Chapter 4

The Subversion of Colonial Ideology: Jean-Paul Sartre

It is time now to look in greater depth at one of the key French figures in the history of anticolonialism, Jean-Paul Sartre. There is no denying the importance of Sartre in the theorisation of colonialism and anticolonialism, as well as in the politics and practice of the anticolonial struggle, not least for his recognition that this was not a subsidiary issue, but one that was absolutely central to twentieth-century history. In many ways, Sartre has to be considered as one of the pioneers in the history of European thought in this area, and much of the contemporary and subsequent work that has been done on this question, particularly, though not entirely, in Europe, has relied heavily on some aspects of his thought and returned to it as an essential foundation for much that was to follow. There are inevitably aspects with which later thinkers would disagree, as well as contradictions and limitations that need to be recognised. However, it is also necessary to give full credit to his courage in consistently affirming positions that were based on a fundamental commitment.

His most important, most original theoretical contribution consisted in his philosophical theorisation of the Other and in particular the colonial Other. The theorisation of the Other rejected and subverted the universalist problematic of the Republican Enlightenment model that had been promoted as the ideological rationalisation of the French colonial enterprise. However, it also has to be seen as part of his preoccupation with formulating a moral anthropology, concerned with the realisation of Humankind as a species, in the longest-term view of History, both written with a capital H.

At the same time, his practical political commitment to the anticolonial struggle, particularly in respect of Algeria, was equally important in the political context of the time. This work was the product of his engagement with real history in the making and was characterised by a hard-nosed, practical, political understanding of the current situation. As well as his own work on this question, however, it is also important to recognise his role in acting as a conduit for the ideas of others active in the anticolonial struggles, and his contribution in making their views known and published through the review *Les Temps Modernes* and other channels.

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Although these two facets were often convergent, there is no denying that they were sometimes at odds. In particular, the political requirement to take a clear-cut stance to identify with a particular camp in the struggle (in Sartre's case, the anticolonial camp), along with the espousal of its ideas, could sometimes lead to contradictions with his own basic theory.

There is a third aspect that deserves to be signalled, and that is his analysis of the specificity of French colonialism, particularly his analysis of the French colonialist system in Algeria, which was first delivered as a speech to a meeting organised by the 'Comité d'Action des Intellectuels contre la poursuite de la guerre en Afrique du Nord', at the Salle Wagram in Paris on 27 January 1956, and then published in *Les Temps Modernes* under the title, 'Le colonialisme est un système' (Sartre 1956) and reproduced in *Situations V* (Sartre 1964: 25–48). This analysis of the specific economic and political features of French colonialism in Algeria is notable on at least two grounds. First, it makes clear the overriding importance and central role of Algeria in French imperialism; Sartre's critique of colonialism is the critique of French colonialism in Algeria. Secondly, it implicitly calls into question the universal applicability of Lenin's theory of imperialism, particularly with regard to the export of capital.

In this text, Sartre quotes Jules Ferry as a precursor of Lenin in the theorisation of the economics of colonialist imperialism:

> This time, it is capitalism itself that becomes colonialist. Jules Ferry would become the theorist of this new colonialism: 'France has always had an abundance of capital at her disposal and has exported it abroad in vast quantities. It is thus in France's interests to consider the colonial question from this perspective. What is at stake for countries like ours, which are destined by the nature of their industry to export on a grand scale, is the fundamental question of markets … Where you find political predominance, there you will also find the predominance of products, economic predominance.' You see, Lenin was not the first to define colonial imperialism: it was Jules Ferry, this 'great man' of the Third Republic. (Sartre 1956: 1373)

There are clear political differences between the two. Moreover, Ferry was not actually arguing for the export of capital to the colonies. The benefits of doing so were too uncertain and the profits would take too long to return. Sartre was quite clear on Ferry's policy, which was to create new industries in France itself, the products of which were to be sold in the colonies.

> What was entailed? Creating industries in the conquered lands? No way: the capital of which France had such an 'abundance' was not going to be invested in some underdeveloped country; the returns were too uncertain and the profits would take too long to achieve, as everything would have to be constructed and equipped. And even if it could be done, what would be

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> the point of creating from scratch production facilities that would be in competition with metropolitan industry? Ferry is very clear: capital will not leave France; it will simply be invested in new industries that will sell their manufactured goods to the colonies. The immediate consequence of this was the establishment of the Customs Union (Union douanière 1884). This Customs Union is still in existence. It ensures that French industry, which is handicapped on the international market by its excessively high prices, retains a monopoly on the Algerian market. (Sartre 1956: 1373–74)

Who was going to buy these goods? Not the Algerians, who lacked the resources to do so, but a new kind of artificially created consumer, in the shape of the French settler, who was given every advantage and subsidy to enable him to acquire land, from which to produce foodstuffs and raw materials for the metropolitan market. Both sides of this trade were thus safeguarded through a rigid protectionist system.

Sartre does not develop the theoretical implications for a more general analysis of imperialism and, indeed, the value of his analysis lies in its very specificity, in explaining some of the very particular parameters of the Algerian case. One might nonetheless deduce from the above that the relative backwardness of the French industrial economy, compared with that of Britain, Germany and the United States, at the time of its imperial expansionism could provide some explanation for its specificity at the level of economic relations.

However, the specific issues that are perhaps more interesting here relate to Sartre's theorisation of the Other and the significance to the development of his thought of tensions between the universal and the particular.

Sartre and the Theorisation of the Colonial Other

It is evident that, in the context of the prevailing consensus of the time, based on the Enlightenment and Republican ideologies, Sartre's theorisation of the Other in general, and of the colonial Other in particular, emerged as a radically original attempt to break with these dominant perceptions. Indeed, he developed his ideas outside and in complete disregard of the universalist Enlightenment tradition. One of the key elements that Sartre developed in his theory of the Other was the importance of the visual, through the notion of the gaze, *le regard*. These two aspects are closely related to each other.

The gaze, in its simplest form, is the relationship of the subject, the voyeur, to the object of the gaze. The act of looking at another person transforms this person, the Other, into an object, a thing, determined and fixed by the gaze of the seeing subject. So far, this is a one-way process, in which the relationship is simply that of the subject to its object. And, although that may be the end of the matter, as it is possible to see without being seen, nonetheless the dialectic of the gaze implies, at the very least, the possibility of a reciprocity, in which the Other is not only the object of the subject's gaze, but also a subject who, in their turn, looks back at the *voyeur*, thus constituting the original subject as object.[1]

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This theory was developed in *L'Etre et le néant* (Being and Nothingness), above all in relation to the freedom of the individual subject and the capacity to act without restriction or a priori determination. In this context, the gaze of the Other was a constant threat to this freedom, even more so as there was the risk of succumbing to the temptation to enter into a complicity with the Other, in seeing oneself through their eyes. This self-determination via the gaze of the Other was a stratagem to escape one's own *angoisse*, amounting to an abnegation of one's freedom and a complicity in the process of the transformation of the self into a thing. This scenario, whereby we 'grasp ourselves from outside, as though we were another person or a thing', is set out in the following passage taken from *L'Etre et le néant*:

> Such is the whole set of processes by which we attempt to hide our own *angoisse* from ourselves: we grasp our own potentiality while avoiding consideration of other potentialities, which we ascribe, as their potentialities, to an undifferentiated other: we do not wish to see this potentiality as sustained in being by a pure annihilating freedom, but we attempt to grasp it as though it were brought into being by an object that is already constituted, which is no other than our Ego, envisaged and described as the person of the other. Of our primary intuition, we would like to retain the sense that it gives us of our independence and responsibility, but it also means that we play down anything in it which is part of the original annihilation; besides we are always ready to take refuge in the belief in determinism, if this freedom weighs too heavy upon us or if we need an excuse. Thus, we take flight from *angoisse* by trying to grasp ourselves from outside, as though we were another person or a thing. What is usually called revelation of the inner sense or primary intuition of our freedom is not original in any way: it is a process that is already constructed, expressly designed to hide our *angoisse* from ourselves, the actual 'immediate given' of our freedom. (Sartre (1943)/1994: 78)

Thus far, it has been a question of the individual. At this stage, Sartre says that any attempt to turn the gaze back upon the Other is always doomed to failure, although this assumes that the goal is solely to gain insight into the Other's subjective consciousness (Sartre (1943)/1994: 419–20). The possibility that such a reversal may bring about a change in the Other's subjectivity, as well as that of the subject, leading to the possibility of new relations of solidarity or a change in the relations of power, was largely ignored. It was later that Sartre was to relate his theory of the gaze to the precise significations with which it was loaded when linked to definite power relations of domination and subordination, arising from social factors, rather than as a phenomenon limited to an individual's consciousness.

