

## Reading Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* as a Call for Human Enhancement

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**Abstract :** The present paper examines the emergence of a discourse of resistance to oppressive ideologies and racist structures with reference to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). The task is to examine how the author came up with a narrative of his own whereby to oppose the socio-political and cultural aggression of Black people by targeting all the institutions, which are complicit in the perpetuation of racism and developing of an inferiority complex. The analysis of cultural representations through characters of Fanon's book will be conducted under the theoretical scheme suggested by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book entitled *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989). The focus in this paper will be put on the discursive and textual strategies with which Fanon subverts and revises the Eurocentric prejudices, stereotypes, and representations of the Black Man.

**Résumé :** Le présent article examine l'émergence d'un discours de résistance aux idéologies oppressives et aux structures racistes en référence à *Black Skin White Masks* de Frantz Fanon (1952). Il s'agit d'explorer la manière dont l'auteur a construit son propre récit pour s'opposer à l'agression sociopolitique et culturelle des Noirs en visant toutes les institutions, complices de la perpétuation du racisme et du développement d'un complexe d'infériorité. L'analyse des représentations culturelles du livre de Fanon sera menée selon le schéma théorique proposé par Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths et Helen Tiffin dans leur ouvrage intitulé *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989). L'accent sera mis sur les stratégies discursives et textuelles avec lesquelles Fanon subvertit et révisé les préjugés, les stéréotypes et les représentations de l'Homme Noir.

**Key words:** Reversal- Writing back- Subversion- Reversal.

**Introduction:** The present paper explores the stakes of writing in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). The author wrote his book in the aftermath of the World War Two, an era when revolutionary ideals were perverted by the far-reaching effects of racism and colonial oppression. One way for Fanon to have an independent voice is to challenge the premise of colonization by rewriting and responding to uncover the flawed foundation of the colonizer's discourse of enlightened benevolence. Hence, the focus in this paper will be on the analysis of the ways Fanon engages in different discourses and political contexts, yet the common theme is

the question of racism in the context of a gradually changing body politic. The exploration of the political and ideological context that gave meaning to his humanist projects is closely linked to his time of crisis and revolution. Fanon's view is based on the necessity for the oppressed to renounce all compromise with their oppressors and to organize themselves to get rid of colonial injustice and repression. His suggested consensus of a society devoid of racism, repression, domination, and misery has been almost completely ignored in the existing literature on this thinker. In his challenge as a "pedagogue of the oppressed", to paraphrase Paulo Freire, Fanon's life is to be found in dissent against the status quo at a time when struggle on behalf of the unrepresented and disadvantaged groups is unfairly weighted against him. His position exposed him to unkind criticism from the literary establishment.

Some critics present Frantz Fanon as an apostle of violence, neglecting his intellectual and humanistic dimension. Among these authors, Michael Sonnleitner's *Of Logic and Liberation: Frantz Fanon on Terrorism* (1986), Marie Perinbam's *Holy Violence: Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon* (1982), Sohail Khalid's *Prophets of Violence, Prophets of Peace, and Understanding the roots of contemporary Political Violence* (2005). They argue that Fanon sees violent rebellion as an eminently suitable response and boldly refuses to condemn violence. In addition to these few among many other analyses, which vilify Fanon and depict him as an advocate of violence, some political thinkers such as Hannah Arendt can be added to the list of those who criticize Fanon for his obsession and defense of violence. Such thinkers do not remark that he wrestled with two poles of this contradiction throughout his life. Arendt, for instance, assumes that Fanon is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers. She points out that violence does not repeat some natural cycle but brings into being something new, even though what this type of action brings into being is most probably only a more violent world. Consequently, she finds that Fanon is politically irresponsible for advocating violence as part of national liberation (Coks.2002:63).

However, Christopher Lee in his *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (2015) suggests that Fanon uses violence in an instrumental manner. His theory of violence remains more descriptive than prescriptive. Lee writes that “the nuance is sadly missed by both Fanon’s liberal critics and his overenthusiastic supporters, black and white alike”. The reviewer adds that philosophers like Sartre and Walter Benjamin have produced more intensive work on violence; it does indicate some prejudice that their names do not provoke a spontaneous association with violence while that of Fanon’s does. Lee argues that “Fanon distinguished between the illegitimacy of the violence of the oppressor and the legitimacy of the violence of the oppressed” (Lee.2015:136).

