



Frantz Fanon's Theory of Racialization Implications for Globalization

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Abstract: This article investigates Frantz Fanon's theory of race and racism. Three constitutive elements of Frantz Fanon's racial theory are explored—race as historically situated, race as culturally maintained, and racial constructions as embedded in human ontology. It is argued that Fanon's work provides a starting point for bringing conversations of race and racism into globalization theories in ways that create space and possibility for human emancipation under twenty-first century globalization.

INTRODUCTION

In the foreword to Frantz Fanon's key text, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004 [1961]), Homi Bhabha states that Fanon's work provides the conceptual tools necessary for critiquing contemporary processes of globalization. Bhabha states that while Fanon's scholarship draws from localized experiences under European colonization, it is able to transcend these historically situated immediacies.¹ This transcendent, timeless quality of Fanon's work is partly attributed to the "racial optic" (xiii) through which Fanon analyzes the colonial condition. Consequently, argues Bhabha, Fanon's work can serve as a blueprint for

conceptualizing the social inequalities that are proliferating under (corporate and national) global aspirations and impositions of the 21st Century.

Over the past decade, several contemporary social theories of globalization have emerged from diverse disciplinary locations (Roberston 2001), many of which grapple with the restructuring of such social inequalities. While these theories are broad in scope, several themes have emerged from this body of literature. The role of the nation-state in processes of global formations (Appadurai 1996, Bauman 1998, Huntington 1996, Hardt and Negri 2000, Robertson 2001, Sklair 2002) and the nature of the relationship between global and local economies and cultures (Appadurai 1996, Bryman 2003, Caldwell 2004, Kellner 2002, Pieterse 2004, Ritzer 2004a and 2004b, Robertson 1995, Rosenau 2003, Tomlinson 1999, Turner 2003, Urry 2003)² are two major themes centered in these aca-

¹ Fanon, too, makes this assertion. For example, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), he draws from his lived experience in Antilles but argues that this experience can be universalized to conceptualize colonial conditions and black-white relations generally (1967: 14, 18, 25).

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demic debates. Despite a wide range of perspectives, underlying these debates is the shared assumption that globalization is fundamentally determined by the economic aspirations of global and national institutions (transnational corporations, nation-states, NGOs, etc.). Consequently, the canonical works of this relatively nascent interdisciplinary field of study fail to investigate how race and racism constitute organizing principles of globalization processes. This systematic omission of the racialization of economic and socio-political processes places serious limitations on globalization theory's ability to remain critical and to foster human emancipation in the 21st Century. If globalization theories co-opt the "post-race" assumptions of the status quo, they risk reproducing color-blind ideologies, that is, the notion that race no longer matters and that racism is not structural but merely a problem of a few individuals (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

This article seeks to contest the absence of the "racial optic" in this body of knowledge by investigating more closely the questions raised by Bhabha, questions that have remained largely unexplored despite their timely relevance. Fanon's work is engaged as a site for re-theorizing globalization through an intersectional, multidimensional lens. Placing Fanon's work in conversation with theories of globalization is a means not only for creating new representations of the social world but also for contesting the myth of color-blindness and the status quo with which it colludes.

Thus, below, I undergo a close reading of two of Fanon's key texts, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004[1961]) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) to more closely explore his

² This debate is often expressed in polarized terms with one camp arguing globalization to be producing homogeneous cultures and/or economies (i.e., Ritzer's "McDonaldization" thesis), and others arguing globalization to be a heterogeneous process (i.e., Robertson's "glocalization" thesis).

treatment of race as it intersects with the economies of colonies. I am particularly interested in how Fanon's racial theory might be utilized for understanding processes of global flows and frictions in more critical ways. In a historical moment in which color-blind racism is pervasive (Bonilla-Silva 2003, Brown et. al. 2003, Goldberg 2002, Guinier and Torres 2002, Winant 2001) and its consequences materially and psychologically harmful, I feel this is an important theoretical project. I conclude by suggesting that theories of globalization must include processes of racialization in order to be transformative and emancipatory.

