

TRACING THE ROOTS OF RACISM THROUGH HISTORICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract

The reality of racism protrudes from the history of oppression of the African person. This is manifest in the Arab-slave trade, colonialism and even neo-colonialism. Frantz Fanon opines that racism is the core source of Africa's problems since it serves to heighten the esteem of the whites while inferiorising the Africans. Fanon suggests violence as a means of freeing oneself from this oppression and argues that if this violence is not vented onto the oppressor, the Africans end up venting it upon themselves causing civil wars and such other clashes. Ali Mazrui however opposes this concept of violence by citing some nations like in Algeria where it has actually benefited the oppressor (France) and not the oppressed. In any case, Mazrui agrees with Fanon that Africans need to define themselves and own their means of production to determine their direction as a people. This article offers a historical hermeneutics of racism in Africa in the mission to trace racism in the racial-schema that is a social construct of the oppressor's biases and prejudices for the economic and psychic ends, as claimed in the Critical Race Theory.

Key words: Racism, historical hermeneutics, slavery, pre-colonial, colonial and colonialism

Introduction

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.' - Frantz Fanon¹

Frantz Fanon believes that racism is a social construct that has been used to oppress and exploit the Black race for a long time in the human history.² However, racism is not the whole of the oppression structure rather the most conspicuous part of it.³ The aim of colonial structures and those of neo-colonialism as wings of racism is to establish and sustain a continued agony of the Africans.⁴ Africans in the diaspora and in the African continent have continued to experience racism in various ways, one of them being through slavery. Racism

¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 37.

² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88.

³ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press: New York, 1964), 32.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 34.

was non-existent in the African continent, until its contact with both the Europeans and Arabs, especially the former. In the pre-colonial period, Africans experienced racism through their forced trans-location from their motherland to the Americas and the Caribbean in the infamous Trans-Atlantic Trade. Africans also experienced racism in form of colonization and continue to have the same experience in its post-colonial period.

Indeed, many past acts of racism by the oppressor tend to be blanketed into forgetfulness, yet even today, they have remained vivid in the mind of the oppressed as a collective ego.⁵ In line with Fanon's historical hermeneutics of racism in Africa, Chinua Achebe insists that identifying the primary causes of our problems is ideal when he notes the Igbo proverb that 'A man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body.'⁶ The African malady, according to Achebe, owes its seeds in the slave trade, scramble and partitioning of Africa and colonialism.⁷ Above all, like Fanon, Achebe sees the failed modern African states as a result of the loss of the habit to rule themselves and the use of foreign systems of governance.⁸ This article sets forth therefore to trace the racial-historico schema of racism through the interpretation of the historical reality in the pre-colonial Africa, colonial, and post-colonial periods, all in relation to racism.

In relation to its main objective, this article has employed the Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to this idea, racism in our world is just how people generally treat Africans. As a result, racism has become so commonplace in our society that we sometimes fail to see it. Racism has been used to perceive Africans as being inferior, to enslave them, and enrich the White race materially at the expense of Africans. Racism has exhibited itself in the African continent in the pre-colonial Africa, colonial Africa and post-colonial Africa.

The supporters of Critical Race Theory (CRT), include Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and others⁹ believe that treating Africans with racism is the norm in our world today.¹⁰ As a result, racism has become more commonplace in our daily lives to the point that we occasionally fail to see it. However, racism is a manifestation of white domination that

⁵ Pieter Duvenage, *The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Apartheid*, in, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2004), 511.

⁶ Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (Penguin Press: New York, 2012), 1.

⁷ Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 1.

⁸ Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 2.

⁹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York University Press: New York, 2001), 2.

¹⁰ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 7.

elevates white pride while denigrating Africans. It also benefits whites monetarily while keeping blacks in poverty.¹¹ Thus, racism really has a financial motivation to favour and reward white people. The Critical Race Theory asserts that racism is a social construct, not a biological one¹² or ontological.

Pre-colonial Africa in Relation to Racism

Fanon is categorical that if a black person suffers an inferiority complex when encountering a white, it is because the society where the person lives in has made his inferiority complex possible.¹³ In traditional African societies, racism was non-existent. Racism was introduced into Africa by both the Europeans and Arabs. Prior to that, the concept and reality of racism did not exist in Africa and among Africans. According to W. E. Abrahams, Europeans were first to introduce racism into Africa when he indicates: “Europe brought racism into Africa.”¹⁴ This is not true because around the 7th century A.D., a significant part of African history that lasted for more than 13 centuries was the Arab slave trade. It started in the early seventh century and persisted into the 1960s in some capacity.¹⁵ Although the Islamic law provided some protection for the dignity of the slaves, the African slaves taken were castrated if they were men to be eunuchs while the females were sexually mistreated.¹⁶

Clearly, the Arabs exhibited racism to the Africans before the Europeans through slave trade. This means that first way, perhaps, in which both the Europeans and Arabs demonstrated their racism towards the Africans was through slave trade. Slave trade in particular, that one involving Europeans saw the forceful translocation of Africans from their motherland (Africa) to the Americas and to the Caribbean where they underwent untold inhumane sufferings because of their skin colour.

