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## **From black Orpheus: Recognition and Ressentiment in post-colonialism**

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# **From Black Orpheus: Recognition and Ressentiment in Post-Colonialism.**

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*“Since this Eurydice will disappear in smoke if Black Orpheus turns around to look back on her, he will descend the royal road of his soul with his back turned on the bottom of the grotto; he will descend below words and meaning, - “in order to think of you, I have placed all words on the mountains-of-pity”- below daily activities and the plan of “repetition,” even below the first barrier reefs of revolt, with his back turned and his eyes closed, in order to finally touch with his feet the black water of dreams and desire and to let himself drown in it.”*

**Jean-Paul Satre, Black Orpheus.**

**Introduction.**

Many philosophers, psychologists, academics, and even casual thinkers have inevitably grappled with the question: Who am I, and what does it mean to be me? It is deceptively complicated to fathom what constitutes your being. Is it your political beliefs? The God you pray to? The language you speak? The place where you were born? Your accent? The length of your toes and fingernails? The colour of your skin? "Know thyself," says the Oracle of Delphi. A simple question, perhaps deserving of a simple answer, therefore, Let us just pick whatever we feel like. You are smart and kind, intelligent; you are the company you keep and the things you decide to commit your time to. You are as beautiful or ugly as you decide to be. Your body is yours—you decide where it begins, where it ends, and what to do with it.

Perhaps we could decide, but the world would laugh at us. What good is it to say I am beautiful when the world says I am ugly? What good are brave actions when others call them cowardice? One might call it a weakness of will or a fear of being oneself, but we are social creatures. We exist alongside others, trapped by their perceptions, and cannot ignore them, no matter how hard we try, even when we are alone. Identity emanates from us while simultaneously being imposed upon us. There is a tension between who we want to be and how others perceive us, a tension exacerbated by the power imbalances that pervade our society.

Black is not simply an identity forced upon a people but, importantly, one that visibly demarcates them as lesser. The exact nature of the oppression experienced by those inhabiting the Black body will be explored in further chapters. However, the object of this thesis is not to prove that racism and white supremacy exist, as much literature already covers this subject. Rather, I seek to understand the subtleties of this phenomenon and to dare to consider how to address it. Black people may long to deny that the pigment of their skin has anything to do with their being, but society will not allow them to forget that it does. Being Black is a socioeconomic position that affects education, health outcomes, job prospects, and more. This is to say nothing of the more tangible forms of racism and discrimination: slurs, attacks, and murders. Identity is an ephemeral and nebulous construct, yet also an undeniable reality.

This thesis will attempt to answer how people deal with or should deal with this reality. To address these questions, we will turn to Nietzsche and Fanon, who grapple with the question of how to be oneself. Examining both simultaneously and in conversation with each other allows us to gain a better understanding (and perhaps even some answers) regarding how to endure oppression in a healthy way. While many philosophers address these questions, I have chosen Fanon and Nietzsche because they specifically explore how to create identity under oppressive conditions and how that process can fail.

This thesis begins with a discussion of Nietzsche's concept of Master and Slave morality in his works, *"The Genealogy of Morals"* and *"Beyond Good and Evil"*. This analysis explores how values are generated between oppressor and oppressed. I will argue that we can apply this framework to Western European imperialism and its reaction, namely anti-colonial liberatory movements. In this thesis, we shall be focusing on Césaire's Negritude, with a specific emphasis on his work *"Discourse on Colonialism"*. I am not suggesting that Western imperialism and Césaire's Negritude are the same as the master and slave morality presented by Nietzsche. Rather, we can draw analogies and comparisons between Nietzsche's concepts and contemporary examples to problematize how identity under

oppression is constructed. Most importantly, I will address one of Nietzsche's main concerns with constructing identity and values under oppression: the idea of resentment. We will explore in greater depth what resentment means and how we should deal with it. It is the lack of engagement with resentment that creates inauthenticity and potential epistemic harm in Black liberation philosophy. While this criticism has broader applications, this thesis will specifically demonstrate how it appears in Césaire's *Negritude*.

