

# 112

common  
concern  
regarding  
colonialism  
in the writings  
of Frantz Fanon  
and Derek Walcott  
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## ABSTRACT

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**DEREK WALCOTT'S PLAY DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN (1970)** is read in light of some of Frantz Fanon's theoretical formulations on colonial relations proposed in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The paper discusses the colonial regime under which Makak, Moustique, Souris, Tigre live as the one that makes realization of their dreams impossible. As a result of this oppressive social system, the colonized become Fanon's so-called divided subjects who are condemned to live in an inauthentic, neurotic condition. Despite the dreams of liberty that the characters have, they are unable to fulfill them due to a complex love-hate relationship with the imperial power.

**Keywords:** Imperial power, African roots, love-hate relationship, cultural identity.

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DEREK WALCOTT AND FRANTZ FANON are two intellectuals whose work emerges from different national and cultural backgrounds, but who share common concerns regarding colonialism. Fanon's theoretical formulations on colonial relations proposed in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* illuminate an understanding of Makak, the main character of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, a colonized black subjected to a marginalized existence. Like his friends Moustique and Souris, he is a victim of a hegemonic racist European discourse that strips him of his Afro-based cultural roots and condemns him to exist in an inauthentic, neurotic condition. Oppression of the colonized by the colonizer and the colonized rebellion against it, a collective search for identity on behalf of the colonized, and the colonized inability to return to their African heritage are some of the ultimate areas of Walcott's affinity with Fanon.

Makak, a charcoal burner and a member of the oppressed race who has internalized the values of the colonizer, liberates himself through an acceptance of both African and European cultures as important parts of his identity. As a result of a subjection to the European stereotypes imposed on him, he forgets his real name.<sup>1</sup> One night a white goddess appears in his dream, tells about his royal ancestry in pre-colonial Africa, and urges him to cleanse himself of an inferiority complex. Following this, he makes an imaginary

journey to Africa where he becomes a king and a healer who is able to return a dying man to life. In his dream the corporal, a middle class representative who in real life defends the values of the colonizer, is miraculously restored to the fullness of his blackness. He is the one who insists that the beautiful white woman who encourages Makak's search for his roots is "the white light" that paralyzed his mind and persuades him to kill her.<sup>2</sup> When Makak follows the advice of the corporal and beheads the white goddess, he awakens up as a liberated person. Even though the killing of the white woman symbolizes his rejection of the white race as the one superior to his own, he doesn't seek to assert blackness as an opposition to whiteness. Instead, he destroys the illusions of white or black masks and liberates his consciousness through an acceptance of both races.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* deals with the problem of black identity, questions negritude, and reconstructs the lived experience of Caribbean people from a liberating point of view. The play responds to the same types of problems as Fanon's work and raises the same type of issues that were raised by him.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that Fanon influenced Walcott's later works and gave him the analytical tools to go further in the direction in which he was "already proceeding."<sup>4</sup> As Tejumola Olaniyan accurately notes in *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is "a particularly illuminating instance of Walcott's mulatto aesthetics" and "a poignant dramatization of the refusal of debilitating definitions of the self and the concomitant self-reappreciation by the dominated in the Caribbean."<sup>5</sup> Walcott's work is indeed "the narrative of liberation," the narrative "liberated from mythical closure."<sup>6</sup>

It is appropriate to situate *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in the revolutionary theory of Fanon, and it is not a coincidence that the names of Walcott's main characters are associated with animals [Makak, Tigre, and Souris]. This choice shows readers that they are Fanon's oppressed individuals described in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil...

At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms.<sup>7</sup>

The corporal refers to Tigre and Souris as "animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers" and instructs them to "stop turning this place to a stinking

zoo.”<sup>8</sup> They are felons who cannot progress in life just because the color of their skin happens to be black. In the corporal’s opinion they are representatives of an unfortunate tribe that has lingered behind since the beginning of God’s creation. They are “apes” that need to behave like gentlemen and learn to speak the master’s language.<sup>10</sup> As Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*,

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language...

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards.<sup>11</sup>

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the characters are instructed to speak English. An infuriated corporal tells them “English, English! For we are observing the principles and precepts of Roman law, and Roman law is English law.”<sup>12</sup> They are forced to adopt the language and the culture of the colonizer. Acting out as someone else rather than himself makes Makak very tired. When the Corporal asks him to identify his race, his answer is “I am tired.”<sup>13</sup> He is tired of constant oppression, of trying to be himself while at the same time becoming what the colonizer wants him to be, of being forced to speak a language that is not his own. He is tired to be under the “iron and terror rule of colonialism.”<sup>14</sup>

The dreams of the natives are often associated with aggression, power, and action due to the real life oppression existing under the colonial rule. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon writes,

I dream I am jumping, swimming, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing... During the period of colonialization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning....