In this essay, I use as a starting point Bhabha's unexplored insight, that Fanon's "racial optic" (xiii) constitutes a major contribution to globalization studies. I first investigate how Fanon conceptualizes race in/under colonization and decolonization and how this conceptualization can be engaged to inform and contest the narratives that are being told about global processes and global citizens in dominant theoretical texts. That is, this first section is concerned with the structural organization of global formations. Secondly, I more closely investigate how Fanon theorizes the concept of race, that is, the content of his construct. I will argue that an application of Fanon's theoretical conceptualization to globalization theory can allow for more emancipatory potential in the so-called "post-race," "postcolonial" era.

RACE AND RACISM AS ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF SOCIETY

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon makes a statement that marks a profound contribution to contemporary globalization theory.

...it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infra-

structure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. (5)

Extending Marxism, Fanon reminds the reader of a key concept—that racism is not merely a superstructural effect of a determinant economic base—it is an organizing principle of society. For Fanon, class and race gain meaning from one another; they are co-constituted as opposed to causally related. Neither class nor race predetermines or is a consequence of the other; rather, each is dialectically co-produced. Fanon argues this repeatedly throughout *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004). Any order, he argues, is simultaneously a racial order and an economic order. The reader is reminded of this throughout Fanon's continual criticisms of various scholars, particularly psychoanalysts who fail to theorize the "inner relationships between consciousness and the social context" (1967:97, 100) and who fail to theorize how that context is racialized.

In connecting the psyche to the social milieu, Fanon's sociological imagination is necessarily intersectional—race and class co-constitute one another through processes of differentiation that form specific kinds of spatial barriers between (poor) people of color and (rich) white people. The borders within colonized regions, argues Fanon, segregate not only the wealthy from the poor, but also produces clearly demarcated racial formations. The colonized sector is not only a world of "white folks," but is also a world whose "belly is permanently full of good things" (2004:4). On the other side of this decadent border, however, is a "sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads" that is "hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light" (2004:4-5). Thus, racial inferiority is often felt and realized economically, however, it is not merely conceptualized as a dependent variable of the economy (1967).³

Fanon's conceptualization of co-dependent dimensions provides a useful starting point for globalization theorists who wish to take seriously the widening disparities both between and within contemporary nation-states. Under 21st Century globalization, the problematic of singular deconstructions are clear. The systems of power that produced colonial formations have reformulated and, hiding behind the myth of neoliberalism, are reproducing the same inequities. Globalization theories, however, have failed to consider these processes with a "racial optic." To engage Fanon's work to understand these new reformulations of power can generate critical analysis.

To pay attention to the racialization of economic formations creates space for human emancipation. Equality based on a monolithic dimension of power produces short-sighted, and potentially ineffective social change, for economic inequality will continue to manifest itself through racial inequality. Theorizing race, then, is necessary for theorizing globalization. However, it is not simply enough to incorporate race. It also matters *how* race is conceptualized.

DE-MYSTIFYING RACE: TOWARD EMANCIPATION

Decolonization can truly be achieved only with the destruction of the Manichaeism of the cold war..." (Bhabha 2004:xiv)

Although processes of racialization may operate and manifest themselves differently over space and time, the notion that race is an organizing principle of social

³ See Fanon's discussion of black-white love relations in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Here he discusses the inauthenticity of interracial love; love cannot be present when feelings of inferiority are present. Women of color, argues Fanon, desire white men to feel more white. In this discussion, Fanon also discusses how these feelings of inferiority are realized economically.

life can inform our understanding not only of national formations (as in Fanon's work) but also of global formations. There are, however, many ways of conceptualizing race and there is nothing inherently libidinal about including race. It is, rather, the way in which race is understood that matters. For Fanon, what is race? In this section I investigate how Fanon conceptualizes race. I attempt to deconstruct the assumptions that underlie his race theory. A close analysis revealed three core themes around which the construct of race is understood: race as a historical accomplishment, race as culturally maintained, and racial constructions as embedded in human ontology.

Race as a Historical Accomplishment

For Fanon, race is not a biological trait but, rather, a historically constructed phenomenon and culturally mediated artifact. Fanon's work offers a genealogy of race, a history of decolonization, illustrating how the (wealthy, white) colonizer exists only through his relationship with the (poor, dark) colonized (2004:2).