It is this emphasis on health and becoming oneself that I shall argue, brings Nietzsche and Fanon within reach of each other, not just as philosophers discussing similar ideas but as genuine interlocutors. Both seek more than just what is true, such as a true morality or a true identity. This is not to say they are completely divorced from the truth; rather, they place this truth within the larger aim of creating a healthy human being—one who accepts the reality of their being and is unafraid to be themselves. This is crucial for our discussion: the goal is not to create a "true" Black identity but a healthy one. The need for a healthy psychology is woefully under-discussed in post-colonial philosophy, and this lack will be our main critique of Césaire's *Negritude*. We will then attempt to incorporate Fanon's philosophy to address the problem of resentment in a healthier manner than Césaire.

However, Nietzsche is not without his critics. A particular critique we will engage with is that his normative claims are problematic and antithetical to egalitarian and anti-colonial movements. Furthermore, his normative claims cannot be divorced from his metaphysics. When applying the concept of resentment in post-colonial philosophy, we must remember that Nietzsche's solution is individualistic and advocates a return to aristocratic values. Ignoring this requires a misunderstanding or distortion of resentment. Ultimately, I believe this argument fails to recognize the social dynamic inherent in master and slave morality. Additionally, it does not prevent us from evaluating how anti-colonial philosophers deal with resentment, regardless of whether they explicitly grapple with Nietzsche's exact conception.

While Nietzsche does engage with colonialism to some extent, it is primarily from the perspective of white Europeans. He views colonialism as a therapeutic exercise, a character-building endeavour<sup>1</sup>. This perspective should not be ignored, but I will argue that it results from considering colonialism in terms of its benefits for European health. The Black body, however, requires an entirely different prescription to achieve health under colonialism. This is where Fanon's philosophy comes into play in this thesis. While Nietzsche provides the broader framework, Fanon is essential for the specifics. Fanon explicitly addresses the problem of constructing Black identity under white supremacy. I will argue that Fanon attempts to reconstruct Black identity in a way that affirms the existence of Black people while accepting the inherent struggle of being Black under white supremacy. We will explore how Fanon achieves this, whether his approach transcends the resentment discussed by Nietzsche, and if such an approach benefits anti-colonial and Black liberation movements.

Of course, it is also important to acknowledge the differences between Nietzsche and Fanon. As we will discuss, they offer different explanations for the origin of resentment. Fanon emphasizes the psychological impact of colonialism, while Nietzsche focuses on the physiological aspect of oppression. However, I will argue that these differences do not mean

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, "Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality.", aphorism 206.

they are talking past each other or that Fanon is failing to engage with the issue of resentment.

Understanding Fanon's position requires a multidisciplinary approach. The Black identity is forged through history, society, economics, and psychology; in other words, it requires a "sociogenic"<sup>2</sup> understanding. We must observe the particularities of the reality of existing within the Black identity. While Fanon mainly examines the French Antilles, our discussion can also apply to Black ethnic groups in Africa, North America, and South America. These groups are separated by vast distances, time, cultures, and social positions. However, colonialism creates a common thread tying them together. What happens to Black people in one part of the world can inform what will happen to Black people in another part of the world. This cross-cultural compatibility is best demonstrated in the realms of both Black academia and Black art. For example, *The Black Jacobins*, a work by the Trinidadian author C.L.R. James about the Haitian Revolution, was widely disseminated by Black radical groups in apartheid South Africa. Similarly, the popularity of Fanon's own work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, throughout the Black diaspora, particularly regarding the Algerian uprising against the French, is a testament to this interconnectedness.

We must ask what we expect from a liberated Black future. How do we envision these future Black people behaving, forming their governments, and shaping their identities? How will they think and relate to the white and European other? Can Black people live truly and freely without the oppression of the white and still call themselves Black? These are not questions to be deferred to future generations in the hope they will have figured it out. These questions are relevant to us now, as we strive for equality, justice, and liberation. To truly pursue these ideals, we must define what they actually look like, or rather what we want them to look like. We cannot blindly walk towards freedom, hoping to recognize it when we arrive. Open your eyes, grit your teeth, and let us begin.

