

# BLACK SKIN WHITE MASKS: Unconcluded Deduction

In the book, *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon discusses the societal effects of racism and colonialism. The book is written passionately with topics often taken from Fanon's personal experiences of being racially discriminated due to his black skin. **“I think it would be good if certain things were said. These things I am going to say, not shout. For it is a long time since shouting has gone out of my life.”** (P.1 *Black Skin White Masks*.) The book's narration jumps between first and third person emphasizing Fanon's personal feelings toward certain sections of the book. **“Well, I reply quite calmly that there are too many idiots in this world. And having said it, I have the burden of proving it.”** (P.2 *Black Skin White Masks*.) The book also includes an incredibly diverse range of topics such as anthropology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, science and poetry. The use of these areas of study gives the book credibility and the impression Fanon studied the issue of racial discrimination from a variety of angles and subjects. That aspect of the book sometimes has the effect of making it challenging to understand for none of the chapters have one specific method of communication or a conclusion that makes clear Fanon's thoughts. Fanon's unstable writing behavior suggests the book is subject to his own traumas sometimes compromising the book with a bias consequent of his traumatic perspective.

Black Skin White Masks analyzes the topic of race by taking Lacan's "Mirror Stages" theory and using it to make sense of the impact white dominant society have on the black race. Fanon then uses his semi-concluded ideas to analyze relationships between Black woman and White man, black man and white woman and the power struggle of all relationships through the dependency complex.

## **"The Negro And Language"**

The chapter starts by mentioning the importance of language in the process of racial separation **"I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language... For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other."** (P.8 *Black Skin White Masks*.) Fanon explains this linguistic dysfunction divides the black man into two, himself among black man and himself among white man. Among whites, the colonized Black man feels pressured to speak like them, doing so validates him as one of them and becomes the first step in giving up his identity in order to conform to white society. **"Yes, I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it."** (P.11 *Black Skin White Masks*.)

There is a second problem with attempting to speak like the white man which arises when the black man returns to the colony, when speaking with his family and friends they realize he no longer speak like them making him foreign to his own roots. The black man is now no longer aware of who he is, rejected by his past and present. **"In every country of the world there are climbers, "the ones who forget who they are," and, in contrast to them, "the ones who remember where they came from." The Antilles Negro who goes home from France expresses himself in dialect if he wants**

**to make it plain that nothing has changed.”** (P.24 *Black Skin White Masks*.) The black man that now speaks one more language than before is less capable of communicating on a deeper level for if he decides to speak with his family as he used to, he will do so just as unnaturally as with the white world. The communication deficiency could result in the black man seeking to learn other languages in order to find his identity, crippling himself deeper into his trauma.

I wonder if Fanon's use of multiple linguistic devices is a consequence of his own loss of linguistic identity, an attempt to better communicate his thoughts by using multiple languages rather than his own lost natural speech.

## **“THE WOMAN OF COLOR AND THE WHITE MAN”**

This chapter begins stating that man will seek for people who are alike for the purpose of dominance; it also states that man look for woman who can help and reassure his feeling of superiority. **“The person I love will strengthen me by endorsing my assumption of my manhood, while the need to earn the admiration or the love of others will erect a value- making superstructure on my whole vision of the world.”** (P.28 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This statement defines how Fanon approaches relationships throughout the book, almost always as a consequence of people's subconscious desires instead of love and affection towards a randomly selected person for one can't escape from his or hers deeper impulses.

According to Fanon, when black woman falls in love with the civilized white man she is already subject to her complex of inferiority and sees their relationship as a way for

her to escape from being black and becoming a white woman. **“For, in a word, the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it. Whiten the race, save the race, but not in the sense that one might think: not “preserve the uniqueness of that part of the world in which they grew up,” but make sure that it will be white.”** (P.33 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This analysis however blames black woman who chooses to have a relationship with white man for denying their own race, not only becoming white woman but also acquiring white’s inherent racism towards black man intensifying the contradiction of her own *gestalt* and ultimately betraying her own family. **“She says, “I do not like the Negro because he is savage. Not savage in a cannibal way, but lacking refinement.” An abstract point of view. And when one points out to her that in this respect some black people may be her superiors, she falls back on their “ugliness.” A factitious point of view.”** (P.41 *Black Skin White Masks*.) Although this chapter talks about the perspective of black woman, it suggests that Fanon’s dominance impulse when being threatened by white men who seduce black woman, results on a compromise of his work with gender impartiality.

