

BOOK REVIEW

Priyanko Sarkar*:

Black Skin, White Mask**Franz Fanon****Black Skin, White Mask by Franz Fanon****Pluto Press, 2008, INR 595****ISBN: 9780745328485, pp. 186**

Frantz Fanon's Classic text *Black Skin, White Mask* is a book of classical erudition and of enduring relevance to those who are interested in post-colonial studies, critical race theory and popular culture. This is a political text where Fanon tries to justify his idea about how identity or the so-called racial identity is formed through epistemic, physical and racial violence.

In the forward to the book, *The Cultural Critique* Ziauddin Sardar has proclaimed how this relevant text of Fanon put up an idea about the particular definition of dignity. He is of the view that Fanon tries to justify his idea about how dignity is not only located in seeking equality with the white man and his cultural civilization. Nor, it is about assuming the attitude of the white master who allowed his black slaves to dine together at their (white) table. But, it is about how the black race charts his own journey of discovering his black racial dignity through a varied interrogation of his own selfhood.

The background behind the formulation of this text coincides with Fanon's personal experiences of the psychological and social trauma caused due to the violence of colonialism and racism. Fanon wrote this seminal text while he was working as a psychiatrist in Algeria where he observed the ill effects of colonialism on the psyche of the colonised people. The very title of the book encapsulates its major thematic arena

where the psychological and social implications of the evil of racism and colonialism affect black people whose colours of skin itself justifies their own subjugation and cultural inferiority. Fanon through this book delves deep into the psychological impact of colonization and how the colonized subject internalizes the racist attitudes and beliefs of the colonizer leading to a sense of deep identity crisis and self-alienation. While formulating the structure of the book Fanon employs three theoretical paradigms – psychoanalytic theory, existentialism and Marxism- to analyse the experience of black individuals in a white-dominated world.

Fanon tries to establish a critical paradigm by examining how racism and colonialism shape identity, consciousness and subjectivity and calls for a radical transformation of society to overcome the legacy of colonialism and racism. The post-colonial critic Homi K Bhaba in the second forward of the book emphasises the psychoanalytical discourses or practices that this book highlighted, focusing mainly on colonial mimicry and ambivalence experienced by the colonized subject. Further, scholars like Bell Hooks and Cornel West discuss the concept of double consciousness and identity struggle found in a racist society as exemplified by Fanon in the Chapter “The Fact of Blackness”. The existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre exemplifies the existential crisis of the human race and the black individual struggle for freedom and authenticity while discussing the ideological premise in the preface to the French edition of this celebrated work.

Further, Fanon himself elaborates on the idea of the dependency complex of the colonised people in white cultural domination by focusing on a particular text *Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of Colonization* by M. Manoni in the 4th chapter of this book. In it, Fanon remarks how the psychological and social implications of power and control in the context of colonization emphasise the dehumanising effects of the colonised subject. And how only through the themes of resistance, liberation and the revolutionary potential of the colonised subject can decolonization and social transformation occur.

Elaborating on the idea of Fanon, the renowned feminist critic Susan Gubar in her seminal text *White Skin Black Face in American Culture* has spoken about how the phenomenon of black face originated during the 19th century serves the white performers to darken their skin and exaggerated their features to portray black characters in minstrel shows, racial stereotypes and caricatures. She is of the view that ‘Blackface’ represent a form of cultural appropriation and exploitation where white performers appropriate and exploit black culture, history and identity for entertainment and profit. Fanon opened the discussion of the book by metaphorically stating black

man can also be received culturally in his quest while dealing to remove the dilemma of racism. The black man's formation of an inferiority complex is due to the social as well as economic inferiority they experienced while encountering the culture of the white man. In the very first chapter "The Negro and Language" Fanon talked about how the black man and language are intervened in nature and how language assists the black man to exist with other superior races. Fanon is of the view that language is a tool to accept and negotiate a culture and how it permits one to be part of a people. He is of the view that how colonialism has caused the black man to feel the need to escape his blackness, which ultimately results in longing to adopt white cultural values. In the 4th chapter titled "The So called dependency complex of Colonized Peoples" Fanon elaborates on how colonialism not only uses historical objectives or traditions to subjugate the colonised people, but also reflects how human attitudes respond towards those conditions.

And finally in the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' Fanon reflects that as long as the black man is in his space or native place he will not work for colonial powers. The black people love his home, and it is the space where he is debarred from feeling inferiority within it. Thus, this book targets the so-called audiences who try to unearth the impact of colonization and cultural whiteness on black people from the colonies. This book combines the art of literary, critical analysis, and reflections on the lived experience of black people and tries to examine how the impact of colonization can be observable in literary language and controversially in interracial relationships.

The concluding section of the book reflects the symbolic material interactional and socio-psychological factors that help to develop a psychopathological and philosophical explanation of the state of being negro. Though it is a seminal text in post-colonial and critical race studies, it doesn't transgress the lens of criticism. Some renowned scholars and post-colonial critics have argued that Fanon's emphasis on the psychological effects of colonialism and racism can be seen as an essentialist in nature which reduces the experience of black individuals to psychological trauma and pathology. Further, feminist and gender scholars dislike Fanon for not addressing the issue of gender and the problem of intersecting the concept of race with gender. Some critics even argued that Fanon's use of European psychoanalytic theory and language is seen to be Eurocentric in nature, which reinforces the very structure of domination and oppression he otherwise seeks to critique. In sum, literary critics engage with Fanon's ideas and try to explore and challenge his post-colonial theoretical assumptions, political implications, and conceptual framework, which leads to discussions and debates among academic and intellectual communities. So, despite its criticism of being a biased text



Fanon's work highly provides a foundational framework for understanding the complex interplay between race, identity and power in the context of colonialism and racism.

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