

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon strives “to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation” (14). He seeks to recover the black man’s power of self-definition which has been thwarted by the colonial situation. The body of the black man at the center of *Black Skin, White Masks* has been “humiliated, mocked, beaten, raped, assaulted, and murdered” (Vergés 582). Fanon asserts that “black identity [formation] is shaped by the oppressive sociopolitical structure of colonial culture” (Bergner 76). According to Terry Goldie, “Fanon was yearning for ...a new man...a black masculinity, modern and unmarked by colonialism” (Goldie 78). For Fanon, this modern man, untouched by colonialism, would result from the achievement of subjectivity. The black man “must seize his freedom and be free to act, to choose. This freedom demands mastering one’s life, one’s desires, one’s position in society” (79). Fanon finds this mastery in “homosocial relations [with white men] and tends to elide [black] female participation” (79). Black women are elided from the homosocial economy of the colonial relationship between black and white men developed by Fanon as a result of being commodified (Bergner 85). The homosocial “relationship between white men and black men...mediated through [black] women’s bodies, removes feminine subjectivity from the center of [Fanon’s] analysis” (85). This removal, most evidenced by “Fanon’s rigorous critique of Mayotte Capécia” in *Black Skin, White Masks*, has engendered what T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting terms “a postmodern mythology – Fanon as a misogynist” (Sharpley-Whiting 70). I do not seek to prove or disprove Fanon’s misogynistic motives for the elision of black women from his schema for the liberation of the colonized; I posit that Fanon marginalizes black women’s ‘desires’ in the furtherance of ‘mastering’ their own lives because for men like Fanon “who aspire to patriarchal power, the black woman represents an encumbrance” (Young 97-98).

Moreover, the black woman who desires the white man in search of a liberatory, new, modern femininity functions to bring to the forefront what could be argued are repressed latent homosexual desires of Fanon himself.

Fanon writes specifically from the position of an Antillean man and the psychology of racial relations between the colonized and the colonizer which such a position entails. Subject formation for the black Antillean man is trapped, according to Fanon, within the gaze of the white colonizer. Both colonized and colonizer must be freed from the narcissism associated with this dilemma in order to free black men from an internalized inferiority in relation to the white man and to free white men from an internalized superiority in relation to the black man. Fanon invokes Lacan's mirror phase to elaborate this confrontation when he asserts:

Once we have understood the process described by Lacan, there is no longer any doubt that the true "Other" for the white man is and remains the black man, and vice versa. (Fanon 139, n. 25)

In the real world, "the white world" (20), "the black man symbolizes sin" (166). The "existential reality is that blacks...are the antithesis of [white] values and [white] value, a not fully human presence-as-absence" (Sharpley-Whiting 57). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon would suggest that black men

represent not only the absence of values but also the negation of values... they are the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near them; they are the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty and morality; they are the depository of maleficent powers and the unconscious and irretrievable instruments of blind forces. (*The Wretched of the Earth* 41)

Trapped within the gaze of the white man as his true other, the black man is invested with the function to “represent shameful feelings, base instincts and the darkside of the soul” (Fanon 167). Fanon argues that “for the white man...the “Other” is perceived as a bodily image, absolutely as the non ego, i.e., the unidentifiable, the unassimilable. For the black man [it has been] demonstrated that the historical and economic realities must be taken into account” (139, n. 25). For the white man, with respect to the black man, “it is above all in the period of anxiety and suspicion described by Dide and Guiraud that “the Other” intervenes. So it is not surprising to find the black man in the guise of a satyr or murderer” (139, n. 25). Vergés insists that “in the Fanonian approach to Lacan, the “other” for the white must be black, and vice versa, because of the dialectic that Fanon embraces. The other is the projection in the mirror of what the subject desires and rejects: the woman for the man; the black for the white” (Vergés 587).

Fanon even goes so far as to contend that “a Black is not a man” (xii). According to bell hooks, “the blackness/darkness of the colonized body that marks it as other to the white coloniser is always framed within a gendered context wherein the metaphors of emasculation and castration symbolically articulate the psychic wounds of the colonized” (hooks 82). Even worse for Fanon, the colonial subject identity which forms as a result of the “mirroring relation between white men and black men” is “destructive to his masculine identity since he [Fanon] is made the recipient of the dismembering gaze that is normatively the male prerogative” (Bergner 80). Accordingly, the “black man is thus placed in the feminine position [as recipient of the male gaze]” (80). The results of the gaze are painful for Fanon and represent that from which he desires to be freed. hooks adds, “that pain then is inscribed always as the pain of men inflicted upon them by other men. Healing, as Fanon envisions it, takes place only as this conflict between men is resolved” (hooks 82). Color and race as it relates to the well being of men is

eclipsed in a paradigm of healing that suggests all will be well
when men are able to reach a level of homophilia: a quality of love
for one another that precludes the possibility of domination and
dehumanization. (82)