The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.<sup>15</sup>

Walcott’s Makak seeks to “protest against the inferiority that he feels historically” and “attempts to react with a superiority complex.”<sup>16</sup> His dream

in which he encounters the white woman empowers him and makes a realization of his protest against the oppression possible:

I feel I was God self, walking through cloud, in the heaven of my mind... I behold this woman, the loveliest thing I see on this earth, floating towards me, just like the moon, like the moon walking along her own road. Then as I start to move, she call out my name, my real name. A name I do not use. Come here, she say. Come, don't be afraid. So I go up to her, one step by one step. She make me sit down and start to talk to me.

She say I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frightened of people because I think I ugly. She say that I come from the family of lions and kings.<sup>17</sup>

Walcott's choice of the white woman illustrates Fanon's views on black man/white woman relationships proposed in **Black Skin, White Masks**:

By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road and leads to total realization.

I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.

When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignify and make them mine.<sup>18</sup>

Because the white woman accepts him as her equal, Makak discovers unusual strength. He wishes this dream to be true and desires that in real life a white woman would acknowledge him as an equal or even superior human being. Even though he wants to be white in his dream, in this whiteness he doesn't seek to become a European. Rather, he prefers to return to his African roots and wishes to have his own mind, his own will, and a tribe of his own. He wants to be a lion that doesn't sit still in the presence of his enemies, a lion that fights back encountering the opposition. It is no longer an inferiority complex that guides his life, but a black superiority power that gives him confidence and strength.

As a result of Makak's encounter with the white woman, he chooses to fight the colonialism on his own terms, and he is not afraid to risk his life in his effort to get rid of the oppressor. Fanon describes this phenomenon in the following way:

He of whom *they* have never stopped saying that the only

language he understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force. In fact, as always, the settler has shown him the way he should take if he is to become free. The argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force.<sup>19</sup>

Makak, Tigre, and Souris are fighters for the better future who encourage each other in their struggle against the corporal Lestrade. Tigre tells Makak,

How else can you prove your name is lion, unless you do one bloody, golden, dazzling thing, eh? And who stands in your way but you dear friend, Corporal Lestrade the straddler, neither one thing nor the next, neither milk, coal, neither day nor night, neither lion nor monkey, but a mulatto, a foot licking servant of marble law.<sup>20</sup>

Makak tells Moustique, "If we dead, little one, is not better to die, fighting like men, than to hide in the forest?"<sup>21</sup> He is a Fanonian revolutionary who tries to overthrow the power of oppression in a very radical way when he stabs the corporal saying "Blood! Blood! Blood! Lion... Lion...I am...a lion"<sup>22</sup> and believes that "now is the time, the time of war. War. Fire, fire and destruction."<sup>23</sup> He is Fanon's hero who takes a stand against a middle class society in which "life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt."<sup>24</sup>

It is not surprising that both parts of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* start with Fanon's citations. While in the first part Walcott includes a quotation from *The Wretched of the Earth's* prologue, in the second part he refers to Fanon's introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth* to describe a nervous condition of the natives and to show that indeed his characters are so-called divided subjects that are trapped between two different cultures:

Two worlds; that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn they crowd into the churches to hear Mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing. The status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent.<sup>25</sup>

While Fanon is more outspoken in his desire to belong to Algerian or

African, as opposed to French heritage, Walcott is more of a diplomat, more of a writer whose work exemplifies “the refusal of debilitating definitions of the self and the concomitant self-reappreciation by the dominated in the Caribbean.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite this difference, however, Walcott gives significance to Africa and considers it to be a missing piece of a puzzle, an important part of his Caribbean identity. In **Dream on Monkey Mountain**, he shows the importance of African heritage by choosing July 25 and July 26 as the dates during which the main action takes place. In “Walcott’s Way: ‘Do you know where you are?’ ‘At a crossroads in the moonlight,’” Lowell Fiet gives the following explanation of these dates:

Finally, the fact that the action of **Dream on Monkey Mountain** takes place on Saturday, July 25, and Sunday morning, July 26, hardly seems arbitrary. United States troops invaded Puerto Rico on July 25, 1898, and Fidel Castro used Carnival night on July 25, 1953, as a diversion to attack the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba at 5:30 a.m. on July 26, 1953, but these seem inconsequential. However, the Festival of Santiago Apostol (St. James), *el matamoros*, but also frequently interpreted as Shango, at least in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, is a celebration of the Afro-Caribbean heritage of Hispanic island-societies more frequently noted for their European pretensions.<sup>27</sup>

Walcott’s selection of these days as well as a detailed depiction of Makak’s imaginary journey to Africa show the importance of Africa within a Caribbean heritage. **Dream on Monkey Mountain** is Walcott’s recognition of the importance of literature in what Patrick Taylor calls “new historical possibilities” in colonial and postcolonial situations that gives Makak a chance to contest his role as “performer of predefined roles in the drama of European Empire.”<sup>28</sup> Even though Makak is “an extreme representation of what colonialism can do to a man—he is reduced to an almost animal-like state of degradation,”<sup>29</sup> he rebels against this state of degradation and affirms his Afro-based cultural roots.