It is not that slave trade did not exist ‘locally’ in some parts of Africa, it did, but it was not based on race. Slaves existed in Africa,¹⁷ but they were not imported from Europe or America or anywhere outside their communities in Africa. They were ‘slaves’ in a different connotation, not of oppression but of specialization. Slaves were only doing their duties for the wellbeing

¹¹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 7.

¹² Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 7.

¹³ Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 100.

¹⁴ W. E. Abrahams, *The Mind of Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 160.

¹⁵ David Gakunzi, ‘The Arab-Muslim Slave Trade’ *Jewish Political Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2018), 40.

¹⁶ David Gakunzi, *The Arab-Muslim Slave Trade*, 40.

¹⁷ Michael Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.

of their families and societies. Cheikh Anta Diop in his *Pre-colonial Black Africa* gives an example of Senegal where slaves were part of the social stratification. According to Diop, when we look into the pre-colonial condition of Senegal, we observe that slaves and freemen, or *gor*, who included both *ger* and *nen*, made up the two social classes in the Senegalese society. The only manual occupation other than agriculture, which was regarded as a sacred activity, was practiced by all freemen and aristocrats who belonged to the *ger*.¹⁸ Although this seems to depict a kind of human oppression, nonetheless it was a social stratification that arose from division of labour and it had nothing whatsoever to do with racism. Diop continues by stating that the *nen* consisted of all artisans, including shoemakers, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths.¹⁹ So the caste system noted in Senegal before the colonial times elucidates the fact that they were called slaves because of their roles in the society.

It can be appreciated that this kind of stratification of people in their societies as servants, soldiers, and the like, was common in many human societies even outside Africa. But there is no society that underrated their fellow society members as incapacitated and less human. Yet this is the trend in the period of slave trade whereby the Africans were being lowered to an ontological deficit of humanity.²⁰ Frantz Fanon argues that enslavement is only possible with a foundation of constantly making a people feel lesser of themselves.²¹

Fanon is very much convinced that slave trade was key in the establishment of racism.²² Before the Africans' interaction with both the Europeans and Arabs, Africans had never experienced racism. Africans were working on gold and other minerals long before even the Europeans and Arabs invaded Africa to render Africans useless.²³ For example, Fanon highlights that the native people in the colonial times were not just described as valueless but as well declared insensible to ethics and were seen as the absolute evil.²⁴ Both the Europeans and Arabs expressed their racism inclinations in a practical way through slave trade. It is worth noting that prior to the encounter of Europeans and Arabs, there is documented evidence that

¹⁸ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Pre-colonial Africa* (Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1987), 1.

¹⁹ Diop, *Pre-colonial Africa*, 2.

²⁰ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 41.

²¹ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 40.

²² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 41.

²³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Skins*, 130.

²⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 41.

Africans had contacts with non-Africans, but they did not experience racism or made to feel that they were inferior.

Some of the ancient pharaonic tombs were found with archaeological evidences that there were contacts between the Egyptians, Palestinians, and the Spanish long before slave trade.²⁵ In line with this, Daniel Domingues informs us that the slave trade from West Africa assumed greater sociological, political, and economic heights with an essential impulse from the European industrialisation that demanded more imports of raw materials like agricultural produce from the Americas where the Africans were enslaved.²⁶ The labour was provided by the Africans who worked as slaves. As the Africans continued to overwork as slaves for their master (the Whites), a superiority complex was established in the whites and an inferiority complex in the Africans.²⁷

Visitors used to come to Africa from all over the world to marvel and witness Africa's grand progress in Egypt and other parts of Africa. Thales and Pythagoras marvelled at the progress that the Africans were making. Others came for trade like the Portuguese, Chinese, Persians, among others.²⁸ The problem of racism started when some of those visitors of Africa gradually started to envy Africa's resources, advanced skills, and progress. Instead of appreciating them, they now sought to be ruthless intellectual and property scavengers. They began to fashion an exploitative system that rendered the African race a global model of mockery.²⁹ The commercialization of slave trade opened this highway of intimidation and looting of Africa's dignity and property.

Gradually, racism was constructed as a kind of economic domination whereby one is rich by the fact of being white and another poor because of being black.³⁰ Supporting Fanon's view, Cheryl Harris, in her law review: *Whiteness as Property* informs us that racial identity was suffused with stratified social and legal status such that being black was synonymous to being enslaved and being white equated being free.³¹ So, the African person has been 'socially

²⁵ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 69.

²⁶ Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: from West Central Africa 1780-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 16.

²⁷ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 38.

²⁸ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena*, 69.

²⁹ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 38.

³⁰ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 40.

³¹ Cheryl Harris, Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993), 1718.

shaped' to be 'inferior' while the white oppressor is seen as 'superior'. This is what aggravated the appetite for more pride and dominance among the whites to the extent of scrambling and partitioning Africa later.

