation of the slave clinging to bare life, misrecognition here consists in inscribing the essence of the other with “self-sufficient *being*, or with thinghood itself” (*PhG*, ¶190, 113). Conversely, the slave initially *internalizes* this objectification, for whom “life, or being for an other, is the essence” (*PhG*, ¶189, 113). The body, for the systematically misrecognized subject, becomes no longer treated as a *situation*—a site of *both* freedom and facticity, or freedom *within* facticity, according to Jean-Paul Sartre (*BN*, 348)—but is rather “overdetermined from the outside” (*BS*, 95). Sartre’s concept of the “look” partially captures what is at play in this overdetermination. Sartre recounts the formative phenomenological experience of encountering another subject *as an external object* and becoming aware of this subject *as subject*. One only experiences this process, though, in exchanging phenomenological positions and developing consciousness of *oneself as object*, as being “degraded, fixed, and dependent” in the eyes of this Other (*BN*, 384). Fanon suggests, however, that though “Sartre’s speculations on the existence of ‘the Other’ remain correct […], their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious because the white man is not only ‘the Other,’ but also the master, whether real or imaginary” (*BS*, 117n.24). In the subjugating white gaze, not only does the Black recipient experience himself *as* *object* but he “feels the weight of his melanin” (*BS*, 128). Lewis Gordon aptly notes that “theoretical articulations of the *nègre*’s condition on the basis of Self–Other relations fail” because they “presuppose the subtle symmetry of ‘Otherness.’” (Gordon 2015, 69). For Sartre, while the “look” does indeed have the power to render me-as-object, there is the presence of a “subtle symmetry” insofar as I am able to *return* the objectifying gaze. Since racism, however, “is a denial to an *Other* attributes of the self and even those of another self—in other words, even of being an Other—the resulting schema is one of location *below*” (Gordon 2015, 69)—i.e., the famous “zone of nonbeing” (*BS*, xii). It is a systematic dehumanization that precludes the possibility of this objectifying reciprocity.

The threat that misrecognition poses to freedom should now be readily apparent. Self-conscious subjectivity consists, at minimum, in having a complex phenomenal existence and the capacity to abstract from mere givenness—i.e., to *be* this or that or to *do* this or that. The mutual recognition that substantiates and emboldens this subjectivity consists in acknowledging the other as recognizing one’s own self-conscious freedom, such that one is necessarily recognizing this other as the type of being—that is, an equally self-conscious subject—that is capable of bestowing recognition. The white gaze as Fanon describes it, on the other hand, collapses the distinction between its recipient’s self-consciousness and body. According to Fanon, racism therefore often manifests as a particular form of misrecognition, in which the objectification of the individual consists in the conflation of one’s partial or entire being with the demeaning ideas and images fallaciously signified by the racialized body—e.g., “[t]hey inscribed on my chromosomes certain genes of various thickness representing cannibalism” (*BS*, 100). The degree to which this misrecognition is freedom-disabling depends in part not only on what external or physical barriers might be erected as a result (e.g., poverty, segregation, police violence, etc.) but also the extent to which the individual has *internalized* this sense of inferiority. This process of objectification and, subsequently, internalization does not suggest, however, that the systematically misrecognized individual *actually* ceases to be a self-conscious subject; rather, it is that this individual—whose identity, recall, is dialogically and intersubjectively cultivated—is misrecognized to such an extent that their self-understanding is fundamentally altered. More specifically, Fanon’s claim is that systematically misrecognized subjects will often convince themselves that they are essentially unfree, and thereby foreclose their own possibilities and subjective freedom.[[8]](#footnote-8) For this reason, Fanon claims that liberation must unfold at both the objective and subjective levels (*BS*, xv) and that, in addition to ending colonial domination, he is “aiming at nothing less than to liberate the man of colour from himself” (*BS*, xii; *O*, 64, translation amended).[[9]](#footnote-9)

**The “Recognition Trap”**

While misrecognition forecloses freedom to a significant degree—Fanon agrees with Hegel that “human worth and reality depend on […] recognition by the other” (*BS*, 191)—liberation is not accomplished through recognition alone. Worse than that, seeking this recognition from the other may end up *undermining*, rather than *fostering*, freedom. I argue that Fanon’s skepticism towards many forms of recognition and recognition-seeking can be characterized as viewing recognition from the other, especially the literal or figurative master, dominant society, or colonist, as a kind of trap. This “recognition trap” consists essentially in mistaking recognition for freedom itself. As we shall see, this trap-like quality that Fanon identifies with recognition-seeking indicates both that there are ways of recognizing and being recognized that are flawed from the outset and that securing *any* recognition, either in a monological or dialogical form, necessarily falls short of Fanon’s vision of what *true* human freedom is.

The nature of the recognition trap is captured most clearly in Fanon’s critical employment of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic to describe the Black experience post-slavery in France. “Historically,” Fanon (perhaps erroneously) writes, “the black man, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free [without a struggle] by the master” with Schœlcher’s pronouncement that “[*s*]*lavery shall no longer exist on French soil*” (*BS*, 194). Formally and legally speaking, therefore, Black individuals enjoy many of the same rights and liberties as their white European counterparts. In actuality, however, such formal egalitarianism reinforced by recognition obfuscates real inequalities—the white man says, “there is no difference between us” but “the black man *knows* there is a difference” (*BS*, 196). Appealing to Hegel’s claim that the “individual who has not risked his life […] has not achieved the truth of being recognized as a self-sufficient self-consciousness” (*PhG*, ¶187, 111),[[10]](#footnote-10) Fanon argues that the “black man does not know the price of freedom because he has never fought for it” (*BS*, 195). Instead, Fanon suggests that the “black man was acted upon. […] The upheaval did not differentiate the black man. He went from one way of life to another, but *not from one life to another*” (*BS*, 194–5, emphasis added). Here, we begin to both get a sense of what Fanon might mean by the word “freedom” as well as why recognition, by itself, is not enough. The *intrinsic* threat posed here is of mistaking recognition from the other, however mutual it may be, for freedom itself. Worse, Fanon equates this recognitive *bestowal* or supposedly benevolent *granting* of “freedom” as a fallacious form of freedom—a false or superficial freedom that, though in some sense necessary (Fanon is not, of course, arguing against the abolition of slavery), can serve as a ruse or a false promise. Instead, freedom must be initiated by one’s *own* subjectivity: “I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical and instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom” (*BS*, 205).