It appears from the critical reception of Fanon’s texts that most of his reviewers have fallen short by failing to consider how his ideas came into being. Little attention has been devoted to his ideas, particularly his different commitments to the defense of human dignity and social emancipation. Fanon has been regarded as a key figure of Revolution, but his recovery of the humanist values, his ideas about human dignity, and his views of oppression as an activity against human beings have not been fully examined. Beyond the criticism of these reviewers, this study can be seen as a retreat from the revolutionary poetics that failed to bring about the sorts of changes sought by Fanon.

Through a textual analysis of his *Black Skin White Masks*, I claim that the attacks against Fanon are not justified since they miss the real “societal project” this intellectual sought to achieve as a contribution to and a defense of mankind. Hence, for Fanon, the very act of writing became an effective tool of liberation. The ethical and political aspects of his texts appear through his critique of colonialism, imperialism, and oppression of all kinds. His performance of the humanist values lie in the nature of his struggle for national liberation, his prediction of the effects of decolonization on the social environment and his allegiance to what Antonio Gramsci calls the “simple people” through his call for man’s emancipation through a political struggle against

poverty, illiteracy and a parasitical bourgeoisie. Some of these ideas are provided in David Macey's work *Fanon: A Life* (2000) which is about the mind and the passion of that thinker. The same ideas are developed by Lewis R. Gordon (1995), AtoSekyi-Otu (1996), and Nigel Gibson (2003). This paper pursues the same critical approach and distinguishes Fanon, on the one hand, from the prison house of "an advocate of violence" in which his reviewers put him. The attempt is to re-direct the attention towards his "ethical" concerns by looking at the ways with which the transition from revolutionary political violence to a non-violent ethos appears in his text, on the other.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon engages in dialogue with central figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers to examine the impact of racist ideologies in the shaping of the black psyche. He calls for the rational Western reason by combining the "images of the Negro", which results from what the author considers as an "aberration of the effect" in creating a complex that lessens the personality of the Black man. In his depiction of the impact of racism, he employs a cultural dialectic, which is based on the "Self" in relation to the "Other" rather than the "Self" versus the "Other"; he calls it a "Dual Narcissism", which makes 'Negro' enslaved by his inferiority and the 'White' by his superiority while both behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation (Fanon.2008: 2).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Closely aligned with the process of resistance to domination, which comes to sight in Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, the postcolonial discursive framework developed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin provides insights with which postcolonial writers, beginning with Fanon himself challenge the French imperial xenophobic structures on the process of knowledge production and validation through language. They theorize the implication of language in establishing and reproducing dominant discourses and epistemologies. While raising questions about its practice, these theorists stress the capacity of language to subvert the dominant thinking in re-inscribing the colonial and colonizing relations.

Language becomes a tool for expressing the resistant practices against oppression and dominance (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2004:30,58).

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's notion of "writing back" will be used to emphasize power dynamics in which Frantz Fanon produced his text at times of social and political upheaval. Resistance to the West may be seen to reside more potently in the text's disregard or demotion of the West as the categorical and ineluctable point of reference in the representation and self fashioning of the Black man. Fanon's text resists the West by erasing it from his discourse on postcolonial cultures, aesthetics, and politics of identity. The author expresses his paradoxical position of being both fluent in and at the same time imprisoned by the colonizer's racist discourse. The questions to start with are: how does the author voice and give vent to his repressed feelings and wishes as an oppressed, alienated and marginalized Black man? How did he examine invisible wounds on the personal and collective consciousness of Black people? How does he present his perspective to the world? And finally, how can his position mark and evince his own discourse of uneasiness and outright rejection of the imposed identity, history and culture on Black people? These questions will be answered through an analysis of Fanon's Postcolonial dialogic and critical evaluation of the liberty and freedom that was the basis on which Western Enlightenment project rested. It is important to point out however, that Fanon goes beyond postcolonial theory; he did not content himself with identifying the problem of racism as such. He did not limit his writings to a "writing back" to the Empire; he also suggests the different ways of ending it through philosophical thoughts, which aim to end racism, colonialism and any form of domination. I demonstrate that the "writing back to the colonial center" paradigm is undermined by the book's preoccupation with self-interrogation and by the prioritization of the relations between the colonizer and the colonized. In the course of his critical analyses, Fanon responds to various writings: novels, plays, classical works of Western philosophy, psychology, and highly influential works of anthropology. He approaches these works by

strategically a narrative, which does not fit any genre. Through this mixture of genres and a quite challenging thought, Fanon tries to show that the problem of racism has multiple and contrary sources. Therefore, he constructs a discourse, which together brings about the problem of power and racism. Fanon explains that Black man suffers from neuroses, which result from racism and contempt of man to man. He makes two arguments; one is therapeutic while the other is political as means of resistance against the white man's supremacy.