The outside world started now taking advantage of the Africans' hospitality.³² They came in the guise of evangelisation and gradually unfolded their aim of dominating Africa. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta notices how certain Europeans exploited religion as a weapon for racial discrimination as well as for looting African goods. According to Jomo Kenyatta, the Europeans ordered us to close our eyes and pray when they arrived in Africa, and when we opened them, they (the Europeans) had our lands and we had their Bibles.³³ When Cheryl says that the social interactions that established racial identity as a justification for slavery also had ramifications for the idea of property, she seems to be echoing Jomo Kenyatta's point. This outcome was inevitable since the institution of slavery, which was entwined with the concept of property and sat at the very foundation of economic interactions.³⁴ Thus, the Europeans as it will be seen in the next section were not tired of expressing their racism through slave trade, they now enslaved Africans in their own continent through colonisation³⁵ as well as tapping Africa's cornucopia of manpower, minerals, land, African markets, *et cetera*.

Europeans also used religion to propagate and justify racism.³⁶ They erroneously used the Bible³⁷ to claim that the Africans were descendants of Noah's cursed son, Ham. It is erroneous because in the first place Noah did not curse his son, but his grandson Canaan when he said: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers."³⁸ Canaan according to Biblical account was Ham's son. Although it was Canaan who was cursed, the Europeans overlooked him and claimed it was Ham. Secondly, in Hebrew, Ham's name means "dark or black." Some Europeans used the Hebrew meaning of Ham's name to claim and propagate that black was the colour of a cursed race to which Africans belong and thus used it to justify slave trade.³⁹ Contrary to this erroneous view, Biblical scholars point out that in order to justify why the Israelites conquered and enslaved the Canaanites, the author of the book of Genesis justified

³² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 41.

³³ Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1978).

³⁴ Cheryl, *Whiteness as Property*, 1718.

³⁵ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 41.

³⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 42.

³⁷ Genesis 9:18-27.

³⁸ Genesis 9: 24-25.

³⁹ A Commentary on African Bible, 36.

it by pointing out that it was as a result of Noah's curse.⁴⁰ Any rational person who reads this Biblical account will infer that it was the son's sinful act that was 'condemned' but not his color.

And still, even if Africans associate themselves with it, they learn that the issue of blackness as a curse is a lie since blackness is as a result of the environment, the heat of the areas around the equator especially.⁴¹ Moreover, the New Testament teaches us that every person is responsible⁴² for his/her actions and that no person shall be responsible of the sins of another. Consequently, if at all Noah's curse is binding; it should not be felt among the Africans of the New Testament as is the case.

Therefore, Europeans used slave trade to exhibit their racism.⁴³ On their part, they may claim that slave trade was beneficial to Africans, but this is not the case because the inferiorised Africans were made to imitate the oppressor in what Fanon calls the racial distribution of guilt.⁴⁴ This simply means that the Africans who sold their fellow Africans did so in the *persona* of the oppressor who mandated them directly or indirectly to do that. Moreover, it is a lie to say that the whites brought wealth to benefit Africans during the slave trade era. Africa already had her minerals, manpower, and other measures of wealth. Although the white people exchanged some wine and other consumer goods in exchange of the slaves, they took in return incommensurable amounts of gold, bronze, ivory, among other items.⁴⁵ The wine they gave those who were involved in the slave trade was basically out of the sweat of fellow Africans who were enslaved abroad in America or Europe working in the grape farms.

To say that slave trade benefited Africa is an attempt to justify the fiendish acts of the whites to exploit the Africans in the guise of trade. It is similar to justifying a contract that lacks sufficient consideration. The chiefs who sold some of their subjects were not aware that the wine they received in exchange of the slaves was out of their subjects' sweat abroad. Nor were they aware that these slaves would be treated inhumanely and exploitatively. We already saw that Africans treated their slaves humanely because they understood them as full human beings

⁴⁰ A Commentary on African Bible, 36.

⁴¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 45.

⁴² *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 1731.

⁴³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

⁴⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 103.

⁴⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88.

who were specialized in particular skills to serve the society. But the whites exploited the African manpower for no compensation as da Silva points out that the African slave labor was key in the growth of the Brazilian agricultural produce in the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Thus, the alienated African person was used as a tool to create wealth for the whites.

Any reasonable person who is not biased will see the implied fact that the slave trade was a system built to weaken Africa at the expense of building Europe and America, notwithstanding those other parts of the world where slaves were taken outside Africa. It is what Fanon calls the dependency complex of the enslaved people.⁴⁷ In a word, the concept of a 'slave' gained a different social construction as the African kingdoms interacted with the new religions and other earlier visitors like the Chinese, Persians, among others, before Africans encounter with Europeans, something that led to the racial discrimination experience.

Later, this yielded to the scramble and partitioning of Africa, with a widening biased eye against the wellbeing of the African persons in Africa and abroad. For Ali Mazrui, in his famous documentary: *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, the African geography is at the same time the mother of history.⁴⁸ He goes into detail on how the eastern seaboard's openness allowed for the entry of eastern influences, particularly how Islamic culture had an impact on African culture 1,000 years before Western culture could.⁴⁹ Therefore these early visitors came as explorers and traders, and others as missionaries yet gradually admired the African land and other properties. This resulted to their subtle arrangements of exploitation especially the slave trade menace. As a consequence, the African culture has three main sources: traditional Africa, Islam, and the West.⁵⁰ This means that, like any other culture, the African culture was not immune of some external influence. But the main problem is not the foreign influence as such, rather the perception of Africa as hollow, deficient of values, morality, religion, and the like.⁵¹ This is a perception that is loaded with racial tendencies intentioned to annihilate the African person.

