

## Chapter 1

# Sartre on Racism

### From Existential Phenomenology to Globalization and “the New Racism”

*Jonathan Judaken*

In early November 2005, our television screens were suddenly ablaze with cars on fire and the burning rage of the ghettoized *banlieues* that surround the urban centers of France. On October 27, 2005, the deaths of Zyed Benna, 17, and Bouna Traoré, 15, electrocuted fleeing the *flics* (cops) in Clichy-sous-Bois,<sup>1</sup> sparked the pent-up wrath of the mostly Maghrebin and West African immigrant youth that erupted nightly over the next month: The damage included over 8,400 torched vehicles and 2,600 arrests in nearly 100 towns across France.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the neoconservative commentary on the riots,<sup>3</sup> “the rage expressed by young men from the *cités* does not spring from antiimperialist Arab nationalism or some sort of anti-Western jihadism,” Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault maintain, “but rather from lifetimes of rampant unemployment, school failure, police harassment and everyday discrimination that tends to treat the youths as the *racaille* [scum]” that then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy labeled them.<sup>4</sup> To end the violence, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin announced a state of emergency on November 7. In doing so, he invoked an April 1955 law created in order to eliminate support for the budding Algerian war of independence, a provision that was extended for an additional three months on November 15 by the National Assembly.

Did we witness the reprise of colonial legislation in the postcolonial metropole because colonialism has been deterritorialized in the age of globalization? Jean-Paul Sartre, in an article written in 1973 called “Le Nouveau Racisme” (translated as “France and a Matter of Racism”), an intervention in response to the killing of Mohamad Diab by a French police sergeant, suggested more than thirty years ago that there was a nexus between the postcolonial situation and racism. Racism legitimated the exploitation that underpinned colonialism, he declared. Decolonization should have taught Europeans that “the impoverished and weaponless colonials . . . are no more subhuman than we.” Instead, Sartre declared,

the Americans. Africa would be racked by weak central governments, controlled by the bourgeoisie and large landowners aligned with the military, who would do the bidding of multinational corporations.

This neocolonial order marked the decisive reinforcement of white hegemony because separate from an appreciation of the structural forces that underpin it, the white, Western, new world order appeared to have clean hands in the murder of Lumumba. So, concluded Sartre,

The dead Lumumba ceased to be a person and became Africa in its entirety, with its unitary will, the multiplicity of its social and political systems, its divisions, its disagreements, its power and its impotence: he was not, nor could he be, the hero of pan-Africanism: he was its martyr. His story has highlighted for everyone the profound link between independence, unity and the struggle against the multinational corporations. His death—I remember that Fanon in Rome was devastated by it—was a cry of alarm; in him, the whole continent died and was resurrected. (252/200)

The hope of salvation, for Sartre, rested upon the realization of the infrastructure of neocolonialism and its resistance in a series of interconnected armed uprisings.

So by the period of Sartre's commitment to third world radicalism he had come to think of racism not as a situation, a dyad between individuals, or a product of beliefs and ideas, but the substratum of a system of exploitation. Torture, he argued, is merely the most vicious product of racial systems, brutally enacting the cruel logic of racism, which begins with demeaning human dignity, but whose violence also reveals the contradictions of a racial system. Overcoming this violent system of oppression, Sartre preached, is only possible through a violent revolution whose redemptive bloodshed salves the wounds of the oppressed and whose future wholeness is fashioned by their commitment to overcome exploitation in the name of human freedom. When those like Lumumba, keenly sensitive to the racism of the colonial system, nonetheless only conceive their struggle in the narrow terms of national liberation struggles rather than as tactical points within a neocolonial global order, they are destined to fail. For Sartre's vision had now broadened to see that power rests with the owners of the means of production, the military, and the lapdogs in the government who do their bidding, all of whom are readily used and abused by multinational corporations.

### **Antiracist Alter-Globalization**

By the middle of the 1960s, Sartre's writing began to emphasize a new modality of racism, connected to shifts in the global conditions of labor. The

another colonialism has been established on our own soil. We bring in workers from poor European countries such as Spain and Portugal, or from our old colonies to do the unpleasant work the French workers no longer want to do. Underpaid, threatened with expulsion if they protest, and crowded into filthy lodgings, it has been necessary to justify their overexploitation which is now an important cog in the machine of French capitalism. Thus a new racism has been born which would like the immigrants to live in terror, and to rob them of the desire to protest against the living conditions that have been forced upon them.

Reading Sartre's analysis after the November riots is haunting. "This outburst is the inevitable result of the racism that has re-emerged during the last ten years in the administration and the police and which originates in the economy," he fumed. He called upon the French to rise up against this neoracism, to protest its institutionalization "by the power structure," to show that "a point of no return has been reached, that racism must be crushed." To fail to do so, he insisted, meant that we "deserve the government of fear that the bourgeoisie gave us."<sup>5</sup>

As we see, Sartre was intransigent in his impassioned remonstrations against racism until his last days. But the theoretical underpinning of his stances evolved over the course of his commitments. This chapter traces that evolution, suggesting four *overlapping* phases to Sartre's antiracist interventions.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, I insist that both his blindnesses and insights have much to teach us when it is still the case that, as one young Moroccan put it in a discussion on French television about the fate of African immigrants in France, "our color is our pain."<sup>7</sup> The color line at the dawn of the twenty-first century is evidently still one of the great problems that define our age of globalization. And there is still much to learn from Sartre about the differing concepts he mobilized in order to name racism's distinct modalities, about how to assess racism, about where to target our critiques, and about how to combat it.

