

A Frantz Fanonian Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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Abstract

Although the postcolonial reading of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* has been dissected by various points of view, they have failed to use post-colonial writers like Frantz Fanon to examine how far Achebe and Fanon meet and differ in their analysis of colonialism. The researcher will analyze how colonialism destroys the colonized culture, language, education, law, psyche and religion leading to their mimicry, disorientation and rootlessness. Overall, *Arrow of God* will be analyzed in the light of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* written in 1952 and 1961 respectively.

Student of Aimé Césaire, Marxist psychologist Frantz Fanon (20 July 1925 – 6 December 1961) was born in Martinique in a middle class black bourgeoisie family. His father was a government official and his Alsatian mother kept a shop. His groundbreaking anti- colonial writings remain *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* written in 1952 and 1961 respectively. *Black Skin* (originally published in French as *Peau noire, masques blancs*) deals with the clinical and psychological study of the colonial effects on the psyche of both the colonized and the colonizers. He examines the colonized situations of all the blacks of this world and cries against the superiority complex of whites who condemns blacks as jungle savage (5).

The present researcher in this paper excoriates the colonial gaze. As a result of this gaze the black natives in order to keep their inferiority complex at bay adopt the mother country language and it leads to a scenario where he becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (9). In "The Negro and Language", Fanon quotes Professor D. Westermann, who avers:

The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the Native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a

European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements. (qtd. in *Black Skin* 14)

Hence, the colonized adopts mimicry as he assimilates his own race with backhandedness and concludes that the more one is close to the white man, the more they have status.

Fanon cites the various samples of Eurocentric gaze. Gordon propounds that blacks have 14.8 percent inferior brain than whites. Similarly, Sir Alan Burns notes that black men are inherently inferior to the white (qtd. in *Black Skin* 18). Césaire is reviewed by Charles-André Julien as “a Negro poet with a university degree” or “a great black poet”. Significantly, the emphasize is on colour not on his intellect.

As the whites are keeping the blacks under scrutiny, the blacks are suffering from inferiority complex. “The woman of color and the white man” establishes the premise that black women who are bleaching skin and dreaming of magically turning white seek white men with blue eyes, blond hair and light skin (29) as they discern that black is a curse unlike white, the symbol of daylight, virtue and beauty (31). One woman called Mayotte Capecia even feels proud that her grandmother was white (32). The Negro women suffer from neurotic orientation as they hate black men as savages and live in an illusionary Cinderella like world. “Affective erethism” (42) occurs as black women feel the need of the admittance into the white world. In a similar manner, whites because of their superiority complex also develop neurotic orientation (43). Because of all these gaps, both races suffer from neurosis according to psychoanalytic study.

The white panoptical gaze which grants no agency to the black men make them marry white women, the emblem of white culture, white beauty, white whiteness (45) in “The man of Color and the white Woman”. As long as white man ruled the world, white woman flesh was not permitted to black men. In copulating, the blacks are taking revenge on white woman for everything that her ancestors have inflicted on them throughout the centuries (50). It is not love but a way to elevate oneself and to get statuesque to the white man’s level, the master illustrious race. It is a ritual of initiation into manhood (52) and a way to be subject, not the other (55). The researcher feels this is really a sad picture where marriages are not based on love rather anger.

Fanon objects to the colonial gaze of M. Mannoni in “The So-called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples” who posits that the inferiority complex among Malagasies are not high but Fanon counters it by highlighting that two hundred whites in Martinique consider themselves superior to 300,000 people of color and in South Africa there are two million whites

against almost thirteen million native people, and it has never occurred to a single black to consider himself superior to a member of the white minority (qtd. in *Black Skin* 68).

In “The Fact of Blackness” chapter Fanon shares his bitter experience when a white boy felt terrified after seeing him, a Nigger (84). The western panoptical gaze calls Negro sin, bad, mean, an animal and ugly. Locked in an infernal circle, one Negro hates another and that is why horrified Fanon wants to bring an end to all such Negro savages, brutes, illiterate myth (88). To enslave the world as masters, the whites say that Negroes are cannibals. Both Ante-Semite and Ante-Negroes are nonexistent to whites. Fanon who is proud of his race asserts “I was not a primitive, not even a half-man, I belonged to a race that had already been working in gold and silver two thousand years ago” (99). In this way, he denounces the deceptive Europeans.

