

Analysis: Black Skin, White Masks – Frantz Fanon.

Skin colour has a great role in identifying a person's culture. This significant concept is upheld by Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Being a victim of racial discrimination, Fanon writes his experiences to demonstrate how his colour was a major contender in identifying himself in a world dominated by white people. Living in both the colonial and post-colonial era, he writes about oppressing nature of the whites against non-white people just by considering the historical racial schema. In his words, it is evident how much he wants to eradicate this irrational dominance of white people which started by enslaving his ancestors decades before.

Even though the world has evolved very much, non-whites experience this discrimination in one way or the other, if it was in the form of enslavement then, it takes various other forms now. In the contemporary world, while accepting the shameful truth of people who haven't really moved on from treating black people as inferior, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* has much importance as it had back at its time. However, this paper tries to critically analyze this book while shifting the focus to its fifth chapter "The Fact of Blackness" And tries to answer the question "What relevance, according to Fanon, 'blackness' has in determining a person's identity? How does he try to tackle this issue?"

Skin colour and identity.

Firstly, Fanon argues that society has made a direct relation between skin colour and identity. A person with black skin at first is not identified by the place he came from nor the language he

speaks instead it is solely dependent on his colour. Thus, all the people who had more melanin on their body (blacks) are segregated into one group and are treated as inferior to the whites; which defies the fact all human beings are equal. In this scenario, where self-consciousness/ identity is imposed on blacks by the white society, Fanon struggles to find his true self. Whereas, he only finds a self that was already drafted by the white people, a self that is imposed on him for being black. He writes “in the white man’s world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness.” (Fanon, 83) For finding the relevance of blackness and countering it with his rational arguments, Fanon writes as if it was like a journey, a journey in search of self-consciousness.

The Train incident.

Fanon shares a painful experience on a train journey. “‘ Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’ Frightened! Frightened!” (Fanon, 84) While traveling a white kid gets terrified of Fanon as he was black, that’s where his blackness took over while he lost control over his identity. The kid doesn’t know who he was nor talk to him but still, he was being afraid of Fanon just because he was black. Society has made an identity for the blacks with which the kid hallucinated in his encounter with Fanon. It is evident through this incident that the stories, myths, and folks about the black have played their part well and sound. “I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity, which I had learned about from Jaspers” (Fanon, 84) The kid has heard a lot which made him feel whatever Fanon was doing was offensive to him. “The little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with

rage” (Fanon, 86) He never got a chance to express himself to the rest of the world, making him question himself- Was he a black man in these stories? The black man who was being portrayed as barbaric for decades? At this moment, Fanon fails to identify himself “Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? ‘A Martinican, a native of ‘our’ old colonies.’ Where shall I hide?” (Fanon, 85) He says that his blackness caught him between two frames:

1. A frame of his ancestors- which no longer exists as the white men forced them to eradicate their customs and habits as a part of their civilizing mission.
2. The frame of the white society- which discriminates against him and treats him as inferior to them. (Mohring)

Being stuck in the middle of nowhere, he compares the problems caused by his blackness in his identity to the situation of the Jews as he quotes Sartre of how Jews have fallen into the trap that was meant for them. “” They [the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype. . . .”” (Fanon, 85) But still, Fanon feels that their (Jews) case is not entirely similar to his; he argues that, unlike Jews, he is not given any chance. And that’s where he began to look for a solution to this discrimination. He no longer wanted his blackness to constitute anything in determining his identity. He writes “since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known.” (Fanon, 87)

Fanon’s arguments.

After all of these bad experiences, Fanon decides to raise his voice rationally to claim that black people are not inferior to white. He quotes philosophers and politicians to support his claim. He argues that the myths regarding black people are illogical and seemingly outdated now. He points

out how illogical whites are by illustrating an example of a coloured physician: “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? As long as everything went well, he was praised to the skies, but look out, no nonsense, under any conditions! The black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace.” (Fanon, 88) He conveys how the whites use them for their benefits while having the same idea of domination. But even though he used the aid of philosophers, provided rational arguments, proved all myths as a lie, he couldn’t bring these two races together. As a result, he failed his first attempt to find a solution for the problem of black people. “There will always be a world – a white world – between you [the black man] and us [the white people]” (Fanon, 92)

Fanon and Negritude.

As the last thread to catch up his dream of living among men equally, he identified Negritude in the same boat. He finds the Negritude movement as something that will empower his hands to make a change. An independent equal world with self-determination, self-reliance, self-respect were some common objectives before them. “From the opposite end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me. Negro sculpture! I began to flush with pride. Was this our salvation?” (Fanon, 93) Fanon described this movement as salvation, the salvation of a failed black man who had strived for equality and fought against discrimination with his rational arguments. However, Fanon realized at a certain point in time that he is not the correct fit for this movement; the people are too primitive to stand and organize a movement in the contemporary world. Fanon quotes some of the concepts of Negritude “Black Magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism, it all floods over me.” (Fanon, 96) He then declares that he is reluctant to commit

towards the movement which made him fall into a vacuum; between Negritude and the White society.

Did his search for self-consciousness get him into a loop where he always falls in between two contradicting bodies? At first, he was between two frames: the frame of his ancestors and the white society. But even further he falls in between Negritude and white people. He leaves his readers thinking as his pursuit for self-consciousness doesn't have a conclusion. Is it because he is left unanswered that he writes "The black man wants to be like the- white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white...black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man.." (Fanon, 228).

Conclusion.

In conclusion, even though Fanon gets to the point from where he has started; stuck in a loop, he was able to convey the relevance of 'blackness' in determining a person's identity. His experiences in the train show how much a black person suffers to find his/ her own identity in society. Despite being unable to find a solution, Fanon has shown to the world that no whites are superior. In his method of writing rational arguments and supporting them with quotes and poems of other texts has at least made an understanding that both the two cultures: the white and the black are not dominant to one another. Thus Fanon's search for his identity cannot be concluded as an utter failure, instead, it has led people to draw parallels in their personal lives too.

References.

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- Mohring, Manuel. "Glossary entry: Black Skin, White masks." Universitat St. Gallen. 8th Jan. 2017.