Now, Hegel tells us that in his rendition of master-slave dialectic it is the slave that paradoxically experiences the first hint or taste of freedom. Whereas the master’s freedom as *independence* reveals itself to be a *dependence* on the slave’s labour, the dialectical inversion goes both ways and the slave “comes to acquire a *mind of his own*” through the labour process, wherein an abstract idea is translated into an objective actuality (*PhG*, ¶196, 116). But Fanon distinguishes his depiction of the slave from Hegel’s on this point: “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” (*BS*, 195, n.10). Fanon’s point here, in part, is that once we grasp the master-slave relationship to have not only been centred around forced labour but situated in a context of pervasive and dehumanizing racialization, there are residual attitudes, norms, inequalities, etc. that persist long after the formal relationship of master and slave has dissolved, and which continue to animate and undermine attempts at equal recognition. Fanon remarks that the idea that one would “want to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*” is a “form of recognition that Hegel never described” (*BS*, 45). For Fanon, race is a hierarchized socio-recognitive category signified not only by one’s skin, but a series of other cultural and political signifiers. For instance, Fanon observes that “the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being” (*BS*, 2). The futile attempt to make this ascent to (white) humanity is a neurosis that Fanon calls “lactification”, the pathological desire to whiten oneself (*BS*, 29). Fanon, quite controversially,[[11]](#footnote-11) uses Mayotte Capécia and her semi-autobiographical book *Je suis Martiniquaise* as his case study. One of the chief ways that Capécia seeks to climb the ladder of racialization is through her love of a white man—or, at least, what she *perceives* as love, for Fanon bluntly claims that “love is out of bounds for the Mayotte Capécias of this world” (*BS*, 27). Capécia’s “bad faith”—i.e., a form of self-deception, in Sartre’s words, that generally manifests itself as either a denial of one’s *transcendence* or *facticity* (*BN*, 98)—is such that she appears psychologically incapable of authentically affirming the “fact” of blackness and only seeks freedom by attempting to flee from her situation.

Capécia’s case of “lactification” can be understood as, in part, an attempt to transcend the inadequacies of formal and legal equality. She diagnoses her world correctly: whiteness is identified with dignity and freedom—being a “true” human. But, it should be clear, Capécia mistakes recognition from the white world for freedom and, even worse, reinforces the racial hierarchy that undermines her own freedom in the process.[[12]](#footnote-12) Rejecting the bad faith attempt to seek vicarious power and prestige through a proximal whiteness logically leads one to instead reject whiteness and what it symbolizes in white supremacist societies in favour of embracing one’s marginalized identity—in this case, one’s blackness. Fanon describes his own attempt at such reclamation:

Whereas I had every reason to vent my hatred and loathing, they were rejecting me? Whereas I was the one they should have begged and implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an innate complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known (*BS*, 94–5).

In this case, combating a sense of inferiority through the empowering embrace of one’s marginalized identity consists in the resuscitation of past traditions and the debunking of colonial myths of savagery. And, Fanon argues, this reclamation—chiefly represented in Fanon’s account by the Negritude movement—appears as an attractive route towards disalienation. Indeed, Fanon tells us that it “triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized’s psycho-affective equilibrium” (*WE*, 148). This is especially true, Fanon observes, of the “cultured class of colonized intellectuals”, for whom the “recognition of a national culture and its right to exist represent their favorite stamping ground” (*WE*, 147).

This path, too, Fanon eventually dismisses as a dead-end. The preeminent danger that Fanon identifies in seeking this recognition of one’s group identity, culture, or ancestry is the familiar problem of “essentialism” (footnote). The dead-end that Fanon attributes to the Negritude movement, for instance, is that its “historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture” (*WE*, 152) overlooks the fundamentally different objective problems faced across African nations and diasporas (*WE*, 153). In sum, essentialist recognition is often predicated on what Fanon calls a “mummified” conception of a group identity (*AR*, 34), and has the potential to gloss over internal diversity, painting an overly homogenized picture of a people. Kwame Anthony Appiah voices a concern that broadly captures the substance of the critique of essentialism:

Demanding respect for people as blacks and as gays requires that there are some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay, there will be expectations to be met, demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another (Appiah 1994, 162).

Fanon shares this concern with Appiah and goes at great lengths to distance himself, especially in *Black Skin, White Masks*, from most group-identity essentialisms. Fanon definitively claims that “the black experience is ambiguous, for there is not *one* Negro—there are *many* black men” (*BS*, 115). To assume otherwise, for Fanon, would be to quickly lapse back into the *mis*recognition already discussed: the “constantly affirmed concern with ‘respecting the culture of the native populations’ accordingly does not signify taking into consideration the values borne by the culture, incarnated by men. Rather, this behaviour betrays a determination to *objectify*, to *confine*, to *imprison*, to *harden*” (*AR*, 34, emphasis added).