## **Chapter 1 Nietzsche: Master, slave and identity creation**

To discuss Nietzsche and Fanon on colonialism and the values arising from it, we must first understand Nietzsche's concepts of master and slave morality. On the surface, these moralities suggest a master-slave dynamic in every colonial situation. However, not all instances of this dynamic equate to colonialism. Colonialism is a complex and debated

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<sup>2</sup> A term Fanon uses to express the way in which we need to understand the blackness being created by its social context.

phenomenon, with its origins, nature, and purposes subject to fierce discussion. We will delve deeply into this in the next chapter.

We need to establish the framework for our analysis, which aligns with Fanon's approach to some extent. Although a discussion of morality might seem out of place in a paper on colonialism and identity, I argue, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that Nietzsche's dynamic has significant implications for constructing black identity. Specifically, Nietzsche's examination of 'ressentiment' as the oppressed reaction to the oppressor will be contextualized in modern terms in chapter 3. But first, we must explore the concept's origins and implications by discussing morality and value creation.

Before delving into Nietzsche's understanding of morality, we must explain the link between identity, morality, and values. Identity always exists within a social-historical context to which it must react and be informed by, blurring the line of how much of your identity is truly yours. For instance, someone might consider themselves a samurai like those from the Sengoku Jidai era in Japan, dressing in authentic attire and following the Bushido code. However, the social-historical context means that one is not truly a samurai and cannot be, as it is not a socially or legally recognised identity. Thus, living authentically as a samurai today would be delusional.

Similarly, for those with dark skin, the social-historical context often defines them as black or at least as a person of colour. To a certain extent, what you incorporate into your identity is determined not just by your personal choices but also by societal influences.

However, we could also argue that societal recognition does not solely determine one's internal identity. If one genuinely believes themselves to be a samurai, that conviction might make them a samurai in their own eyes, regardless of societal perception. To take a more pertinent example, consider someone assigned male at birth who has been treated as a boy and a man throughout their life. If, deep down, this person feels they are a woman and takes steps to align their physical appearance with their internal reality, does this make them delusional, akin to our supposed samurai?

We might argue that the person who believes themselves to be a samurai and the person who believes themselves to be a woman are not comparable examples. The samurai identity is entirely socially dependent; if society does not recognize you as a samurai, you are not one. In contrast, gender is a social performance: you express your internal experience of gender to the world, and the recognition of this performance by others does not determine the validity of that identity. Thus, we can see that some aspects of identity are society-dependent, while others are within personal control.

However, isn't a performance dependent on being recognized as what it claims to be? If gender did not exist, it would indeed be impossible to perform being a woman, just as it is impossible to be a samurai today. Even to express an internal truth, there must be some recognition of that performance by others, even if they find it lacking. This means that even if we accept gender as a performance of an internal truth, that truth is still filtered through societal expectations. Both the samurai and the woman perform their identities to society through dress, actions, speech, etc.

Having an identity and performing an identity are intertwined. The reason the identity of the woman is authentic, while the identity of the samurai is a delusion, lies in societal



recognition. If the world were taken over by historical reenactment enthusiasts who were also gender abolitionists, the reverse could be true.

What then about race? Does my skin colour, accent, language, eye colour, and hair colour perform my racial identity? Do my purchases, job, and lifestyle perform my social class? If so, could we argue that identity is merely performance? Furthermore, how is it possible to be myself? Is authenticity merely conforming to whatever social standards are available to me?

This position, I believe, overemphasizes the role of society in constructing the self and underestimates the role of our spontaneous will. Yes, we perform our internal feelings, emotions, values, and identities to the world, but that is not all we do with them. We also sit with them in solitude, grapple with them, love or hate them. This very thesis is a testament to that fact. Much of our values are given to us by society, but this does not mean we have nothing to do with them.

Society plays a crucial role in shaping how we interpret our internal reality, which then becomes our identity. We assign the experiences and feelings of our inner lives to the external roles, values, and identities created by social norms. This fusion of internal reality and social reality forms our lived experience and identities. This does not mean we must always conform to the roles that society presents to us. However, even our rejection of these roles or identities depends on their existence in the first place. The acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles, for instance, relies on those roles being present in society, but it also depends on our internal reality and how we feel about these roles. Society's values can pull us in one direction, while our own values might pull us in another.