⁴⁶Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 25.

⁴⁷Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84-88.

⁴⁸ Ali Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage- Program 1, The Nature of a Continent* (Nairobi: YouTube Documentary Video, 9/02/2017) <https://youtu.be/8-pksToXSL4> [16/09/2021].

⁴⁹ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁵⁰ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁵¹ Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, 40-42.

Having seen the African racial discrimination experience during the pre-colonial period, let us now look at the same experience during the colonial period.

Racism in Africa during the Colonial Period

Africans' racial discrimination experience did not end with slave trade, but continued perhaps, in a more ruthless way during her colonisation. Fanon believes that the whites had a conviction that the world belonged to them alone hence their impetus to totally enslave it, dominate the Africans, be the masters.⁵² During the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Africans were trans-located from the African continent to the Americas and the Caribbean, but with colonialism they were now enslaved in their very own continent. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism are exemplary historical examples of racism.

Therefore, one of the impacts of racism or racial discrimination expression is colonialism. The direct and complete annexation of a nation by a foreign state is known as colonialism. Colonialism was formalised with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 which was organized and led by Otto von Bismarck. This conference marked a great wound for the systematized exploitation of Africa by splitting Africa into colonies that would be controlled ruthlessly and greedily by the colonial powers.⁵³ Whereas earlier on, each society had slaves who used to do different tasks, the term 'slave' in the colonial era was loaded with a connotation of only the 'Black' persons.

With its colonisation, Africa became the shrine for constant and immeasurable looting of land, manpower, farm produce, minerals, and anything that the whites saw of any benefit to them. Fanon cries that Africans were no longer in charge of Africa because the white settlers invaded Africa to make it by force, their own, an extension of Europe.⁵⁴ For example, the map of Africa was not designed by Africans. Other than the natural events that resulted to the splitting of the continents, the aspect of political dominance crowned and sealed the task.

As such, Mazrui supports Fanon on Africa losing autonomy by colonialism when he observes that the Suez Canal became the main determinant where Africa began and ended; whereby, the Suez Canal portrayed the European power and planning as can evidently be seen

⁵² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 128.

⁵³ Ali Mazrui, *African Thought in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), XI.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=e000xna&AN=748503>

⁵⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 51.

in the colonization of Africa following the Berlin Conference.⁵⁵ Elizabeth Heath affirms this when she talks about the scramble and partitioning of Africa as a mechanism that sought to feed the growing industrial sectors of Britain, France, and Germany.⁵⁶ Fanon highlights how this Berlin Conference tore Africa into pieces bearing imperial flags.⁵⁷ Africa is seen here as a commodity that belongs to outsiders and not the Africans. This is the tragedy of alienation in the historico-racial schema.

From the aforesaid, there is no doubt that the Berlin Conference among other negative things such as exploitation, social injustice, and colonization was an expression of European racism. Africa has never been the same after this infamous conference. In line with Fanon, Patrick Gathara, in his famous article in Aljazeera, *Berlin 1884: Remembering the Conference that divided Africa* goes on to highlight the negative consequences of the Berlin conference that continue to haunt Africa up to today especially the aspect of this conference setting up rules for the domination and splitting of Africa, in the strategy to formalise Africa as a playground for the outsiders who can meddle with Africa's resources for their own benefits.⁵⁸ From what Gathara says, it can be deduced that before this conference, the Europeans had already visited Africa. They knew about Africa's size of land, minerals, manpower, and many such elements of economic significance. Therefore, we are in agreement with Gathara when he indicates that looting for these items never started after the Berlin conference; rather, it had begun earlier and it was only made official after this conference. The conference was like calling dogs together and awarding each of them the various parts of a prey to crush and swallow in sunlight, even the littlest marrow of it.

What is disheartening most about this conference is the implied racism whereby those who met to discuss about Africa, never involved Africans in that conference. Africans like the Sultan of Zanzibar who tried to attend were not allowed rather laughed off by the colonizers.⁵⁹ Their clandestine intentions and thievery stratagems were well calculated and made official on this

⁵⁵ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Heath, *Berlin Conference of 1884-1885* in *Encyclopaedia of Africa* eds Henry Louis Gates and Kwame Anthony Appiah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-9780195337709-e-0467> [15/09/2021].

⁵⁷ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 66.

⁵⁸ Patrick Gathara, *Berlin 1884: Remembering the Conference that Divided Africa* (Aljazeera: 15 November 2019), 1. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/11/15/berlin-1884-remembering-the-conference-that-divided-africa> [15/09/2021].

⁵⁹ Gathara, *Berlin 1884: Remembering the Conference that Divided Africa*, 2.

day of the conference. If at all they deemed Africans as full human persons, then Africans would have been invited in the conference to air their opinions about their African land.

Moreover, if they had no malicious intentions on Africa, then the conference would have been about something related to the wellbeing of Africa, not the strategized looting and dehumanizing moves established. For Fanon, this depicts their dirty perception about Africans as a people with ill repute⁶⁰ and without the right to ownership of property, a people with no mind to form a sound opinion about the organization of their African societies. It is important to learn that this conference had three main interests from the onset.