When Sartre comes to develop his theory of the collective Other, particularly in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Reflections on the Jewish Question), published in 1946, and then the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Critique of Dialectical Reason), published in 1960, its links with the notion of ideology become more obvious. The

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subsumption of the self beneath the gaze of the Other follows a similar process to that described in some theories of ideology, including that developed by Louis Althusser (Althusser 1970, 1976), as the imposition of ready-made ideological perceptions and values from the outside on more or less willing subjects, who then appropriate them and identify with them as constituting part and parcel of their own identity.

In *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Sartre recognises that individual freedom and self-determination are subject to the influence of socio-economic, political and cultural factors at the level of collective society (Sartre (1946b)/1954: 14–15). However, the development of his concept of *mauvaise foi* into a fully developed theory of ideology is found above all in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, where he explains the genesis of particular ideologies as an effect of a process of generalised alienation, in which each person becomes Other by taking their opinion from the Other and thinking it as Other; in which public opinion, or the Idea, has become a process with an invincible force, not because it is the conscious moment of anybody's praxis, since no one actually thinks it, but rather because it is a 'practico-inert' object, not susceptible to verification or modification in this domain of the Other.[2] More specifically, for our purposes, it is in this text that he develops his theory of colonial ideology (Sartre (1960)/1985: 406, note 1, 798–813), in which, in the form of racial superiority, it acts as the cement of the 'serial unity' of the colonists:

> Colonialism defines the exploited as eternal, because it is itself constituted as eternal exploitation. In so far as this inert sentence passed on the colonised becomes the serial unity of the colonists (in its ideological form), i.e. the link of their otherness, it is the idea as Other or the Other as idea; it thus remains as Idea of stone but its force comes from its ubiquitous absence. In the form of this otherness, it becomes racism … In reality, racism is colonial self-interest lived as the thing that links all the colonists of the colony through the serial flight of their otherness. (Sartre (1960)/1985: 406, note 1)

It is clear from the above that this position is based on very different premises from those underpinning the dominant ideological consensus based on Republican universalism. Indeed, Sartre's analysis of colonial ideology does not take as its object the specificity of the 'official' colonial ideology, founded on the theories of the Enlightenment; it bypasses altogether the importance of this ideology in the imaginary representation of the relations between coloniser and colonised, thus dismissing it as of no real account. And yet, while not engaging directly with it, Sartre nonetheless provides a devastating critique of it on the theoretical plane by bringing to the fore the question of difference. His position is thus based on a very different foundation from that of the shaky edifice of what might be called a phoney universalism. Not only does Sartre highlight the difference between coloniser and colonised, but he also points to Europe's responsibility in accentuating difference and division in the colonies. As he writes in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de*

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la terre (The Wretched of the Earth), 'Europe has multiplied divisions and oppositions, manufactured classes and various forms of racism, in an attempt to use every means to instigate and increase the stratification of colonised societies' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 7–8).

Sartre's great merit is to uncover the reality of the colonial relations, which are experienced in the colonial consciousness through representations that derive from ethnic and racial conceptions, rather than the universal doctrines of Enlightenment ideals. His analysis takes as its starting point the exclusion of the Other from the collective made up of the French colonists. He presents this collective in its stark particular reality, as it is lived and experienced, without confronting this reality with the mythical discourse of Republican ideology. His analysis of the reality of French colonialism thus strips away the usual ideological forms to target conceptions that were common currency in the more transparent official ideology of British imperialism.

It is significant that the overt racism implicit in the colonial gaze in Sartre's analysis and reflecting the reality of the colonial relation is also present in much of what passes as orientalism. The importance of the visual element of orientalism is clearly demonstrated, not only and most obviously in the domains of art, but also in anthropology and literature, as well as in some forms of religion, where the notion of the gaze and the image play an essential role. Indeed, there is a sense in which universalism and orientalism form a couplet in French colonial discourse, in which the orientalist conception of the Other forms the necessary correction to the universalising discourse of the Republic. Given that there is no space for the notion of difference or the Other within the discourse of the indivisible French Republic, it is in these other practices that the visual comes to the fore, with the representation and/or conceptualisation of the Other through the practice and theory of vision. It should be remembered that vision depends on the division of subject and object, the self and the Other.

Indeed, the nature of the visual relation, as one of fundamental inequality between the subject and object of the gaze, makes it eminently suitable as a vehicle for the expression of the relation between coloniser and colonised, in which the actual reality of this relation can be articulated. This aptness is reinforced by the possibility of a complete absence of reciprocity in the relation of the voyeur to the object of the gaze; the latter may indeed be completely unaware even that he/she is being looked at or spied upon.

This fundamental inequality which is intrinsic in the form of the gaze is, moreover, reinforced by the colonial relations of power, where the voyeur is always the European and the object of the gaze the non-European Other. It is an inequality based not on difference alone, but on a fundamental opposition between the subject and the object of the gaze: the object is perceived as the absolute opposite, the negation of the subject. On the most fundamental level, there is a relation of mutual dependence between the colonist and the colonised Other, in which the colonist is defined in his relation with his Other, who represents the negation of everything that characterises him, as in a mirror reflection. This analysis was later taken up by

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Edward Said, who defined the orientalists' conception of the Orient as the negation of the West, but then went on to demonstrate the determining role that this negative reflection plays in the constitution of European identity, by defining it exclusively in relation to its Other (Said 1978: 7, 39).

In this perception of the Other, there is always a value judgement that determines the Other to be inherently inferior. The power to see and thus, ultimately, to know and to pass judgement remains the prerogative of the subject of the gaze, the European voyeur. Within the terms of the colonial perception, it is inconceivable that the colonised Other may also have the right to gaze upon his/her master. It is highly significant, in this connection, that in Algeria there was actually an offence of *l'outrage par regard*. Indeed, in 1945, an Algerian schoolteacher was sentenced to two years in prison for this very offence, for looking at the sub-prefect of Medea and causing him outrage thereby (Suret-Canale 2001).

Nonetheless, this possibility of returning the gaze does exist. It is integral to the relation and is destined to be subversive of it.

The notion of the subversion of the gaze is an important one in the context of the anticolonial struggle and more will be said about it shortly. However, if Sartre's theorisation of the gaze and the colonial Other remains probably the most original element of his contribution to the understanding of colonialism, it nonetheless has to be seen in the context of his understanding of the role played by the repressive violence that was a key element of colonial rule.

Colonial Ideology and Repressive Violence

The implicit exposure of colonial ideology in theoretical terms had as its counterpart the more explicit acknowledgement of the role of force in maintaining the colonial system. There is a strong case for arguing that there is here an intimate connection to the emphasis on the visual in Sartre's analysis of colonial ideology. On the one hand, his theory of the Other undermines and subverts the 'official' discourse of universalist Republicanism. At the same time, he consistently downplays the importance of ideology per se in the maintenance of colonial power, with the argument that the colonial system rests primarily on the foundation of brute force. The little importance that is given to ideology, and consequently language, is not an omission but a necessary corollary of his analysis.

In 'Le colonialisme est un système', Sartre laid bare the economic foundations of the colonial system, as far as Algeria was concerned. He also showed that the system was only maintained through the use of violence and gave little weight to the role of ideology in maintaining the status quo.

For one thing, he pointed to the fact that most Algerians were in fact excluded from participation in French education and French culture and therefore remained largely uncontaminated by any ideological indoctrination. 'As for our famous culture, who knows whether the Algerians had any great desire to acquire it? But one thing is for sure and that is the fact that we refused to give it to them' (Sartre 1956: 1380). With an illiteracy rate of 80 per cent, the extent of any ideological

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indoctrination was in any case bound to remain limited. Not only were the majority of Algerians denied education in the French language, even literacy in Arabic was not encouraged and the Arabic language was officially considered to be a foreign language.[3] We shall see that, even with regard to the French language, it is a striking fact that significantly more Algerians have been taught French since independence than was ever the case before. For instance, writing in 1983, Xavier Deniau claimed that there were four times as many French nationals teaching in Algeria than in the time of colonisation (Deniau 1983: 102).

Sartre had also pointed out that the secularism that was a major pillar of the French Republic at home was not a feature of French rule in Algeria, where there was no real separation of religion and state, with the French authorities endeavouring to control Islam and to make use of the most backward features of the religion through the fostering of superstition and obscurantist practices.[4] For Sartre, therefore, French colonial ideology, especially in the form of the 'civilising mission', could have no role to play in maintaining French power; the logic of the system was such that force increasingly became the only option left for the colonists. As he says in the preface to *Les Damnés de la terre*: 'Our Machiavellianism has little hold over these highly conscious people who have cottoned on to one after another of our lies. The only recourse left to the colonist is force, or what remains of it; the only choice for the native is that between servitude and sovereignty' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 9). This reliance on force is accentuated by the contradictions of the colonists themselves. As Sartre pointed out, the colonists were 'Republicans' in France, '*chez nous*', i.e. within the context of French metropolitan institutions. In Algeria, on the other hand, they were fascists who hated the Republic and only loved the Republican army (Sartre 1956: 1384).