Of Fanon’s own immersive contact with Negritude and reclamation of blackness, he writes that, for a moment, “I had been recognized; I was no longer a nonentity” (*BS*, 108). But, as Sonia Kruks nicely puts it, although interpersonal recognition may be psychologically empowering, Fanon arrived to the conclusion that to “affirm one’s identity is not, in itself, to change the world” (Kruks 1996). As we shall see, however, Fanon does not entirely abandon the importance of recognizing cultural difference and practices, nor does he ultimately counterpose *authentic* cultural identity and changing the world. Fanon argues that the concern for national culture need not necessarily obfuscate the “national truth”, which is “first and foremost the national reality” (*WE*, 161). As of yet, however, we do not have clear grasp of what exactly freedom demands. What would it mean, concretely speaking, to initiate one’s “cycle of freedom”? And how might this consist in going from “one life to another”? And, finally, how might this freedom avoid the recognition trap Fanon outlines, and meaningfully provide an alternative to the recognition paradigm without abandoning the need for recognition altogether?

**Fanon’s Alternative: Freedom as Self-Constitution**

Summarizing Fanon’s views on freedom, let alone philosophically expounding his ontology of freedom, is no simple task.[[13]](#footnote-13) In this section, I give a cursory view of what I take to be the main features of Fanon’s conception of freedom, before more concretely elaborating on how recognition figures into this framework in the following section. What do we know about Fanon’s freedom? We know that its demands and conditions go well beyond much of what typically qualifies as freedom. In a critique that resembles Karl Marx’s famous assessment of individual liberties in *On the Jewish Question*—e.g., “a state may be a *free state* without man himself being a *free man*” (Marx 1978, 32)—Fanon suggests that freedom is not reducible to one’s political or legal status (such as the one granted to the freed slave), nor can it be articulated in solely negative terms (Berlin 1958, 7). Hobbesian non-interference falls short of Fanon’s high standards for freedom because its materialism—“when the words *free*, and *liberty*, are applied to any thing but *bodies*, they are abused” (*Lev*. Pt. II, Ch. XXI, 2)—fails to capture the phenomenological dimension of non-freedom that Fanon views as indispensable for fully understanding racism and colonialism. Freedom as non-domination comes closer to grasping what is at stake by orienting our attention to arbitrary or unjust power differentials that exist irrespective of how they are deployed or abused. As Philip Pettit nicely puts it, “I suffer domination to the extent that I have a master; I enjoy non-interference to the extent that that master fails to interfere” (Pettit 1999, 22–3). But, as we have seen, Fanon is not satisfied with the mere absence of a master, either. Instead, we must be attuned to the free or unfree subject’s *actual capacities* and *possibilities* within a determinate social context.

For Fanon, attending to the subject’s capacities in this way demands that some degree of *non-alienation* be taken seriously as a necessary condition for true freedom. We know from Fanon’s lengthy descriptions of the experience of misrecognition in *Black Skin, White Masks* that alienation is a hindrance on freedom. But the constructive role that non-alienation, or a sense of belonging, serves is expressed especially clearly in his psychiatric writings and practices.[[14]](#footnote-14) There is a closeknit relationship between alienation, mental illness, and the loss of freedom. “Madness,” Fanon writes in his resignation from his post at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria in 1956, “is one of the means man has of losing his freedom. […] If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization” (*AR*, 53). Alienation produces madness, or madness can be understood as an extreme form of alienation. Fanon writes that “*the mad person is someone who can no longer find his place among people*. Either he *feels* superior to them, or he *feels* unworthy of entering the category of the human. In both cases, he *feels* he is different to them” (*AL*, 224). Writing against what he describes as the Lacanian view of madness as an extremity of freedom—the madman being “one who has accepted to inventory all the abysses that freedom offers” (*AL*, 268)—Fanon classifies madness as a “pathology of freedom”. Mental illness, in other words, is a *real* impediment to freedom; it “situates the patient in a world in which his or her freedom, will and desires are constantly broken by obsessions, inhibitions, countermands, anxieties” (*AL*, 497).

On the one hand, non-alienation is therefore essentially conducive to freedom in a merely *negative* sense. If the *presence* of alienation, or its extremity in madness, hinders or destroys one’s freedom, then the *absence* of alienation signals a degree of autonomy. The therapeutic practice of disalienation is *world-expanding* in the sense that the scope of objects, activities, possibilities that one has access to, unhindered by fixations and psychological immobilisation, is radically widened. This is why disruptions to one’s “psychological notion of the body” (*AL*, 230) or, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one’s “body schema” (*AL*, 232), also has “impacts on the patient’s psychic personality” (*AL*, 233). It is by means of a body schema that “I hold my body as an indivisible possession and I know the position of each of my limbs” (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 100–1). But the body is not an object among other objects. It is primordially experienced not as a *positional* spatiality but a *situational* spatiality (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 102). The descriptions that Fanon gives of the psychiatric symptoms of neurological disruptions of the body schema are remarkably similar to the ways he describes the effects of systematic relations of misrecognition.[[15]](#footnote-15) Fanon concludes in his doctoral thesis, which examines the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in cases of Friedrich’s ataxia, a neurodegenerative disorder that affects motor and sensory capabilities, that individuals experiencing such a “progressive limitation of [their] field of action, [often] cannot conserve an intact psyche” (*AL*, 219). Similarly, once the elaboration of one’s body schema becomes racialized, the body schema collapses into an “epidermal racial schema” (*BS*, 92) and frustrates the ability to express one’s possibilities in relation to the body’s position and proximity to objects. This is why Fanon argues that “any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society” (*BS*, 89); universal onto-phenomenological categories cease to capture the racialized experience of being-in-the-world. In “the white world,” Fanon writes, the “image of one’s body is solely negating. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty” (*BS*, 90). Here, instead of a strictly physical or neurological impediment, it is what Fanon calls an “*affective* tetanization” (*BS*, 92, emphasis added) that has the potential to restrict one’s range of actions. Hence, fantasy and dreams begin to replace the wish for unimpeded freedom in the here-and-now: the patient in the overly oppressive classical hospital setting is condemned “to exercise his freedom in the unreal world of fantasy” (*AL*, 497) and, likewise, the “dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. […] During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning” (*WE*, 15).