This concept extends beyond identity to all aspects of social life. Your social context provides moral norms for behaviour, beauty, intelligence, and more. These norms can evoke various feelings and may cause internal conflict or harm. Race is one such category, blending societal values with personal values. The racialized category carries the additional burden of superiority and inferiority complexes due to its historical origins. This doesn't mean every white person feels superior to every black person and vice versa. However, this configuration of social categories elicits specific reactions, emphasizing certain values among both those deemed inferior and those deemed superior. For instance, movements like Negritude, Black Power, and Black Nationalism arise as reactions to situations where one's identity is considered inferior.

Society, for various reasons, has deemed some people superior and others inferior. The superior individual has no problem relating to themselves, as society already affirms them, resulting in little internal conflict—setting aside the notion of guilt for now. However, those with an inferior identity need to be more creative to live fulfilling lives. This creativity gives rise to movements that aim to reconstruct this identity against societal norms.

To assess whether these reactions of inferiority and superiority are genuinely healthy responses to oppression, especially under colonialism, we need to understand their precise nature. We can achieve this using a Nietzschean framework, as Nietzsche critiques purely reactionary reconstructions of inferior identities.

Nietzsche does not view values as divinely ordained; they are human creations, crafted for specific purposes, both individually and societally. The context in which these values and moralities are created significantly influences their nature.

Nietzsche posits the existence of two general types of morality: master morality and slave morality<sup>3</sup>. The context for the first form of morality is conquest and 'barbarism.' He contends that early in human history, there were peaceful and docile peoples and brutal, power-hungry "men of prey."<sup>4</sup> These aggressive individuals imposed their will upon the more docile humans, establishing themselves as superior. Their morality, which Nietzsche terms master morality, reflects this dominance.

Masters see themselves as good; for them, morality is more about self-glorification than adherence to universal rules. The master values traits that affirm their superiority, such as confidence and strength, which enable them to rule over others and themselves<sup>5</sup>. Their morality is self-affirming, rooted in how they choose to live their lives. At this stage, morality is less about right and wrong actions and more about good and bad taste. In this context, "good" and "bad" equate to "noble" and "despicable."<sup>6</sup> Masters value strength not because of some universal moral law but because it allows them to be who they are and enjoy their lives. Conversely, they devalue weakness because it prevents one from living a fulfilling life. For masters, being weak is bad and pitiful because the weak cannot fully enjoy their existence.

The values of the master revolve around notions of superiority and inferiority. The master inherently values themselves as superior, while those who are not masters are simply deemed inferior. These values shape the master's identity as a superior noble, and through this identity, the master filters their actions. What does it matter when you burn a village, conquer a city, destroy a nation, or enslave a people when you are the superior race, when you love your strength, and these are the actions that strength compels? The master looks down upon those caught in their path of destruction, if they look at all. If they do acknowledge those they consider inferior, it is only to reaffirm their own superiority.

*'... Like a jubilant monster without a conscience, who saunter away, with bravado and equanimity, after a rampage of murder, arson, rape and torture, as though they had merely played some wild students pranks, perfectly convinced that the poets will now have something to sing about and celebrate for long after.'* (Genealogy of Morals page 29 aphorism 11.)

On the other side are those subjugated by the master's will, forming their own values and morality—what Nietzsche calls slave morality. The slave lives under what they perceive as the arbitrary wielding of power by the masters. Given their social context, they value traits that allow them to survive and alleviate suffering. Traits such as pity, kindness, and helpfulness become morally good, as do wit and intelligence, since slave morality focuses on survival and utility<sup>7</sup>.

Because slave values are a reaction to master values, they decry or at least view with suspicion the traits that masters value. The master's power appears as cruelty, their confidence as arrogance, and their self-glorification as vanity. Under slave morality, these

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<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Page 194, aphorism, 260

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Page 192, aphorism, 257

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Page 196, aphorism 260

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Page 195, aphorism 260

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil. Page, page 197, aphorism 260

qualities are not merely in bad taste but signify serious character flaws. Masters are not just bad—they are evil<sup>8</sup>.

For the slave, morality is defined by actions: good actions versus evil actions. Those who commit evil are evil, and those who do good are good. What distinguishes these two identities is not who they are, but what they do.

