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## **DECOLONIZATION IN FRANTZ FANON'S THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH AND BLACK SKIN WHITE MASKS**

*FRANTZ FANON'UN YERYÜZÜNÜN LANETLİLERİ VE SİYAH DERİ BEYAZ MASKELER ESERLERİNDEKİ DEKOLONİZASYON KAVRAMI*

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### **Abstract**

Being one of the most leading behavioral scientists, Fanon became the spokesman of the third world citizens oppressed by the colonists and pointed out the effects of colonialism after the so-called independence gained by the colonized. The Algerian scholar handled the psychological tendencies and the retaliations of the colonized and displayed the relations between the colonized and the settler who owes his existence to the colonial system. Though Fanon died at very young age, he produced some outstanding works two of which are *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In his works, the relations between the natives and occupier- described as a violent phenomenon and the control of a certain species of men by a new one, and attitudes peculiar both sides are presented during decolonization. In his book entitled *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon has the tendency to provide his readers with violence created by the colonizer and the difficulties of establishing a national consciousness. His latter work -*Black Skin White Masks*- aims to clarify black-white relations and questions psychological aspects of decolonization. Although national liberation was gained after the colonization period, Fanon's works contend that the effects of oppressors still continue among the oppressed. Although colonization period seems to have ended, it is apparent that lots of nations from different parts of the world are still suffering. As the occupational mentality still dominates the natives, this paper will focus on how the colonized behave, feel and interact with oppressors during the period of decolonization.

**Key Words:** Decolonization, The Wretched of the Earth, Black Skins White Masks, Frantz Fanon, Colonized, Colonizer

### Öz

Davranış bilimcilerin önde gelen temsilcilerinden biri olan Fanon, kolonistler tarafından sömürüye uğramış üçüncü dünya ülke vatandaşlarının sözcüsü olmuş ve sömürülen halklar tarafından kazanılmış sözde bağımsızlık sonrası kolonyalizmin etkilerini ortaya koymuştur. Cezayir’li düşünür sömürülenlerin psikolojik eğilimlerini, misillemelerini ele almış ve varlığını kolonyal sisteme borçlu olan sömürgeci ile sömürülen arasındaki ilişkileri gözler önüne sermiştir. Fanon erken yaşta ölmesine rağmen, *Yeryüzünün Lanetlileri* ve (1961) *Siyah Deri Beyaz Maskeler*’in (1952) de aralarında olduğu seçkin eserler üretmiştir. Çalışmalarında, bir grubun başka bir grup tarafından kontrol altına alınması ve şiddetli bir kavram olarak tanımlanan sömüren-sömürülen ilişkisi ve her iki tarafa özgü tutumlar ortaya konulmaktadır. *Yeryüzünün Lanetlileri* adlı eserinde Fanon, işgalci tarafından yaratılan şiddet kavramını ve ulusal bilinç oluşturulmasının zorluklarını okuyucularına sunmaktadır. Sonraki eseri *Siyah Cilt Beyaz Maskeler*, siyah- beyaz ilişkilerini ve kolonileşmenin psikolojik boyutlarını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Kolonileşme sonrası ulusal bağımsızlık kazanılmış olmasına rağmen, Fanon’un eserleri, emperyalistlerin etkilerinin sömürülenler arasında hala devam ettiğini iddia etmektedir. Her ne kadar sömürge dönemi görünürde sona ermiş olsa da, postkolonyal dönemde farklı ülkelerden birçok insanın hala büyük acılar çektiği gerçeği açıkça görülmektedir. Sömürgecilik zihniyeti işgal edilmiş hakları hala domine ettiğinden dolayı, bu makalenin amacı kolonileşme sonrası, işgale uğrayanların nasıl davrandığını, nasıl hissettiğini ve işgalci ile nasıl bir etkileşim içinde olduğu üzerine yoğunlaşacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kolonileşme Sonrası, Yeryüzünün Lanetlileri, Siyah Deri Beyaz Maskeler, Frantz Fanon, Sömürülen ve Sömüren