### **The Synopsis of the Book**

Frantz Fanon uses many literary forms and genres in his *Black Skin White Masks* to reveal the state of confusion, chaos, and alienation of a Black man. Through a multilayered and fragmented narrative, he presents a tension in the established order through polyphony of "assailing voices, rolling down the stages of history" (P.8), which impose themselves on the author himself. By using these anguished voices, Fanon addresses the problems of identity and racism pleading for a new vision of humanism, which is based on brotherhood and men's mutual understanding. The author's inquiry sets a stage for the binary oppositions, the stereotypes, the contradictions, and dogmatic arguments of the Western thought, which continues to reproduce black inferiority and white supremacy. The condensed and angry voice of the narrator addresses an anonymous audience and re-acts the Enlightenment's interest in man to perform the racist strategies and discourses, which force the Black man to suffer from an acute identity crisis. The tone of language in the narrative evinces a proliferation of anger and indignation; such indignation can be interpreted as an outcome of years of suffering. The following passage is a representation of the pent-up anger that is ventilated through the medium of language:

Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to

watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another,

he has to give up projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexist in him. The black is a black man; that is, as the result of a series of aberrations of effect, he is rooted at the core of the universe from which he must be extricated (Fanon.2008:2).

The excerpt illustrates the way Fanon subverts and reverses all discourses on the established oppressive orders. The same criticism is to be found in AiméCésaire's texts, which can be read as a scathing critique of European Humanism in its failure to end oppression and subjugation of the Black people.

### **Fanon's Point of View on Cultural Obstruction**

Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* opens with a quotation from his mentor, AiméCésaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), translated into English by Joan Pinkham (1972): "I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkys" (Césaire.1972:7). The statement reflects the thinking of its author on race relations between French colonial Africa and Metropolitan France. Fanon uses Césaire's ideas on colonialism and his violent writing style to express his own anger for the racist constructions by the "former governors, the former missionary, to whom he has no mercy" (P.2). He then re-acts the Enlightenment's interest in the discovery of truth and knowledge, love and happiness, which echoes the humanist values of 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Reason to claim that "what matters is not know the world, but to change it" (P.8). The author stresses the ways in which racism and colonialism devastated Black people's lives, imposing restrictions, thwarting their aspirations to happiness, filling them with guilt, and erasing their indigenous cultures. His discomfort appears in the way he addresses identity and liberation for the Black man: "Every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and the burial of its local cultural originality" (P.8). This quote displays Fanon's eclectic and dialogic method with reference to W.B. Dubois's idea of

“Double Consciousness” to explain the process of being at the same time a “Negro”, Black and non-Black in the Antilles. He emphasizes the process of “Separation” and the problem of the existence of the colonized Negro who lives in a distressing inferiority complex as he is seriously wounded by his situation, which he expresses in what follows: “I am starting to suffer from not being white” (P.8). The word “alienation” best summarizes this state of mind. To support his arguments, Fanon refers to his own experiences to explain the hereditary racial prejudice through his encounter with racism in different situations. He tells about the Martinican reality, the colonial hegemony of Europe, the oppression of France to soldiers, mainly Senegalese Black officers, who served first of all, “to convey master’s orders to their fellows”(P.9). These encounters were determinant and had deeply shaped his thought and perceptions of the world.