Yet the fact of the military presence itself served to tighten the circle further. As the repression made the colonists more detestable, so the military presence became more necessary, along with the necessity for an overthrow of the system by revolutionary counter-violence. The system thus contained the seeds of its own inevitable destruction; it prepared its own downfall through its own necessary intransigence.[5]

This point was reinforced by the economic implications. As Sartre says, in 1956, the costs of the war to the French state were estimated at 300 thousand million francs per year, a sum that was equivalent to the total Algerian revenue. His necessary conclusion was that the cost of maintaining the colony would outweigh the economic benefits that it brought and that the struggle would necessarily be abandoned when the burden became too great (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 37). Moreover, any real reform to make assimilation a fact, rather than an ideological premise, would in fact have destroyed the whole basis on which the colonial system was founded.

Yet, if Sartre dismissed the importance of ideology for the maintenance of colonial power, it was nonetheless given more weight by many of the colonised themselves, not just as a tool of repression, but also as an essential factor in the anticolonial struggle. Aimé Césaire, speaking in 1956 at the same meeting of the

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'Comité d'Action des Intellectuels', emphasised the point that colonialism was not just maintained by force, but also through what he terms the *'confiance'* of the colonised peoples, a *'confiance'* that has been betrayed. This is what he had to say:

> We have reached the moment, when all over the world peoples who have hitherto been passive or resigned are now rising up to affirm that the time is now past for a world founded on the imposition of racial hierarchy and the oppression of the peoples of the world.
>
> It would be wrong to become blasé about this and say that after all this is nothing new, that it has always only been by force that empires have been kept in being and that force will continue to hold sway for a long time yet. The truth is very different. The truth is that for decades the colonised peoples have tried to have trust, have believed that they should have trust and have in fact been trustful. Their conquerors spoke such fine words! They spoke of the rights of man, of freedom, of justice, of civilisation, and lord knows what else! They proclaimed their universal mission.
>
> Now, out of the sheaf of dramas that constitute the colonial problem, the most important drama, the one with the greatest consequences, is perhaps not the initial drama of colonial conquest, but rather the drama represented by the betrayal of trust. I mean by that the trust that all colonial peoples, without exception, have been led to invest in the colonial power and that has always, inexorably, been betrayed.
>
> Well! We are now at a moment in history when all the colonial peoples, without exception, have learnt from bitter experience and are refusing their trust and are telling the world that they no longer have any trust. (Césaire 1956: 1367)

Sartre had also written about the ideological dimension to colonialism before, particularly in 'Orphée noir' ('Black Orpheus'), his preface to Senghor's anthology of black poetry, published in 1948. Here, he recognised that the black poets had been through a process of acculturation in white schools, though, in this text, the main thrust was to bring out the resulting alienation and exile from their own culture:

> The herald of the black soul has been schooled by the whites, according to the ancient iron law, which denies to the oppressed any weapon other than those he has stolen himself from his oppressor; it is in this white culture shock that his negritude moves from the level of immediate lived existence to become an object of reflection. Yet, at the same time, it also means that he has, to a greater or lesser extent, stopped living it himself. By choosing to see what he is, he has become his own double; he no longer coincides with himself. On the other hand, it is because he was already exiled from his own self that he felt this duty to speak out. He begins then with exile. A double exile in which the exile of his body offers a splendid mirror image of the exile of his heart. (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xv–xvi)

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He sums up this alienation in the physical image of 'the walls of white culture that stand between her [Africa] and him [the black], *their* science, *their* language, *their* customs' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xvi).

In the Preface to *Les Damnés de la terre*, Sartre also dwelt on the ideological dimension, especially as it affected the manufacture of elite minorities of the colonised to serve as intermediaries between the colonisers and the colonised, again stressing the cultural and linguistic alienation that this process brought in its train, making these intellectuals into *mensonges vivants*, 'living lies'. Eschewing the stark realities of the colonies, the European elite aspired to create a 'native elite'. From adolescence, the candidates were singled out, branded on the forehead with the principles of Western culture, sent off to France to be gagged by fine, cloying words and phrases stuffed down their throats, and then sent home again in their altered state.[6]

In the first stage, it was a one-way process, with the Word 'loaned' from France to the colonised,[7] serving in effect to deprive them of their own voice, to 'gag' them. But Sartre also talks of the various stages by which this colonised elite began the process of talking back, at first to criticise the contradictions between the colonists' own values and their actual practice,[8] then to raise the contradictions within the European discourse, particularly that between the purported universalism of the humanist ideology and the actual exclusion and stigmatisation entailed in racist ideas and practices,[9] and finally to question the applicability of the European values to the reality of their own lives. With Fanon and those inspired by similar ideas, this process would go even further; they would simply turn their backs on the European discourse, as of no relevance to their situation.

The *reprise de parole* by the colonised, the regaining of their voice, was an important element of the anticolonial struggle.[10] However, neither the ideological alienation of the colonised nor their subsequent rediscovery of their own voice figures largely as a central feature of Sartre's own theory, although he acknowledges this aspect, especially when commenting on the work of the colonised intellectuals. The originality of his theoretical contribution with regard to the colonial question lies elsewhere; it is mainly articulated through the notion of the gaze, not through the role of language and ideology.

The Subversion of the Gaze

We have seen that the essential characteristic of the colonial gaze is to deny any possibility of reciprocity. Yet a constant element in Sartre's thought is the ever-present option of refusing the self-definition of the subject, both as individual and as collective subject, by the Other. This applies equally well to this case. Thus, there is always the option for the colonised Others to turn the gaze back on to the colonisers, transforming them, in their turn, into Others, objects of their gaze.

In fact, this reversal of the gaze, which heralds the beginnings of the anticolonial struggle, forms the second moment in a dialectic of the gaze, which is closely modelled on that of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and the slave, or more accurately of the lord and the bonded servant (Hegel (1807)/1977: 111–19). The reversal of the gaze does not, of course, suffice on its own to eliminate the colonial

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system. For this, the full espousal of counter-violence to meet the violence of the colonial power was deemed necessary.

The second moment is a necessary development in this dialectic, in which the supremacy of the coloniser is doomed in advance. For just as colonial violence could not be pursued to its conclusion, i.e. to the death of the colonised, whose labour is essential to the colonist, so too the process of dehumanisation, which is one of the effects of this violence, cannot be fully completed, because the colonist needs to acknowledge the colonised as men, in order that they may serve his own ends. Thus, Sartre dismisses as vain what he calls a 'petrified ideology', which attempts to portray the colonised as 'talking beasts'. To be able to give them orders, to get them to work, however brutal the regime, their basic humanity has to be acknowledged; a man cannot be 'treated like a dog' unless he is first held to be a man.[11]

As if in a mirror image, violence inevitably begets violence; so too, attempts to dehumanise the 'native' lead to the dehumanisation of the colonial master.[12] The counter-violence of the colonised, on the other hand, provoked by the power and the impotence of the colonist, enables them to realise their own humanity.[13]

As Sartre said, Fanon showed that violence was not wild savagery reborn or an outburst of instinctual resentment: it was man reconstituting himself as a human being, 'c'est l'homme lui-même se recomposant' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 15). Thus, Sartre endorsed Fanon's position that only violence could overcome violence; only through violence could the colonised overcome his neurosis to become a free man.

> For, in the first stages of the revolt, it is necessary to kill: killing a European is like killing two birds with one stone, getting rid in one throw of both an oppressor and one of the oppressed: afterwards there remains a dead man, but also a free man; the survivor feels he is treading on his own national land for the very first time. (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 16)

This is still only the second moment of the dialectic of the anticolonial struggle and, for Sartre, it was also important to recognise the specificity of race as an integral element of this second stage, which he categorises as the moment of 'separation' or 'negativity'. Already in 'Orphée noir', Sartre had made his view clear that what he called an 'anti-racist racism' was an essential phase if differences of race are to be abolished. It was not sufficient to proclaim the unity of the oppressed in the same struggle. In the colonies, it was essential for the colonised to first assert their own specificity and wage their own specific struggle against racist oppression before this ultimate unity could be achieved (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xiv).

This was a position that Memmi, amongst others, was later to take up with his notion of 'counter-racism'.[14] However, all credit must be given to Sartre for taking this position long before it became fashionable to do so and against the dominant positions of the Left at the time. The European Left, both socialist and communist, shared the refusal to acknowledge that the specific exploitation and oppression of the colonised peoples might entail the need for specific struggles against racism and any talk that smacked of separatism was anathema.