### INTRODUCTION

During the period of colonization, all the values of the natives were poisoned and diseased by the settlers and they were exploited. They were confined to live as slaves on their own lands and lose their values ranging from culture to religion that is to say they were alienated to their values through systematic oppression. As a result of the aforementioned oppression, the oppressed tend to question their identity. Tanritanir and Karaman describe the continuous struggle of colonizer and the effects of colonizers on the occupied as;

power-holders become greedier, they want more power and attack each other applying to nonhuman ways and wars. These nonhuman deeds put the post-war and pre-war victims in a despair and confusion. The despair and confusion create a curiosity in the human mind and lead him to search his existence. (2018:91)

According to Butts “Fanon’s purpose was to arouse, excite, anger and activate those who were the victims of racism and exploitation” (1979: 1017). The anger, according to Fanon, results from the disparity between the two poles -occupied and occupier-. There have always been striking differences between the settler and the colonized. The living conditions are not the same and natives suffer from poor living conditions. “On one side, the settler’s town is strongly built, brightly lit and its streets are covered with asphalt (Fanon, 1963: 38). On the other side, the villages where the colonized live have ill fames and they are full of starving people whose only dream is to possess what the oppressors have. This envious look can never be actualized because the towns are protected by the soldiers and policemen slaughtering any native suspected. The colonized who has enslaved the natives, used violence as a devastating weapon in the colonized countries and dominated African and Asian nations through

exploitation and massacres. That's why, the violence was the method applied to dominate the people and it was created by the settler himself. Fanon expresses that decolonization is the practice of; the first shall be last and the last the first (1963:36). For that reason, the colonized, who were once on tenterhooks, use violence because violence is the only language a colonialist society understands. *The Wretched of the Earth* described as "a deeply political book and has a hotly contested life" (Gibson, 2007: 78) exhibits the fact that during the struggle for independence, the oppressors were attacked by the fatal weapons they used in order to enslave people having a different color. The desire to make the last the first is only possible through bullets and blood-stained knives (Fanon, 1963:36) and the struggle between the two protagonists (oppressor and oppressed) is conducted by an absolute violence. In the decolonization period, the only truth is the break-up of the colonialist regime. That's why, peasants, discovering the validity of violence, act as they think that colonialism yields if it is confronted with a greater one. But is the violence- as the intuition of masses- enough to gain independence? Fanon answers this question by emphasizing that independence has established dignity but it has not built up their values yet. The nation, called to fight against oppression during the colonial period, is asked to cope with illiteracy, and underdevelopment in the decolonization period (Fanon 1963:93) which shows that liberty requires a continuous struggle. Unfortunately, after the independence, the nationalistic call for a wholistic struggle is far from the interest of the national party. The leaders, calling on their people to fight, do not integrate, and educate the people of the countryside which causes the leakage of the oppression again. The mistrust, once felt for the colonialists, appears once more as the national parties turn into a union considering economic benefits and exclude illegalists by

labeling them as undesirables. Colonial regime which is still dominating the oppressed succeeds to separate natives from each other because boycotted by the attitudes in towns, illegalists have to leave the towns and settle in outskirts where they understand that political action in town is not able to overthrow the colonial regime. (Fanon, 1963:125) National consciousness that is the prerequisite for a newly independent country to actualize itself is another issue which is not easily established. Immediately after the independence, the nationals living in richer districts despise the ones in the poorer places. New settlers of the farms do not want to feed the others and a new hatred comes to the surface between the people in more prosperous regions and the peasants in the villages. In addition to the hatred, a merciless fight begins in order to occupy the vacant posts after departure of the foreigner. Natives of the newly independent country display an eagerness to own the properties left by the occupier and each one claims them to be theirs. Not only the desire to have territorial ownership but also religious conflicts appear because missionaries claim that African culture was disrupted by Arabs. Arab imperialism is spoken of in some districts whereas Christians are accused of being conscious enemies of national independence. Owing to the media, settlers from "the mother country" create new rivalries and the natives who were ones killed for the betterment of the nation are forced to kill each other. During the period of decolonization, political parties are unable to manage the country districts. What they are supposed to do is to build a new national character upon the existing structures but they try to destroy the living traditions instead. They are far from applying their theoretical knowledge to serve the mass and they are unable to present any objects to the country people. Although the country people are ready to listen to the authorities from the towns, they do not use such an opportunity to

educate the people of the countryside and raise their awareness regarding the continuity of the struggle. As a result of parties' negligence a sharp gap exists between the residents of the town and countryside the former being accused of having no morals.