## **“THE MAN OF COLOR AND THE WHITE WOMAN”**

When writing about the relationships between man of color and white woman Fanon decides to analyze this type of relationships from the perspective of white civilization instead of the colony. This distinction is left unexplained and once more raises questions about Fanon’s gender bias; nonetheless he makes a few interesting remarks. In this chapter, Fanon describes two unconscious reasons man seek interracial relationships: the wish to become white and the wish to revenge white man.

According to Fanon, when a black man has a relationship with a white woman he is faced with the opportunity to experience things that are exclusive to the white world. **“When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.”** (P.45 *Black Skin White Masks*.) In it the white woman becomes an objectified symbol of white society and possessing it means being able to enter this white world. So far this is a similar conclusion to the previous chapter, however in this case Fanon mentions that when the black man enters an interracial relationship both the black man and the white society is responsible for making a white out of the man of color **“When the question is put directly, then, the white man agrees to give his sister to the black—but on one condition: You have nothing in common with real Negroes. You are not black, you are “extremely brown.”**” (P.50 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This serves as another example of white man suppressing the black man’s identity leaving him with a greater *gestalt*.

The other subconscious reason for this attraction is the black man’s wish to revenge himself from the white man by having sex with white woman. **“Talking recently with several Antilleans, I found that the dominant concern among those arriving in France was to go to bed with a white woman. As soon as their ships docked in Le Havre, they were off to the houses. Once this ritual of initiation into “authentic” manhood had been fulfilled, they took the train for Paris.”** (P.52 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This ritual shows the black man using the objectified symbol of woman as a way to conquer the white man and very directly putting their phallus in her, a similar gesture to erecting a flag on conquered land.

The theory when analyzed from the perspective of white society ignores a

statistically relevant factor of interracial relationships that is completely ignored on this chapter; France has a greater population of white woman than black woman. This data should make it more likely that a black man in France will fall in love with a white woman. Whether Fanon was blind to this thought or not, it shows another compromise consequent of his own inferiority complex, one which would perhaps be obvious had he been able to end his thesis more conclusively.

## **“The Fact of Blackness”**

This chapter is perhaps the most personal in the entire book, it is written mostly in first person and it describes the various stages Fanon experienced in the process of making sense of his own identity. The chapter is also incredibly repetitive and makes use of various areas of study. It describes the consequences of the colonial racial discrimination and it suggests ways a man of color can endure living the white world.

The first point made in this chapter is that every black man in white civilization is an ambassador for their race. **“I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a Negro physician?”** (P.88 *Black Skin White Masks*.) The black man’s behavior is constantly being analyzed with a bias that makes any negative behavior a consequence of their race. The pressure of being always analyzed results in black man among white people behaving in a very consciously constructed manner. **“A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world... it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.”** (P.83 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This extremely conscious behavior put’s the man of color in a

disembodied state and prohibits his own nature from leaving his subconscious. This constant surveillance resembles religions that claim all people are in God's constant watch and makes me wonder if both have similar psychological consequences.

In order to cope with this surveillance the black man must embrace his roots and reason their superiority to the white world. **“I embrace the world! I am the world! The white man has never understood this magic substitution. The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. He finds himself predestined master of this world. He enslaves it.”** (P.97 *Black Skin White Masks*.) This freedom achieved through reason is perhaps an existentialist conclusion which ultimately gives value to looking at the world with as much objective realism as it can offer for that is the only way society is able to minimize its traumatic consequences. It is also a satisfyingly conclusive idea, which comes at the end of a paragraph that hints Fanon's struggle to express his thoughts in a traumatic manner.

## **In Conclusion**

*Black Skin White Masks* is a hard book to read, not only due to its mixture of linguistic mechanisms but also because it speaks sad truths about the world we still live in. The book's gender and statistical bias is a consequence of the fact the author is himself a victim of the psychological phenomena he attempts to communicate, leaving the reader the task of concluding Fanon's thesis and finding his identity masked by his language.