The whites use literary device such as writing to belittle the blacks. “The Negro and Psychopathology” monitors that colonizers release their aggression on the blacks through magazines, comic books and Tarjan stories where Negroes are shown as wolf, devil, evil spirit and the bad man (113). Ironically, black children identify themselves with the explorer, the bringer of civilization and the white man carrying white truth. The occidentals are not correct as they say that in the collective unconscious of homo occidentalis, the black symbolizes darkness, immorality, wretchedness, death, war and famine (148). The dichotomy is not true - justice, good, truth, virginity are white but Satan is black. A Negro is a victim of the white civilization who calls them a biological-sexual-sensual-genital nigger (156).

Fanon in “The Negro and Recognition” captures the Negroes who want to be, to emerge and to elevate their ego and be recognized. Tearing off the blanket of the colonial gaze, they seek love, freedom, generosity, no degradation and no exploitation (193). In the concluding chapter “By Way of Conclusion”, Fanon identifies that fighting against hunger, misery and exploitation is the only solution for sugar plantation workers. Voting for equality, his ultimate prayer for the blacks is to question all the beastliness of the white men and to know that black is not an inferior race so that they do not dishonor their own race by imitating whites.

Regarding this book, Feminist critics take issues with Fanon as they condemn him for not granting women of colour any agency. Bart Moore-Gilbert proposes that this book discriminates between the experiences of men and women of colour (qtd. in Sardar XII). Nonetheless, Sharpley Whiting thinks feminist critics have circumscribed Mayotte Capecia’s agency more than Fanon (qtd. in Frindéthié 211). The researcher negates Moore-Gilbert as well

as detects that Fanon is not demeaning women as he was writing in a period where awareness about the usage of gender neutral language has not occurred.

Published in French as *les damnés de la Terre* in the year of Fanon's death 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth* (hereafter referred to as WE) criticizes colonialism. The colonial gaze of French against Algerian revolution from 1954 to 1962 influenced Fanon who was practicing in Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital of Algeria to such an extent that he felt it his duty to attack colonialism. Divided into six chapters-“Concerning Violence”, “Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weakness”, “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, “On National Culture”, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” and “Conclusion”, the book recognizes the calamity of lumpenproletariat or the underprivileged sections of the society during and after colonialism.

In the first place, Fanon establishes the thesis that decolonization which means the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men is always a violent phenomenon (35). He believes that as the colonized states were maintained by genocide and extermination by guns and machines of policeman and soldier, it is a necessity that it will take violence to reverse this power relationship. The totalitarian colonial lens paints the native as evil (32), a bestial animal and the church teaches the ways to the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. The land for the colonized peasants remains their bread, their survival and in revolting they have nothing to lose but everything to gain, for example, freedom in Indochina, Indonesia, North Africa and so on (66). Fanon adds “Europe is literally the creation of the Third world” (81) and by using violence the blacks are cleansing their lands from murderous foreigners.

In the second place, Fanon divulges that the “flesh-eating animals” (154) or elite intellectual national bourgeoisie dresses and speaks like Europeans and they betray the national heritage by not putting their theoretical knowledge to the service of the inferior, jungle peasant people (89). These betrayers promote internal civil war to strengthen their power. Decolonization does not end the problems of the proletariat as bourgeoisie looks down upon their own race. Anti-democratic regime can be sorted if, Fanon counsels, policies are made for the masses. The party should be the direct expression of the masses as the land belongs to those who till it.

In the third place, Narcissistic European historians propagate that colonialism came to lighten the darkness of the barbaric indigenous people. In order to turn aside such fake fairy tales, colonized must build up national consciousness. Thereby, African-Negro culture must uphold the people's struggle for freedom, the “literature of combat” (193). Fanon thinks that

colonial administration harvests the germs of mental trauma in both the colonizers and the colonized. He urges all brothers and comrades of colonized countries “Let us decide not to imitate Europe” (252). Fanon imparts the desire to create heritage, individuality and status of all the colonized nations of this world.

This book has been reviewed in many ways. Ngutor Sambre, Tarungwa Akpoo and Alakali Terfa Kingsley connect Fanon with Marxist Karl Marx as both seek for a “better society” (16) without inequality, exploitation, suppression and oppression. Dennis Forsythe delineates dissimilarities between Karl Marx and Fanon. While Marx stressed the rise of private property as the original sin in world history and his center of focus was Europe, Fanon focuses on slavery and colonialism of the third world (167). He uses examples of Che Guevera and Mao T'se who think that only armed struggle can bring about the defeat of the occupying nation (qtd. in Forsythe 169). Although Fanon's ideas are in stark contrast with the non-violence proprietors like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the researcher favours violence as a necessary step to stop the panoptical gaze of whites. Edmund Burke III likes Fanon's criticism of bourgeois nationalism (133) and the present researcher believes that Fanon should be given credit for revealing the true picture of the corrupted bourgeoisie.