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Moving on now to the third moment of the dialectic becomes more problematic, for much of what Sartre posited as the next stage remained at the level of myth or wishful thinking about some kind of a grand synthesis, in which humanity would finally realise itself and the previous differences and negations be subsumed into a fully reciprocal, fraternal vision of a new type of human society.

The notion of the 'new man' came into its own, on the one hand, as a counterweight to that of the old 'European' man, who achieved his humanity at the expense of the colonised and the enslaved.[15] Now, in a reversal of the process, Europeans have ceased to be the subjects of history; they have become its objects. Europe was portrayed as a sinking ship.[16] A 'new man', a 'better-quality' man was in the process of being created, out of the violence of the Algerian and other struggles, which was a necessary part of the birth process.[17] And, indeed, this kind of rhetoric, regarding the creation of a 'new man' and a 'new society', was common currency in Algeria in the war years and post-independence period (Benrabah 1999: 93–96; and see Chapters 5 and 6).

Ultimately, however, Sartre had in mind a more inclusive conception of the new human species, which would not just be 'the sum total of the inhabitants of the planet but the infinite unity of their reciprocity' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 19–20). For Europeans to be part of this, they would have to put aside their particular garb of European superiority, or as Sartre put it: 'This is the *end* for us … we will only be able to be part of this totality, from which we are banished by the black gaze, if we tear off the uniforms and badges of our whiteness in an effort simply to be human (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xi). This was about becoming human, not superhuman in the Nietzschean sense. Sartre's vision was akin to that of Marx (at least that of the early Marx of the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx 1975)). It looked forward to the first realisation of the humanity of the species, which had hitherto consisted of subhumans.

There would be much to say about Sartre's later views of this anthropological humanistic goal, as well as his apparent (if contested) disavowal of his unconditional support for political, revolutionary violence (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 63–64). However, its relevance is only marginal to the present question, given the importance and influence of Sartre's earlier positions, as set out here, and the lack of resonance that any supposed changes of heart were to have.

The rest of this chapter will explore other problematical areas of Sartre's thought relating to colonialism and the anticolonialist struggle. These include some of the issues relating to the question of language, issues relating to the dialectic of the universal and the particular and, finally, the contradictions that may have arisen because of Sartre's own position as a Frenchman.

The Word and the Gaze

Some of these problematical issues arise in connection with the primacy of the gaze in Sartre's theorisation of the colonial relation, in comparison with the role accorded to ideology or the Word.

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In 'Orphée noir', Sartre had already talked about the gag being removed from black people, but, more especially, he concentrated on the notion of the 'return of the gaze'. Returning the gaze could only be done once the bowed heads are raised, as the following passage shows:

> Did you think that once these heads, which our forefathers had forced to bow down to the ground, were raised you would see only adoration in their eyes? Here are black men standing erect and looking at us and I hope that you can feel, as I do, the sensation of shock at being seen. For three thousand years the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen; he was pure gaze, the light of his eyes drew out everything from the native obscurity, the whiteness of his skin was still a gaze, made up of condensed light. The white man, white because he was a man, white like the day, white like the truth, white like virtue, illuminated creation like a torch and uncovered the secret, white essence of beings. Today these black men are looking at us and our gaze is sinking back into our eyes; it is the turn of black torches to light up the world and our white heads are no more than little paper lanterns tossing in the wind. (Sartre in Senghor 1948: ix)

Yet, on reading this passage, it has to be said that it is simply not true that blacks had only now been able to look at whites after 3,000 years. Blacks had always looked at whites, whenever they were involved in a relation, even if the whites were unable to see it or were sublimely indifferent to it because of their confidence, reinforced by racist ideology, that only their gaze counted. The difference is that, in the anti-imperialist struggles, the blacks were now articulating this reversal of the gaze through the white man's language, displaying it to the white man, writing in his language.

However, Sartre also claimed that the poems of Senghor's black anthology were not written for 'us'; any shame that 'we' might feel upon reading them is unintentional (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xi). He insisted that they were written by blacks for blacks, and, of course, they were. Yet the fact that they were written in French and published in France cannot be dismissed so easily, nor can the fact that the black French-reading public was actually quite limited in number. The *prise de conscience* by the black poets was in fact only one step in the process; the next was to assert themselves to their French colonisers and thus throw the poetry and the language back in the face of the oppressor. The writing of most of this poetry for a purely black audience is inconceivable.

Consonant with Sartre's concentration on the gaze was his dismissal of ideology and the little importance he actually gave to the word or to language in his theorisation of the Other. In this connection, the purely visual approach that he adopted to the question of whiteness and blackness is also significant. For colour only acquires its significance through connotations, which are created through language and ideology; there is no inherent significance in the actual visual manifestation of colour. Furthermore, the absolute whiteness and blackness, which feature in language, do not exist in reality, where there are only shades of white, pink,

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yellow, brown and black. Whiteness and blackness acquire their moral, ideological and political connotations through the signification that they have acquired in the language of culture and ideology. Moreover, there is nothing absolute about these meanings: black and white are both used as the colour of death and mourning, depending on the country concerned; both white and black are considered the colour of modesty in dress and virtue, again depending on the culture.

What is perhaps even more problematic is the link that Sartre established between language and the nation. On the one hand, this was a clear critique of the much-vaunted universalism of the French language. In Sartre's view, the French language was closely linked to the particularity of the French nation and French national identity. The learning of the national language was a major factor in the acquisition of a national identity (Sartre (1943)/1994: 558–59).

This link between language and national identity was brought out very clearly in 'Orphée noir', where Sartre claimed that the independence struggles of most ethnic minorities in the nineteenth century were also focused on an attempt to resuscitate their national languages. In addition to belonging to a collective with its own economic and political autonomy, it was also necessary to think of oneself as part of this national collective and, for Sartre, this meant thinking in the national language. He gave the example of Ireland, where he asserted that those who claimed to be Irish did not just need to belong to an independent economic and political entity, but also to think Irish, which meant thinking in the Irish language. As he said, 'the specific characteristics of a society correspond exactly to those expressions in its language that cannot be translated'.

The fact that the black poets had to use French to spread the word of their struggle seemed a major limitation to Sartre. Yet, given the upheavals and dispersal of the slave trade, amongst other factors, black people did not have a common language and were thus forced to use the language of the oppressor to call the oppressed to unite. Within the confines of the French Empire, the use of French would ensure the widest audience amongst the black peoples. Yet this was not without its difficulties. The use of French to proclaim their rejection of French culture meant that the black writers were 'taking with one hand what they were pushing aside with the other'. Inevitably, this meant allowing the thought machinery of the enemy to lodge in their brains. Moreover, the syntax and the vocabulary of the French language, forged as they were in other times and climes, for different needs and to denote different objects, were not appropriate tools for the black writers to speak of themselves and their own concerns, hopes and desires. Following Mallarmé, Sartre described the French language as 'goose-fleshed, pale and cold like our skies', 'the neutral language par excellence', in line with the French national spirit, which required the toning down of loud colours and flamboyance. This was the language in which the poets of Negritude were to 'pour the fire of their skies and their hearts'. As an analytical language, corresponding to the analytical nature of French thought, the French language might be singularly inapt to articulate black consciousness, given that the 'black genius' was most probably synthetic in character. Although the term *négritude* itself was one of the rare black contributions to the lexicon of the

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French language, it remained inadequate to express the other sub-analytical concepts and perceptions of 'black consciousness', for which the words were simply lacking in French (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xvii–xviii).

There is much in this, which is open to debate, including the essentialism implicit in the concept of the 'Negro', as set out here. With regard to language, Sartre went on to state that French was not a foreign language for the 'Negro', as he had been taught it from a very early age (though clearly this could only apply to the elite minority who went to French schools). He claimed that there was no problem with using it to talk of matters to do with technology, science or politics; the only problem was when it comes to speaking of 'himself'. Here, there would always be a slight hiatus 'separating what he says from what he would like to say': 'It seems to him as though a northern Spirit is stealing his ideas, gently inflecting them to mean more or less what he intended; it seems as though the white words are soaking up his ideas like sand soaks up blood' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xix).

In this text, language was seen by Sartre as 'half signs and half things' ('à moitié signes et choses à demi'). This was a view that clearly saw an important ideological role for language, in addition to its role as a vehicle of communication, combining a measure of essentialism with instrumentality. He concluded by saying that, because of the difficulties of expression through this language, the poetry actually attempted to make the language disappear; it used it to create silence (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xx). The black poets were engaged in a process of destruction of the French language, or rather, as Sartre put it, 'defrancising' the language. One of the ways in which they did this was by breaking down the customary associations of words, particularly through the reversal of the usual hierarchical order of white and black (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xx–xxi).