In the homosocial bond Fanon describes, the black man is the prisoner of the white's look and the white man is the prisoner of the black man's look. The gaze of the other becomes one's own conscience, and the illusion of being always watched precludes the possibility of ambiguity as a result of the other existing as the mirror in which one sees oneself. This is but one aspect of what Fanon calls "the black man's dimension of being-for-others" (Fanon 1). While Lacan practices a psychoanalysis concerned with the subject formation of the subject who sees, Fanon speaks from the object of sight, the one being seen, in an attempt to rescue a desired subject position. As an object who speaks, Fanon embodies the violence done to him by white fears, desires and hatred; as the black man in the feminine position, Fanon symbolizes lack. Just as the masculine gaze displaces the anxiety of lack onto the female body by objectifying the image of women, silencing the voices of women, and excluding women from a subject position within "scopic systems of signification," Fanon too is objectified, silenced and excluded by the gaze of the white man. Like the objectified woman, the black man, Fanon, signals difference or castration and suggests lack (Bergner 79).

Fanon utilizes the idea of castration to describe racial disempowerment; while Lacan, through channeling Freud, would suggest that sexual difference is signified by the penis, which could be understood to relate to the signifier of sociosymbolic power (i.e. the phallus), the colonial relationship as described by Fanon invests social power with relevance to skin color.

The phallus, or possession thereof, is associated with skin color: the white man possesses it, while the black man does not. Perhaps, this is why Fanon suggests that the Black is not a man.

In a world where the black man is the “eternal victim of his own essence, of a visible appearance for which he is not responsible” (Fanon 18), a world where “whether he likes it or not, the black man has to wear the livery the white man has fabricated for him” (17), Fanon seeks to answer: “What does the black man want” (xii)? The black man is concerned “with being as powerful as the white man...the black man endeavors to seek admittance to the white [world]...he needs approval” (33-34). The black man seeks recognition and validation and “there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white” (xiv).

Ironically, it seems as though the disavowal of that which the white world has “made Negro” would constitute one manner of entrance into the white world for Fanon. Fanon, it could be argued, disavows his nationality as an Antillean and his history as a black man, and even black women in his bid to liberate himself from the objectified gaze of the white man over that which the white man invests with ‘blackness/darkness.’ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he mocks the Negritude movement while at the same time embracing his status as a Frenchman in the furtherance of separating himself from Martinique (read black folk). Fanon asks:

What’s all this about black people and a black nationality? I am French. I am interested in French culture, French civilization, and the French. We refuse to be treated as outsiders; we are well and truly part of French history and its drama. When an army of men who were basically not bad but rather mystified occupied France to subjugate her, my duty as a Frenchman told me that my place was not on the sidelines, but at the very heart of the problem.

I take a personal interest in the interest of France, the French nation, and its values. (Fanon 179)

Now technically, of course, Fanon is right. Martinique, to this day, is a part of the French republic. And he has every right to claim his Frenchness. But this is not the tone with which he begins his book. He begins speaking as a “black man *on his home territory*” and suggests that his “observations and conclusions” are “those of an Antillean” (xviii). This luxury of ambivalence regarding what he claims to be and not to be is problematic, for he does not allow for such an ambivalent stance from black women, as we shall understand momentarily. Eventually, in the desire to recover his “wounded masculinity” (Vergés 593), Fanon will not only relinquish any filial bonds to the Antilles, but to any and everything which reminds him of the “white master [who] begets little Negroes but refuses to inscribe his paternity in the Symbolic” (585). Any trace of the white other, Fanon’s own conscious as the mirror projection of the Imaginary in the dialectic he has created, is a burden regarding Fanon’s search for legitimacy, validation and acceptance: the presence of the other is a constant reminder of his emasculation, of his castration, of that which he lacks. Fanon will cut ties with the “enslaved father and the raped mother” (594); these cannot be his parents as a liberated man. He cannot accept the *metisage*, the result of the mixing of people of different races of which he is a product. The Antillean man, with his enslaved past, raped women and mix-race children represent the realm of the emasculated man for Fanon. And this history, along with its connection with France, he will exchange for allegiance with the Algerian freedom fighter, in whom Fanon will invest an understanding as the embodiment of an emancipated modern man. Unlike the black man of the Antilles, the Algerian man, in the eyes of Fanon, has “the courage to attack the castrating master, the French man, and to castrate him in return” (594).