But freedom as non-alienation also has a *positive* connotation when freedom is to be understood, in part, as a kind of *belonging*—or, at least, when freedom cannot be articulated without recourse to some form of belonging. Fanon tells us that “systematized delusions, hysterical manifestations and neurotic behaviours must be considered reactional conducts of an ego *at odds with intersocial relations*” (*AL*, 272, emphasis added). The “I” or self’s irreducibly social or dialogical nature reveals the importance of maintaining, to the greatest degree possible, the psychiatric patient’s existing social relations. Because “mental illness is often manifest through an alteration in the notion of the ‘I’” (*AL*, 318), it is of the utmost importance to allow patients to hold onto personal items, clothes, wedding rings, etc. in order to preserve a stable sense of self—e.g., to “call a married woman, a mother of two or three children, by her maiden name, means obliging her to take a step backward” (*AL*, 318). In line with many theorists of recognition, Fanon is arguing that much of the importance of maintaining a unity of the self is for the sake of *practical identity* *formation*.[[16]](#footnote-16) The basic idea here is that we cannot know *what to do* without having recourse to appealing to some idea of *who we are*. Freedom and the proper exercising of subjectivity does not exist in a vacuum, outside of determinate social context. One’s sense of self, identity, or self-understanding plays a constitutive function in giving freedom its *content*. So, as we shall see, in arguing in favour of integrating more culturally relevant events for the patients at Blida-Joinville, Fanon says that “for a Muslim, to live also means to have the chance to celebrate the end of Ramadan” (AL, 321).[[17]](#footnote-17)

The source of this non-alienation or belonging, however, cannot become rigid or fixed. In other words, for Fanon, belonging cannot come at the expense of human *spontaneity* and ceaseless *rejuvenation*. Fanon’s famous “final prayer” that concludes *Black Skin, White Masks*—“O my body, always make me a man who questions!” (*BS*, 206)—conveys a radically non-teleological view of freedom as *process* or a “permanent tension” (*BS*, 206). This conviction or principle of freedom is predicated on an arguably existentialist[[18]](#footnote-18) evaluation of the human being’s essential qualities and capabilities: “In the hospital […] people are what constitute the goal, that is the goal of our daily action, [so] it becomes clear […] that no dose of habit, of habituation, of automatism can intervene. *For people have the extraordinary quality of being in constant renewal*” (*AL*, 338, emphasis added). Here, the enemy of freedom becomes not so much alienation or a lack of belonging but habit, routine, inaction, weariness, etc. One of the problems Fanon associates with classical internment approaches is that it offers “a false protection” in the form of asylum, which fosters “the patient’s lethargy, a sort of wakeful sleep” (*AL*, 474). Therapeutic practice must speak to this feature of human freedom, then, and ought to consist in “life in movement, the involvement of the boarders, their commitment, their engagement” (*AL*, 340).

So, Fanon tells us, a “person makes or unmakes him or herself every day. Every day the task has to be conducted with tenacity” (*AL*, 336). But this making or unmaking never occurs in isolation. And against the formal freedom procured through the pronouncement that “[*s*]*lavery shall no longer exist on French soil*” (*BS*, 194), Fanon reminds us that the “real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life. In the world I am heading for, *I am endlessly creating myself*” (*BS*, 204, emphasis added). Freedom, we may summarize, is *self-constitution*. The active and voluntary participation of the individual in the cultivation of this self is necessary, though the content and source of this self and its practical reasons are not derived exclusively internally but are irreducibly and unavoidably socially mediated.[[19]](#footnote-19) While Fanon arguably gives us some possible examples—ranging from being a parent to a Muslim to a revolutionary—he does not attempt to delineate which shapes or kinds of selfhood one ought to pursue.[[20]](#footnote-20) What self-constitution concretely looks like is necessarily context-dependent but it must also be open-ended, both with respect to the nature of the context-dependent self and the possibilities for the creation of entirely new shapes of selfhood. Self-constitution may be briefly contrasted, here, with a closely related shape of freedom—self-*realization*. The term “realization” arguably implies a latent substance which pre-exists and anticipates its realization. In this case, the critique of essentialism so often leveled against recognition theorists (footnote), for instance, holds weight; recognition is granted to a pre-existing self and misrecognition disqualifies this self from being granted dignity and respect. In the case of the latter, freedom is understood as something *transformational*. Therefore, for the revolutionary movement, Fanon asserts that what is fundamentally at stake is “the type of social relations they will establish and their idea of the future of humanity. […] All else is hot air and mystification” (*WE*, 169). It is a new form of life that must be forged through the struggle for independence. “Decolonization,” Fanon writes, never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and *fundamentally alters being*” and, therefore, “is truly the *creation of a new men*” (*WE*, 2, emphasis added).