More importantly, Fanon performs Dubois’s notion of “Doubling Personality” to explain the mental disorder associated with having a dual identity. He states that such a conflict drives from the white man, who creates the black man’s “resentment” of himself and his race. “The white civilisation and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro” (P.6). This hatred forces him to endeavour to be a White man. Through a horrific litany, Fanon denounces the European erasure of his culture and language in creating a kind of collective “amnesia”. He tells this “denial” through his story when he grew up in a society where Creole was scorned at school; it was either banned by some families or used by others to ridicule their children when using it (P.10). With Césaire and the Negritude philosophy, Fanon learned the various impacts of colonialism and the loss of value that culture of the colonised suffered makes Fanon share with the Negritude writers a desire to recover African values and to share those values with the world. But within the accumulative dynamics of the tradition while emphasizing the pressing needs to delegitimize arguments that would advocate European claims to political leadership and racial supremacy. He uses some of its forms to develop his own vision of a transition beyond

negritude when he writes: "The discovery of the existence of the Negro civilization in the fifteenth century confers no humanity on me. Like it or not, the past can in no way guide in the present moment" (P.175). In contrast to the Negritude adoptive projects, Fanon claims to bypass the binary opposition as a necessary cultural condition for decolonization and enfranchisement of the colonized from the racist features prevailing in the colonialist thought. The Black pride as a counterbalance to the assimilation and the essence of race, the "essentialized identity", and the notion of blackness remain an inadequate solution to the problem of racism. Fanon claims that "the theoretical and practical assertion of the supremacy of the white man is its thesis; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. It is insufficient by itself" (P.102). Therefore, he argues that the Negritude started the emancipator struggle, but it cannot be considered as an end in itself (P.144).

The next dialogue in relation to the analysis of the origins of European racism against Blacks is engaged with the theoretical concerns the psychology of "Self" and the "Other". Fanon offers a corrective to the dominant theory of the psychological tradition of Freud, Lacan, Jung, and Adler on which he draws and subverts in order to shape his own theory of "Racial Division", its causes and its effects. Fanon explains the nuance their texts generate and use them for critiquing colonialism and other hegemonic practices.

### **Fanon's Psychoanalysis and Philosophy of Environment**

As a psychiatrist, Fanon addresses the problems generated by a "cultural imposition" and racism, which make the "Antillean a slave of the white man and of himself" (P.148). His vision of man is evidenced by his quest to untie the structure of the black-ego by his formulation of the oppression of Black man by White man, especially within the colonial experience. The author maintains that the European civilisation and its best representatives are responsible for colonial racism because the Black man is not black but that is a creation of the White man (P.97). Fanon refers first, to Sigmund Freud's analysis of the closed setting in which the White and the

Black are confined; he performs the psycho-existential complex and explains its psychological effects on the dreams of the white man as well as on the psychic life of the Black man, who imagines himself white (P.69). Basing his experiment on psychoanalytic theory, Fanon examines the origins and causes of the dreams through the behavior of the colonized. He discovers by transposing Freud's formulation: "What does a woman want?" into "What a Black man wants" to explain all the desires of a Black man is to be white (P.1). The author maintains that these great desires are mainly caused by sociopolitical and cultural environment that construct the white as a powerful subject while reducing the black man to an inferior object. He then shows the Black's yearning to be White through language, sexuality and dreams (P.32). He illustrates his assumption with the determination of a Black wife to have a white sexual partner, the effort of skin whitening, and hair-straightening (P.32). These desires create an identity crisis and pathologies of a "Black skin, white masks". Fanon adds that such conflicts occur through unconscious processes and insists that they are cultural in form since they are caused by the inequalities of social structures of the racist and oppressive society rather than internal psychological workings of individual subjects (P.18). These pathologies driving from a social and political strong "Habitus", make the Black man suffer from emotional disorder or "neurosis of blackness", which leads to abnormal behavior and unusual actions, which is caused by what the author calls: "the myths of blackness", that devaluates and denigrate Black people: "since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to make it unconscious" (P.101).

However, Fanon departs from Freud in two aspects: first, he insists on the links between psyche and society in the process of internalization and "epidermalisation". Second, he remains unbending on socio-historical, economic, and political environment, which fosters these neuroses because "racism is a methodological construction of experience" (P.101). To reinforce his arguments, Fanon conceptualizes the relationship between individual and social

self-consciousness to claim that domination is not merely physical or economic: it is primarily psychological and linguistic. As an illustration, he gives relevance to European languages that he considers as instruments of domination, dislocation, separation, and as being responsible for the alienation of Black intellectuals (P.14). In so doing, he rejects Freud's ontogenetic concept and replaces it with his "sociogenetic" model. He writes: "What I want is help the Black man free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (P.19).