### Sartre's Anti-antisemitism

Phase 1, Sartre's anti-antisemitism, stemmed from his existential phenomenology, which he developed over the course of the 1930s. He was a lycée teacher publishing philosophical treatises on the role of the imagination and perception in consciousness when in 1933–34 he spent the academic year in Germany just as Hitler rose to power. He returned to a France increasingly polarized over fascism and antisemitism. Only the signposts of the era can be mentioned here: the Stavinsky affair; the riots of February 6, 1934; the accession to power of the Popular Front (1936–1938), headed by

the first socialist and Jewish premier, Léon Blum. Blum embodied the associative logic of stereotyping that enabled the opponents of the Popular Front to tar the French Republic with a series of interchangeable epithets, exemplified by fascist Jacques Doriot's condemning what he called the "pluto-Judeo-Bolshevik coalition" that he claimed ruled France.<sup>8</sup>

Sartre's response to this widespread antisemitic discourse was his first overtly politicized work, the novella *L'Enfance d'un chef* ("The Childhood of a Leader," 1939).<sup>9</sup> The story is an ironic *Bildungsroman* deeply critical of the Action Française's shock troops, the Camelots du roi,<sup>10</sup> and the politics of the extreme Right more generally who defined their Frenchness against the abject image of "the Jew."<sup>11</sup>

The literary portrait of Lucien Fleurier, the would-be *chef* of the story and the archetype of the *salaud* (bastard)—whom Sartre never tired of decrying—would reach fruition in his famous theoretical treatise on anti-semitism, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Antisemite and Jew*, 1946). His "Portrait de l'antisémite," Sartre's phenomenological description of the racial oppressor, was the first concrete application of the key existential axioms regarding the relation of Self and Other articulated in *L'Être et le Néant* (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943) and the crystallization of Sartre's anti-antisemitism.<sup>12</sup> "The most striking feature of Sartre's fight resides less in his victory than in the new weapons he deploys," Emmanuel Levinas proclaimed in applauding Sartre's essay, since "antisemitism is attacked with existentialist arguments."<sup>13</sup>

Sartre developed these existentialist arguments in his philosophical magnum opus *Being and Nothingness*, which was, as the subtitle proclaims, a "phenomenological essay on ontology."<sup>14</sup> Here he articulated the philosophical underpinnings at work in his existential-phenomenological critique of antisemitism and racism: his ontological description of human freedom, his existential analysis of responsibility, and his concepts of "bad faith," "the situation," and the dialectic of human recognition between Self and Other engendered by "the look." The first half of *Being and Nothingness* is concerned with defining the central categories of Sartre's ontology through an elaboration of the distinction between the object world, which Sartre calls the in-itself (*être-en-soi*) and the perceiving subject, which he names the for-itself (*être-pour-soi*). There is also a third kind of being that Sartre discusses, which occupies the second half of *Being and Nothingness*, being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*).

The gaze determines the basic structure of being-for-others. I see others and see them seeing me and know that they judge my choices. The Other's gaze turns me into an object in his/her world, a character in his/her life drama, and thereby takes away my freedom to freely determine my own essence. When I am looked at (*être regardé*), I become objectified and my

subjectivity is fixed by my being-for-others; this can be avoided by returning the gaze and objectifying the Other. On the basis of this structure, Sartre describes all concrete relations with others as forms of struggle. Indifference is impossible: it is a mode of self-deception that refuses to see that others gaze at me, a refusal to accept that I am alienated from my own objectivity. My desire for this objectivity—my desire to be the foundation of my own existence, to constitute my-self as an essence, to be an *en-soi-pour-soi*, is the quintessence of self-deception or what Sartre calls *mauvaise foi* (bad faith)—and it is animated by the human desire to be God. This desire creates the inherent conflict in my concrete relations with others. There are fundamentally only two kinds of response to the gaze of Others: to make oneself the kind of object that you would like to be perceived as (which in its severe form Sartre names “masochism”) or to desire the pure instrumental appropriation of the Other (which in its ultimate manifestation is named “sadism”). Masochism is the desire to be the object of the gaze of the other, while sadism is the desire to objectify the other, achieved at its extreme through violence.

In the final part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre concretizes this discussion more explicitly around the relation between the antisemitic gaze and the Jewish Other. It takes place in the context of a larger discussion about “freedom and facticity: the situation.” In this section, he makes clear that the conception of freedom that he is developing is not an abstract freedom divorced from the strictures upon individual choices. Freedom is always situated and conditioned by the individual’s perceived “situation.” There are specific factors that Sartre outlines that determine one’s situation: a person’s *place* in the world, their *past*, the *environment*, and all *others* that shape their context.

In the subsection on “my fellowman” Sartre explicitly uses the example of the relation between the antisemite and “the Jew” to explicate the struggle for recognition and the objective limits of freedom in a situation:

It is only by my recognizing the *freedom* of antisemites (whatever use they may make of it) and by my assuming this *being-a-Jew* that I am a Jew for them; it is only thus that being-a-Jew will appear as the external objective limit of the situation. If, on the contrary, it pleases me to consider the antisemites as pure *objects*, then my being-a-Jew disappears immediately to give place to the simple consciousness (of) being a free, unqualifiable transcendence. To recognize others and, if I am a Jew, to assume my being-a-Jew are one and the same. (675)

Sartre thus explains that a limit of the Jewish situation is the gaze of the antisemitic Other, who defines “the Jew” in accord with an essence of being-

a-Jew. “The Jew,” can refuse this designation. However, “the Jew” cannot deny that the antisemite perceives him as a Jew. The question for “the Jew” becomes how s/he responds to this limit factor in his/her situation.