For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man...his inferiority comes into being through the other. (1967:110)

Each exists only through the other and the nature of their relationship constructs their ontological polarization. Wealth exists in relationship to poverty, indeed is predicated upon poverty and whiteness exists only through the social construction of blackness.

Fanon devotes an entire chapter (The Negro and Recognition) to this notion of relationality. A trained psychiatrist, Fanon takes on the work of Hegel and of Alfred Adler, the prominent Austrian psychologist of the fin de siècle. So often absent in Eurocentric scholarship, Fanon expands upon

their work by adding the racial dimension. As he does this, he explores human comparison and its essential participation in the construction of inferiority and superiority based on racial signification. He explains the role of comparison in the ongoing and circular accumulation of racist ideologies in the colonies. Human comparison, he argues, is what bestows individuals with their sense of inferiority and superiority, in effect, with their sense of human worth and esteem. The Antillean Negro and the colonizer exist as inferior and superior only as they recognize themselves in relation to the Other. Each understands the other only in relation to what they are not (the colonizer is not black, the colonized is not white) and from this relational comparison emerges polarized collective identities with structural consequences.

Thus, for Fanon, it is not only difference that is historically constructed but also the social signifieds, the system of (de)valuation, associated with that difference. The poor material circumstances associated with the black body is not a natural consequence of his inferior status, but has a "historico-racial schema" (1967:111). In this schema, the "white man" has constructed a narrative of the inferiority of blackness through "a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (111); it is through socio-cultural institutions that the racialized hierarchy becomes materially and discursively intertwined. Fanon avoids a teleological explanation (he is inferior because he is dark, he is dark so he is inferior) by understanding meaning as formed through colonization. Race *comes into being* as an accomplishment. This accomplishment becomes further embedded through the "culture industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno's phrase).

Cultural Artifact

In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon denatures race by examining the role of colonial cultures in maintaining and legitimating

the racialized economic hierarchy. He shows how culture operates as the instrument through which the normalization of the social construction of race as a system of hierarchical power relations occurs; through the culture industry skin pigmentation became deeply imbued with hierarchical meaning.

In the colonial world, this system of signification became a system of power legitimating white supremacy. The task of the colonist was to replace indigenous histories and cultures and replace them with the newly constructed racial ideologies. Fanon explains, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), how this task came to be realized. The racial domination of the colonies was legitimated through racist propaganda (69), through religious institutions that equated darkness with evil and inhumanity (6-7), all serving to instill "a mood of submission" in subjugated peoples. Gradually the overt mechanisms of domination became hegemonic, embedded in a variety of institutional sites—schools, government, criminal justice, and so forth—all operating to mediate the polarized racialized economic systems of colonial worlds. Most importantly, racial significations are transferred and internalized into the psyches and structures of society through the cultural component of language.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon is particularly interested in investigating the movement of racism through culture, particularly language. He states that, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.... To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture..." (1967:17). When the colonized speak the language of the oppressor, they co-opt the racist ideologies of that world that are woven into speech. To co-opt the language of the colonizer is to co-opt racism and to "betray" one's own self and culture, and to internalize one's

own inferiority. Through this historical process, this gradual loss of language and hence, culture, the history of the colonized is buried in the past, its great accomplishments and thinkers lost. To use the language of the colonized is to enter their world, a white privileged world.

Ontology

For Fanon, this movement to the white world constitutes more than merely a linguistic preference; it produces a transformation of being, a new ontology. He argues that movement across worlds has the effect of separating one from their former physical space but also leads to psychic changes, an actual "mutation" (1967:19) of being, a "new way of being" (1967:25), a radical change in personhood. A black man becomes whiter by using the language of the white man, by taking upon himself this other world (38). In some ways, Fanon's conception of an ontological shift is problematic, for he engages in a discursive colonization of the very subject whom he desires to free. He calls the colonized "duped," that is, he believes the colonist has tricked the colonized into accepting his own inferior social status (1967:29, 31). This constitutes alienation, a consequence of the imposed "psychological-economic system" (1967:35). Here we see that for Fanon, racial boundaries are certainly clearly demarcated and polarized, but they are not fixed by skin color nor is this system a natural consequence of skin color but, rather, of cultural-historical processes.