When Fanon challenges Freud's approach, he turns to Carl Yung and appropriates his terminology about "a shared culture", to assume that racism is not just about difference in culture or in race; it is rather about superiority and inferiority because the colonial power presents people superior to others (P.114). The idea of superiority and inferiority spreads through the "shared culture" and what Fanon calls a "collective unconscious". The author illustrates his arguments with children in the Antilles French colony, who grew up with the same story books and films, which shape the White man as a hero while the Black is totally absent from the stories and films (P.113). He is either invisible or presented in a demeaning and belittling ways to make him inferior. The kind of superiority of the white hero becomes associated with whiteness while inferiority with blackness (P.23). The author points out that children grow up with this outlook of superiority for the White and inferiority for the Black, which will be reinforced by education both at school and at home. In addition, with adult groups, society identifies White man as superior while Black remains inferior. The idea of superiority and inferiority is embedded from childhood and causes crucial problems. This passage proves the point: "The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about "our ancestors the Gauls, [...] he identifies himself with the explorer, the Bringer of civilisation, the white man who brings truth to savages-an all-white truth (P.114). It is important to point out the ironic tone of the last sentence, which turns the white's truth into a 'big' lie for the Black man. Fanon does not agree totally with the

theory of Yung because the notion of “shared culture”, according to him, is neither innate nor internal; it does not drive from the invariable structure of the brain. It is rather a common culture and a cultural medium; it is an “alienation from an environment” (P.59), produced by the “interaction” between the family, school, and society. Racism comes through upbringing (family and school); it is reinforced by the wider culture during the adult life to create a kind of sedimentation to paraphrase Simone De Beauvoir. Fanon does not mention this Feminist theorist, but the idea of sedimentation of values of the white man’s “collective unconscious” through unnoticed racism of the sinful, lazy, and evil black man resembles De Beauvoir’s “collective social unconscious” in the construction of gender. Sedimentation appears right with the title of the book, *Black Skin White Masks*, which can be interpreted in what follows. The use of different masks to hide one’s identity, the various ways with which black people try to become white form a number of layers. The performance of what lies beneath a mask is a surface for a next mask, which is constructed in a multiple ways through repetition of many themes. The fact that Black man and White man are held in bounds forged by racial prejudice from which they cannot escape. As a social protest, Fanon stages the interplay between masking (hiding) and discovering (unmasking) to show that masking is empowering. Unmasking becomes a therapy and a way of healing; it is a “collective catharsis” (P.112) or a kind of ritual process as it is developed by Victor Turner.

To display the Black man’s disalienation, Fanon responds to Jacques Lacan’s theoretical concepts of “Mirror Stage” and his notion of “Female Sexuality”, published in volume 8 of the *Encyclopédie française* in 1938 to explain the traumatic social and cultural encounter with difference. In revising Lacan’s theory, Fanon explains the different manifestations of racism and proposes another model for his examination of the importance of culture. He claims that the Black man is not only objectified by the white gaze, but he also sees himself from the angle of that gaze. His internalisation of the

white gaze creates a disastrous shift from his “corporeal” to the “racial epidermal schema”. The Black becomes unable to live his body normally; he lives it rather as a racialized, assailed, and layered body (P.115). Fanon reverses Lacan’s imago to explain the problem of difference; this “negrophobia” in creating attraction and repulsion impulses characterized by fear and anxiety of an object (P.117). The centrality of the family as a site of cultural knowledge becomes the center of the “identification process”, with the child growing up in an environment, which shapes his world of inferiority and superiority. As an adult, his traumatic socio cultural encounter with difference will shape his character (P.146). To distinguish between the various kinds of racist strategies, Fanon uses the “mirror image” as a way to retrieve the Black man from his alienation. He describes the traumatic experience of discovering the reality, a reality of denial; his own reality of a Black man. He narrates his social and cultural encounter with difference; he tells his own story of an experimented doctor and soldier with many other achievements in his life, but does take much to trigger his sense of inferiority. However, Fanon disagrees with Lacan on the fact that the “unconscious” is a fantasy while racism is a lived experience. It is a real story of betrayal, murder, and enslavement (P.154). He uses the body to express the atrocities done by racism on Black man. He relies on the White man’s desires without love, which aims to fulfill his perverse and projected paranoid fantasies (P.143).

