

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

October 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-V

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

African Culture across the World Frantz Fanon's *On National Culture*

Sayar Singh Chopra

&

Devendra Kumar Gora

M.Phil. Scholar

Centre for Comparative Literature

School of Languages, Literature and Culture

Central University of Punjab, Bathinda India

'Culture' is a way of life, the custom, beliefs and art, way of life in social organization of a particular community, country and group. European, Islamic, African, American etc. culture is divided by religion and economic power. For example upper-class culture, middle class culture, ethnic, minorities groups culture and low class culture. Art, music, literature are parts of culture, for example the upper classes in a society legitimized certain artifacts as culture. Some objects- a painting by M.F. Hussein the writings of Nobel Prize winner Rabindra Nath Tagore and William Shakespeare the film of Satyajit Ray acquired an aura of respectability as culture. In *Culture and society*, According to Raymond Williams, the idea of "Culture" developed in England when two forces (Democracy and Industrialism) were undermining traditional notions of both. Raymond Williams, the brilliant English Marxist and cultural materialist, has convincingly argued that the historical range, conceptual depth and textural quality designated by the concept of literature, political, economic and historical factor. In this paper I have taken Black African English writer Frantz Fanon literary text "On National Culture".

The structure of African literature consists of several major components. Literature written by blacks and whites (mostly of English ancestry) in the English language; literature written by mostly white Afrikaners and some so-called Coloureds (people of mixed class and community) in the Afrikaans language; and literature written exclusively by blacks in the various African native languages for example, (Zulu, Sona, Giku, Urba, Xhosa, Sothe, Venda, Ndebele, etc.), which is contiguous to oral literature realized in these languages. This elementary breakdown of the unified structure of South African literature clearly indicates the complex nature of African national literature.

According to S.T. Coleridge; *Religious Musings and Kubla Khan*, Make the key distinction between "civilization" and "culture". Coleridge uses the word "Civilization" to describe the general progress of society and he used the word "Culture" to express a standard of perfection independent of the progress of society. [96-99]

According to Matthew Arnold, our cultures depend largely on religious beliefs because our human society is divided into different religious community. All of the communities are divided into religious rule. Popular culture is a part of religious.

According to Karl Marx; Culture depends upon our "Class" and "Economic" condition. Because economic factor is an important part of human social life. According to Homi K. Bhabha; "culture Diversity and Different", "Location of Culture", Cultural diversity is an epistemological construct—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the principle of culture as "knowledgeable," and systems of cultural identification.

As we know African culture, Literature and language may be divided into following parts.

- (1) African literatures written by Westerners in Western languages.
- (2) African literatures written by Africans in Western language.
- (3) African literatures written by Africans in African language.
- (4) African oral traditions.

Representation of postcolonial African culture identity is re-examined in the light of most of Wole Soyinka's major plays, novels and poetry. The role of African tradition has been central to debates about postcolonial African identity since the earliest days of missionary and colonial education. The concern with cultural conflict between the African and Western traditions was integral to the inaugural movement of African writing in English. It is this issue that frames Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), in which we are represented with a society whose values, seen as barbaric by the agents of colonialism-missionaries, and functionaries of the colonial government are marginalised within the colonial symbolic order. For Achebe the role of the African writer is to recover the lost value of the African golden past culture, showing that Africans did not first hear of culture, from Europe and that the pre-colonial African was not just one long night of savagery.

Frantz Fanon was born in 1925, in a middle class family in the French West Indian island colony of Martinique. Fanon left France for Algeria, where he had been stationed for some time during the war. In that time all African countries were suffering under the French and British colonial power. He was a social psychologist and a psychiatrist at Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital. It was there that he radicalized methods of treatment. In particular, he began socio-therapy which connected with his patients' cultural backgrounds. Fanon made extensive trips across Algerian culture to study psychological life of Algerians.

In December 1958 he attended the historic All-African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana, which was convened by the then prime minister and leader of the ruling Convention People's Party, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Fanon was later invited to relocate to Accra as a permanent representative for the Algerian National Liberation Front. His experiences in Ghana as well as Tunisia during this time shaped his observations related to the post-colonial period. Fanon saw the ideological and political bankruptcy of the post-colonial ruling elite who constituted the dominant social class within many of the nationalist parties which led the fight for independence.