Fanon rejects the possibility of a Negro essence (for example, the myth of the hypersexualized black man) arguing that biological determinism is an ideology of the colonial master and a premise for racial othering. To search for the essence of a race, is to fail to understand how historical and economic realities have shaped the lives of Negroes (see esp. 1967:160-161, footnote on 161). Following this premise, if there is no

Negro essence, there is also no automatic or inherent racial unity (1967:173). That is, one is not necessarily oppositional because he/she is racially othered, nor is one inherently oppressive because he/she is white. In so arguing, Fanon rejects essentialism, universalism, and the tendency in scholarship to produce monolithic racial categories that do not intersect with other dimensions of power (for example, class).

If race is culturally and historically situated as opposed to a reified fact of biology, then potential for liberation is possible. While it is in the racialized interest of the colonist to naturalize race (normalized through violent imposition and through culture), Fanon removes his conceptualization from essentialism through a definition of race that demystifies race.

Instead, for Fanon, although race has materialized in very discrete and polarized forms, it is possible for individuals to shift between these polarized worlds. One world, the world of the colonized, is white/rich/powerful and the “other” world, the opposite world of the colonized is characterized as the black/poor/alienated world. This is what Fanon referred to as the “compartmentalized” sectors of the colonial condition (2004). Yet, Fanon often refers to the mobility of individuals between these worlds. One is “white” only when he/she internalizes racial hierarchy and seeks after the vain things of the world. Thus, he often refers to middle class, urban-dwelling Antilleans as white.

Initially, it may seem fatalistic to read of the internalization of inferiority, of oppression that is psycho-affective, it is also in this conceptualization that space for emancipation or “disalienation” emerges. Fanon concludes that racial equality can only come through the rejection of essential racial categories. It is not merely through recognition that cultural and social institutions are racialized (that race is relational), argues Fanon, but through movement between these compartmentalized world, through

the rejection of essentialism, the idea that one must remain in the world to which power has assigned. Fanon wants movement and communication between the raced sectors and this movement and communication is made possible only by understanding each others’ worlds (1967:231), indeed, through recognition of the other (1967:218). It must be a mutual, dialogic recognition and “authentic communication” (1967:231).

Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible. Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at dis-alienation...Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? (1967:231).

Fanon’s new world is not one that is composed of categorical, hierarchical, divisions. And this new world is not attainable through the actions of any single racialized world. Both oppressor and oppressed must travel to the world of the other, love the other, for both are unconscious, both are alienated. What is significant is that disalienation requires two-sided movement. For the colonized to become knowledgeable of history may lead to intellectual disalienation, yet, this is not full emancipation for it cannot produce racial equality—it is one-sided movement. Because race is relational, the racialized other, the Negro, cannot become conscious until the colonizer recognizes the colonized, until he moves to the world of the colonized, until he “knows” the colonized. This can occur only through movement to that world for the colonized cannot “recognize” (1967:218) the colonized until he shifts to this other world.

This movement is transformative, it

constitutes an ontological shift, a change in one's very being. It is not mere lip-service but to go to the world of the colonized marks a change in the being of the colonizer. Likewise, when the colonized go to the world of whiteness, for Fanon, they literally become white as they internalize all the ideologies of the colonizing world. By rejecting the essential category race, Fanon rejects that the powerful and disempowered are fixed in their alienated states. All can become conscious, the world(s) can fight the tendential movement toward social entropy. Thus, he concludes *Black Skin, White Masks* by stating, "I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness" (1967:232).

It is the way in which he defines and understands the concept of race that gives Fanon's work its emancipatory quality; in his characterization is embedded the potential for liberation from the psychological and material consequences of racism. In fact, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon clearly states that his purpose for writing the text is to seek social justice (12, 30); Fanon is hopeful—he envisions a world where it is possible for both the white and black man to become "disalienated" (12). His racial theory embodies this hope.

RACISM: FANON & GLOBALIZATION

While some globalization theories have a nihilistic vision of an unstoppable "juggernaut" (Bauman 1998) or a "runaway world" (Giddens 2000), others optimistically envision a global world of dialogic sharing of some abstract category called "difference" (Turner 2003). In both models, it is unclear how power is conceptualized and the workings of racism are entirely absent. Krishnaswamy (2002) states, "Undoubtedly there is (and always has been) considerable cultural exchange between the West and the rest; but it does not make for a great big dialogical carnival. The de-

sire of every culture or civilization to complete itself in/through the Other is clearly not played out on an even field..." (2002:117). Because globalization is directly related to the polarization of inequality along race, gender and class lines it is becoming increasingly exigent that globalization theory move away from this carnivalesque approach of cultural hybridity, creolization, and global sharing.