This was also how he saw Fanon subverting the French language, inverting the normal subject/object order of discourse, by excluding the erstwhile French subjects from the dialogue altogether.

> A 'French-speaking' ex-native bends this language to meet new needs, puts it to use and addresses his words to the colonised alone: 'Natives of all the under-developed countries, unite!' What a comedown! For their fathers, we were the only people worth talking to; now the sons no longer think we are worth talking to at all. We have become the objects of the discourse. (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 7)

There is a clear tension here, between on the one hand the French language as a particular entity with its own essence and features, constituting an integral part of the French national identity, and, on the other hand, the potentialities that also exist to recreate it as an instrument that will suit a variety of multiple purposes.

In 'Orphée noir', Sartre had claimed that 'words are ideas'. However, this was not to say that he believed that thought was the same thing as language, or that it was reducible to it. He made this clear in a later interview in *Telos*, at a time when he was targeting the structuralist approach to language. Here he said that, for him

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'thought never confounds itself with language. There was a time when thought was defined as independent of language, as something unknowable and ineffable, existing before expression. Today we make the opposite error. They wish us to believe that thought is only language, as if language itself were not *spoken*' (Sartre 1971: 111).

In a plea for a dialectical approach, he went on to propose two levels for language, a structural level, which he likens to an element of the 'practico-inert', and the other, the level of praxis:

> In reality, there are two levels. At the first level, language actually appears as an autonomous system which reflects social unification. Language is an element of the 'practico-inert', a sonorous matter united by a practical whole. The linguist takes this totality of relations as an object of study, and he has a right to do so since it is already constituted. It is the moment of structure, where totality appears as the thing without man, a network of oppositions in which each element defines itself by another one, where there is no term, but only relations of difference.

Sartre thus concedes that, at one level, language is constituted by its structures. Yet these structures themselves bear the mark of human activity and intervention:

> at the same time this thing without man is matter worked by man, bearing the traces of man. In nature you will not find oppositions such as those described by the linguist. Nature knows only the independence of forces. Material elements are placed one next to the other and act one over the other. But the lines of force are always external. It is not a matter of internal relations, such as that which poses masculine in relation to feminine or plural in relation to singular: that is, of a system in which the existence of each element conditions that of all others. If you admit the existence of such a system, you must also admit that language exists only as spoken, that is, in action. Each element of the system returns to a whole, but this whole is dead if every moment does not take it up and make it function. (Sartre 1971: 111)

Thus, there is always a second level to language, the level at which human activity, or praxis, comes into play.

> At the second level, it can no longer be a question of structures already there which will exist without us. In the system of language, there are some things that the inert cannot give alone: the mark of praxis. Structures impose themselves upon us only to the extent that they are made by others. Thus, to understand how a structure is made, it is necessary to introduce praxis as that totalizing process. Structural analysis must pass over to a dialectical comprehension.

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The Dialectics of Difference: the Universal and the Particular

This dialectical approach is also evident in his discussion of the tension between the universal and the particular. One of the key features of Sartre's contribution in this domain is his subversion of the universalist discourse that was used in support of the French colonial project.

Sartre brought out quite clearly the way in which the economic foundations of the colonial system in Algeria were in fundamental contradiction with the universalist ideology of the French Republic, explaining how this led the pied noir colonists to oppose the political institutions of France and any extension to the colonised of the democratic rights which they enjoyed as part of the metropolis (Sartre 1956: 1383). These rights were only for the colonists and were only to be enjoyed in France, amongst French people. The universality of the metropolitan institutions, even if only formal, was anathema to the colonists. However, this was where racism stepped in, 'to counterbalance the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism' (Sartre 1956: 1384). By relegating the colonised to the category of the subhuman, they were therefore not entitled to come under the aegis of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.[18]

In Algeria, there was no attempt at cloaking the labour relation in the guise of a free contract between equal human beings. In a situation of forced labour and military repression, the pretence of universal humanism was rejected. Away from France, the army rejected metropolitan universalism and worked on the principle that only a limited number of the world's population could qualify as part of the human race. In this way, the colonised were excluded and therefore exempted from the moral law that prohibited crimes against one's fellow man.[19]

This subversion of the universalist discourse, as far as Algeria was concerned, did not mean, however, that universalism per se had no role to play in Sartre's thought. What he was saying was that the universalism of the French political discourse was not in fact a reality; he was not necessarily opposed to it as a principle, as far as it went, which, in the context of Sartre's overall political positions, was not far enough, given its limitations as a result of its bourgeois character.

There are other domains in which Sartre was undeniably a universalist, particularly in his understanding of history and his own anthropological project, based on the notion of a progress towards the realisation of humanity.[20] And, although he viewed history to date as dominated by the European subjects of that history, he clearly saw the liberation struggles as an opportunity for the colonised to enter into history and thus make it truly universal for the first time (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 9).

He also had a clear belief in the universalism of knowledge, with its fundamental tenet that all human knowledge is available for the whole of the species and also its counterpart that there are no areas of human experience belonging to particular cultures or societies that are inherently closed to human knowledge. He was also part of the body of thinkers who believe that it is possible to explain the evolution of humanity and human societies through a single conceptual system and to elaborate a project that embraces humanity as a whole (Amin 1989: xi).

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However, a belief in the universalism of knowledge does not imply uniformity, especially in the domain of culture, where Sartre had a clear understanding of the particularity of different cultures. This could at times lead to a tension in his thought, especially when the assumption of his own and others' historicity seemed to involve the adoption of a ready-made essence that seemed to be at odds with his position that there is no a priori essence.

Some of these difficulties were evident in his analysis of Negritude in 'Orphée noir', where, at one point, he referred to 'the irredeemable suffering that is the universal essence of mankind' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xxxv). Yet, Negritude itself was not seen as an a priori essence, but as *'devenir'*, 'becoming', a moment in history, an enterprise, a future, a mission (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xxxix). Negritude was not universal in scope. Rather, there was a clear distinction to be made between race and class, which were not congruent, the former being 'concrete and particular', the latter 'universal and abstract' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xl–xli). However, Negritude was a stage, albeit a particularist one, in a movement towards the universal.

Sartre spelled out the terms of the dialectic thus: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy was the thesis; the assertion of Negritude as an antithetical value represented the negation of this thesis. However, this negation was not a sufficient goal in itself. It was merely a stage in the preparation of the synthesis to come, when humanity would be realised in a society without races. Negritude had only come into being in order to be destroyed. It was a phase, not the end of the process, a means to an end, not an end in itself (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xli).

Thus, Negritude was far more than merely a celebration of atavistic instincts, looking back to the past. It also entailed the transcending of a situation. As Sartre put it, it was 'born from Evil', but 'pregnant with a future Good', existing in a state of tension between nostalgia for a past to which there is no real return and a future in which Negritude itself will give way to new values (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xliii).

Sartre quotes a poem by the Haitian poet, Jacques Roumain, who felt obliged, as a communist, to abandon his African identity to become a member of the international proletariat:

Africa, I have kept your memory Africa
you are in me
Like the splinter in the cut
like a fetish standing guard over the village
make of me the stone of the sling
make of my mouth the lips of your wound
make of my knees the broken columns of your degradation
yet
I only want to be part of your race
Workers and peasants of the world (quoted by Sartre in Senghor 1948 :xli)

In this scenario, to become part of the universal, international proletariat, the black man must 'tear out his heart', i.e. his race. Yet this is only one interpretation and one

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that implies a very abstract form of universalism, against which might be set, for example, Aimé Césaire's more pluralistic variety of the universal concrete, 'riche de tout ce qui est particulier', in which all existing particularisms could coexist and act as a source of mutual enrichment (see Chapter 2).[21]

In Sartre's view of the dialectic between particularism and universalism, the black man was 'one who walked on a crest between the particularism of the past which he had just climbed and the universalism of the future which would be the twilight of his negritude; one who lived to the limit his particularism, to discover in it the dawn of the universal' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xiii). This vision of universalism is one of the future; it has nothing to do with the universalism of the Republican discourse of the Rights of Man, which is not a project, but a statement of inherent rights, constituting part of the eternal human essence.

Sartre's analysis of Negritude clearly has its limitations, some of which are no doubt due to the historical form of the phenomenon itself. One can remain uncomfortable with the essentialising treatment of the black man or the Negro, as with the (stereo)typical view it presents of the black African male, ignoring differences amongst black people, not least those between men and women, the latter only figuring as the object of men's desire or as mother. However, this chapter will now move on to a discussion of Sartre's own position as a Frenchman, in an attempt to determine how far this particularity impinged on his work in this area.