Without any consideration of Africa's sovereignty and the African people, nor the look into the Africans' legitimacy of ownership of their very land, minerals and other resources, the Berlin conference executed their mega plan of crude thievery. It is as if, all Africans were considered dead, for how could someone lay claim of another person's property when that person still exists and is in possession of it?

All these affirm the undeniable truth that the splitting of Africa was done intentionally by the whites who wanted to demonstrate their insatiable levels of greed, callousness, and cunningness. It further demonstrated especially, the fact that they deemed the African person as passive and not worthy to own Africa. According to Fanon, the colonised Africans needed decolonization that could involve puking the values of white supremacy.⁶¹ The natives' dream to be free, to prosecute the white oppressors, grew vivid each day.⁶² Nonetheless, the foregoing unbearable levels of toxic racism illustrate the ill perception of the whites on the African person during the colonial epoch.

Whereas in the pre-colonial era the Africans were taken to other countries outside Africa to work there as slaves, in the colonial period, Africans were mostly enslaved in their very land.⁶³ In his book, *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon observes that Africans were presented as a prey before their colonisers.⁶⁴ Freedom was only adequate for the whites and entirely deficient for the Africans in their very African land. For the African person, there was no peace in Africa nor abroad. The system of racial domination and intimidation ensnared the African

⁶⁰ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 39.

⁶¹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 43.

⁶² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 53.

⁶³ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 52.

⁶⁴ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 41.

person here at home and even abroad, for those who found themselves outside Africa. The element of alienation was vivid.

African cultural values were rendered useless. The dressing manner, the traditions and cultural values of each society show the uniqueness of each community.⁶⁵ To be shaped towards hating one's cultural values is a kind of self-hatred and therefore a form of alienation and racism.⁶⁶ In Algeria for example, the French tried to disintegrate the Algerian culture and originality through the assimilation method.⁶⁷ Africans' ancestral stems and roots were thus marred by the sprinkled biases and prejudices of racism, associated with inferiority. Africans were often lumped together in a category of a people who lacked the littlest individual expression.⁶⁸

Seeing Africans as Negro people ordinarily is not a problem and strictly, does not deny the Africans of their individuality. However, the problem comes when the term 'Negro' or 'African' is racially reconstructed by the whites who act in bad faith in relation to the affairs of the Africans to mean inferior, uncivilized, mentally incapacitated, and such other biases. Thus, Jean-Paul Sartre notes that the European elites deformed the African elites by ensuring that they perceived everything through Western cultural glasses rather than their own native African ones in the foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.⁶⁹ This alienating of people by making them hate everything associated with who they are, is the ontological problem of racism that is conspicuous in the period of colonization. In the same vein with Fanon, Mazrui speaks of the negative effects of colonialism on some Africans when he notes that some Africans acquired alien tastes even in their choice of foods by preferring exotic ones.⁷⁰ Africans abroad were turned to be mere puppets of the Western culture.

Even though the African person could professionally be a doctor, nonetheless, the tinge of inferiority never missed. Abroad, most of those whites were convinced that they were superior to the Africans.⁷¹ Educated Africans were still seen as evolving apes who had not yet reached the ontological level of humanity that the whites were generally in and had to prove their worth

⁶⁵ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 35.

⁶⁶ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 33.

⁶⁷ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 35.

⁶⁸ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 24.

⁶⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, xliii.

⁷⁰ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁷¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 12.

constantly, their intellectual voltage, their thoughts.⁷² They were basically lesser human beings whose duty was to imitate the whites as the only way of redemption. In the words of Fanon, the Africans had one destiny, to be white.⁷³

This is the reason why many Africans abroad technically deemed themselves to be advanced, more like ‘whites’ and not their fellow Africans whom they deemed to be ‘primitive’. Although these Africans who were abroad considered themselves as whites, nevertheless they were whites just by imitation of the whites, ‘whites of a substandard’ category. Forced to renounce their African spirit and live like whites, was the highest level of racial intimidation and alienation. In a way, this phenomenon of racism in the colonial era was like someone who is painting a tree’s leaves and branches as white, yet the tree’s roots are black. The shoot of blackness was conditioned to be white for the greater merits of the whites. This cannot change the ontological structures of the tree; rather, it will affect the perception of this tree entirely.

This was purely a manipulation of the African person’s personhood. In the context of Europeans, it was compulsory for the Africans to be ignorant, yet this bore a great deal of curiosity for learning the knowledge of books.⁷⁴ The African person was therefore not allowed to know the truth except as the whites cascade it to the African’s mind. The ‘compulsory ignorance’ aforementioned was the white man’s attitude to the Africans as people who were intended not to know their true self in themselves. It was an attempt to mechanically demonstrate the evil venom of racism.⁷⁵ Thus, the values he had esteemed as African now had to be spit off as inferior and uncivilized.

Those Africans who had been captured and sold to India felt that they were superior to their fellow Africans in Africa. They tried to imitate the whites abroad and thought that in doing that they had become superior to their fellow Africans who were belittled. But these Africans abroad were intimidated by the whites as inferior. Hence, after 1945 as some came back to Africa, they were nostalgic of the African identity.⁷⁶ They were simply tired of racial

⁷² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 12.