Fanon's racial theory provides a starting point for critiquing the polarizing tendencies of global formations. While he does not incorporate gender (and sexuality), he provides a framework for incorporating these other dimensions of power in intersectional ways. By theorizing a construct that embodies movement between polarized worlds, he also provides the tools for a praxis that breaks down the Manichean tendencies of globalization. One's geographical, class, and race need not make one's situation as the oppressor/oppressed inevitable. Those living in more privileged "sectors" can become conscious, responsible, and subversive. As Paulo Freire (1981) argues, the process of humanization requires all to shift to a dialogic world that breaks down the binaries of an oppressor-oppressed world.

Deconstructing particular "case studies" can illustrate the ways in which an intersectional lens matters for understanding globalization. For instance, Oil conglomerate ExxonMobil has extracted over \$40 billion from its operations in Aceh, Indonesia, where the company has operations on the Arun gas field, one of the largest gas fields in the world (Democracy Now! 2005). They also hire units from the Indonesian National Army to act as security forces that protect these operations. These units have been charged with brutalizing the local population through rapes, murders, property destruction and torture. ExxonMobil is charged with continuing to finance these units despite ongoing human rights violations.

Lawyers from the Washington, D.C., based advocacy organization, the International Labor Rights Fund, have filed suit against the company in attempts to hold them accountable for this systematic terror. ExxonMobil continues to deny its role and responsibility to Acehnese peoples. Becoming curious about these types of corporate crimes certainly leads one to an understanding of global inequalities as economically-driven. Not only is exploitation based upon the extrapolation of raw resources, impoverishing the local peoples, but it is precisely that this world is occupied by (gendered/sexualized) racialized Others that makes their exploitation justifiable to white, Western eyes. An economic analysis of such a situation reduces the complexity and modes of power through which inequality operates. Globalization theorists have played a central and important role in understanding the relationship between the globalization of neoliberal capital and increasing global economic inequality, however, a singular lens is too reductionistic.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed several components of Frantz Fanon's racial theory. Through an intersectional lens, Fanon's work seeks not only to include race as an organizing principle of colonization, but also to understand it in ways that do the work of demystification and create space for possibility, for human emancipation, from the oppressive structures that constrain the collective psyche. To not do this, is to collude with the status quo.

An underlying assumption of this article is that the erasure of race and racism in globalization literature contributes to the reformulation of racism through colorblind ideologies and frameworks. This project seeks to speak to this problematic theoretical omission through the work of Frantz

Fanon and hopes for a more robust understanding of the global citizen that leads to a reclaiming of the global subject under/in the frictions and flows that work through the oppressive structures of globalization.

Emphasizing vast transformations in and related to capitalist organization, globalization theories often privilege the economic realm. Indeed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss neoliberal capital restructuring when theorizing globalization. However, that capitalism is a racialized structure, that is, that the way in which capitalism organizes and materializes, has failed to be incorporated into mainstream globalization theories. That some are privileged, and others marginalized, by global capital is clearly related to who becomes classified as Other. Systematically, economic macro processes play out such that certain groups of bodies, the simultaneously constructed and materially marked dark/sensual/erotic/animalistic body is made other in these macro processes. Yet, globalization theory rarely becomes curious about why it is that globalization realizes according to rigid racial lines—why it privileges certain social groups and not others. Putting globalization theory into conversation with Fanon can potentially build both theoretical studies of globalization as well as the stream of postcolonial theory that has been influenced by Fanon's work.

Fanon wrote for social change, a necessary component for theories that aim for critical consciousness and human emancipation (Collins 1998). Fanon does not believe the status quo is inevitable or unchangeable. Race is not essential but rather socially constructed and culturally imposed. All people, regardless of identity, can exert their agency in ways that break down the false binaries that oppress and make life difficult and unbearable for many under 21st Century globalization practices.

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