Sartre the Frenchman

One thing that is striking about the more political of Sartre's writings is the extent to which he gives expression to the divide between 'us' and 'them', characteristic of writing about colonialism at this time. There are a number of questions that need to be posed. First of all, who are the 'we'? Secondly, what is the basis of this identification and why does it figure so largely in Sartre's work? And, finally, is it a problem?

There is no single answer to the question of who 'we' are, as the precise identification of the group in question changes from text to text. However, the basic collective identity with which Sartre identifies in these texts is as a Frenchman. Sometimes this French identity is subsumed within a larger European or 'white' identity. However, underpinning all this writing is the basic historical fact of Sartre's Frenchness and his identification with it.[22]

Now, this French 'we' does not always have precisely the same meaning for Sartre or cover exactly the same category of people. Sometimes, 'we' means the coloniser, as opposed to the colonised, in an understanding of the complicity of all French people in the colonial process. At other times, Sartre clearly intends the 'we' to exclude the *pied noir* colonists; 'we' signifies only the metropolitan French. Yet again, at the height of the opposition to the Algerian War, 'we' clearly signifies not even the metropolitan French as a whole, but the French opponents of this war.

What is nonetheless striking is that 'we' never seems to include the Algerians, or other colonised people as part of the collective identity. The 'us'/'them' divide remains integral to Sartre's discourse, mirroring that of the colonial view of the

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Other. This was not the case with Césaire, whose position may be contrasted with that of Sartre on the 'us'/'them' binary divide. Not only did Césaire believe that the French people shared an inherent anticolonialism (Césaire 1956: 1366); he also believed in a common 'order' amongst nations, seeing the epoch of empire as a departure from this common order, to which Europe should now return (Césaire 1956: 1368).

The 'us'/'them' problematic comes through strikingly in Sartre's preface to Fanon's *Damnés de la terre*, a text that breaks completely with the distancing which Sartre could still achieve in respect of the French colonial administration, in, for example, 'Le colonialisme est un système' (Sartre 1956: 1380). This is particularly so in the way in which Sartre differentiates his 'we' from that of Fanon himself. Sartre, in his preface, specifically addresses his fellow countrymen – *'mes chers co-continentaux'* he calls them at one point (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 6). His preface has as its objective the enlightenment of his fellows; he wishes to persuade them that there is something in Fanon's book that is of relevance to them.

Fanon, on the other hand, is not addressing the Europeans at all, let alone as part of a collective identity with which he has any affinity; on the contrary, he is talking about them to his fellows, his 'brothers'. He is outside Europe and his view is from this outside. What is interesting are the terms Sartre uses to describe this 'scandalous' aspect of the book: 'par cette raison, son livre est scandaleux' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 7). This emotive expression may strike the reader as rather odd. For, if Fanon is telling it like it is, i.e. the truth, why should this be scandalous to the rational mind? It implies something in Sartre's gut reaction to the book, which, by making the colonised into the subjects and the colonisers the object of the discourse, threatened the very Frenchness in which he was rooted.

Throughout the preface, Sartre acts as the voice of the French coloniser, talking of 'our notorious crimes', 'our Machiavellianism', 'our lies' – no doubt with the intention of subverting this voice. Fanon, on the other hand, is portrayed as the voice of the Third World, 'their' voice, through which they are discovering themselves and learning to communicate to each other.[23] Its interest for 'us', the French, is that, in showing 'us' what 'we' have done to 'them', we will understand what 'we' have done to ourselves (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 7). Sartre then proceeds to address the 'Europeans' this time as *'vous'* not *'nous'*, urging them to open the book and enter into it: 'Européens, ouvrez ce livre, entrez-y.' Then, in the next paragraph, the *'nous'* reappears, though it is an oblique *'nous'* in indirect speech. The *'nous'* of those whom he was addressing is not a 'nous' in which he includes himself: 'In that case, you may say, let's throw this book out of the window. Why read it since it isn't written for us?' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 9–10). In the next sentence, he slips back into an identification, when he gives as one of the two reasons for reading it, the fact that Fanon 'explains you to his brothers and exposes for their benefit the way in which our alienation operates'; Sartre urges the European reader to take advantage of this to gain self-knowledge as the object of analysis. He then claims that 'our victims know us through their suffering and chains; this is what gives their evidence its credibility'. Thus, 'it is enough for them to show us what we have made of them, in

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order for us to understand what we have made of ourselves'. Then again he reverts to the second person, *'vous'*, in an apostrophe, urging the French to become aware and ashamed of what is done 'in your name' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 10). Then, moving to the *'je'* form, Sartre comes out with what appears as a quite extraordinary statement, in which he claims, as a European, to be stealing the book of an enemy, to be able to use it to heal Europe.[24]

Why is this so extraordinary? The first reason is the fact that Sartre should take his identification as a European so far as to see Fanon as an 'enemy', even if this is for rhetorical effect. However, more crucial is the fact that what emerges from this text is not a primary concern with the problems and potentialities of the colonised, but a concern with the problems of Europe and the Europeans, with 'our' problems. At this point, it might be apposite to quote one sentence from his preface to Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé*, in which he criticised him for not having given equal weight to the suffocating effect of colonisation on the colonists themselves, who were also victims of the system.[25]

While it is undoubtedly true that, as Sartre says, both the colonist and the colonised were to some extent 'victims' of the colonial system, some were undoubtedly more victims than others. This is something of which Sartre was fully aware, yet in many of these texts the effect on 'us' is promoted to the major concern, and it is true that his interest in the question of colonialism was inspired as much, if not primarily, by his concern for its impact on the French people, of which he was part. Indeed, he claimed that Fanon's book had no need of a preface, particularly as it was not addressed to 'us'. Yet he wrote one, precisely in order to take the dialectic to its logical outcome: 'we too, people of Europe, are being decolonised: this means that a bloody operation is taking place to cut out the colonist that is inside each one of us. Let us look at ourselves, if we have the courage, to see what is happening to us' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 18).

It was nonetheless unusual for Sartre to have any sense of identification with the colonist settlers in North Africa, and the division between 'us' and 'them' often comes across as that between the metropolitan French and the *colons* – the *pieds noirs*. In his preface to Memmi's book, he had compared the divide between the metropolitan French and the *pieds noirs* to the split between the north and the south in the United States, particularly for the claim by the southerners that only they knew the blacks and only they were qualified to speak about slavery and other issues related to it (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 31). Sartre pitches himself clearly on the metropolitan French side of the divide. Colonialism is in its last throes and the job of the French of the Hexagon (*'nous, Français de la métropole'*) is to hasten its demise. The *pieds noirs*, on the other hand, would stop at nothing to defend their system, demanding the sacrifice of young Frenchmen for the sake of racist and Nazi values and even undermining the French law and constitution to establish a fascist regime in France itself (Sartre 1956: 1386).

The *nous* here is the *nous* of the *Français de France*, who have the potential to resist this 'shame'. Just as there were French to fight against fascism in the Second World War, there were those, including many prominent artists and intellectuals,

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who became involved in initiatives against the war and called the law into question: campaigns such as the 'Appel des 121', in which 121 intellectuals argued that desertion and civil disobedience were legitimate courses of action in the face of an unjust war; legal defence groups to defend those arrested, involving lawyers such as Jacques Vergès, Gisèle Halimi, Roland Dumas and many others; support networks, like the *réseau Jeanson*, or the one later organised by Henri Curiel, or the 'Nizan group', which gave practical help to those involved in the political and armed struggle (Hamon and Rotman 1979; Evans 1997).

However, just as the Resistance did not involve all the French, neither did the opposition to the Algerian War. Thus, Sartre's *nous* can sometimes be more restrictive, including only those French people who were active opponents of the war. In the 1980 conversations with Benny Lévy, where he reviewed his positions regarding the Algerian War, this was put very clearly, as was Sartre's deeply felt patriotism:

> It was the time when I was seeing a lot of Fanon, who was a profoundly violent man, and this certainly influenced the way I expressed myself. There was also the fact that we were in an awkward position, given that, after all, we were fighting against France and together with Algerians who didn't really like us very much, even though we were on their side. This put us in a rather odd position, which is reflected in this text, in the malaise, the extreme violence, the rigid stance adopted, because it wasn't easy at all. France is something that exists for me. I found it most disagreeable to be against my own country. (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 64–65)

In fact, Sartre made a clear differentiation between the Resistance and the opposition to the Algerian War. Unlike the Resistance, in which the intellectuals and the saboteurs were the same people, or at least in the same boat and interchangeable, this was not the case with the Algerian War, where the intellectual opposition in France was clearly not made up of the same people as those fighting on the ground in Algeria (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 65). Moreover, while he saw the Resistance's violence as a necessary evil, in the case of Algeria he claimed that he felt he had to go even further to give his support to the violence in order to compensate for the collective responsibility and guilt that he assumed as a Frenchman.[26]

There is no doubt that the 'us' and 'them' divide was fully in line with his philosophical approach to the Self and the Other and in contrast with the position taken by such as Césaire. The absolute opposition that it implied had the merit of reflecting the actual reality of the colonial relation; at the same time, it risked bringing a number of problems in its train. Not least of these was the problematic role in the anticolonial struggle for the 'us' in Sartre's sense, in which the question of identification was one of the key issues.