More dramatically, the town dwellers form a kind of alliance with the Europeans to benefit from the advantages of colonialism. *"The townspeople are traitors and knaves who seem to get on well with the occupying powers and do their best to get on with the framework of the colonial system"* (Fanon, 1963:111). The dangerous interaction, based on the exploitation of the peasants is what the oppressor wants and the members of the colonized community might move away their ideas regarding the anti-colonialism. In order to eradicate the conflicts in the newly decolonized community, Fanon highly stresses that culture as well as education are indispensable factors to combine the nation and offers the leaders to take *lumpenproletariat* into consideration during the rebellion. If not so, the enemy, ready to change its tactics, can use the weakness and ignorance of this mass and we may see hired soldiers fighting against the people from their own nation. In his study titled *psychopolitics, and critical psychology*. Hook claims that "independence did not bring an end to colonial politics such as social conflicts and post-colonial societies are still subject of the colonizers" (2004:87) Likewise, in his work *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon demonstrates that post-colonial periods can never be fully separated from their colonial pasts as their impacts are still dominating the natives. He addresses to millions of people; "injected with fear, inferiority and abasement" (Fanon,2008:9). He is appealing to people who are still occupied by the Europeans even after the independence. To Yuzsuren, "Fanon handles the alienation and inferiority of the black after the physical and psychological invasion by providing concrete samples" (2015:4). The colonized, whose destiny is considered to serve white, have inferiority complex and try to whiten

their color in different ways. Mostly it is because of the assumption that the black man becomes whiter as long as he renounces his blackness. The language of the occupier, for instance, has a direct effect on the behaviors of the colonized especially the Negro. "The negro adopts a language different from that of a group into which he was born" (Fanon, 2008:25) as a sign of separation. The more he speaks the language of the settler the more he thinks he approaches the European level. Fanon states that a negro's inferiority complex forces him to be close to the white man and he makes great effort to use "bombastic" words and phrases as a proof of equality between the two races. Fanon underlines the absurdity of the conviction that "the white are the chosen people and the colors of others (black, yellow) are because of their sins" (Fanon, 2008:30) but a negro feeling ashamed of his color and native language even locks himself in a room and tries to read aloud so as to learn diction. Under the effect of colonization and its dominant culture, the hybridized man or woman once labeled as savages try to mimic his occupier. The primitivized, and imprisoned black man desperately imitates the settler's language thinking that he is whitening his skin. The idea that "the person I love will strengthen me and my womanhood" (Fanon, 2008:41) and admiration of others for a value-making structure is common among the women of color. Every black woman has the desire to marry a white man. She expects nothing and whether the man respects her or not is not important. What matters is that he has blue eyes, blond hair and more importantly a light skin. She sacrifices herself just for a bit whiteness in spite of the fact that she is not valued for the color of her skin even after the marriage. In his works Fanon states that, the colors of two different nations are reflected as two poles of a world. According to the white; white is the symbol of virtue, beauty and honor while black is associated with primitivity and ugliness. The difference between the two colors are expressed as; "I am white: that is to

say that I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the color of daylight.... I am black, It is not the result of a curse, but it is because, having offered my skin, I have been able to absorb all the cosmic effluvia". I am truly a ray of sunlight under the earth." (Fanon, 2008:4) Fanon employs some examples from black women and mulattoes and tackles the issue of desperate search for white men. He highlights that women believe in the whitening of the race and they consider it as the save of the race as well. The attitudes of the colonized after the independence is criticized by Fanon and he tries to frame his nation in terms of their psychologies after the struggle for independence. Contrary to Boehmer's claims that "colonial literature was written by European and colonialist literature for the superiority of European culture" (1997:42) Fanon paves the way to observe how colonization affected the world views of the colonized. He closely scrutinizes the attitudes of men and women and clarifies the reasons of their reactions. During the decolonization period, a black man's relation with a white woman is different from the one between a black woman and white man. As soon as the black man arrives in Europe he intends to flirt with a woman just for being the master of the settler's woman. He wants to marry the European woman not so much out of love he feels for her but as a way to take revenge for what her ancestors did.