### **Fanon’s Revision of Jean Paul Sartre’s Point of View**

Fanon continues his eclectic stance and dialogic approach by finding a gap in Sartre’s idea that the Jew is merely a construction of the Anti-Semite, which he published in his *Réflexion sur la question juive* (1946). He draws some parallels to reach the conclusion that “the Black man” is merely a construction of the White man, with whom he does not share the same vision of man. He agrees with Sartre’s idea of radical freedom, but he disagrees with his idea of a pessimistic future for mankind and maintains an impossible universal brotherhood, arguing that the slave would remain dependent with a tendency to

reproduce the same situation that he was attempting to get rid of. Unlike Hegel and Sartre, Fanon dreams of universal brotherhood; he writes:

Man is motion towards the world and towards his like. A movement of aggression

which leads to enslavement or to conquest; a movement of love, a gift of self, the

ultimate stage of what by common accord, is called ethical orientation. Every

consciousness seems to have the capacity to demonstrate these two components,

simultaneously or alternatively. The person I love will strengthen me by endorsing my

assumption of manhood, while the need to earn the admiration or love of others will

erect a value-making superstructure on my whole vision of the world (P.28).

Fanon believes in the possibility of love and his optimistic vision of the future of mankind springs from his observations, particularly in *Black Skin White Masks*, where he examines the alienation that Black people from the West Indies experience when transfixed in the colonial context. He looks at circumstances in which White people consider themselves as superior to Black people while he advocates equality between them (P.48). He also explores the colonizer's attempts to legitimate the colonial project under the guise of the "Civilizing Mission", a fact that necessitated for him the destruction of the colony's history and culture. In the colonial situation where the world is Manichean, for the White settler, the Negro represents evil, and the black people who are confronted to such a situation have to choose between two situations; either to accept the fate of "the civilizing mission" imposed on them by the colonial rule or to defy it. It is from that perspective that Fanon seeks an answer to an existentialist question: what does man want? Throughout his work, he tries to shape man's challenges. By the concluding part of the book,

the reader gets a concrete idea of what human beings want, or, at least, from his perspective, what they should want, and especially racially colonized humanity. The subsequent passage is an illustration:

I found myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: that

of demanding human behavior from the other. One duty alone: That of not renouncing

my freedom through my choices [...] No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is

his destiny to be set free [...] I, the man of color, want only this: that the tool never

possess, the man; that the enslavement of man by man cease forever.

That is, of one by

another; that it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be

(P.180).

An attentive scrutiny of the excerpt reveals that it begins with incantations dedicated to humanist values. Furthermore, the author reiterates his optimism when asserting the possibility of disalienation to find a way to freedom, which requires an effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize it. It is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. It appears clear that Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* is not only an analysis of the impact of racism on colored societies but also a work that has a major influence on the question of civil rights, anti-colonial struggle, and also black consciousness movements around the world. The author's arguments are clearly stated: white colonialism has imposed a mock existence upon its black victims and has degraded their image. The writer demonstrates how the problem of race and color is connected with a large range of words and images; he examines race prejudices from two points of view; as a philosopher and as a psychologist. His text has a diversity of tones; it varies from outrage and indignation to cool examination and scientific analysis.

Fanon's personal experience as a Black intellectual elaborates the ways in which the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is normalized. His standpoint from his early life, his schooling and cultural backgrounds that made the young Fanon conceive himself as French and the profound change of his perceptions after his initial encounter with French racism was a turning point in his life that shaped his psychological theories about race. It is through his medical and psychological practice that he states the problem of justice as follows: "how is it possible that there may exist a racism, which generates harmful psychological constructs that subvert the Black man and subject him to a universalized white norm". For him, this alienates his consciousness. Speaking French means one accepts the collective consciousness of the French. Blackness is thus obviously identified with evil and sin. Tolerating and recognizing difference becomes one of Fanon's humanist dimensions, which he develops fully with his analysis of the basic confrontation between colonialism and the struggle for liberty. The intermingled relations between colonialism and racism are denounced since it served as a basis for him to defend human rights, putting into perspective the racially colonized person's inferiority complex to point to the profundity of the racial colonial predicament.