Fanon is involved in a constant tug of war regarding his homosocial bond with the white man as he “is propelled toward the world and his kind. A movement of aggressiveness engendering servitude or conquest,” love or hate, attraction or repulsion, fear or desire (Fanon 24). According to Fanon, for black men, white men are the mirror that reaffirms the unity of black selfhood. Vergés explains: “The desire for another is the desire for that other’s desire for oneself, or what the black [man] desires is the white [man’s] desire for the black man” (Vergés 589). Fanon’s understanding suggests that the “feminization of the colonized black man implies at once desirability and weakness and that sexual identity is tied inevitably to cultural identity and the structures of power” (593). Bergner claims that as a result of the mirroring relation between white men and black men, “women mediate between black men and white men, enabling the differentiation of masculine subject positions according to race” (Bergner 80). The recovery of Fanon’s ‘wounded masculine’ identity, the attempted shedding of his feminized position, results from the marginalization or silencing of black women’s desires. Vergés asserts that Fanon’s “phallogentrism may be a response to emasculation by white men, but the story that he tells is a story among men with women’s bodies as the hostages in the racial war” (Vergés 593). The black man’s “ostensibly heterosexual interracial desire becomes an act of both identification with and resistance to the white man... interracial heterosexual desire masks interracial homosocial fear and desire” (Bergner 80). Perhaps this lends some insight into Fanon’s choice of a white wife and his displeasure with black women who desire white men. Black men’s “competition with white men for social authority is played out on sexual terrain; Fanon articulates fear through concern about white men’s influence over black women” (81).

In an article entitled “The Politics of Admittance,” Rey Chow underscores such a stance. Chow understands Fanon’s concern about white men’s influence over black women as a concern

about the threat posed to black postcolonial community formation in light of “the unmistakable recognition of female sexuality as a form of physical power” (Chow 39). Chow claims that “the ultimate danger posed by the Negress and the mulatto [who desires a white man]...is that their sexual agency carries with it a powerful (re)conceptualization of community...that threateningly vies” with Fanon’s conceptualization of community. Black women like Mayotte Capécia who “choose white males...as the ultimate purveyor of value” (Sharpley-Whiting 60-61), refuse to act as “empty, mobile figures [empty signifiers], figures of convenience onto which [Fanon] could write his own script” for the community of the non-emasculated modern black man as envisioned by the thinker (Chow 49). Women like Capécia thwart the postcolonial black community suggested by Fanon’s liberated black man because her “racial social intermixing gives rise to alternative groups of people whose origins are all bastardized and whose communal bond can henceforth not be based on the purity of their status as black” (46). While Fanon would be presented this ambivalence and his admittance to the black community not threatened or denied, such a role of ambivalence would not be extended to black women like Capécia. Black women, “by virtue of being female and colored, having entrance points into and out of the community through sex and through ethnicity, become extremely suspect in a situation when supposedly only the black man has such a privilege of ambivalence and when supposedly only race” as the black man experiences it matters “in the articulation of community consciousness” (48). Fanon “cannot trust [women of color like Capécia] because he cannot control the potentiality that ensues from their acts of miscegenation” (49). Chow writes:

If, in terms of the inequality of race, Fanon correctly identifies the ‘infernal circle’ of shame and longing-for-recognition as the condition that traps the black man, who is not refused entry yet

not exactly given his due recognition by the white [man], he also uncannily inflicts a similarly ‘infernally circle’ on the woman of color. (50)

If, for Fanon, skin color, the epidermal schema, is the place where he can never be sure of his admittance and recognition into the world of the other, the world of the white man, i.e. the real world, then for black women, sexuality as much as skin color is what makes admittance and recognition by all communities, especially that of her own race, at least according to Chow, problematic (50).

In his desire to be ‘as powerful as the white man,’ to exist as a possessor of the phallus, Fanon asserts his power of the gaze over black women. Vergés suggests that “Fanon assumes that there is one conception of masculinity, one that requires female submission. Women [in general, but particularly black women] are a degraded mirror for the black man” (Vergés 593). The objectification which results from such female submission permits entry into the community Fanon envisions and acknowledgement of black women “based on her sexuality, as sexual object” (Chow 43). Because the admittance that Fanon gives black women like Capécia – admittance to community, admittance to his liberatory schema – is solely based on sex, “Fanon’s reading means that the woman of color is... a black traitor (when she chooses the white man)” (45). So, to a certain degree, in his pursuit to be ‘powerful’ like the ‘white man’ Fanon has succeeded, at least along one front: “he is just like any other man – he is simply a patriarch who cannot tolerate differences and impurities” (46). Fanon’s patriarchal stance is antithetical to black “female sexual agency” because such agency would “mean that a purist notion of community cannot but dissolve” (50).