The researcher assents with Nguyen Nghe who tells that the peasant alone cannot develop a revolutionary consciousness, the urban militant must help them to do so (qtd. in Jinadu 294). Nghe also accuses Fanon for failing to distinguish between proletariat elements such as dockers and miners and petty-bourgeois groups such as interpreters, taxi-drivers, and clerks. Instead, Fanon had put all of them into one homogeneous group-the proletariat (qtd. in Jinadu 295). Colin Leys puts forward Fanon's inability to differentiate between the hard-core corrupted Lumpen-proletariat and the migrant peasants (qtd. in Jinadu 294) who are between town and country all the time. While Marx considered lumpen-proletariat to be the lowest, most degraded stratum of the social class, especially criminals, vagrants, alcoholics, thugs, and unemployed (qtd. in Sambre, Akpoo, and Kingsley 16), Fanon uses this term to identify colonial subjects.

Even though Fanon has been reproved for advocating violence, Simone de Beauvoir in her autobiography recalls the pain which Fanon experiences at the contemplation of the results of violence, whether inflicted by the enemy or his own side (qtd. in Martin 383). Lewis R. Gordon thinks Fanon is not the harbinger of violence (83). Tony Martin comments:

Colonialism itself is the incarnation of violence. It is imposed and sustained by fire and sword, and Fanon can't bring himself to believe that such a situation can be changed fundamentally by inviting the Queen to preside over a flag-raising ceremony. The only road to real freedom is by making a clean break with colonialism. And a clean break necessitates violence. (391-392)

The writer of this paper prescribes with Fanon who battles for violence to decolonize the lands of the colonized. To the researcher, the book lays the claim that revolution is necessary to assert liberty from the pent up frustration and confined subservient status. Fanon is right as the peasants need to stand against injustice. This is what all colonies have done for their rights. War is aggressive but if it is the only way to achieve freedom then the natives are left with no choice but to use violence to counter violence.

Arrow of God

The encounter between the colonizers and the colonized in 1920s is reenacted in *Arrow of God* (mentioned hereafter as AOG). This novel was published in 1964 and this time it is Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu in Umuaro who will be sacrificed by the arrow of the god of the colonizers. Ezeulu has sent his son Oduche to learn the wisdom of the whites out of fear that the colonizers will thwart them soon. Oduche tries to kill the sacred python and this worsens Ezeulu's relationship with his opponents Nwaka and Ezidemili, the leader of the python and the chief priest of Idemili in-respect, as both blame him for advocating Christianity. The democratic TFA pre-colonial society has disintegrated into communal war and Europeans are actively participating into their judiciary cases. When white Winterbottom wants him to become the chief of the indirect rule policy, he rejects it and this leads to his imprisonment. In jail he cannot announce the date of the yam harvest. Upon release, he decides to delay it. Disgruntled natives who are on the verge of famine get annoyed with Ezeulu. The nascent whites who have previously forced free labour on Umuaro labourers and even beaten workers take this as an opportunity to convert the whole village into Christianity to strengthen their power over the whole Igbo tribe. Eventually, whites again are the victors as the colonized fall apart.

Arrow of God in the light of Frantz Fanon

Fanon is right that "white men consider themselves superior to black men" (*Black Skin* 3). Mr Wright who denounces blacks as bone lazy, loyal as "pet dogs" (77) and those who only responds to severe handling birches Obika for being late though whipping is not a justifiable

way. He defames the African workers as “black monkeys” (83). He is not punished for such an offence by his colonial official friend Clarke who makes no inquiries about this illegal labour.

Eurocentric mindset that Africans are “jungle savage” (*Black Skin* 5) which Fanon disapproves a lot is prominent in the tone of Captain Winterbottom who is ridiculous of his servant Boniface whom he calls as “raw” (36). He makes fun of tribes whom he denigrates as great liars like children with no idea of ages (39). Known as Otiji-Egbe, the breaker of guns (38), he exercises immense power over the Okperi and Umuaro war crushing the judiciary of the Igbo tribe by giving the controversial land to Okperi as they support whites unlike backward Umuaro. The book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (33) of *Things Fall Apart* gets its author here called George Allen. Winterbottom has read this book and also given it to Clarke for further reading. Although Clarke censures the book as “dull” (33) and “smug” (34), he is reading it. This ratiocinates that the language is a tool to instigate colonialism. The chapter heading of Allen’s book is “The Call” (34). It is the bell for the west to civilize the backward races. This is an apt illustration of the unfounded tall story of occidentals. Skeptical of the Igbo who have not developed any central authority (38), Winterbottom fails to understand the complex indigenous Igbo governance with elders or *ndichie* of the clan.