Sartre goes on to tackle this question: “How then shall I experience the objective limits of my being: Jew, Aryan, ugly, handsome, kind, a civil servant, untouchable, etc.?” The objectification of your being, the designation of your essence by an Other, does not define who you are for-yourself. These labels conferred upon us by Others require “an interiorization and a subjectivizing” (675). Every essence ascribed to us by others, Sartre categorically insists, must be conferred with a meaning for us. In short, “a Jew is not a Jew *first* in order to be *subsequently* ashamed or proud; it is his pride of being a Jew, his shame, or his indifference which will reveal to him his being-a-Jew; and this being-a-Jew is nothing outside the free manner of adopting it” (677). In other words, the Jewish situation is like the condition of all humans for whom there are objective conditions which structure our choices—class, race, place, the body, and the gaze of the Other. But ultimately these only have the meaning that an individual confers upon them. The difference for “the Jew” is that this meaning is always doubled: it is a question not only of the meaning of human existence, but what it means to be-a-Jew, and how this shapes one’s humanity.

While Sartre’s mention of Jews and Judaism are relatively scant in the body of his enormous ontological description of the human condition, he is explicit about its implications for the antisemite and draws some provisional conclusions for Jews. The antisemite’s bad faith is that he wants to be God: to have an absolute foundation for the meaning of his existence. As such, he embodies the quintessence of bad faith by seeking to found his essence in his sadistic appropriation of “the Jew,” which at its extreme leads to a violent hatred for “the Jew,” that at bottom is a hatred of all alterity. “The Jew” must respond to his situation by defining the meaning of his Jewishness and his humanity—always a double responsibility—knowing that Others will define his choices in part by how they perceive “the Jew,” thus conferring upon Jews the facticity of their being-a-Jew.

*Antisemite and Jew* would elaborate upon what Sartre had sketched as examples in his ontological description, applying systematically for the first time the categories of *Being and Nothingness* to a concrete situation. Sartre argued that antisemitism does not rest solely upon economic, historical, religious, or political foundations, but rather demands an existential analysis of the antisemite and “the Jew.” In undertaking this examination, he argued that the fundamental cause of antisemitism is the *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) of the antisemite: his fear and flight from the human condition.<sup>15</sup> Rather than face his own finitude and freedom, the antisemite, like Lucien in “The Childhood of a Leader,” adopts in advance a “certain idea of the Jew, of his

nature and of his role in society” (14/13) and through a process of projection and transference chooses himself through this image. In accord with a Manichean logic, he defines himself through abjection, opposing his identity to the impurity, depravity, corruption, pollution, impiety, ugliness, untruth, racial deviance, urbanity, or foreignness of “the Jew,” whom he deems threatens essential Frenchness.<sup>16</sup> Through this negative image, the antisemite explains his experience of the world. With this model of the degraded and perverse Other, he “is under no necessity to look for his personality within himself. He has chosen . . . to be nothing save the fear he inspires in others” (24/21). Antisemitism consequently boils down to a “basic fear of oneself and of truth” (21/19), a fear of all humans’ fundamental ontological freedom. Antisemitism is therefore the paradigmatic form of bad faith in the face of the human condition.

On the basis of these axioms, the *Réflexions* instantiated several key theorems of Sartre’s antiracism: first, that there is no biological, cultural, or metaphysical reality to “race”; it is a social construct.<sup>17</sup> Second, Sartre was nonetheless aware that “race” for the racist is constitutive of reality. As such, he called racism a “passion” whose bad faith is akin to religious faith and therefore not amenable to any rational evidence that opposes the racist’s Manichean and conspiratorial logic.<sup>18</sup> Third, Sartre’s *Réflexions* also castigated what he labeled the “politics of assimilation”<sup>19</sup>—the Enlightenment and liberal tradition that defined Franco-Judaism and Jewish emancipation—contending that it ultimately eliminated Jewishness through its universal and abstract principles that did not recognize Jewish difference. He thus decried any polity based upon homogeneity, normalization, or what goes by the name today in France of *intégration*. Fourth, conjoined to this proposition, Sartre also announced that the fight against racism must be waged in the name of liberty, not based on the abstract axioms of liberalism (i.e., human rights, constitutionalism, equality of opportunity, equality before the law, etc.), but rather on the existential conception of freedom at the root of human existence. And finally, he maintained that the primary responsibility to combat antisemitism lay with the dominant culture whose own freedom was contingent upon the freedom of all in their midst. “The fate of the Jews is *his* fate. Not one Frenchman will be free,” he thundered at the conclusion of his *Réflexions*, “so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fullness of their rights” (185/153).<sup>20</sup>

### Anticolonialist Existential Humanism

Beyond the occasional allusion to his *Réflexions*, and his involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Sartre would write little about the Jewish Question in the period from 1945 to 1960.<sup>21</sup> This second phase of his antiracism was

nonetheless significantly indebted to his critique of antisemitism. “Replace the Jew with the Black, the antisemite with the supporter of slavery,” he claimed, “and there would be nothing essential to be cut from my book [on the Jewish Question].”<sup>22</sup> The phase of anticolonialist existential humanism was based primarily on developing a key axiom in *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 1946) where Sartre maintained, “if existence really does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is . . . and when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.”<sup>23</sup> This claim—that each individual’s freedom is dependent upon the freedom of all—made clear the meaning of the concluding lines of the *Réflexions*.

This imperative underlay his antiracist anticolonialism, which figured racial oppression as a central lever in (colonial) domination in his occasional writings on racism in America (1945), in *La Putain respectueuse* (*The Respectful Prostitute*, 1946), in his excursus on “The Oppression of Blacks in the United States,” in *Cahiers pour une morale* (*Notebooks for an Ethics*, 1947–1948), in “Présence noire” (“Black Presence,” 1947), “Orphée noir” (“Black Orpheus,” 1948), and in most of his other early writings on colonialism and decolonization gathered in *Situations V* (*Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism*, 1964). We will consider only a few examples from this period to establish further key theorems of Sartre’s antiracism.