### **Fanon's Revision of the Constitutionalist's Premise of Colonization**

The next dialogue is engaged between Fanon and Octave Mannoni; it is based on the latter's publication of his *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950), which came as an outcome of its author's explorations in psychoanalysis after twenty years of residence and work as a colonial functionary in French controlled Madagascar. As a French psychoanalyst, Mannoni compares the mind of the Malagasy and the French one, which is based on his experience and study of Madagascar under French rule in the 1930s and 1940s. In his *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon devotes the whole fourth chapter to debunk Mannoni's defense of French culture, evident in his attempt to

demarcate divisions between benevolent Frenchmen and the racist kind of its ideology. For Fanon, racism cannot be limited to individual attitudes and behaviors; "it is not inborn; it has to be cultivated" (P.37). It is a set of structural social mechanisms, which the colonial authority uses to legitimate its use of force to maintain its supremacist patriarchal colonial capitalist ideology over the colonized people.

Furthermore, Fanon insists that Mannoni's two concepts of "dependency" and "inferiority", by which he means that the African natives need a paternal figure to look after them are fixed labels, which function as a sort of standing insult to the colonized. By beginning the chapter with an epigraph from Aimé Césaire's *Et les chiens se taisaient* (1962), Fanon maintains: "In the whole world, no poor devil is lynched, no wretch tortured, in whom I too am not degraded and murdered", he affirms that Mannoni does not present a well-argued examination of European colonization because the French theorist lacks the basis on which to ground any conclusion applicable to the situation, the problems, or the potentialities of the Malagasy (P.61). Although Mannoni has devoted 225 pages to the study of the colonial situation, writes Fanon, [he] has not understood its real coordinates; persisting that the fact that when an adult Malagasy is isolated in a different environment, he can become susceptible to the classical type of inferiority complex, and this proves almost beyond doubt that the germ of the complex was latent in him from childhood (P.62). Mannoni fails to understand "the real coordinates" of the colonial situation, "for lacking the slightest basis on which to ground any conclusion applicable to the situation, the problems, or the potentialities of the Malagasy in the present time", adds Fanon (P.62). He persists in his claim that while Mannoni writes: "When black men with guns appear in children's dreams at night it is not because of the terror of French rule: no, the guns stand for penises" (Mannoni.1950:75), it is not only a misinterpretation of dreams but also a devaluation of the mental abilities of the colonized. Fanon answers that the French psychoanalyst misreads the dream of children to excuse the terror of French rule and how it was affecting his

patients. He underscores how France was racist while Mannoni remains blind to it in his attempt to look past it in undermining the violence done to the native psyche by colonialism (P.64). Violence on the psyche of the black man is responsible for encouraging the complex where it does arise.

Furthermore, Fanon uses Jean Paul Sartre's idea of the construction of the Jew combined with Césaire's expression of "the old courtly civilization" to reiterate that "dependency" and "inferiority" are fixed labels that function as a sort of standing insult to the colonized. They serve to hide the tyranny of the colonial rule, which pretends that "France is unquestionably one of the least racist-minded countries in the world" (P.68). Fanon reinforces his argument claiming that the French rule of Madagascar was cruel as it did not only stand for a justly creditable response to the enormity of the historical material consequences of Western racism, but also as that of the "other", posited in the philosophy of Western humanism. The French government and all those committed to colonial ideology used all means to create the complex of inferiority in the unconscious of the Senegalese, to make it possible, and make the society in which he lives perpetuate it (P.74).

Fanon insists, however, that Freud is of no interest to understand why Senegalese soldiers strike fear into the hearts of natives. In 1947, the French put down an uprising, killing 80,000 natives. As if that were not enough, the French practiced torture in Madagascar. Fanon calls the use of black soldiers to force French rule on people of color "the racial allocation of guilt". His indignation and anger become obvious with this comment on Mannoni's book: "We uncovered, in certain of M. Mannoni's statements a mistake that is at the very least dangerous" (Fanon.1967:69). What seems certain is that Fanon wants to break the stereotypes and the prison walls to liberate the colonizer imprisoned or hiding behind the walls of the colonial prejudices. For him, the process of revolutionary thought helps the colonized people to transcend the ego-personality forced by the colonial environment. The fundamental error committed by Mannoni, Fanon denounces, is

grounding his claim that “most natives are content to put whites above them and be dependent on them because it fulfills a deep need in their hearts, one that was there long before whites showed up”. For the French psychoanalyst, “not all peoples can be colonized: only those who experience the need”. Fanon notes that for Mannoni, “European civilization and its agents of the highest caliber are not responsible for colonial racism. It comes from lower-level whites who blame their unhappy lives on the natives” (Ibid.P.91). It is important to point out that Fanon does not only criticize Mannoni’s Eurocentric point of view, but also rejects the way the “White colonials suffer from a “Prospero complex”. He explains that the colonizers cannot accept others as they are, but want to dominate them. The following passage expresses clearly Fanon’s indignation:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world (P.98).