Contrasting French rule based on teaching French culture to backward Africans with that of the English who secures “old savages”(37) to the throne, Winterbottom supposes that the English race is giving Africans space to flourish which in reality is not happening. In both French and English rule, blacks are losers. He is also boastful of the punitive expedition to kill the “unco-operative” (109) Abame clan who are still wild. Fanon has talked about violent “decolonization” (WE 35) and here when Abame individuals try to fight against vicious colonizers to decolonize their lands, the whites use more bestiality to outflank them. “We must not destroy the African atmosphere, the Africa mind, the whole foundation of his race...”(57) is the slogan of the whites who are involved in the crush of indigenous governance, religion, culture, mind, education and also recognition as in the case of Igbo Nwabueze who became “Johnu” (171) as he starts working in a white household.

Describing Ezeulu as impressive because of his “light complexion” (39) like “terracotta” (10) only disentombs Winterbottom’s racial mentality. He is enraged to such an extent that he signs an arrest warrant and sends two policemen to arrest Ezeulu who decides not

to meet Winterbottom in Okperi. Although previously he has suggested Ezeulu to send his son to learn white man's wisdom and admired Ezeulu for speaking truth in Okperi and Umuaro collision, he now tries to know nothing about Ezeulu's choice. Ironically, Ezeulu is wrong when he thinks that Wintabota has "good intentions" (177) but his intermediaries have done all the misdeeds. Clarke glows with "I-Know-this-will-Knock-you-over feeling of a benefactor" (175) as he proposes the job of warrant chief to Ezeulu. When Ezeulu declines the offer, Clarke castigates the priest ship of Ezeulu as "witch-doctor" (179) thus further uncovering the British racism. In fact, Wright's physical relationship with native women further strips the sheer misuse of Africans, in this case African women become the products of sexual pleasures of the Europeans.

Colonialism takes a heavy toll on Africans who want to get rid of their African "jungle" (*Black Skin* 9). Religious ideology of African Christian Goodcountry who thinks that the early Christians of Umuaro has fought against the bad customs of Umuaro people and python should be killed explains the total damage of African psyche by the colonizers. Warrant chief James Ikedi is a product of this colonial system. In spite of the fact that Winterbottom, Clarke and Wright are all divorced from lawfulness, they are critical of Ikedi who has set up an illegal court and a private prison and he develops amoral relationship with all women who catch his fancy without paying the customary bride-price. He not only intimidates the villagers that if they fail to give him money, the new road will pass through the middle of their compound but also demolishes three compounds even to raise his illegal tax. Growing of mushroom kings like "His Highness Ikedi the First, Obi of Okperi" (59), which Ikedi calls himself is closely concomitant with his desire to copy the western system of monarchy. "They all manage to turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. It seems to be a trait in the character of the negro" (109) is European panoptical gaze though the lawlessness of west is itself responsible for the birth of Ikedi. Significantly, despite his Christian education, he is involved in corruption.

Fanon resists lose of African identity and thus pleas "let us decide not to imitate Europe" (WE 252). But like Goodcountry and Ikedi, Nwabueze also becomes a mimic man. He has to change his name to Johnu to work as a house servant in a white house for money. What is sarcastic is that instead of feeling proud that Umuaro people are not supporting whites, he feels "shame" (171) as Umuaro has no share in the market and office of colonizers. He wants to bring his clan in front of the white man which shows that copying the Europeans bear status in his eye.

The Fanonian discourse concerning language of the colonizers as the source of power is patent here as Ezeulu wants his son to write with the left hand and speak English like Moses Unachukwu. Likewise, Oduche sits apart from his other family members during the orature session while learning alphabets from “Azụ Ndu” (192). Contrary to Moses Unachukwu, Oduche justifies the killing of python as “It is not true that the Bible does not ask us to kill the servant. Did not God tell Adam to crush its head after it had deceived his wife?”(50). The incident where all children clap for him attests the educational ideology which has completely taken over the traditional Igbo religion. He tries to kill the python. In effect, Oduche is culturally alienated from participating in the sacrificing marriage ritual and he wears loincloth of toweling material, keeps a slate, chalk, white singlet and highly valued wooden box unlike other heathen children. Ugoye’s oral folktale is placed alongside Oduche’s learning of the alphabet to manifest his solitude within the community (George 356). Finally, Oduche fails to inform his father about the Christian move to harvest the yams in the name of Christianity. This specifies that Oduche’s mind has been absolutely despoiled by the colonial education. The disoriented fragmented world of Oduche makes him desire to know Christianity thoroughly to become a “great man in Umuaro” (47). English carries such power that the Igbo people who came to arrest Ezeulu talks among themselves in English to display their superiority over the colonized.