The ideas of Frantz Fanon played an instrumental role in revolutionizing the U.S. Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee studied Fanon, and his influence was also profound within the Black Panther Party. Before he left France, Fanon had already published his first analysis of the effects of racism and colonization, *Black Skin White Masks* was published in England in 1967. This shows the influence of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jacques Lacan (1919-1990) and Alfred Adler (1870-1937). The philosophic writings of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) were also crucial to the development of Fanon's thought about race and identity. Fanon's second work *A Dying Colonialism* (1959) the current English title phrase suggests, the study will focus on the 150 years long French occupation of Algeria, and that colonization will expire of natural causes. Fanon's third work *The Wretched of the Earth*, who was published in 1961, is ambitious, brilliant, and disturbing. He was taken to Washington in late 1961 and died there in December of that year at the age of thirty-six. Widely considered Fanon's most important work, it gathers theory and issues from his earlier writing racial identity formation, analysis of colonialism,

history, narrative of liberation, critiques of Manichean thinking political prophesy and extends them to the phenomenon of decolonization, particularly as it affects African nations. Although other African countries gained independence without killing and violence during that period. Early in 1958 Fanon started speaking on behalf of African independence movements and travelled around the continent. He served as an ambassador for the Algerian rebel movement's provisional government, traveling to Ghana for the All-African Peoples' Conference of 1958, and circulating through the French colonies and former colonies of West Africa. As David Diop represents the childhood memory of Fanon's life.

“Africa my Africa
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children
Africa tells me Africa.” [153]

An anti-Colonial Black writer, Fanon is an important figure in this regard. Fifty years after his death, what remains most alive in Frantz Fanon's theory of cultural signification—enables us to see the necessity of theory and the restrictive notions of cultural identity. For Fanon, the black “people” who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity. They are caught up in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation, as he writes in *“Wretched of the Earth”*.

“...we have seen that the whites were used to putting all Negroes in the same bag. During the first congress of the African Cultural Society which was held in Paris in 1956, the American Negroes of their own accord considered their problems from the Same standpoint as those of their African brothers. Cultured Africans, Speaking of African civilization, decreed that there should be a reasonable status within the state for those who had formerly been slaves. But little by little the American Negroes realized that the essential problems confronting them were not the same as those that confronted the African Negroes. The American Negroes realized that the objective problem were fundamentally heterogeneous. The test cases of civil liberty where by both whites and blacks in America try to drive back racial discrimination has very little in common in their principles and objectives with the heroic fight of the Angolan people against the detestable Portuguese's Colonialism Thus during the second congress of the African Cultural Society the American Negroes decided to create an American society the people of black cultures.” (167-168)

In the 1950 and 1960s a change in focus came about in cultural analysis. African culture and identity are themes that have engaged Frantz Fanon's imagination the most and are among the most debated topics in academia today. Scholars challenge and compete with each other to produce intellectual frameworks and paradigms that best explain and speak to issues of identity and identity formation, change and continuity in knowledge systems, especially in the diaspora. He reminds us of some basic truth, that it is culture that gives people their identity and dignity.

Finally, he calls us to use African cultural principles to transform African people from being passive objects that only react to Western representations, into self-affirming subjects who are in charge of their destiny; and to mobilize an African collective conscience for the collective use of talents, resources and potential in order to guarantee continuity and survival. African

“national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture whose destruction is sought in systematic fashion. It very quickly becomes a culture condemned to secrecy” (Richard Grinker, Richard Grinker, and Christopher B. Steiner 493). This idea of culture is immediately seen in the reactions of the occupying power which interprets attachment to traditions as faithfulness to the spirit of the nation and as a refusal to submit. There is simply a concentration on a hard core of culture which is becoming more and more shrivelled up, inert and empty.

Frantz Fanon notes in his essay, “When the first demands for equality and dignity are raised by natives, the colonialist regime responds by feigning deep concern and implementing programs aimed at correcting injustices and abuses. But colonialism soon realizes it is incapable of creating programs of the magnitude to meet the expectations of the natives. It is this very attitude by the colonizers that supports the myth that all was darkness before the Europeans came and spread their culture and civilization” .But the discovery of one's own indigenous culture and the revival of artistic expression as a result is one powerful means of reclaiming some basic human dignity for the native, according to the psychiatrist. Fanon says a national identity in the wake of colonialism that put all black people into a single category in order to extinguish their individuality. As an example of how this process works, Fanon cites recent (in 1961) developments in the Arab world where the struggle against colonialism entails throwing off the veneer of Western culture which was implanted in minds of natives as superior to their own culture, just as is the case in other former colonies such as Algeria. Soon the native artist or writer, having discovered his or her cultural roots, realizes that their true vocation is to depict and refract the contemporary real from which the future independent state will develop. By the time a century or two of exploitation has passed there comes about a veritable system of the stock of national culture As he writes in *Wretched of the Earth*.