"Enraged by this degrading ostracism, mulattoes and Negroes have only one thought from the moment they land in Europe: to gratify their appetite for white women. "The majority of them, including those of lighter skin who often go to the extreme of denying both their countries and their mothers, tend to marry in Europe not so much out of love as for the satisfaction of being the master of a European woman; and a certain tang of proud

revenge enters into this. (Fanon, 2008: 69)

When presenting the reactionary responses of black community, Fanon conveys the realistic conviction of him and cannot behave objectively since he believes that the racist is responsible for creating inferiority. Normally, inferiority complex is found with minor people in a group but Fanon approaches the assumption from a different perspective. Considering the populations of the white in the colonized countries, one can easily see that although they are the minor groups they are not despised and do not have inferiority complex. For instance, in Martinique there are almost 200 white people over three hundred thousand native settlers. Despite the minority, the white are not treated as inferior and the Negroes, seen parasites, accept them as they are. Thus, it could be mentioned the minority group consisting of the white is still exploiting the majority consisting of the black community. The issue of negritude is one of the most significant matters dealt by Fanon. He claims that colonizer thinks that "the negro is an animal, the negro is bad, the negro is mean and ugly" (2008:113) In "mother land" even a small child considers the negro primitive and ready to eat other people. Fanon points out the useless effort of the negro to prove himself in a community where he is rejected. The Negro is denied and not recognized so the only solution is to make himself known but it is not always easy to be recognized since the white created conflicts even among negroes such as despising each other for the color of their skins. Frantz Fanon, who studies the relations between the white and black, scrutinizes psychopathological aspects of members of both sides. Not only does he consider adults as subjects of his studies but also deepens his analysis by handling the families and the children raised by them. He states that there is a clear distinction between the European family and Oriental one which shapes

the characters of individuals. Firstly, considering the European family structure, Fanon mentions that the family is a miniature of the society in which he/she will confront with the same norms and values. The European child emerged from the protection of his family will be a good man and the education system itself supports the idea that he is the superior. Compared to the European family and society, the child, grown up in an Oriental family or society such as in Antilles, is exposed to a systematic exploitation beginning from his childhood. Fanon exemplifies his situation by stating the educational exploitation in the colonized. The system conducted in the European country and encompassing the collection of books and magazines to reflect the Negro as devil continues in the colony. Such an educational program aims to alienate the black children from his own ancestors and considers his ancestors evil, bad and savage. As the Indian and negro are the symbols of sin according to Europeans, Fanon underlines the seriousness of the problem as; "there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the white boy, becomes an explorer, and adventurer, a missionary "who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes" (2008:146) Such an attitude as the author states is problematic because the school boy whose lessons are based upon rejection of his ancestors is forced to identify himself with the white as the explorer bringing the civilization to his country. Finally, the colored child adopts white man's attitude and sacrifices himself. The situation becomes more complicated when the young black- wherever he comes from- encounters with European life in a European country. In such a circumstance, Fanon expresses that the boy rejects his family for it has not a connection with European structure and tries to become a part of the society. Although "he is made inferior" (2008:149) by the colonizer he tries to get into the world of settler. Despite his efforts, the indigenous is associated with being bloody, primitive and even animalistic.

### Conclusion

All in all, in both *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon displays how the colonized people feel after the independence process. On one hand, he presents the devastating results of colonization, on the other, he demonstrates the attitudes of natives. Violence created by the colonized is considered as a weapon to destroy the occupier. Moreover, Fanon criticizes the administrative drawbacks of national parties and their attitudes towards the peasants and formation of the national identity. He underlines the fact that, the occupied do not need a leader after the independence as it is a dangerous approach which excludes the will of a whole nation and suppress their motto to struggle. According to him the fight never ends since the oppressed still have conflicts among each other in the formation of national consciousness. The inferiority complex as a hereditary illness dominates the occupied and they are under the influence of this devastating concept in their relations with Europeans. It is clear that Fanon has a critical eye on his nation at the same time and offers what should be done in order to be a fully independent nation. Additionally, Fanon displays the systematic exploitation of natives which shapes their behaviours. Oppressed in their own territories, they react in different forms both in their own homeland and European country. Fanon, considering the importance of questioning, underlines the struggle for recognition. He advocates the idea that the negro is asking to be recognized. He is eager to meet the convulsions of death but knows that there is "the possibility of impossible" (218). On behalf of all occupied nations, he demands human behavior from the other and free will to make his choices. Moreover, he does not want to be the slave, he wants to be recognized for his own foundation and he does not want to go back to history to decide upon the inferiority or superiority. He offers that in order to achieve the recognition struggle, it is imperative that people's brains be developed,

filled with new ideas and they be turned into real human beings.

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