In the immediate postwar period, Sartre’s existential phenomenological analysis of antisemitism would be applied to the racial oppression of blacks in many of the same terms that structured his scrutiny of antisemitism. His key concepts remained freedom, responsibility, bad faith, the situation, and the dialectic of human recognition engendered by the gaze. In “Retour des États Unis: Ce qui j’ai appris du problème noir” (“Return from the United States,” 1945), the structure of the look still defined his philosophical assessment of the situation of black Americans. Sartre described how under Jim Crow blacks were treated as “untouchables” who when you “cross them in the streets . . . you do not return their stares. Or if by chance their eyes meet yours, it seems to you that they do not see you and it is better for them and you that you pretend not to have noticed them.”<sup>24</sup> Blacks function like “machines”: they serve whites; they shine their shoes and operate their elevators. To Sartre, this was the ultimate example of the sadistic reification of the Other and its attendant bad faith and alienation that he had assessed in *Being in Nothingness* and had applied to the situation of Jews.<sup>25</sup>

But a new element began to emerge in Sartre’s discussions of racism in the United States. He started to address the *institutionalized oppression* of blacks: their differential treatment as citizens with no rights, who live in a state of “semislavery” (87) in the South, with only slightly better conditions



in the segregated North. Segregation provided the legal framework for the separation of populations and for blacks' unequal access to education, services, goods, housing, healthcare, theaters, restaurants, cinemas, and libraries with the effect that "the majority of them live in horrible misery" (84). Sartre described the material conditions of subordination and disenfranchisement resulting from "the economic structure of the country," insisting that "it is that which one must examine first" (87). Thus, while he had discussed economic factors in his assessment of antisemitism in his *Réflexions*, it was in his writings on the conditions of African-Americans in the United States that he first went into some detail about where and how racialized subjects live, which he maintained conditioned the racial state.<sup>26</sup>

Sartre would elaborate upon the institutionalized oppression of blacks in the United States in an excursus included in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*.<sup>27</sup> Addressing the domination of blacks under slavery, he sought to explain how through legal prescriptions covering matrimony, civic and military duties, and through the governing norms of social interaction, the legalization of oppression makes it seem legitimate. Making racial oppression lawful puts it in a realm beyond discussion, making it sacred, and therefore part of the natural order of things. In articulating this argument, Sartre distinguishes violence, which "cannot be defined apart from some relation to the laws that it violates (human or natural laws)" from oppression. Oppression is institutional: "It suffices that the oppressing class legitimate its oppression by law and that the oppressed class, out of weakness, complicity, ignorance, or any other reason, obeys these laws and implicitly or explicitly recognizes them through its behavior" (579/561).

Sartre was stumbling toward seeing race not as an idea, but as an ideology, not only as a phenomenon of consciousness, but as a product of behaviors, practices, rituals, folkways, and symbols institutionalized daily. In this he anticipated the argument of Barbara Fields, among others, that slavery created racism (and not the other way around), since people are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed.<sup>28</sup> In short, for Sartre, "the abject institution of slavery, lived through, reworked, and rearranged," transformed "itself into a concrete relation, a type of existence, a social architecture" (583/564–65) that structured social relationships and thereby provided the oppressor with a good conscience.

But the analysis of the institutional character of slavery did not supplant the dialectic of the gaze that underpinned the existential phenomenology of racism. With a copy of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* at hand as the springboard upon which many of his reflections are constructed,<sup>29</sup> Sartre still focused on the different modalities of the bad faith of slavery. Slave masters justified the institution by claiming that it was blacks who sold other

blacks into slavery; they deployed the Hamitic myth; they suggested that Africans were not Christians and therefore not privy to the same ethical norms; in short, they contended that blacks were “submen” (580/562–63). The concepts of *Being and Nothingness* are still apparent, as Sartre examined how under slavery and segregation the for-itself “freezes the other into an object” (581/563). He also described the “limited transcendence” of both master and slave.

Nevertheless he clearly sought to go beyond the limits of the Hegelian dialectic as well.<sup>30</sup> “In reality, Hegel saw just one side of the slave: his labor,” Sartre claimed. As a result, “his whole theory is wrong, or rather it applies to the proletariat, not to the slave” (586/566). Sartre, like Marx, therefore flipped Hegel on his head when he asserted that “oppression is *institutional*” because it functions through a set of norms and rules that make possible “a certain way of living out a relation with the other” (589/570). Antiracism thus depended upon transforming the structures of oppression, which themselves conditioned the structures of perception. “To see clearly in an unjustifiable situation,” Sartre averred in an arresting formulation, “it is not sufficient that the oppressor look at it openly and honestly, he must also change the structure of his eyes” (590–91/571).

But Sartre’s antiracism would continue to focus primarily on dismantling racist structures of perception in this period, as is apparent in “Black Orpheus,” his famous celebration of negritude poetry written as a preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Anthology of African and West Indian Poets Writing in French).<sup>31</sup> As “Black Orpheus” makes plain, much of his early writing on colonialism would continue to revolve around the same conflict that he characterized for Jews: the struggle with how the dominant culture imposes itself, how this is internalized, and how colonial subjects can liberate themselves. In “Black Orpheus,” however, he did take a more definitive step in the direction of the argument that defined his politics in the postwar period: the demand that the writer reveal the world from the perspective of the oppressed.<sup>32</sup> The standpoint of “the Jew,” “the African,” the colonized, and the worker offer a critical lens through which to view the system of oppression.