Sharpley-Whiting differs with Chow's assessment of Fanon's motives when she claims that

Fanon's impatient, dismissive reading of Capécia is not related to her interracial relationship proper, nor to his own desire to circumscribe black women's sexuality ...in order to ensure the patriarchal power of black men, but to the internalized oppression she invokes in articulating her desire. (Sharpley-Whiting 65)

She goes on to imply, in agreement with Fanon, that in her choice of the white male and selection of the white male as purveyor of value "Capécia is duped" (61). Accordingly, "love has played a strategic but futile role as a resource of emancipation, redemption and mimicry for the inferiorized native" (66). Like Fanon, Sharpley-Whiting denies Capécia the ambivalence extended to men like Fanon. While Fanon, in his desperate attempt to attain freedom is allowed to select a white mate (and no one labels him as duped or writes of his failed strategy or how they despise him), Capécia is not granted such permission. Fanon readily agrees that the inscription of blackness onto his body is a constant reminder of lack, yet "Blackness...as a fundamental source of angst" is problematic for Sharpley-Whiting regarding the black woman. Why? Sharpley-Whiting's suggestion that for Capécia "such a feeling of inferiority...to black femininity...is articulated in terms of a mixed raced female identity" nearly echoes what Chow has determined is a patriarchal concern over an intolerance for differences and impurities (67). Does Sharpley-Whiting have a matriarchal concern regarding intolerance for differences and impurities? Sharpley-Whiting goes on to conclude that Capécia is "the complicit victim of the exploitative, antiblack woman colonial condition" (72). I ask, what options are truly open for black women like Capécia? In the discussion as laid out, she can either be the empty signifier

called for by Fanon or the proponent of the sexexploitative, antiblack woman colonial condition as suggested by Sharpley-Whiting. As the empty signifier of Fanon or the sexual conquest of white men, Capécia will be used related to the motives of others over which she has no control. I say: allow her the freedom of choice to follow her desires which she believes will allow her some attainment of freedom, some attainment of mastery of life in this world. Who are we to pass judgment on her motivations regarding her decisions? The extension of agency precludes us from projecting our desires onto others. Besides, regardless of their motivations or ‘particular’ personalities, Capécia and the mythologized Fanon, that international figure advocating a modern, postcolonial world for the liberated black man, both choose white mates for the reflection each receives. Capécia selects a white mate for she believes the white male to be the purveyor of value; it could be argued that Fanon selects a white wife for he wants to be white. After all, he tells us that “the black man who wants to sleep with the white woman...wants to be white” (Fanon xvii).

While I take exception to some of the points raised by Sharpley-Whiting, we are in accord on at least one issue: for Fanon, Capécia invokes internalized oppression in articulating her desire. Capécia’s desire for the white male reminds Fanon why black men are marginalized and designated as the depository of all that is bad, and sinister and subject to maleficent powers. Perhaps Capécia’s interracial heterosexual desire exacerbates Fanon’s interracial homosocial fear and desire. In his desire to possess the phallus like the white man, could Fanon want to possess the phallus of the white man? Could the homosocial fear and desire, so present yet deeply repressed within Fanon, border on repressed homosexual fear and desire of the white man? Vergés insists that “Fanon fears rape. Rape by the white father, the Master, the racist...Rape by the white father is an act of...inscription upon the black male body...of his [the white man’s]

power” (Vergés 588). This could explain Fanon’s ‘rigorous critique’ of Capécia. He wants to be Capécia. On one level, a level Fanon feels reflects submission to racist ideology, Capécia has discovered a sense of recognition and validation in the world of the white man; acceptance and validation has eluded Fanon.