**Fanon’s Strategies of Freedom: The Role of Recognition and Culture in Disalienation**

We now have a broad picture of what freedom means for Fanon: not only autonomy and agency without arbitrary barriers, but non-alienation and constant renewal, too—in sum, I have argued, self-constitution. It remains to be seen how this picture of freedom as self-constitution more-or-less successfully navigates the recognition trap. The central question remains largely unanswered: what role, if any, ought recognition to play for freedom? To answer this question, I continue the line of inquiry into how his psychiatric works and practices shed light on the nature of freedom and self-constitution. In particular, I focus on Fanon’s struggles to implement social therapy in Blida-Joinville. The foundational importance of culture for disalienation revealed in this study, I argue, gives us a clearer view of the ways that recognition necessarily figures into a free life. I turn, then, to Fanon’s later theorizing of culture, or *authentic* culture, to show how it satisfies each requirement for freedom, and gives us a more precise, albeit no less open-ended, picture of social freedom in practice.

Fanon arrives in Algeria in the fall of 1953, promptly taking up his post as medical director at Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital and getting to work introducing social therapeutic reforms.[[21]](#footnote-21) Fanon’s description of the treatment of North African patients in France in the 1952 essay “The ‘North African Syndrome’”largely mirrors what Fanon came to find in Blida. The North African in France—whom Fanon describes as “starving for humanity [… and] complete recognition” (*AR*, 3), whom the doctors “thingify by calling him systematically Mohammed” (*AR*, 14)—faces medical personnel with an “a priori” attitude. It is frequently assumed, Fanon describes, that the North African has no *real* illness and so, instead, is diagnosed with the so-called “North African syndrome” (*AR*, 7–8). Algerian Arabs, Fanon describes, likewise continue to be systematically misrecognized in the hospital setting by the largely European staff. Antoine Porot, one of the designers of the Blida-Joinville Hospital and the founder of what would become known as the “Algiers School”, had firmly established an ethnopsychiatric paradigm prior to Fanon’s arrival, explicitly diagnosing Muslim North Africans across the board as *essentially* and *naturally* primitive and prone to crime and dishonesty.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Fanon would come to find, however, that employing just any humanistic or social therapeutic approach for addressing the patients’ disorders, which the Algiers School regime could only have exacerbated, would be deficient. In other words, simply importing the social therapeutic methods Fanon practiced at Saint-Alban with Tosquelles turned out to be a “methodological” error made “possible only through an attitude devoid of objectivity” (*AL*, 353). Initial social therapy measures at Blida-Joinville included celebrations organized by the patients, participatory theatre, film nights, a hospital journal, and weaving workshops. Fanon and his colleague Jacques Azoulay report in a 1954 article, that while these measures were an immediate success among the European women, they were a complete failure among the Muslim men, who represented over half of their hospital division (*AL*, 354). The Muslim patients, they write, experienced a “twofold alienation resulting from the tyranny of subjectivity”—i.e., not only were they experiencing mental illness, but their abilities to feel at home were doubly threatened by the sociocentricity of the hospital’s cultural practices (*AL*, 354). And the reasons for the inefficacy of the new program were clear: the social therapeutic measures were not adapted to the Muslim patients’ cultural and social milieu. The games and films were European, the celebrations were often not religious or familial in nature (which the authors report as appearing rather abstract to the Muslim patients), the hospital journal was attempting to cater to a largely illiterate population with a strong oral tradition, and the handicraft workshops were viewed as unappealing “feminine” work to the men (*AL*, 368–71). Fanon and Azoulay summarize: “We had naively taken our division as a whole and believed we had adapted to this Muslim society the frames of a particular Western society at a determinate period of its technological evolution” (*AL*, 362). “Socio-therapy,” they conclude, “would only be possible to the extent that social morphology and forms of sociability were taken into consideration” (*AL*, 364). Taking the indigenous “forms of socialibility” seriously, practically speaking, meant establishing a Moorish café, bringing in a professional Muslim storyteller, introducing regular celebrations of traditional Muslim feasts and holidays, among other things (*AL*, 371). If the point of social therapy is to rediscover one’s freedom, as Fanon suggests, then it must entail the immanent *situation* of the possibilities of this freedom within an already existing self-understanding or cultural context. The point, Fanon writes, is to “relearn […], not to add onto an existent personality a sum of behaviors. […] It is a matter of enabling the boarder to reprise, to begin again by helping him or her to understand better, to grasp things better, that is to say, to grasp him- or herself better again” (*AL*, 332).[[23]](#footnote-23) For the socially minded therapist, this means granting affirmative recognition to the patients’ cultural particularity and attempting to understand the ontological and metaphysical assumptions they carry.[[24]](#footnote-24)

At the same time, this recognition is only significant to the extent that culture is understood as a practice of freedom. Against the fixed or reified view of culture we have already seen Fanon critique intellectuals and the Negritude movement for, what Fanon might conversely call “authentic” culture (footnote) cannot be untethered from social practice. It is not an abstract ideal or set of values that a cultural community must reach toward or resuscitate. Culture “eminently eludes any form of simplification. In its essence it is the very opposite of custom, which is always a deterioration of culture” (*WE*, 160). Instead, Fanon descriptively and normatively depicts culture, when colonialism is absent, as being “living and open to the future […], permeated by spontaneous, generous, fertile lines of force” (*AR*, 34).[[25]](#footnote-25) Fanon’s conception of culture as a dynamic and open-ended process is, I suggest, the practical means by which he seeks to reconcile freedom’s principles of non-alienation and ceaseless rejuvenation, as well as both the irreducible sociality Fanon associates with the self and his seemingly individualist declaration, “I am *my own* foundation” (*BS*, 205, emphasis added). These principles may otherwise appear to be in tension, for non-alienation or belonging might evoke a sense of *stasis*, which stands opposed to the ceaseless *movement* or spontaneity that characterizes a kind of existential freedom. Despite the fluid nature of culture, Fanon suggests that cultures still provide “systems of reference” (*AR*, 38). Since it is not “possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within the framework of a culture that *recognizes him and that he decides to assume*” (AR, 34, emphasis added), one of the preeminent wrongs of colonialism’s cultural imperialism is its liquidation and denigration of a more-or-less coherent yet fluid system of values, norms, and practical identities that substantiates or grounds to a large degree individual practices of freedom.