Similar to his *Réflexions*, “Black Orpheus” positioned the intellectual as a critic of established values and norms, which exclude and repress through the pathologization and exploitation of the subaltern. There are homologies in his analysis of blackness and Jewishness. Both are defined by what they oppose: racial oppression and antisemitism. Negritude is a critique of the cultural discourses and institutional practices and policies that repress the African in the European world. Since race is intrinsic to their oppression, Sartre is emphatic that blacks must first be made conscious of their race

and therefore, “anti-racist racism is the only road that will lead to the abolition of racial differences” (xiv/18). In a counterpart to his discussion of authentic Jewishness, since the oppression of blacks has depended upon the vilification of blackness, there must first be a moment of pride in being black. As Abiola Irele incisively put it, “Sartre’s term [“antiracist racism”] therefore meant a negro racial pride designed to destroy racialism itself.”<sup>33</sup>

Sartre does, however, emphasize a difference of degree between the alienation of Jews and blacks, for “a Jew—a white man among white men—can deny that he is a Jew, can declare himself a man among men. The Negro cannot deny that he is a Negro, nor can he claim that he is part of some abstract colorless humanity: he is black” (xiv/18). But while the possibility of assimilation is thus greater for Jews, as he maintained in his *Réflexions*, it is ultimately destined to fail. In a fashion not dissimilar to what Sartre described for Jews, repressed by European culture, blacks develop what W.E.B. Du Bois called “double-consciousness”<sup>34</sup> and what Sartre describes as the split consciousness of their “double exile” (xvi/20). Exiles from Africa, they are exiled within Europe. Sartre calls negritude “Orphic because the negro’s tireless descent into himself makes me think of Orpheus going to claim Eurydice from Pluto” (xvii/22). This Orphic journey into the self is undertaken “to ruin systematically the European knowledge he has acquired, and this spiritual destruction symbolizes the great future taking-up of arms by which black men will destroy their chains” (xviii/22).

One of the radically new claims of “Black Orpheus” is that if blacks have nothing to lose but their chains, this will depend upon negritude writers deconstructing how blackness is figured within the semiotic system of the West. Sartre’s semiology of the racialized Other as a sign within the system of colonial oppression thereby anticipated certain deconstructive and post-colonial analyses. Since he is writing about black Francophone poets, he argues that these diasporic critics must use the oppressor’s language for their resistance, utilizing the master’s tools to dismantle his house.<sup>35</sup> Negritude poets exploit the failures of European culture to name black experience and this misunderstanding, Sartre claims, facilitates our ability to see the whole civilization and its discontents.

Negritude poetry pushes the French poetic tradition from Mallamé’s symbolism to surrealism that is about the “autodestruction of language” (xx/25) in new directions. Negritude writers traverse the “short-circuits of language” (xx/26) because within the semantic field that defines the key terms of colonial and racial discourse—exile/home, black/white, and native/colonist—there are already prescribed positions of hierarchy and subordination. Negritude negates the semiotics of whiteness, which is identified with humanity, light, truth, virtue, essence, and spirit, as opposed to the carnal flesh, inessential, deviant, dark bestiality of blackness. Negritude

poetry upsets this hierarchy by valorizing the secondary and inferior terms. There is thus a self-destruction of the semiotic system in negritude, analogous to Duchamp's art and surrealism. Negritude is thus a poetry of negativity: a refusal and destabilization of colonial and racist signification, upsetting and reorienting our concepts of blackness.

Sartre argues, however, that because their critique happens in language, negritude poets are destined to reestablish "the hierarchy they have just upset" (xxii/27). But just as was the case with his writing on Jewishness, where he recycles certain antisemitic motifs,<sup>36</sup> Sartre contributes to this restabilization by unproblematically accepting stereotypical conceptions of blackness and Africa. As Stuart Zane Charmé acutely puts it:

Repeating the same strategy that had produced *Antisemite and Jew*, Sartre remained on the level of myth or symbol rather than history. Like the Jew, the black's primary mythic function was to embody simultaneously the victimization by, and the negation of, white European culture and the colonialism it supported.<sup>37</sup>

Sartre's depiction of blackness as the negation of white supremacy serves to destabilize white, European, bourgeois hegemony. In the process, however, he reinscribes typological constructions of blackness that figure for him the negativity of European values.<sup>38</sup> He thus identifies "the black" with primitivism and he resorts to images of blacks as natural man and unchaste woman whose identification with nature and *Eros* have an emancipatory function not only for blacks, but also for repressed Europeans. Sartre says, for example, that the blacks "wild and free looks that judge our world" (x/14) do so by plunging "man back into the seething breast of Nature" (xxv/31). Blacks have "timeless instincts, a simple manifestation of universal and eternal fecundity" (xxxviii/46). His identification of blacks with nature, sexuality, a phallic order, instinct, creation, and rhythm are justified by him as a necessary stage within what he calls "Universal History."

But this ultimately mired Sartre's patronage of negritude in the quagmires that result from his strategic essentialism—his "antiracist racism"—that he advanced as a means to undo racialism. In *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952), Frantz Fanon sharply criticized Sartre for failing to condemn some of his hackneyed images of blackness. Fanon blamed the effacing of what he called "the lived experience of blackness" on Sartre's dialectic with its totalizing and universalizing logic that he construed as the foundational problem in Sartre's writing on behalf of the black Other.<sup>39</sup> The historical specificity of the Other, "the lived experience of blackness," is sacrificed to a mythological and ahistorical depiction within the logic of Sartre's dialectic. Fanon's rejoinder served as a warning that

when Sartre abandoned his existentialist premises, even doing so for strategic political ends elucidated by his dialectic of history, he risked falling into the trap of racist discourse.

Sartre's other early anticolonial writings would elaborate on the need for avoiding these traps through the demystification of stereotyping that he referred to as "the picturesque" in his preface to Henri Cartier-Bresson's *D'une Chine à l'autre* ("From One China to Another," 1954).<sup>40</sup> Stereotyping "scorned collectively" (7/17). Cartier-Bresson's virtue was to provide snapshots of a society in transition that exploded the exoticism and "convenient label[s]" (9/18) of typologies. Assedine Haddour thus rightly praises Sartre for prefiguring "the arguments of Roland Barthes in 'Myth Today' and Edward Said in *Orientalism*, i.e. [criticizing] the fabricated quality of the mythic idea and its orientalizing intent."<sup>41</sup> This is crucial, for as Sartre maintained, "What separates has to be learned; what unites can be seen in an instant" (12/20). He concluded the piece by rejoicing in the Chinese revolution that Cartier-Bresson's album documented as it moved from the countryside into the municipal capitals of China, since it offered hope for overcoming the archipelago of "capitals of poverty" that defined the Third World.