When Sartre acknowledged the validity of Memmi's distinction between the *'colons qui se refusent'* and the *'colons qui s'acceptent'*, this might be interpreted as a recognition of the freedom to choose not to accept one's given situation – as one might expect from him (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 32). However, he also said

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that there are no good or bad colonialists – only colonialists, even if some refused to accept their objective reality; there was a collective guilt, which was inescapable.[27] Yet the definition of the collective was complicated by the fact that Sartre's 'we' did not extend to the *pieds noirs*. Thus, while he appeared to approve of Memmi's apparent solution, which Sartre said was to transcend his own particularity by seeking refuge in the universality of *'une Raison rigoureuse'* (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 32),[28] his own prime concern with the metropolitan French passed through a different trajectory, in which the notions of shame and then guilt were necessary staging points.

There are numerous examples in his writings of this sense of shame at being a Frenchman, a European or a white man, depending on the context, and the gaze of the colonised Other played a crucial role in producing this shame. For instance, a reading of the texts of the black poets transformed the European reality for the white man into something 'accidental', no longer the norm, in which the grandeur and dignity that were formerly found through the European mastery of the blacks and reflected in their meek, 'tamed' subservience was now shattered by the 'power of their wild and unbridled gaze which casts a judgement over our land'[29] or, put another way, 'the force of their calm, caustic gaze pierces us right through to the bone'.[30]

In Sartre's own case, however, it has to be said that the return of the gaze provoked not just the shame of which he spoke, but also a positive desire to overcompensate for the colonial process. This was evident in his outright commitment to a violent solution in the anticolonial struggle, as well as statements such as that when he claimed that 'black poetry in the French language is the only great revolutionary poetry today' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xii).

His identification with the *nous* represented by the French people was essential to the task of bringing home to the French public the shame of colonialism. He saw this shame as a necessary stage in the realisation of what the colonial reality was and why the *nous* constituted by the French people, in which he included himself, was the legitimate target of the Algerian Revolution.[31] This undoubtedly represented a moral choice, at the same time as a political choice, implied by his fundamental anticolonialist stance. For fundamental to his position was the notion of the collective guilt of the French people, all of whom had benefited from colonial exploitation and were therefore implicated. Indeed, he went further to say that 'we are all exploiters'; 'we have taken the gold and the minerals, then the oil from the "new continents" and brought it back to the old metropolitan homelands' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 18). This included the French Left, and indeed all those whose talk of humanism masked a core racism. All were in the same collective camp and would be treated the same by the Algerians fighting for their freedom.[32] Sartre saw no contradiction in the existence of a racist humanism, since 'the European has only achieved his humanity by creating slaves and monsters' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 18–19).

This notion of collective guilt acquired some of its relevance in connection with a past that was still very much in the recent memory of the French, the experience of the Second World War and the moral issues it had raised. However, it also had implications that carried forward into a future that has become our present.

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Thus, in spite of the contradictions endemic in the dialectic of universalism and particularity, especially in respect of Sartre's own identity and specific historicity as a Frenchman, the notion of collective guilt, as developed by him, could provide a starting point for the development of a political analysis of the role of those who have hitherto benefited from the North/South divide, in a global strategy to bring about change. As Sartre left it, it remains predominantly a moral concept, whereas what are at stake are no doubt economic, political and, to a lesser extent, cultural issues, which require economic, political and cultural solutions.

Sartre's major importance to anti-imperialist thought certainly lies elsewhere, in his theorisation of the colonised Other and the possibilities of subversion of the colonial relation. On a different plane, his legacy also lies in his exemplary value as a committed intellectual. His political involvement was, unquestionably, closely tied to national liberation struggles, yet he himself had no theory of the nation as such. Indeed, his own national identity as a Frenchman was never seriously questioned, but was rather taken as a given. Where he talked about it at all, it was largely defined in terms of his self-identity being mediated through the French language. Thus, in spite of the great input and influence of Sartre's theoretical work (even when unrecognised as such), it was for others to develop the theoretical dimension of the national liberation struggles themselves.

Notes

1. 'C'est que, en effet, autrui n'est pas seulement celui que je vois, mais celui *qui me voit*' (Sartre (1943)/1994: 266).
2. Les *opinions* de l'opinion publique se forment à la manière de la Grande Peur, en tant que chacun se fait Autre par son opinion, c'est-à-dire en la prenant *de l'Autre*, parce que l'Autre la pense en tant qu'Autre, et en se faisant informateur des Autres. A ce niveau, l'Idée est processus; sa force invincible lui vient de ce que personne ne la pense, c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne se définit pas comme le moment conscient de la *praxis* – c'est-à-dire comme dévoilement unifiant des objets dans la temporalisation dialectique de l'action – mais comme un objet pratico-inerte dont l'évidence s'identifie pour moi à ma double incapacité de la vérifier et de la transformer chez les Autres. (Sartre (1960)/1985: 406).
3. On compte aujourd'hui encore 80% d'illettrés en Algérie. Passe encore si nous ne leur avions interdit que l'usage de notre langue. Mais il entre nécessairement dans le système colonialiste qu'il tente de barrer la route de l'histoire aux colonisés; comme les revendications nationales, en Europe, se sont toujours appuyées sur l'unité de la langue, on a refusé aux Musulmans l'usage de leur propre langue. Depuis 1830, la langue arabe est considérée en Algérie comme une langue étrangère; on la parle encore, mais elle n'est plus langue écrite que virtuellement. (Sartre 1956: 1380).
4. pour maintenir les Arabes dans l'émiettement, l'administration française leur a confisqué leur religion; elle recrute les desservants du culte islamique parmi les créatures à sa solde. Elle a maintenu les superstitions les plus basses, parce qu'elles désunissaient. La séparation de l'Eglise et de l'Etat, c'est un privilège républicain, un luxe bon pour la Métropole. En Algérie, la république française ne peut se permettre d'être républicaine. Elle maintient l'inculture et les croyances de la féodalité, mais en

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supprimant les structures et les coutumes qui permettent à une féodalité vivante d'être malgré tout une société humaine; elle impose un code individualiste et libéral pour ruiner les cadres et les essors de la collectivité algérienne, mais elle maintient les roitelets qui ne tiennent leur pouvoir que d'elle et qui gouvernent pour elle. En un mot, elle *fabrique* des 'indigènes' par un double mouvement qui les sépare de la collectivité archaïque en leur donnant ou en leur conservant, *dans la solitude de l'individualisme libéral*, une mentalité dont l'archaïsme ne peut se perpétuer qu'en relation avec l'archaïsme de la société. Elle crée des *masses* mais les empêche de devenir un prolétariat conscient en les mystifiant par la caricature de leur propre idéologie. (Sartre 1956: 1380–81).