I am not the first to suggest that repressed homosexual fear and desire are alive in Fanon. Kobena Mercer claims, in “Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon’s Sexual Politics,” that Fanon’s avoidance of black homosexuality “can be taken as a symptom of homophobic fixation and disavowal in the political economy of masculinity” (Mercer 125). Goldie adds “it is possible, of course, that Fanon’s homophobia is more specifically personal, as in his claims about Negrophobia” (Goldie 77). If Goldie is correct, and I believe him to be, and if we are to take Fanon at his word when he claims that “the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual,” then I posit that Fanon is a repressed homosexual (Fanon 135). He certainly expresses Negrophobic tendencies in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He expresses an “anxious fear of the object [the black man]” (135). Remember, that for the Antillean, Fanon claims that the “autosopic hallucination in the Antillean is always neutral” (140, n. 25). Vergés suggests that what Fanon means is that “although the hallucination [perhaps the repository of the maleficent?] should be the white man for the Antillean, it is another black who serves this function” (Vergés 582). Fanon makes this exceptionally clear when he speaks of the Guadeloupean teachers and the Senegalese soldiers: the black man’s body is the object of fascination, Fanon’s ‘autosopic hallucination.’ Fanon notes how “we [the Antilleans] eagerly scoured the streets for a sight” (Fanon 140, n. 25) of the fierce, black Senegalese soldiers and how “driven by *curiosity*, we went to the hotel where Monsieur B, a philosophy teacher, was staying. He was said to be excessively black” (141, n. 25). Men’s bodies do represent the desirable for Fanon.

Goldie stresses that Fanon makes “many statements which are aggressively homosocial, some with a barely hidden homoeroticism” (Goldie 77). According to Goldie, Fanon has been noted as saying:

I have a confession to make: I have never been able, without revulsion, to hear a man say of another man: ‘He is so sensual!

I do not know what the sensuality of a man is. (qtd. in Goldie 77)

In proclaiming his ignorance of the homosexual, Fanon “doth protest too much” (Goldie 78).

Remember, in *Black Skin, White Masks* he claims:

Let us mention in passing that we have never observed the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique, the reason being the absence of the Oedipal complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well known to us. There are, nevertheless, what they call “men dressed as women” or *makoumé*. They mainly wear a jacket and skirt. But we are convinced that they lead a normal sexual life. They drink rum punch like any other guy, and are not insensitive to the charms of women, be they fishwives or vegetable sellers. In Europe, on the other hand, we have known colleagues who have become homosexuals, though not always passive. But there was nothing neurotic in their homosexuality and for them it was expedient, as pimping is for others. (Fanon 157-58, n.44)

Fanon is ironic with regard to the ambivalence he allows for himself. While he has considered the sexual dimension of the attraction and repulsion in the construction of the black male body as

other for the white man, he insists that the sexual dimension of his attraction and repulsion is based in ignorance and curiosity.

One last note regarding Fanon and the aspects of his repressed homosexual tendencies: in David Macey's *Frantz Fanon: a Biography*, he writes of Fanon's time in Algeria when "for the moment, we [Fanon and his commander] are sharing the same bed" (Macey 440-41). Macey suggests that this remark has been "over-interpreted as an expression of a need for homosociality or even a repressed homosexuality" (440-41). In opposition to any homosexual intent, Macey claims the sharing of the same bed "seems to be a bonding moment which made him [Fanon] part of the Algerian movement" (440-41). To this claim I respond: Greek soldiers experienced such bonding moments! Unlike Macey, and perhaps because I have never been a soldier in any kind of military situation, I do not interpret the scene as a "banal situation: an unexceptional aspect of military life," especially when one considers that "Fanon had shared his tents and probably beds [with other soldiers] in an earlier war" (440-41). In light of Fanon's staunch homophobic expression as described in *Black Skin, White Masks*, I am not convinced by Macey as an apologist. After all, many have suggested that Fanon's derision of Mayotte Capécia and elision of black women from his liberatory schema have been 'over-interpreted.' In my estimation, Fanon finds and is able to recognize that which is homosexual and he knows the signs of homosexuality: this raises questions by this reader. In combination with his determined claims of a virile heterosexuality I posit: the most heteronormative and homophobic often have the most to hide - closeted homosexual desires.

I do not know if Frantz Fanon's dismissal of Mayotte Capécia and her desires as a black woman seeking the validation of the white male stems from misogynistic motivations. I do understand Fanon to be "resolutely a man of [his] times" (Fanon xvii). And his times were

vehemently patriarchal and antiblack. He very well could be dismissive of Capécia as any man of his times would be: because she does not fit the patriarchal schema and because she is black.

What I suspect is that Fanon has repressed fears and desires of being the object of inscription by the white phallus in the furtherance of validation. Capécia has used such inscription as her means of emancipation in a world which denies black freedom. On a certain level, Fanon envies her position, for if he practices her teachings they will contrast with the heteronormative outlook which he has devised as crucial to the liberation of the emasculated black male. To follow Capécia's lead would only further highlight the castrated, feminized position of the black man in the real, white world.

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