Sartre's antiracist anticolonialism thus elaborated upon some of the perceptive pronouncements of his anti-antisemitism at the same time that he expanded his conception of racism. The keystone of this phase was his leap from his earlier emphasis on individual existential freedom toward his existential humanism, insisting that the freedom of the individual is dependent upon the freedom of all. Second, while he continued to hold that the kernel of racism is the sadistic reification of the other in an effort to deny their freedom, he also clarified that seeing things from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed helps to divulge the structures of oppression in a society. Third, he asserted that a first step to overcoming racism by racialized groups is to embrace their collective identity as part of the struggle against racism; an "antiracist racism" was thus necessary to destroy racialism. But antiracism on the basis of a strategic essentialism also risked reduplicating racism, unless it was marshaled as part of a committed effort to explode the racial order as a whole. Fourth, as such Sartre venerated the novel efforts of poets and writers to deconstruct the semiotics of race in order to detonate the stereotypes that underpin racism. But it was in his immediate postwar writings on racism in the United States that Sartre first broached axioms that would shape the next phase of his reflections on racism. Here, he schematically explored how oppression was institutionalized and as such how racism was part of the social architecture. He contended that racism was not only conditional upon the stereotypes or roles that are assigned to oppressed groups, but is woven into the fabric of

practices, rituals, symbols, and institutions that structure social systems. Antiracism thus depends upon transforming the structures of oppression, which themselves condition structures of perception.

### Third World Radicalism

By the late 1950s, as Sartre's defense of the Algerian revolution became more unbridled and as the conflict became more violent on both sides, the terms of his understanding of racism changed more clearly in the direction of an emphasis on racialized social structures. A transitional text was his preface to Albert Memmi's classic analysis *Portrait du colonisé précédé du colonisateur* (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1957).<sup>42</sup> Sartre commended Memmi's inquiry, which is clearly modeled on Sartre's intersubjective dialectic of the gaze. Memmi's existential premises concerning freedom and authenticity in a specific situation are also derived from Sartrean precepts. The *Réflexions* also remained foundational for the two portraits Memmi draws: the colonizer is not unlike the portrait of the antisemite and the situation of the colonized overlaps with Sartre's portrait of "the Jew." But Sartre is nevertheless critical of Memmi's subtle psychological depiction of the dynamic relationship within colonization and how this results in the interiorization of colonial hegemony. "The whole difference between us arises," Sartre asserts in a critical footnote, "because he sees a situation where I see a system" (27/xxv).

Sartre had made this shift in his thinking by the time of his speech "Colonialisme est une système" ("Colonialism is a System," 1956), which reflected the subsuming of his existential-phenomenological analysis within his developing existential Marxist framework. In his remarks made at a protest rally held at the Salle Wagram against continuing the war in Algeria he stressed, "Colonization is neither a series of chance occurrences nor the statistical result of thousands of individual undertakings," or choices in isolated situations. "It is a system," he continued, "which was put in place around the middle of the nineteenth century, began to bear fruit in about 1880, [and] started to decline after the First World War."<sup>43</sup>

In the third phase of his antiracist works, Sartre described the mechanisms and material effects of colonial exploitation in far more detail than his earlier writing on institutionalized racism in the United States. He labored to show that each of the signs of the European civilizing mission—the roads, French schools, and public health and hygiene—were, in fact, means for colonial domination.<sup>44</sup> But nothing was more central to the colonial system than the systematic dispossession of Arab land and the concomitant mechanization of colonial agriculture. Colonial exploitation was thus experienced as "methodical and rigorous: expelled from their lands, restricted to

unproductive soil, obliged to work for derisory wages, the fear of unemployment discourages . . . [colonial] revolts" (37/39). Consequently, for many Algerians, their only alternative was to emigrate to France where they worked to send back money to support their families in Algeria. Sartre thus explained, as Tony Smith sums it up, "the congruence between economic spoliation, cultural imperialism, and political domination of the native Muslims by the French invaders and colonizers . . . where cultural antagonism compounded class struggle with aspects of race warfare."<sup>45</sup>

Sartre's shift from the analysis of the colonial "situation" to a "system" carried over into his understanding of racism. If capitalism had to become colonialist to expand its markets and the sources of its raw materials, its ideological justification was liberalism, which purported to uphold universal human rights that could only logically be denied Algerians in light of a racist rationale.<sup>46</sup> "One of the functions of racism," Sartre therefore claimed "is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism." Hence "since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made subhuman" (CS, 44/45).

But in his preface to Memmi, he made clear that the racist rationale is itself a function of the system of exploitation: "Colonialism denies human rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence, and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance that Marx would rightly call a subhuman condition. Racism is ingrained in action, institutions, and in the nature of the colonialist methods of production and exchange" (26/xxiv). While racism operates psychically, conditioning how we perceive and receive the Other, serving to dehumanize colonial and racialized subjects so that human rights and equality need not be extended to them, Sartre's point now is unequivocally that racism is enmeshed in the power structure and material system of oppression itself. Discrimination functions not only cognitively and intersubjectively, but within institutions and everyday practices and policies. The racist colonial system "is embodied in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system" (CS, 43/44). The racist system therefore shaped both the colonized and the colonizer, infecting all "with its racism" (CS, 47/47). This was nowhere more apparent than in the methods that were used by the French to pacify resistance to colonialization.