In relation to the psychological turmoil as a corollary to colonial rule which Fanon has discussed in *Black Skin, White Masks* we espy the disorientation of Ezeulu. Madness has been constantly referred to in this novel in connection to Ezeulu whose mother Nwanyieke has suffered from madness. Colonialism leads to psychological turmoil of Ezeulu when he refuses to be the mimic man of colonial indirect rule policy. During this jail infringement, he visualizes that his native people are against his grandfather saying “He shall not speak; we will not speak to him” (160). They want to drive away his grandfather like the neighbours of Aninta who burnt Ogba and soon Ezeulu sees himself instead of his grandfather and some spit on his face and call him the priest of the dead god (161). This dream prophecies the cataclysm which will soon take over Ezeulu. Weighed against Nwaka, Ezeulu sums up that it is a fight of the gods and he is no more than “an arrow in the bow of his gods” (193). As his six villages blame him for supporting the white decision in the Okperi and Umuaro land debate and they have allowed the white man to take him away, he now wants to “wrestle”(181) with them. Although his ten tribe members assure him that they will carry the abomination on their heads, Ezeulu remains firm in his

conviction. Sola Soile accuses Ezeulu because he has forgotten that “revenge is not justice but an unreasonable human retribution which has a way of getting out of proportion to the original offence and thereby constituting a new crime” (294).

Surprisingly, Ezeulu who intended to adopt to the changing world before is ultimately interested in pursuing the “religious order of his society” (Mathuray 51). Thus, his inflexibility and his relying on the religious deity Ulu culminates to his doom when his own pastoral people blame him as the demented, headstrong and ambitious priest, the cultural other.

Fanon is right when he supposes that the whites create phobogenic (*Black Skin* 117) blacks. Fear of the British is mixed with the psyche of these pastoral inhabitants in such a way that they stop their Okperi and Umuaro war when Winterbottom orders them. Apprehension that white man will take over the land and rule over them compels Ezeulu to send Oduche to white man’s religion. Moses Unachukwu screams to Obika “Are you mad to attack a white man” (83). The countrymen are agitated that if Ezeulu refuses to meet Winterbottom, the whites will take all their leaders to Okperi prison and can kill them like Abame people. No one militate against the whites here unlike the protagonist Ezeulu at the end.

It is a matter to note that none comprehends the agitation of Ezeulu. Nwaka reasons that Ezeulu is as proud as a “lunatic” (178) and by the same token, Ogbuefi Ofoka speculates that Ezeulu has caught his mother’s sickness (214). His wives are harassed in the market. Many neighbouring people sell yams to grow fat out of Umuaro’s misfortune as kinship bonding has been wrecked. His dream that his whole compound is vacant is a presentiment of his own debacle. The death of Obika acts as an augury that the chief priest has been punished by god. Obika acts as the *ogbazulobodo* which in Igbo epithet means the one who runs around the village or the one who runs as protector for the village (George 357). His death documents that no one can save Igbo from the whites. With the dethronement of Ezeulu and the outbreak of famine, the six villages began to sacrifice yam in the name of Christianity. “Thereafter any yam harvested in the fields was harvested in the name of the son” (232) unburies the fact that colonizers have succeeded to get total foothold in the Igbo land. Significantly, Ezeulu, Oduche and Obika are all devoured while the new cycle of Yam harvest in the name of Christianity desecrates the Igbo religion profoundly.

Conclusion

In summary, Fanon refutes the colonial gaze and Achebe exhibits in *Arrow of God* the false Eurocentric believes of the Winterbottom, Clarke and other British colonizers. The indirect rule colonial policy subdues the religious power of Ezeulu which in turn completely ruins his mental universe as well as his authority in the Igbo land. Fanon believes that colonized people must not imitate the occidentals and Achebe draws the turmoil of hybrid Nigerians like Goodcountry, Johnu and others who are mimic man of the west. All-inclusive, Fanon correctly showcases the colonial mistreatment of the colonized in his two books and thus Achebe succeeds in fictionalizing Fanon's ideas in *Arrow of God* to a great extent.

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