⁷³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 12.

⁷⁴ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, ‘Strivings of the Negro People,’ *The Atlantic Magazine*, no. 16 (August 1879).

⁷⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 13.

⁷⁶ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 25.

discrimination. They wanted repose in their authentic being as Africans, not imitators of whites. This was manifest in Senegal.

The apartheid regime in South Africa prevented black people from freely mixing with white people. Fanon understands apartheid as a form of division of the colonial world into blacks and whites, each existing separately.⁷⁷ The Africans had a different education system, political and social set-up. It was an imposed separation of blacks from the whites who were assumed superior and deserving everything.⁷⁸ Even mixed marriages between blacks and whites were not allowed.⁷⁹ Thanks to Steve Biko who fought tooth and nail to pull down this systematised racism in South Africa through his black consciousness that called upon a psychological healing of the Africans as a step towards resuscitating the African identity. For him, “Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time”.⁸⁰ This clarion call for self-acceptance, not as inferior, but as full human beings, equal in humanity like all, is what fills the chalice of Biko’s grand contribution in fighting racism.

In a way, this change of mind shows that the African people gradually became aware of their African identity and of course, about the distortions by the colonial powers. Mazrui observes that the British families in Africa worked on creating a New Britain abroad.⁸¹ This suggests that these colonial powers were not after improving the living standards of the Africans; rather, they were concerned in exploiting them if not eliminating them to benefit Britain.

According to Fanon, the colonial period split people into the world of whites who dominated the Africans who belonged to a lesser world such that one would have resources because one was a white and one would be white because one had resources.⁸² This explains the fact that whiteness has been a construct based on economic merits. Everything of the whites is deemed perfect and worth our bragging about, but everything African is associated with inferiority and worth universal repugnancy. In return, the whites managed thus to create a

⁷⁷ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 52.

⁷⁸ Mhlauli, Salani, and Mokotedi, *Understanding the Apartheid in South Africa*, 204.

⁷⁹ Mhlauli, Salani, and Mokotedi, *Understanding the Apartheid in South Africa*, 205.

⁸⁰ Steve Biko Foundation, *Steve Biko: The Black Consciousness Movement*, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/steve-biko-foundation/GQWBgt1Wh4A?hl=en> [17/03/2022].

⁸¹ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁸² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 5.

global market of their commodities in Africa⁸³ at the expense of effacing our African markets by intimidation. This is a symptom of racism.

Fanon further argues that the world is cast as a duo reality whereby the whites deserve everything good and the Africans deserve everything that is bad or at least substandard.⁸⁴ Du Bois, in line with Fanon, talks about the social stratification of humanity based on racism when he asserts that the Negro is the least in the human stratification while the other races are all superior to him.⁸⁵ Racial discrimination continued to manifest itself in the colonial era in many other ways.

This being the case, the struggle for independence continued. And still, the intimidation of the Africans on their very African soil never stopped. The looting was subtler yet deeply felt. The thievery strategies of the colonial powers went on to deliver for the equations of economics they were intentioned to fulfil, for the greater glory of the whites at the expense of rendering Africa and the Africans useless, poor, and sub-human. This is why Fanon opines that the wealth of the imperial countries belongs as well to those African countries from where it was looted, and from where slaves were obtained to create that wealth.⁸⁶ The African person triggered his search for freedom, for identity, for authentic living that negates racial biases and prejudices. The duty of releasing their peoples from the burden of colonialism, humiliation, and exploitation fell to a number of African men.⁸⁷ In any case, the Africans fought for their independence in order to reclaim their lost African identity as a people.

They won the battle. But at this time, the colonial powers had already tasted the huge wealth of Africa. Economic wealth never accompanied Africa's freedom.⁸⁸ Fanon, we shall see, was wrong in assuming that the dawn of independence in the African states brought moral compensation to the colonised people and a sense of dignity.⁸⁹ Like a stubborn tick that has swelled by siphoning blood from a cow, these colonizers were reluctant to leave Africa. Those who left had many clandestine strings attached, that created avenues for them to suckle from

⁸³ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 65.

⁸⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 45.

⁸⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.

⁸⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 102.

⁸⁷ Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, 29.

⁸⁸ Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, 29.

⁸⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 81.

the under of the African wealth by using some African leaders. We shall see this phenomenon in the condition of Africa after independence.

Racism as inherent in the Post-Colonial Africa

Kwasi Wiredu, like Fanon, sees post-colonialism as a period characteristic of Africans trying to define themselves.⁹⁰ However, their efforts have not been successful, to a great extent. Racism is a key factor in this failure of self-definition by Africans. Fanon warns of the malleability of racism such that it fits into existing political systems of exploitation.⁹¹ It is not surprising that the colonial era never lasted too long, yet we all know that the wounds and scars it left continue to affect the condition of Africa and the African person today. The exploitative economic systems in Africa serve to benefit outsiders at the expense of ruining our environment. Mazrui, in the spirit of Fanon, warns against Africa's change of climate when he points out how Africa that lacks dead seas is today experiencing numerous dead rivers.⁹² It is a fact that drought in many parts of Africa has resulted to displacement of many people in Africa due to lack of food. In the words of Mazrui, "Africa, the first habitat of man seems to be the last to be taken habitable for man."⁹³ We wonder why the Post-Colonial Africa is worsening every now and again. Indeed, imperialism was not the solution to our African sickness; death continues to take African lives.⁹⁴ Africans need to be fully in charge of Africa.