The passage indicates that Fanon blames the Europeans for their “evil projects”, which they make up to maintain their supremacy. He considers, for instance, “European civilization and its best representatives as the responsible for colonial racism” (P.88). If Mannoni distinguishes colonial exploitation from other forms of exploitation, and colonial racism from other kinds of racism, Fanon answers vehemently: “when one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one’s back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place” (P.88). He dismisses Mannoni for his incapacity to really understand the plight of the colonized peoples of the world, for uttering such statements as “France is unquestionably one of the least racist-minded countries in the world” (P.92), or that

“European civilization and its best representatives are not responsible for colonial racialism” (P.91). For Fanon, Europeans remain blindly indifferent to the black’s state of subordination. He reinforces his arguments with reference to Francis Jeanson’s article, published in *Esprit* (1950), to denounce the French exploitation and oppression. In his “Cette Algérie conquise et pacifiée”, Jeanson condemns the way Europeans keep “distance from realities of a certain kind”; he disapproves “how they [Europeans] succeed in keeping themselves unsullied, it is because others dirty themselves in their place. They hire thugs, and, balancing the accounts, it is they who are the real criminals, for without them, without their blind indifference, such men could never carry out deeds that damn them (Jeanson.1950:624, cited in Fanon.1967:92).

Fanon also demystifies the colonial myths provided in Mannoni’s analysis of mental disturbances of the “So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples”. He notes that at a certain stage, the colonized has been led to wonder whether he is indeed a man, a human being; it is because his reality as a man has been challenged. Fanon’s attempt to deconstruct the overwhelming consideration of the supremacy of the white who builds up a world where only white men are seen as humans, denying the identity and the dignity of the oppressed. The trauma of French colonialism on the colonized as identified by Frantz Fanon is a “massive psycho-existential complex” that involves questions concerning identity and inferiority complexes derived from economic inequality, racism and cultural prejudice that Fanon identifies as “a feeling of non-existence” (1967:139).

It is important to point out that Fanon has already rejected “neurotic” and recommends the construction of a new environment as “a change of air” because “man cannot be limited to “negation”; he is rather a “yes that vibrates cosmic harmonies” (P.59). He provides arguments, which would legitimate self-recognition as an essential means to shape the Black man and decolonize his mind in order to reach a new humanism and a human recognition. He suggests that each man as only a man, not seeing color at all; it is provided by the

end of the book, when Fanon writes: "My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (P. 180).

### Conclusion

It can be deduced that Fanon counters the arguments that legitimated colonialism and slavery. His critique of racism is sharp and runs consistently through claim to a universal humanity. He maintains that existence precedes essence; there is no fixed ethnic identity, no fixed property, no fixed individual, no fixed personality, no fixed human nature, no essence of language, no essence about white or black man. In an existentialist tone, he affirms: "In the world through which I travel, I'm endlessly creating myself" (P. 179). In addition, Fanon offers an alternative mythology of history which denies and defies the values of history. In rejecting the model of the gullible, the hopeless victims of colonialism trapped in the hinges of history, he insists that the oppressed should be fighting their own battles for survival in their own way in order to be defined, not by their skin color, but by their political choices. He refuses to drive his purpose from the past of the Black man. He also objects dedicating himself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negrocivilization. He does not want to exalt the past at the expense of his present and future (P.177). Fanon opts rather for an emancipator struggle through action. What can help a society to survive is the reconfiguration of its experience with and its selfhood because the color is not "the wrapping of specific values" while "the moral law is not certain in itself" (P.177). The quest for freedom is another essential element that binds one human being to another, one human group to another; he calls for "not renouncing to freedom through choices" (P.179). Fanon's project is based on the construction of a world where human beings live without domination, enslavement, and hatred. Coherence can be attained by action, not self-reflection: "we become by doing". The message of Fanon is clear; the human being's essence is only created by his own projects, their own creativity, and the values they choose. Understanding this kind of truth is based on two things: first,

overcome racism itself, overcome essentialism, which is a kind of view by some ethnic groups define themselves superior to others.

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