Sartre responded to the reciprocal reign of terror that began to characterize the French-Algerian conflict by the time of the Battle of Algiers (1957) by insisting that torture was a product of systemic violence and dehumanization that in turn produced inhuman acts. This could only be overcome through a revolution against the system of exploitation that might restore our humanity. In "Vous êtes formidables" ("You are Wonderful"), he insisted

that all who failed to denounce “the cynical and systematic use of absolute violence,” which included “pillaging, rape, reprisals against the civilian population, summary executions, [and the] use of torture to extract confessions or information” were complicitous with the system because none could deny ignorance.<sup>47</sup>

He goes on to analyze the different modalities of elision, evasion, and denial about torture in liberal societies that nonetheless produced a “troubled conscience” that ultimately cannot repress “the game of hide and seek that we play, the lamps that we dim, this painful bad faith” (65/60). All who fail to rail against torture are blameworthy of what Jaspers in *The Question of German Guilt* called the “metaphysical guilt” of those who acquiesce when categorical injustice is committed in their name: “False naiveté, flight, bad faith, solitude, silence, a complicity at once rejected and accepted, that is what we called, in 1945, collective responsibility” (66/60), he reminded his readers.

In his introduction to Henri Alleg’s *La Question* (*The Question*, 1958), he would elaborate on how torture was the ossification of a system of exploitation whose connective tissue was racism.<sup>48</sup> “In this way,” Sartre expounded about torture, “exploitation puts the exploiter at the mercy of his victim, and the dependence itself begets racialism” (120/32). He explained that torture is not really about producing information, but instead is about destroying human dignity (118/30), which ultimately is the only thing that can legitimate the system of exploitation. The purpose of torture is not to make a person talk, but “rather to humiliate them, to crush their pride and drag them down to animal level. The body may live, but the spirit must be killed. To train, discipline and chastise; these are the words which obsess” the torturers Sartre insists (121/33).

Torture is merely the most brutal and crude mechanism in the system of domination. In this sense, “Torture was simply the expression of racial hatred” (121/33), just as racial hatred was the means to justify treating some people as animals or cogs in a machine. As such, torture ultimately ends up destroying the human being who hates, just as exploitation cannot but result in enmeshing the exploiter, for “hate is a magnetic field: it has . . . corroded them and enslaved them [both]” (122/34). In the end then, torture reveals the limits and the ends of systemic exploitation and how racism was imbricated within it: “Torture was imposed here by circumstances and demanded by racial hatred. In some ways it is the essence of the conflict and expresses its deepest truth” (124–25/36).

In short, by the late 1950s, Sartre conceived of racism not as a mythical blinder that legitimates oppression; he argued that it is a central pillar in the structure of exploitation itself. The conception of the institutionalization of racism and its enmeshment in the system of production and exchange goes



beyond the terms of his earlier reflections on antisemitism and his support of the negritude negation of colonialism, elaborating on what he first explored in his writing on racism in the United States, reaching full fruition in his existential Marxist writings.

The theoretical elaboration of his existentialist Marxist position was most developed in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (*Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 1960), where a new series of concepts governed Sartre's analysis: dialectical history, praxis, the practico-inert, totalization, and seriality.<sup>49</sup> The *Critique* sought to explain how humans make history and in turn are made by that history. Or as Sartre put it, he wanted to explain the "permanent and dialectical unity of freedom and necessity." Developing what he called after Henri Lefebvre the progressive-regressive method, dialectical history moved back and forth between the social totality and the individual in search of the mediations that could account for historical configurations. Humans are always set in specific situations, which they interpret and act upon. This "subjective process of self-definition through action in the world" defines praxis, which as Martin Jay explains, translates Sartre's notion of the for-itself in *Being and Nothingness* into the terms of the *Critique*. The accumulated result of human action is the practico-inert. "Like Marx's concept of capital as dead labor or Sartre's own earlier notion of the in-itself," Jay elaborates, "the practico-inert confronts man as an irreducible other, despite his role in its creation."<sup>50</sup> Most people thus lead atomized, alienated lives, an existence that Herbert Marcuse called the life of "one-dimensional man," where they do little more than internalize the dead existence of the practico-inert, satisfied with themselves as the reified incarnation of prescribed social functions. Collective existence is thus dominated by what Sartre called seriality. "'Serial' collectives are agglomerations of human beings," William McBride explains, "engaged in some enterprise to which a common name can be given but which far from unifying them, reinforces their isolation."<sup>51</sup> Racism, Sartre maintains, is a part of "a *praxis* illuminated by a 'theory' ('biological,' 'social,' or empirical racism, it does not matter which) aiming to keep the masses in a state of molecular aggregation" (721).

Abstracting from his specific interventions into the Algerian conflict, but also reflecting on Nazi and Stalinist antisemitism, Sartre tried to elucidate what he now called "the seriality of racism" (652). Internal to the supra-exploitation of colonialism was violence and appropriation that was justified through the self-reinforcing logic of racism. In the terms of the *Critique*, Sartre enumerated its unfolding: it begins as a

structure of alienation in the *practico-inert*, it is actualized as *praxis* in colonization; and its (temporary) victory presents itself as the objectification of the practical ensemble (army, capitalists, commodity merchants, colonialists) in a

*practico-inert* system where it represents the fundamental structure of reciprocity between the colonialists and the colonized. (720)

This “serial axis” is engraved in the practices and institutions of the lived world, where the colonialist or antisemite “lives on an ‘Island of Doctor Moreau,’ surrounded by terrifying beasts created in the image of man, but botched” (720). Since the racial oppressor lives constantly with a paranoid vision that those subhumans—demonized, bestialized, and racialized to justify colonial oppression or antisemitism—are dangerous and violent, he presents the everyday violence of the racial system as well as any extreme measures that might become necessary as a legitimate self-defense to the threat of the racial other.