The natives’ inability to return to their original African heritage uprooted by colonialism is another concern that Walcott shares with Fanon. Despite Makak’s realization of his unhappiness of living as a man without a name who does everything the white man says and his desire to return to his African roots, he is unable to follow through with his dream due to the complex love-hate relationship with the imperial power. Souris cannot understand why Makak changes his ideas towards the end and asks him, “You will

bring us so far, then abandon us? You will surrender that dream?<sup>30</sup> Yet, Makak does give up his dream of returning to Africa for the colonial power has skillfully injected him with fear, inferiority complex and despair. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon writes,

The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.<sup>31</sup>

Makak is a product of the colonialism that has shaped his identity. Despite his hatred of the oppressive political system, despite the opposing nature of two mindsets [Makak's worldview and the colonial worldview], despite all of the contradictions that exist, he is not able to completely break up with the imperial power and to return to his African heritage:

But if the moon is earth's fiend, eh, Tigre, how can we leave the earth. And the earth, self. Look down and there is nothing at our feet. We are wrapped in black air, we are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind.<sup>32</sup>

Like Walcott himself, whose performative aesthetics has been characterized as "mulatto,"<sup>33</sup> Makak comes to a realization that both African and European cultures are important parts of his identity. His "royal" dream experience in Africa reveals an idealized vision of this continent and he finally understands that an Afrocentric counterdiscourse can be as dangerous as racist European discourse. As Patrick Taylor accurately notes, "Makak beheads his goddess, he eliminates the white mask, but in so doing he must likewise destroy the black reaction to that mask, the black illusion that the mask itself has engendered."<sup>34</sup> Finally, Makak comes to a conclusion that one race is not better than the other, rather it is a combination of different cultures and races that makes a West Indian society special and unique.

In conclusion, oppression of the colonized by the colonizers and the colonized rebellion against it, a collective search for identity on behalf of the colonized, and the colonized inability to return to their original heritage are some of the common concerns regarding colonialism that Fanon and Walcott share with each other. Fanon's theoretical concepts regarding colonialism enlighten the understanding of Makak's quest for African roots. Even though he is a product of a society whose main purpose was to inject into his mind and soul that colonialism was supposed to lighten his darkness, he refuses to kneel down to this system and liberates his mind through the

imaginary journey to Africa. Since colonialism has destroyed the pre-colonial Africa that once existed, Makak can no longer go to a geographical Africa to find himself. He can only imaginatively construct the African cultural treasure within his Caribbean identity.

## NOTES

- 1 DEREK WALCOTT, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, New York, Farrar, Straus, 1970, p. 219.
- 2 *Ibid*, p. 319.
- 3 PATRICK TAYLOR, *The Narrative of Liberation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 184.
- 4 *Ibid*, p. 185.
- 5 TEJUMOLA OLANIYAN, *Scars of Conquest/Mask of Resistance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 104.
- 6 PATRICK TAYLOR, *op. cit*, p. 5.
- 7 FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, pp. 41-42.
- 8 DEREK WALCOTT, *op. cit*, p. 216.
- 9 *Ibid*, p. 217.
- 10 *Ibid*, p. 218-219.
- 11 FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, p. 18.
- 12 DEREK WALCOTT, *op. cit*, p. 218-219.
- 13 *Ibid*, p. 219.
- 14 PATRICK TAYLOR, *op. cit*, p. 5.
- 15 FANON, FRANTZ, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 52-53.
- 16 FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 213.
- 17 DEREK WALCOTT, *op. cit*, pp. 235-236.
- 18 FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 63.
- 19 FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched Of The Earth*, p. 84.
- 20 DEREK WALCOTT, *op. cit*, p. 283.
- 21 *Ibid*, p. 242.
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 285.
- 23 *Ibid*, p. 295.
- 24 FRANTZ FANON, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 224-225.
- 25 DEREK WALCOTT, *op. cit*, p. 277.
- 26 TEJUMOLA OLANIYAN, *op. cit*, p. 104.
- 27 LOWELL FIET, *Walcott's Way: Do you know where you are? At a crossroads in the Moonlight*. p.112-113.
- 28 PATRICK TAYLOR, *Narrative, Pluralism, and Decolonization: Recent Caribbean Literature*, *College Literature* Vol. 20, N. 3, Oct. 92-Feb. 93, p. 79.

- 29 ROBERT TAYLOR, DEREK WALCOTT, *Crisis (The New)*, Vol. 106, N. 3, May-June 1999, p. 31.
- 30 DEREK WALCOTT, *op .cit.*, p. 304.
- 31 FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 211.
- 32 DEREK WALCOTT, *op .cit.*, p. 304.
- 33 TEJUMOLA OLANIYAN, *op .cit.*, p. 103.
- 34 PATRICK TAYLOR, *op .cit.*, p. 214.

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