Cultural membership or belonging is predicated on mutual recognition among and between its participants. Feeling a sense of responsibility or obligation to one’s fellow community members or the state, Fanon notes, “cannot take place without the prior *reciprocal recognition* of the group by the individual and of the individual by the group” (*AL*, 410, emphasis added). But because culture is understood as social practice or a form of life, as opposed to an abstract ideal, it has certain basic material and political preconditions. We know that colonialism stifles culture, either by destroying or ossifying it. So, Fanon argues, to “fight for the national culture first all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow” (*WE*, 168). Fanon’s new humanism, decolonial liberation, and the accomplishment of a truly human freedom cannot be accomplished through intersubjective reciprocity alone; Fanon’s demands for the radical transformation of the socio-economic order—“disalienation will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place” (*BS*, xv; *O*, 66)—should remind us that his project is not concerned with recognition or identity at the expense of what we may designate as “material” considerations. Political and economic independence is essential for culture: the “restoration of the nation must therefore give life in the most biological sense of the terms to national culture” (*WE*, 177). Nor does Fanon then follow Nancy Fraser’s suggestion in adopting a “two-dimensional conception of justice”: one recognitive, the other redistributive (Fraser 2003, 34–7). Both of these elements are bound up together in culture and, by extension, a fuller picture of freedom. Insofar as we cannot divorce culture from practice, we “cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people’s struggle for liberation” (*WE*, 168), and the struggle for independence “cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people’s culture” (*WE*, 179).[[26]](#footnote-26)

Mutual recognition becomes one piece of a larger picture of what freedom demands of us. The solution that Fanon provides for the recognition trap, then, is both complex and by no means definite. It involves not only avoiding the “bad” forms of recognition, especially pernicious forms of essentialism and recognition-seeking that reproduce recognitive inequalities (e.g., “lactification”), but tirelessly negotiating the extent to which recognition from others is conducive to our freedom. At the same time, recognition remains both an essential and necessary feature of lives. It substantiates the culturally situated practical identities that we take up in the process of self-constitution. But given the dual demands of belonging and spontaneity, both captured in his view of culture, recognition can be understood to ideally facilitate the bringing of a self into socially recognized existence, without necessarily ossifying this self. Michael Monahan makes a clarifying distinction between propositional and practical (re)cognition. The former “demands full and complete knowledge of the authentic identity of the recognized as a kind of static object to be ‘grasped’ in a determinate and final way” (Monahan 2023, 50). Conversely, practical knowledge consists of “knowing-how” rather than “knowing that”, as might be the case when one states that they “know” how to play guitar (Monahan 2023, 52). There is no definite end to practical knowledge; to suggest otherwise, as one might by suggesting they have “perfected” the art of playing guitar, is not only outrageously bold but overlooks the inherently fluid and open-ended nature of the practice. Progress is not defined here in relation to a *telos*, but to re-inventions of a practice that fundamentally alter how we understand the practice itself. Much of the same may be said of Fanonian freedom.

**Conclusion**

This inquiry demands further investigation. Against, or between, proponents of the recognition paradigm and its radical critics, Fanon helps us think about *both* the positive and negative, freedom-affirming and freedom-denying, roles that recognition can play in our social and political lives (footnote). Not only are there certain kinds or modes of recognition-seeking that actually conflict with the demands of freedom, but articulating the role and function that recognition plays within a full view of the free life also produces the possibility for conflicts and trade-offs between the demands of recognitive reciprocity and other essential conditions of freedom—namely, political independence and decolonization. The *intrinsic*[[27]](#footnote-27) and *necessary* violence Fanon associates with decolonization—i.e., the figurative and literal replacement of the colonizer with the colonized (*WE*, 1)—is certainly not oriented, at least directly, towards mutual recognition, for instance. Actively struggling against the master or colonist will often be necessary for securing a certain degree of autonomy and self-determination.[[28]](#footnote-28) What might be initially viewed as a contradiction—i.e., how can recognizing the other and doing violence to the other coexist?—could be equally read as symptomatic of the complexity of Fanon’s analysis, speaking to the poverty and contradictory nature of the colonial situation. It also might suggest a way forward for grasping Fanon’s unique conception of freedom without a *necessary* appeal to violence. Recall, the problem with the master granting “freedom” to the slave was not the absence of struggle or violence *per se*, but that the freed slave had not enacted their own transformative cycle of freedom. Rather than focus on what is at most a contextual—i.e., not ontological—necessity for violence, we might begin to consider what new lives we can create for ourselves. Fanon tells us, “once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded”, a more universal process of freedom-production can take place: the “two cultures can affront each other, enrich each other” (*AR*, 44).[[29]](#footnote-29)