5. 'L'unique bienfait du colonialisme, c'est qu'il doit se montrer intransigeant pour durer et qu'il prépare sa perte par son intransigeance' (Sartre 1956: 1385–86).
6. Aux colonies la vérité se montrait nue; les 'métropoles' la préféraient vêtue; il fallait que l'indigène les aimât. Comme des mères, en quelque sorte. L'élite européenne entreprit de fabriquer un indigénat d'élite; on sélectionnait des adolescents, on leur marquait sur le front, au fer rouge, les principes de la culture occidentale, on leur fourrait dans la bouche des baillons sonores, grands mots pâteux qui collaient aux dents; après un bref séjour en métropole, on les renvoyait chez eux, truqués. (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 5).
7. 'Il n'y a pas si longtemps, la terre comptait deux milliards d'habitants, soit cinq cent millions d'hommes et un milliard cinq cent millions d'indigènes. Les premiers disposaient du Verbe, les autres l'empruntaient' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 5).
8. 'les voix jaunes et noires parlaient encore de notre humanisme mais c'était pour nous reprocher notre inhumanité' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 5).
9. 'vous faites de nous des monstres, votre humanisme nous prétend universels et vos pratiques racistes nous particularisent' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 6).
10. As Césaire was to say: 'Cela signifie la parole donnée et pour la première fois depuis 1830 au peuple algérien, et l'assurance qu'il pourra librement orienter ses destinées' (Césaire 1956: 1370).
11. une idéologie pétrifiée s'applique à considérer des hommes comme des bêtes qui parlent. Vainement: pour leur donner des ordres, fût-ce les plus durs, les plus insultants, il faut commencer par les reconnaître; et comme on ne peut les surveiller sans cesse, il faut bien se résoudre à leur faire confiance: nul ne peut traiter un homme 'comme un chien', s'il ne le tient d'abord pour un homme. L'impossible déshumanisation de l'opprimé se retourne et devient l'aliénation de l'oppresseur: c'est lui, c'est lui-même qui ressuscite par son moindre geste l'humanité qu'il veut détruire; et, comme il la nie chez les autres, il la retrouve partout comme une force ennemie. Pour y échapper, il faut qu'il se minéralise, qu'il se donne la consistance opaque et l'imperméabilité du roc, bref qu'il se 'déshumanise' à son tour. (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 36–37).
12. 'Ils ne connaissent, disiez-vous, que la force? Bien sûr; d'abord ce ne sera que celle du colon et, bientôt, que la leur, cela veut dire: la même rejaillissant sur nous comme notre reflet vient du fond du miroir à notre rencontre' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 10).
13. Ne vous y trompez pas; par cette folle rogne, par cette bile et ce fiel, par leur désir permanent de nous tuer, par la contracture permanente de muscles puissants qui ont peur de se dénouer, ils sont hommes: par le colon, qui les veut hommes de peine, et contre lui. Aveugle encore, abstraite, la haine est leur seul trésor: le Maître la provoque parce qu'il cherche à les abêtir, il échoue à la briser parce que ses intérêts l'arrêtent à

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mi-chemin; ainsi les faux indigènes sont humains encore, par la puissance et l'impuissance de l'oppresseur qui se transforment, chez eux, en un refus entêté de la condition animale. (Sartre in Fanon (1961/ 1987: 12–13).

14. See Chapter 3.
15. 'l'Européen n'a pu se faire homme qu'en fabriquant des esclaves et des monstres' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 19).
16. 'C'est la fin, comme vous voyez: l'Europe fait eau de toute part … que nous étions les sujets de l'histoire et que nous en sommes à présent les objets' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 20).
17. Nous trouvons notre humanité en-deça de la mort et du désespoir, il la trouve au-delà des supplices et de la mort. Nous avons été les semeurs de vent; la tempête, c'est lui. Fils de la violence, il puise en elle à chaque instant son humanité: nous étions hommes à ses dépens, il se fait homme aux nôtres. Un autre homme: de meilleure qualité. (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 17).
18. Le colonialisme refuse les droits de l'homme à des hommes qu'il a soumis par la violence, qu'il maintient par la force dans la misère et l'ignorance, donc comme dirait Marx, en état de 'sous-humanité'. Dans les faits eux-mêmes, dans les institutions, dans la nature des échanges et de la production, le racisme est inscrit; les statuts politique et social se renforcent mutuellement puisque l'indigène est un sous-homme, la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme ne le concerne pas. (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 34).
19. 'Nos soldats, outre-mer, repoussent l'universalisme métropolitain, appliquent au genre humain le *numerus clausus*: puisque nul ne peut sans crime dépouiller son semblable, l'asservir ou le tuer, ils posent en principe que le colonisé n'est pas le semblable de l'homme' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 11).
20. Sartre's conception of progress and history at the end of his life were recorded in the controversial and disputed conversations with Benny Lévy:

    Je supposais que l'évolution par l'action serait une série d'échecs d'où sortirait, imprévu, quelque chose de positif qui était déjà contenu dans l'échec, mais ignoré de ceux qui avaient voulu réussir. Et que ce sont ces réussites partielles, locales, difficilement déchiffrables par les gens qui ont fait le travail, qui, d'échec en échec, réaliseraient un progrès. C'est comme ça que j'ai toujours compris l'histoire. (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 35).

21. Sartre had his own interpretation of pluralism in relation to universalism, which he defines in connection with his own writing:

    J'écris, et les pensées que j'offre aux gens par écrit sont universelles. Mais elles ne sont pas plurielles. Elles sont universelles, c'est-à-dire que chacun en les lisant formera ces pensées, bien ou mal. Mais elles ne sont pas plurielles, en ce sens qu'elles ne sont pas produites par une rencontre de plusieurs personnes et ne portent la marque que de moi seul. Une pensée plurielle n'a pas d'entrée privilégiée; elle est abordée par chacun à sa manière; elle n'a qu'un sens, bien sûr, mais que chacun produit à partir de prémisses et de préoccupations différentes et dont chacun comprend la structure par des exemples différents. (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 42).

22. Sartre's view of his own historicity, at least in his last years, also encompassed the notion of a particular intellectual and religious tradition, i.e. a certain Christian theological one to which he belonged. As he is purported to claim, in the conversations with Benny Lévy: 'C'est ça ma tradition, je n'en ai pas d'autre. Ni la tradition orientale, ni la tradition juive. Elles me manquent par mon historicité' (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 28).

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23. 'Bref, le Tiers Monde se découvre et se parle par cette voix' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 7).
24. 'Européen, je vole le livre d'un ennemi et j'en fais un moyen de guérir l'Europe' (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 10).
25. 'Il eût mieux valu, peut-être, montrer le colonialiste et sa victime pareillement étranglés par l'appareil colonial … qui, après avoir donné toute satisfaction aux colonisateurs, se retourne contre eux et risque de les broyer' (Sartre in Memmi (1957)/1985: 32–33).
26. Si je voyais et souhaitais les Algériens moins violents qu'ils n'étaient, je pactisais avec les autres Français: j'étais de nouveau repris par la France. Il fallait que je voie les Algériens comme des hommes malmenés, crucifiés par la France, qui battent contre les Français parce que les Français sont injustes. Et moi, je suis Français, je suis injuste comme eux, parce qu'il y a une responsabilité collective, mais, en même temps, j'approuve et c'est là que je me distingue de la plupart des autres Français, j'approuve ces hommes torturés de lutter contre les Français.

    B. Lévy: Violence verbale, parce que autoflagellation nationale?

    J-P Sartre: En partie, oui; en partie, certainement. (Sartre and Lévy 1991: 66).
27. D'abord qu'il n'y a ni bons ni mauvais colons: il y a des colonialistes. Parmi eux, quelques-uns refusent leur réalité objective: entraînés par l'appareil colonial, ils font tous les jours ce qu'ils condamnent en rêve et chacun de leurs actes contribue à maintenir l'oppression; ils ne changeront rien, ne serviront à personne et trouveront leur confort moral dans le malaise, voilà tout. (Sartre in Memmi (1957/1985: 35).
28. See Chapter 3.
29. Jadis Européens de droit divin, nous sentions déjà notre dignité s'effriter sous les regards américains ou soviétiques; déjà l'Europe n'était plus qu'un accident géographique, la presqu'île que l'Asie pousse jusqu'à l'Atlantique. Au moins espérions-nous retrouver un peu de notre grandeur dans les yeux domestiqués des Africains. Mais il n'y a plus d'yeux domestiqués: il y a les regards sauvages et libres qui jugent notre terre. (Sartre in Senghor 1948: x).
30. 'L'Etre est noir, l'Etre est de feu, nous sommes accidentels et lointains, nous avons à nous justifier de nos moeurs, de nos techniques, de notre pâleur de mal-cuits et de notre végétation vert-de-gris. Par ces regards tranquilles et corrosifs, nous sommes rongés jusqu'aux os' (Sartre in Senghor 1948: xi). Or, as one of the poems by Aimé Césaire put it: 'Ecoutez le monde blanc / horriblement las de son effort immense / … / Pitié pour nos vainqueurs omniscients et naïfs' (quoted by Sartre in Senghor 1948: xi).
31. 'Une telle négociation impliquerait évidemment qu'on reconnaisse ce que représentent ceux qui nous combattent: la réalité nationale algérienne' (Sartre 1956: 1352).
32. Dès que leur guerre a commencé, ils ont aperçu cette vérité rigoureuse: nous nous valons tous tant que nous sommes, nous avons tous profité d'eux, ils n'ont rien à prouver, ils ne feront de traitement de faveur à personne. Un seul devoir, un seul objectif: chasser le colonialisme par *tous* les moyens. Et les plus avisés d'entre nous seraient, à la rigueur, prêts à l'admettre mais ils ne peuvent s'empêcher de voir dans cette épreuve de force le moyen tout inhumain que des sous-hommes ont pris pour se faire octroyer une charte d'humanité: qu'on l'accorde au plus vite et qu'ils tâchent alors, par des entreprises pacifiques, de la mériter. Nos belles âmes sont racistes. (Sartre in Fanon (1961)/1987: 15).

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