The forces of capitalism continue to tear Africa apart. The African people are being conditioned to exploit one another, in order to maximize the profits. This expresses the African alienation as a symptom of racial distribution of guilt⁹⁵ that arises when the imperial oppressors share their loots with the few natives who they have brainwashed to collaborate with them. In the African traditional context, a sense of belonging from a shared ancestry was conspicuous. Africans never had words like cousins, these people were considered brothers and sisters; Africans never had nephew and niece, because one's brother's children are considered to be his/her children, hence his/her sons and daughters.⁹⁶ This marked the authentic family fabric of the African family of coexistence.

⁹⁰ Kwasi Wiredu, *Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time*, in, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2004).

⁹¹ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 41.

⁹² Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁹³ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁹⁴ Mazrui, *The Nature of a Continent*.

⁹⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 103.

⁹⁶ Mazrui, *A Legacy of Lifestyle*, <https://youtu.be/fByaUppoGs> [16/09/2021].

In the contemporary Africa, racism is inherent in the tendency of renouncing the African modes of leadership at the expense of imitating those of the former colonial powers. This phenomenon illustrates how Africans lack confidence in their cultural systems to the extent of looking for foreign ones. As the African nations attained their independence, the British parliamentary system was believed to be the noble legacy that Africans received from Britain.⁹⁷ But we know that this system has never made Africa any better in terms of addressing her African problems on development.

When lamenting how the oppressors force new modes of life and viewpoints on the people, Fanon prophesied this.⁹⁸ Mazrui, agonizing with Fanon, is eloquent that, “You can teach other people how to speak English, Christian doctrines...but you cannot teach them how to govern themselves. That, they must learn themselves.”⁹⁹ But in neo-colonialism, the Africans are refereed and remote-controlled by the former colonial powers how to run the affairs of Africa for the greater benefit of the foreign nations, other than Africa. This is racism because it attempts to present the African person as inferior and incapable of controlling the affairs of Africa.¹⁰⁰

The current generation may think that Africa never had her own political systems before colonization. Or, that Africans never had the concept of democracy or even human rights. The truth however is that they did. Mazrui informs us about the Ashanti chiefs and how they were not hereditary but nominated by the queen, after a rigorous inquiry from the natives, and still that the nominated candidates could be challenged by the people.¹⁰¹ This demonstrates that indigenous African forms of government were not all about power and exploitation rather about serving the people well, by meeting their needs.

African nations were left by the former colonial powers on shaking grounds. Strictly, the substratum of the colonial government has proved to be amorphous.¹⁰² The colonial powers were happy and are happy that African nations continue to shake in search of stability because only in such instability can they continue looting from Africa and pretend to be special humanitarians to offer all solutions to the African problems.

⁹⁷ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

⁹⁸ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 38.

⁹⁹ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁰ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 34.

¹⁰¹ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰² Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

The army became the strongest force after independence in Africa. Coups were staged in many African nations. Mazrui thus notes that power is abundant in those owning the means of destruction as opposed to the means of production.¹⁰³ A great record of over seventy *coup de tats* was experienced in Africa after independence. The weapons being used were imported. The military tactics were foreign. The government systems were alien. The African person was alienated still. Mazrui therefore wonders that Africans do not know where political asylum ends and economic refuge starts.¹⁰⁴ The refugee issue is threatening because Africa has the largest population of the refugees in the world, more than half of the world's refugee population.¹⁰⁵ This is absurd.

It has been a great challenge to turn the artificially created African nations into habitable units for the African person since independence. Whereas the colonial jails produced some of Africa's forefathers like Kenneth Kaunda, Mazrui laments that today the barracks are hatching the future leaders planning how to overthrow the government.¹⁰⁶ But he warns that inasmuch as the military can change the African politics, nevertheless, they cannot transform Africa's economy because they are not specialists in that area.¹⁰⁷ This instability favours foreign looting as they meddle in the African affairs as peace makers.

Maathai, echoing Fanon, observes how the colonial intimidation continues to dog the newly formed African states after independence. Maathai mourns that the African leaders who took power after independence failed to serve the people as they had promised and rather embarked in looting the public resources and mistreating the citizens.¹⁰⁸ The African condition is therefore a racial problem, clearly delineated in the ashes of history as demonstrated. However, Renate Zahar, a renowned Fanon scholar, observes that violence of the oppressed manifests the reaction of the oppressed to the oppressor and the oppression.¹⁰⁹ This supports Fanon's believe that the oppressed need to master violence as a means to exit the ugly condition of racial subjugation and intimidation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁴ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁵ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁶ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁷ Mazrui, *In Search of Stability*.

¹⁰⁸ Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Teodros Kiros, *Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)* in, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2004), 219.

¹¹⁰ Teodros Kiros, *Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)*, 220.