“A mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally Perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and From giving free reign to its evil instincts. To make Western cultures their own”. [147]

In these lines, Fanon says about to Algerian most natives are mad, bad and dangerous to know children. In contrast ‘native intellectuals’ educated in colonial schools to admire colonial values and serve the colonial regime act like “adopted children” eager for approval and trying to make Western religion and culture their own. Fanon’s views on the nature of the psychology of the oppressed were studied systematically in France and in Algeria.

Fanon first speech is related to national middle class who takes over power at the end of the colonial rule. Practically, this underdeveloped middle class has no economic power. Fanon’s second pointing out is the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions, and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country.

These Fanon’s speech will never be a single, global black culture because there is no politician with a mission to create black republics and "niggers are disappearing" as the dismantling of colonialism proceeds, according to Fanon. And, he says, there can be no hope for the spread of an African culture devoid of the struggle for liberation from colonialism in Africa. The beginnings of an authentic African culture can occur when native artists and writers throw off the secrecy of trying to create art in a colonialist society and imitating the art of the mother country. In that transition, the true native art begins to blossom when the artist addresses his own people, rather than the former colonial overlords, Fanon says. When new forms of expression

appear, white colonialists and cultural "experts" are mystified and try to find antecedents in the previous, white-influenced forms. Fanon draws a parallel with the explosion of be-bop on the American post-World War II jazz scene- intended for ballroom dancing, a music of anger and rebellion.

“American author Philip Roth references Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in his novel *American Pastoral*, including the work in a long list of revolutionary literature that the protagonist's daughter reads. Included in the novel is the famous passage from Fanon's work about Algerian women.” (71-72)

Salman Rushdie quotes Fanon in *The Satanic Verses* (23). The character Gibreel reference Fanon to express anti-British sentiment. American president Barack Obama writes that he has read Fanon in *Dreams from My Father*. "To avoid being mistaken for a sell-out, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active black student, The foreign students. The Chicanos, The Marxist Professors and the structural feminists and punk-rock performance poets. We smoked cigarettes and wore leather jackets. At night, in the dorms, we discussed neo-colonialism, Franz Fanon, Euro centrism, and patriarchy. When we ground out our cigarettes in the hallway carpet or set our stereos so loud that the walls began to shake, we were resisting bourgeois society's stifling constraints. We weren't indifferent or careless or insecure. We were alienated. (100–101)"

Works Cited:

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th Ed. New Delhi: Thomas Business International Press, 1999. Print.
- Bhabha K. Homi. “Culture Diversity and Different”, “Location of Culture”. London: Routledge Press, 1994. Print.
- Bhattacharji, Shobhana. ed. *The Romantics*. New Delhi: Doaba Publications, 2003. Print.
- Diop, David. *African Commonwealth Poetry*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Landon: Penguin books press, 2001. Print.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Gibson C. Nigel. *Living Fanon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2011. Print.
- John, Parker and Rathbone, Richard. *African History A Very Short Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Msiska, Mpalive Hansson. *Cross/Cultures 93 Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*. New York: Rodopi Publication, 2007. Print.
- Nayar, K. Pramod. *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2011. Print.
- Nayar, K. Pramod. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi: Pearson Press, 2011. Print.
- Richard Grinker, Stephen C. Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner. *Perspective on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation*, West Sussex: Black Well Publication, 2010. Print.
- Obama, Barack. *Dreams of My Father*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004. Print.
- Roth, Philip. *American Pastoral*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. Print.
- Salman Rushdie. *Satanic Verses*. New York: Penguin Publisher, 1988. Print.
- Smith, J. Mark. *Culture Reinventing the Social Sciences*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2005. Print.
- Watson, C.W.. *Multiculturalism*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2005. Print.

Wyrick, Deborah. *Fanon for Beginners*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Publication, 2003. Print.
Yousaf, Nahem. ed. *Chinua Achebe*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2010. Print.