Crucially, despite whatever trade-offs or “traps” we might encounter as we seek affirmative recognition from the other, Fanon does not advise us to abandon the ideal of recognitive reciprocity. In the same vein as Fanon’s *sociogenic* approach to psychopathology (*BS*, xv), Fanon diagnoses misrecognition as a *social*, not *ontological*, problem. Here, despite his otherwise strong affinities, Fanon departs from the existentialist view of intersubjectivity as necessarily antagonistic, along with its rejection of the Hegelian notion that two recognitive subjects might come to “*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*” (*PhG*, ¶184, 110). In declaring a supersession of the subject-object relation an impossibility, Sartre ontologizes misrecognition: “I am—at the very root of my being—the project of assimilating and making an object of the Other” (*BN*, 474). The Other for Fanon is portrayed as something not to assimilate but touch, feel and discover (*BS*, 206). Racism according to Fanon “is not a constant of the human spirit,” but “a disposition fitting into a well-defined system” (*AR*, 41), whereas for Sartre antisemitism is indicative of a “fear of the human condition” (*AS*, 53–4) and Beauvoir similarly traces the gendered immanence-transcendence relationship back to “the imperialism of human consciousness” (*SS*, 66). The hope for reciprocity and mutual recognition, not merely as a regulative ideal, is made possible by the irreducibly *social* character of oppression: “I am fighting for the birth of a human world, in other words, *a world of reciprocal recognitions*” (*BS*, 193, emphasis added).