This dialectical system of values and morality that Nietzsche presents in *Beyond Good and Evil* delineates the dynamic between the master who conquers and the slave who survives. Nietzsche argues that modernity has made slave morality the dominant moral framework. While master morality avoids imposing its values on others, slave morality seeks to universalize its values. For the slave, morality is not merely a matter of good and bad taste but a distinction between good and evil individuals. Consequently, they strive to eradicate evil, in the world and even within themselves.

Nietzsche identifies two main problems with the dominance of slave morality. First, it eliminates the plurality of moral systems, leaving no alternative frameworks against which to evaluate our own<sup>9</sup>. Second, slave morality fails to affirm itself; Europe is now afraid of its true nature, shying away from recognizing the constructive role that violence and suffering can play in creating strong and healthy individuals.<sup>10</sup>

However, Nietzsche revisits the concepts of master and slave morality in *On The Genealogy of Morals*, where his emphasis shifts subtly. In this work, slave morality transitions from being primarily about utility to being primarily about what he calls "ressentiment." Nietzsche argues that the dominance of slave morality in Europe began with the Roman conquest of the Jewish people, whose values spread during this period through Christianity.

The Romans, as Nietzsche portrays them, embody master morality. They value strength, honour, beauty, and wealth. Their gods reflect these qualities, being bold and beautiful, yet also prone to bickering and fighting, lusting for women, and punishing offenses not out of justice but personal desire<sup>11</sup>. Due to their master values, Romans do not shy away from violence, leading them to conquer and subjugate "weaker" peoples, including the Jews. In their conquest, they force the Jews to confront Roman values, rubbing their faces in their perceived inferiority and bending them to their will.

However, the Jews do not simply accept their subjugation. Like all people, they seek to assert their own will and rebel against their Roman rulers. Yet, their rebellions fail because they are not strong enough to overcome their oppressors<sup>12</sup>.

Because the Jews cannot exact their revenge in reality, they take their revenge in their minds. They denounce the moral degeneracy of conquest, violence, and the arrogance of ruling over others. They believe that due to the moral failings of their rulers, these oppressors will eventually be punished and suffer eternal damnation. Therefore, it becomes virtuous to be as unlike the Romans as possible: to be humble, peaceful, and forgiving—to be un-Roman and unmasterly, embracing the identity of a slave. Nietzsche calls this a morality of ressentiment. These values of kindness and community are not born from love

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, page 158, aphorism 228

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Page 125, aphorism 202

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Page 44, aphorism 44

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Page 26-27, aphorism 10

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Page 29-30, aphorism 11

but from hatred disguised as virtue<sup>13</sup>. The Jews, unable to overcome Roman strength, instead assert, "We are a kind and forgiving people; we don't seek vengeance—that is Roman, that is evil." They preach to love thy neighbour, to turn the other cheek. In the next life, perhaps through some divine justice, the Romans will be punished, and the Jews rewarded. While the masters begin with themselves, the slave generates values through opposition to the master. Thus, slave values do not affirm their own existence but rather create values by devaluing the master.

'O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.' **Psalm 137, verse 8 king James bible**.

Nietzsche uses the allegory of eagles and lambs to illustrate his point. Eagles, with their powerful wings and sharp talons, prey upon the lambs. The eagles do not hate the lambs; they simply see them as good prey. However, the lambs perceive this differently. Accepting that eagles are predators and they are prey is too harsh and pessimistic. Instead, the lambs claim that the eagles are choosing to be cruel by preying upon them. They argue that the eagles could choose to be lambs if they wanted to, thus framing their own existence as virtuous by 'choosing' to be lambs.

This is Nietzsche's primary concern in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: that slave morality glorifies weakness, mediocrity, and servitude. Nietzsche's true target is not Judaism but Christianity and its values. The spread of Christian values throughout Europe has led to a mindset that prevents people from having faith in themselves and affirming their existence. This, Nietzsche warns, will eventually lead to nihilism, where the highest values undermine themselves<sup>14</sup>.