In the view of Fanon, it is the modern African master who has been alienated, who actually opposes revolution. Like the white racists, the inferiorised African elite and leader kills his own people, steals from them, eats his own children, tortures them and exploits them by systemic calculations¹¹¹ like taxation that is high. As such, Nigel Gibson, a prominent scholar of Fanon stresses the fact the new African person is fashioned from the lived experiences¹¹² of oppression and alienation. This seems to support the idea of violence to the extent that a violent person must have been provoked. Yet, Mazrui takes a sharp departure from violence as propounded by Fanon. For Mazrui, Fanon was very wrong in saying that the oppressed gain from violence. For Mazrui, it is actually the oppressor who still benefits from violence. This, he claims, has been proved in the human history like in the case of Algeria and France where the war benefited France than Algeria or Mozambique where it benefited Portugal.¹¹³

Mazrui, like Fanon, nonetheless acknowledges the reality that African nations are still striving to define themselves even with the rising cost of life. Here Mazrui talks of six paradoxes. First, he notes that several Africans have died as a result of conflict between Africans and Africans- what Mazrui calls ‘The paradox of racial deficit’.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, Mazrui seems to remain on the phenomena and fails to access the noumenon. This is because Fanon elaborates how the oppressor through racial distribution of guilt manages to camouflage racism today through clandestine means.¹¹⁵ Fanon would thus argue that the physical absence of the white oppressor does not mean the oppressor’s absence because the inferiorised Africans have been conditioned to hate themselves in the pursuit of whiteness, in the standards of whiteness.¹¹⁶

Secondly, Mazrui speaks about boarder conflicts whereby the Africans fight within borders and not across the boarders as a result of the amorphous nations created by the splitting of Africa with no common values and cultures.¹¹⁷ Thirdly, he talks of the paradox of religion and ethnicity whereby ethnic conflicts by dint of tribalism percolate the fabric of Africa.¹¹⁸ Fourth, he explains on identities and resources that include Africans among themselves fighting for

¹¹¹ Teodros Kiros, *Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)*, 221.

¹¹² Teodros Kiros, *Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)*, 222.

¹¹³ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence* in, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2004), 475.

¹¹⁴ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 480.

¹¹⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 103

¹¹⁶ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 480.

¹¹⁸ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 480.

identity while whites fight among themselves for resources.¹¹⁹ Fifth, the modern weapons are in the hands of African soldiers who are not yet modernised contrary to the scenario at independence when African armies were more disciplined and professional although with less advanced weapons.¹²⁰ Lastly, Mazrui explicates how civil wars have left deep scars on Africa than interstate conflicts.¹²¹

In any case, Fanon would still insist that the African status quo has a deep tap root in the historico-racial schema that keeps on changing in its manifestations in Africa today. The conflicts of Africans amongst themselves will thus be attributed to the unvented violence that, for Fanon, need to be directed to the oppressor. The aspect of religion and ethnic identities for Fanon, lack the authentic values of the natives or have been inferiorised by their demonization by the oppressor leaving practically whiteness for the natives to mimic. The African armies with modern weapons manifest the same situation of alienation for Fanon because these weapons are shipped from without to harm and destabilise the natives so that the oppressor can continue dominating and looting from them. This is the same for the civil wars where one tribe is charged by the oppressor against another, behind the scenes as racism camouflages, as Fanon cautions. Briefly therefore, the historico-racial schema comes as the burden of the totality of agency in Africa's current plight.

This is why Tsenay Serequeberhan insists that Africans need to define themselves as that is their cultural right.¹²² For Serequeberhan, philosophy is always not neutral because it must have the gist of politics hence western philosophy has been and still does serve the best interests of the westerners and not the Africans.¹²³ More elaborately, Serequeberhan points out how cultural paradigms were created by western ideologies to foster the historico-racial schema of demonizing African values and worldviews at the expense of pontificating western ideas as the ideals.¹²⁴ This is basically Fanon's argument when he discusses about the inferiorised African who chases after whiteness, after being alienated, after renouncing oneself as evil and an

¹¹⁹ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 480.

¹²⁰ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 481.

¹²¹ Ali Mazrui, *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Violence*, 481.

¹²² Barry Hallen, *Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy: A Survey*, in, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, 2004), 129.

¹²³ Barry Hallen, *Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy*, 128.

¹²⁴ Barry Hallen, *Contemporary Anglophone African Philosophy*, 128.

antithesis of development.¹²⁵ To this end, racism has a firm ground in the enslavement of Africa.

Conclusion

The Critical Race Theory's guiding ideas are seen in the historical understanding of racism. According to the Critical Race Theory, racism is the norm in how people in our world interact with Africans. This has caused racism to become so commonplace in our society that sometimes we are unable to see it. In order to subjugate and benefit the White race materially at the expense of Africans, racism has been utilized to see Africans as inferior. Pre-colonial Africa, colonial Africa, and post-colonial Africa all saw instances of racism on the African continent. Beginning with the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in pre-colonial Africa, racism in the form of slavery has existed in all of these "phases" of African history. Africans were translocated from their homeland to foreign places during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to serve as slaves. After the Trans-Atlantic slave trade ended, colonialism—a new type of racism—took hold, subjecting Africans to slavery on their own continent. On the other hand, despite the end of colonialism, racism has continued to subjugate Africans in subtle ways. One of the ways racism has always been present is via slavery.

¹²⁵ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 38.

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