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1. The politics of recognition can be broadly understood as a form of politics in which the object of political struggle is the normatively affirmative recognition of an individual or collective identity on the part of the institutions and members of a political community. If successful, a particular political status, set of rights or endowments, and/or overall cultural disposition of respect follows from the conferral of such recognition. For popular accounts, see: Taylor (1994), Honneth (1995), and Williams (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As was customary, particularly in France, Fanon follows Alexandre Kojève’s translation—and interpretation of Hegel more broadly, to a large degree—of *Herr* and *Knecht* to *maître* (master) and *esclave* (slave), accordingly. See: Kojève 1969, 3–70. I follow Fanon in using the Kojèvian “master” and “slave” here. For a discussion of the relationship between Fanon and Kojève, see Van Haute (2001). For an overview of Kojève’s (mis)reading of Hegel master-slave dialectic, see Lynch (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I am using “non-ideal” in the sense that Charles W. Mills uses it, counterposing it to ideal theory (e.g., Rawls) in “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology” (2005). “Non-ideal,” of course, doesn’t do justice to the realities of white supremacy and colonialism that Fanon is contending with in his writings and political engagements. It does, however, capture that an acknowledgement of these kinds of inequalities needs to be our starting point for our theorizing, especially on recognition. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Speaking to the anti-Black racism of his supposed comrades and French complacency towards fascism, Fanon writes to his parents on April 12, 1945, that he had left Martinique to “defend an obsolete ideal” (Macey 2012, 102). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It should be noted that Fanon did not use this term, “dialogical self”, but I hope to demonstrate his basic commitment to the idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. One example Fanon gives is of René Maran’s character Jean Veneuse in *Un homme pareil aux autres*. Veneuse, an intelligent and introverted orphan of Antillean origin who lives and studies in France, suffers from an abandonment neurosis, characterized by a self-devaluation and anxiety that takes on a racialized significance: “Above all, he wants to prove to the others that he is a man, that he is like them. But let us not be misled: Jean Veneuse is the man to be convinced” (*BS*, 48). Veneuse forecloses his own possibilities on the basis of his racialized self-understanding. He loves a white woman, AndréeMarielle, who loves him back. Yet, he is completely unwilling to accept this love as anything but a fantasy (*BS*, 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E.g., see: *AR*, 14 [EXPAND?]. As we have seen, misrecognition can consist in the conflation of an individual’s being with ideas of inferiority, stereotypes, etc. The extremity of this misrecognition is total dehumanization. Fanon, echoing Aimé Césaire’s formulation here of “colonization=‘thingification’” (Césaire 2000, 42), goes on to argue that the “logical conclusion” of colonial Manichaeanism is the reduction of the colonial subject “to the state of an animal” (WE, 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Here, Fanon has already departed from many critics of the recognition paradigm. Patchen Markell and Nancy Fraser question whether misrecognition and its harmful effects can be a *primary* source of injustice or wrong. Fraser (2003) eschews a “psychological” understanding for a “status model” that focuses on the ways that misrecognition leads to being “denied the status of full partners in social interactions” (29). Markell also argues that widespread patterns of misrecognition are *symptomatic* of, and often *epiphenomenal* to, the primary source of injustice—namely, “ways of patterning and arranging the world that allow some people and groups to enjoy a semblance of sovereign agency at others’ expense” (Markell 2003, 5). Not only does Fanon take seriously the intrinsic harms of misrecognition, irrespective of its external threats, but his diagnosis of this wrong or injustice need not imply some discernible intention or benefit on the part of the individual, group, etc. failing to offer adequate recognition. This is precisely the significance of Fanon identifying the little French boy— “Look! A Negro!” (*BS*, 89)—as a culprit; the norms and values that produce systemic misrecognition are pervasive and often unconscious.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. When I see it necessary to amend the translation, I cite Fanon’s *Oeuvres* (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hegel does not believe that everyone, in order to be free and self-conscious, must in *actuality* risk their lives; living in an ethical political community, which grants the status of personhood to its members, accomplishes the same thing (*EG*, §432 Z, 172). Hegel is providing an account of self-consciousness’ *conceptual* development, and claims that such a struggle might only *actually* occur in a state of nature (*EG*, §432 Z, 172). For Fanon, however, the colonial state poses serious threats to the individual’s freedom, and struggle re-emerges as a contextual—though, as I will argue, not an ontological—necessity. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Fanon’s commentary here is indeed scathing: “One day, a woman by the name of Mayotte Capécia, obeying a motivation whose reasons are difficult to grasp, sat down and wrote 202 pages on her life in which the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random” (*BS*, 25). For an overview of feminist receptions of Fanon, the backlash against his arguably sexist treatment of Capécia and her book, and a measured and compelling defence of Fanon, see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s (1998) *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* (9–52). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In a similar argument, Kelly Oliver (2001) identifies recognition as often symptomatic of the “pathology of oppression” (9). As Michael Monahan (2006) notes, however, Oliver’s criticism of recognition acknowledges only recognition within a context of inequality or subordination that characterizes the *struggle* for recognition, rather than the *pure* and *reciprocal* recognition advocated for by Hegel and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Emmanuel Hansen (1977) explains this apparent under-theorization on Fanon’s part by suggesting that “like Marx, he was more interested in changing the world than in philosophizing about it” (62). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Biographical note. I will be largely drawing from Fanon’s doctoral thesis, articles written for psychiatric journals, and Fanon’s editorials in the Blida-Joinville hospital *Notre Journal*, much of which were only recently translated and compiled in *Alienation and Freedom* (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is not only time that Fanon, implicitly or explicitly, controversially makes parallels between the experience of racialization and disability. Most notable is Fanon’s refusal to accept the “amputation” he likens being racialized (*BS*, 119). For constructive attempts to engage with Fanon’s complicated relationship to critical disability studies, see Al-Saji (2023) and Titchkosky (2017, 277–80). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Taylor (1989) writes that identity (his examples being Catholic or Québecois) “provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value” (27). Or, as Honneth (1995) puts it on more pragmatistic grounds, “one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one’s partners in interaction, as their social addressee” (92). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. Hansen 1977, 59–69. Hansen makes the distinction for Fanon between *political* and *individual* freedom and, moreover, between the individual’s incongruous *existential* and *social* freedom. Here, I am arguing that there is no necessary contradiction between existential and social freedom and am reading Fanon as being in basic agreement with Hegel in that pure subjectivity, “the will’s self-conscious aspect,” remains one-sided and negative. It is the *free* will which translates “its ends from their subjective determination into an objective one, while at the same time remaining *with itself* in this objectivity” (*PR*, §28, 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Freedom, for Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, must be constantly taken up and affirmed: “freedom can not will itself without willing itself as an indefinite movement” (Beauvoir 2018, 31). The ethical disposition that is properly suited to existential freedom is one in which the individual takes responsibility for each of their actions in such a way that every act of the will is not treated as given, inevitable, or externally determined. To do otherwise is characteristic of what Beauvoir calls the “serious man,” who “loses himself in the object in order to annihilate his subjectivity” (Beauvoir 2018, 49) or, as we have seen, being in bad faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Conversely, subjectivity is the source of all value, according to the existentialists [citation/expand]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. With the exception, perhaps, of being a revolutionary in the face of colonialism, which is to fight for the possibility of freedom. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Irene Gendzier (1973) describes Fanon as swiftly upon his arrival walking “through the hospital wards unchaining men and women” (76)—an account that has been refuted by those present but not for lack of dismal conditions in the hospital (Macey 2012, 225). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The following quote is particularly revealing as to just how natural, deep-seated, and essential Porot viewed the North African’s supposed primitivism: “Primitivism is not a lack of maturity, a pronounced arrest in the development of the individual psyche; … it is far more deep-seated and we indeed think that it must have its substratum in a particular disposition, if not the architectonics, then at least of the ‘dynamic’ hierarchization of the nervous centres.” Antoine Porot, ‘Notes de psychiatrie musulmane’, *Annales médico-psychologiques*, May 1918 [Note by Porot and Sutter]. Cited from *AL*, 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The importance of this *maintenance* or *reinforcement* of social connections, community, and any existing sense of self is one of the reasons why Fanon ultimately distances himself from the earlier social therapeutic approach he practiced at Saint-Alban and Blida-Joinville, which sought to “create a neo-society within the hospital” (*AL*, 475), in favour of the no-less-social approach of day hospitalization that he practiced later in Tunis. Day hospital patients return home in the evenings, granting them far more freedom and a sense of normalcy that is rendered impossible by full-time hospitalization. This shift in Fanon’s thinking and practice is made particularly apparent when we compare a remark, made in 1959, that “[w]e do not believe in the curative value of dissolutions of consciousness” (*AL*, 493) with his dismissal six years earlier of critics of electroconvulsive therapy’s risks (namely, memory disorders): “does this attitude not hide an ignorance about the dynamism of personality, as psychoanalysis has revealed to us […]?” (*AL*, 293). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Fanon’s ethnographic writings, especially on views of mental illness in Algeria: *AL*, 373–84; 421–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. One might be reminded here of Hegel’s suggestion that “spirit” (Geist) “is never to be conceived as being at rest but rather as ever advancing” (*PhG* ¶11, 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A useful, albeit perhaps controversial (Literature), example of the interpenetration of culture and revolutionary struggles for independence, and hence culture in flux more broadly, is Fanon’s discussion of the revolutionary deployment of the *haïk*. EXPAND. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See: Roberts 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See: Coulthard 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Fanon also says this of the relationship between doctor and patient: in the case of the day hospital, the “*a minima* master/slave, prisoner/gaoler dialectic created in internment […] is radically broken” and the “doctor-patient encounter forever remains an encounter between two freedoms” which is a “condition is necessary for all therapy, but especially in psychiatry” (*AL*, 497). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)