So, is slave morality fundamentally a morality of utility that needs to be balanced with an opposing moral framework, or is it a morality of resentment whose dominance will eventually lead to the downfall of European society? I believe it is both. My interpretation of Nietzsche's work is that the resentment inherent in slave morality does help the slaves survive, particularly by valuing intelligence and mutual aid. However, these values arise from the resentment that slaves harbour towards the masters.

Just as the masters affirm themselves first, enabling them to inflict vast suffering upon the world without guilt, the slaves resent first, and this resentment helps them survive in a world they perceive as arbitrary and cruel. I believe Nietzsche wants us to confront the problems with slave morality by recognizing that it is not the only possible system of values.

In the next chapter, we will further explore how master and slave morality can be applied to Western imperialism and colonialism. However, it is already evident that the key issue is that one cannot maintain the same self-understanding when subjugated as when free. More often than not, this means prioritizing survival over self-affirmation. In the face of overwhelming strength, the best one can hope for is to survive.

This raises several important questions: Do values of survival always come with resentment, and is this resentment as detrimental as Nietzsche initially suggests? Furthermore, do self-

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<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Page 34-36, aphorism 14

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Page 32, aphorism 13

affirming values always lead to cruelty? Is master morality always desirable and slave morality always to be avoided?

Before moving on, we must note that a consistent theme in Nietzsche's philosophy is the ill effects of the dominance of slave morality, particularly the growing trends of egalitarianism and the avoidance of suffering. For Nietzsche, egalitarianism and democracy signify humanity's loss of faith in itself, suggesting that strong and unique individuals can no longer stand out from the crowd. Instead, we distribute power equally because we believe that no one is superior to another<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, by avoiding pain and suffering, we fail to recognize that suffering produces some of humanity's best qualities. Our drive to eliminate suffering will only result in mediocre beings incapable of achieving greatness<sup>16</sup>.

For Nietzsche, the ideal man lives above and apart from society; community is a sign of weakness, and compromise is coercion<sup>17</sup>. This perspective starkly contrasts with most anti-colonial and civil rights movements, which might tempt one to dismiss Nietzsche as an outdated relic of the past.

While it might be tempting to dismiss Nietzsche entirely, I believe this would be a mistake. Fundamentally, Nietzsche encourages us to strive for greatness and not be constrained by the expectations of those around us. To achieve this, we must accept reality as it is rather than how we wish it to be, face the world's cruelty head-on, and reject our own mediocrity. This requires standing firm in our individuality. However, Nietzsche fails or refuses to see the possibility of achieving this in harmony with our fellow human beings.

At its core, Nietzsche's philosophy does not view values and morality as parts of a larger philosophical system but as tools for thriving in the present. We must hold on to this aspect of Nietzsche's thought: the aim to construct an identity that allows for the greatest flourishing, rather than one that is merely coherent.

'The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment: it is here that our new language perhaps sounds strangest. That question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species breeding;...' **(Beyond Good and Evil, page 35 aphorism 4)**

### **Chapter 1.5: Does Nietzsche belong here?**

Fundamental to this argument, and the entire thesis, is the premise that we can examine a post/anti-colonial movement such as Negritude through the lens of resentment in the first place. Veeran Naicker has already investigated this assumption and concluded that the concept of resentment cannot be detached from Nietzsche's larger philosophical and psychological project of individualism and aristocratic ideals. Conversely, Ofelia Schutte acknowledges the limitations of applying Nietzsche to anti-colonial politics but still endorses his potential for contributing to a philosophy of liberation. I believe this question hinges on the extent to which we should interpret Nietzsche as a political thinker in the first place.

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<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, On The Genealogy of Morals. Page 32, aphorism 12

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, On The Genealogy of Morals. Page 72, aphorism 44

<sup>17</sup> Wininger, K.J. On Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals . J Value Inquiry 30, 453–470 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00164554>

Nietzsche's philosophy is aimed at health, at creating a type of human being who is unafraid to be themselves—in other words, fostering authenticity. This requires a profound belief in oneself, meaning that one does not view oneself merely as a product of social, genetic, and political factors beyond one's control. Furthermore, it entails accepting the harsh realities of being a person in the world—a person with biological drives that sometimes conflict, existing among others with competing and conflicting wills<sup>18</sup>. Just as love and joy are integral to the human experience, so too are pain and suffering; one must be ready to embrace both.