This criminalization of the victim engenders in turn a new mechanism of common praxis that takes the form of “agitation, publicity, the diffusion of information . . . campaigns, slogans, the muted orchestration of terror as an accompaniment to orders, ‘stuffing people’s heads’ with propaganda, etc.” (642). The machinery of racial indoctrination disseminated through the mass media, inculcated in educational apparatuses, and incorporated into ordinary habits turns racism into an invisible practice of everyday norms. So “the hatred which these dummies excited in everyone belonged to the Other; but totalizing propaganda constituted this hatred into other-direction as an exigency of a totalizing ceremony” (653). Everyone within the system comes to internalize the crimes that belong to no one in particular, so collective responsibility is avoided as “serial responsibility” (654). When the material conditions of life become such that life itself becomes impossible for those whose domination is justified by racism, the only solution is revolt: “The only possible way out was to confront total negation with total negation, violence with equal violence; to negate dispersal and atomization by an initially negative unity whose content would be defined in struggle” (733).

The crystallization of Sartre’s third world radicalism saw revolutionary violence as the solution to institutionalized exploitation undergirded by racism. This point of departure was apparent not only in his campaign against the French-Algerian war, but in his opposition to the Vietnam war, his support of revolutionary movements in Latin America, especially the Cuban revolution, and most emphatic in his “Préface aux *Damnés de la terre*” (preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961) and his “Lumumba et le néo-colonialisme” (“The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba,” 1963).

The clearest exemplar of this new phase in Sartre’s antiracism is his introduction to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which echoed Fanon’s call for a revolutionary uprising of the Third World against Western culture in order to discover its authentic subjectivity through revolutionary violence. The camps of the opposing forces in the apocalyptic scene that Sartre draws

this time are not determined by the dialectics of the gaze, but by the struggle for power itself, defined by control over limited resources.<sup>52</sup>

Sartre heralded a new generation of anticolonialist writers who expressed the contradictions of colonialism by showing that European moral principles and codes of conduct and the material lives of colonized peoples “did not hang together, and that [the colonized] could neither reject them completely nor yet assimilate them” (10/8). Sartre insisted that while Fanon spoke exclusively to the wretched of the earth Europeans should read the book because it explained how we are “estranged from ourselves,” since in defining the non-European, Europeans do not only alienate and subjugate others. “It is enough that they show us what we have made of them for us to realize what we have made of ourselves,” Sartre exclaims. The dehumanization and ostracism of racialized others, what Sartre describes as “their scars and . . . their chains,” (14/13) are therefore part and parcel of the creation of European identity and hegemony.

Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* consequently reveals how the West has shaped the rest of the modern world. His advocacy of violence is justified as the return of the repressed violence of colonialism deflected back upon the West, playing out in geo-political terms Sartre’s earlier description of the inherent violence of intersubjectivity. Sartre reaffirms, “we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made us” (16/17). This is the key premise that animates the Sartrean dialectic of authenticity first applied in the *Réflexions*. But it also discloses what Sartre’s existentialism shares with Marxism encapsulated in Marx’s comment in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>53</sup> Sartre’s *Critique* was the extended elaboration of how this functions. His preface to Fanon urged that Europeans support the revolutionary blowback from the colonial encounter, for “we in Europe too are being decolonized: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out” (22/24). The “boomerang” (19/20) of colonial revolt was the restorative violence of “man recreating himself,” (19/21) and in the face of it, Sartre recommended that Europeans “stand in judgment” (26/31) of themselves and side with the revolution that will bring about the final liberation of all humanity, not only from racism but from all structures of oppression.

Sartre’s “Lumumba et le néo-colonialisme” (“The Political Thought of Patrice Mumumba,” 1963) more cogently, but just as emphatically, wove together an account of systemic economic structures and racial oppression. It also celebrated revolutionary violence as necessary to forge a solution. Thus, Lumumba and Fanon are hailed together as the “two great dead men

[who] represent Africa. Not only their nations: all of their continent.”<sup>54</sup> The preface to Lumumba’s political speeches was an effort to analyze his rise and fall and to offer an account of why, ultimately, he was murdered.

Lumumba, for Sartre, was a “black Robespierre,” (219/175) caught in the contradictions of his own Jacobin desire to centralize and unify the Congo, while only dimly aware of the structural forces of neocolonialism that ended up destroying him. He embodied the inconsistencies of colonialism and the paradoxes of the anticolonial struggle, but he had the potential to “stir up the people against neocapitalist mystification,” which was why he had to die (247/196). Educated first by Catholic and then Protestant missionaries, incorporated into the colonial civil service, he realized at the age of twenty that he had already reached his zenith: “Above all the blacks, he would always remain beneath the whites” (202/162). Lumumba lived the contradictions of his elite status as black in a segregated and racist society:

The registered black had no more right than the unregistered to enter European towns, unless he was working there; like them, he could not evade the curfew; when he went shopping, he met them again at the special counter reserved for blacks; like them he was a victim of segregationist practices on every occasion and in every place. (203/163)

Sartre was clear that he now thought economic exploitation was the cause of this racist segregation. He was categorical that the suffering from the daily toil for their master’s benefit was worse than the pain of racist discrimination, since prejudice and inequity was a consequence of the extraction of surplus labor.

In his singular emphasis on a political solution to national independence however, Lumumba, failed to see the forest for the trees, which would have necessitated fusing his political struggle to a social revolution like that waged in Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, and Algeria. It was only a movement created through a revolutionary uprising, where “the oppressors violence begets counter-violence which at the same time turns against the enemy and against the divisions that play the enemy’s game” that the cleavages of the Congo and in turn of Africa could be overcome (228/181). Sartre did not mince words. One could only eliminate the vestiges of the old order “through persuasion, political education, and if necessary, through terror” (228/182). Terror was thus legitimated as the weapon of the weak.

Lumumba’s failure ultimately meant that what happened in the Congo would be repeated in Africa as a whole, which was already an iteration of the neocolonialism that stymied Latin America and the Caribbean. A new indigenous elite, who conspired in Lumumba’s downfall, would replace the old government but remain completely dependent upon the Europeans and