However, despite this emphasis on personal authenticity, Nietzsche's work also reflects certain political views and perceptions. Time and again, Nietzsche rails against democracy, egalitarianism, feminism, and other movements aimed at making humans more collective and equal<sup>19</sup>.

Naicker argues that one cannot selectively adopt parts of Nietzsche's philosophy without accepting the whole. He points to Nietzsche describing his own work as aristocratic radicalism, emphasizing the necessity of a higher class of beings who lead and a lower class who serve as mere instruments of labour. According to Nietzsche, equality, freedom, and democracy are the results of Christianity taming and degenerating humanity<sup>20</sup>. These values, he claims, emerged from the Good-Evil dichotomy born of resentment. Therefore, one cannot move away from resentment without also moving away from these values and toward a more individualistic and hierarchical society<sup>21</sup>. This stance is, of course, antithetical to the anti-colonial project or any social justice movement.

Naicker contends that anti-colonial thinkers have misunderstood or misrepresented Nietzschean resentment, viewing it not as a method of valuation requiring the negative valuation of others to affirm oneself, but rather as an internalization of colonial morality. This misunderstanding means they do not escape resentment but instead address it with more resentment. In short, Nietzsche's prescriptions for the individual inevitably have larger social and political implications.<sup>22</sup>

However, Naicker does not suggest abandoning the concept of resentment when dealing with colonialism. Instead, he advocates understanding its implications to effectively deploy it in discussions about anti-colonialism<sup>23</sup>.

On the other side of this argument is Ofelia Schutte, who contends that Nietzsche can play a crucial role in a philosophy of liberation. Like Césaire, she argues that anti-colonial philosophy needs to offer both epistemic and material liberation, and this is where she believes Nietzsche can contribute<sup>24</sup>. Schutte highlights Nietzsche's rejection of an absolute or universal good, noting that an absolute good necessitates absolute authority. While

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<sup>18</sup> Wininger, K.J. On Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*. J Value Inquiry 30, 453–470 (1996). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00164554>, page 461

<sup>19</sup> An exhaustive would be difficult and unnecessary, but a look at the *Beyond Good and Evil* Chapter 2, the free spirit gives an indication.

<sup>20</sup> Naicker, Veeran (2019). Resentment in the postcolony: A Nietzschean analysis of self and otherness. *Angelaki* 24 (2): page 61-63

<sup>21</sup> Naicker, Veeran (2019). Resentment in the postcolony: conclusion.

<sup>22</sup> Naicker, Veeran (2019). Resentment in the postcolony: 61, 68

<sup>23</sup> Naicker, Veeran (2019). Resentment in the postcolony: Conclusion.

<sup>24</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martán (2004). Schutte's Nietzschean Postcolonial Politics. *Hypatia* 19 (3) page 147

Nietzsche deploys this argument against God, it can also be applied to state authority and the supposed universal superiority of Western imperialism<sup>25</sup>.

From an anti-colonial perspective, there is great benefit in examining the origins of values and norms and recognizing that the way the world is does not dictate the way it must be. Schutte particularly values Nietzsche's resistance to simplistic binaries, such as good and evil or right and wrong. This approach encourages an anti-colonial movement to view itself not as a singular good culture fighting against an evil one but as part of an intercultural struggle with a plurality of perspectives aimed at liberation.

This does not mean that Schutte endorses Nietzsche's politics; she believes we can adopt his metaphysics while leaving his normative claims aside. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that his more abrasive politics can still help us challenge the certitude of the status quo<sup>26</sup>.

The disagreement stems from Naicker's claim that we cannot separate normative claims from metaphysical claims. He also argues that Fanon and other anti-colonial thinkers misunderstand Nietzsche, a topic we will explore in a later chapter. For Naicker, Nietzsche's aristocratic commitments are deeply rooted in his analysis of the origins of values and morality in modern society; his political views are intertwined with these commitments and cannot be easily dismissed. Therefore, to bypass Nietzsche's normative claims, we must present an independent argument demonstrating their contradiction with his metaphysics.

While Schutte does not accomplish this, her points about Nietzsche's usefulness in anti-colonialism remain valid, and we can still apply a Nietzschean framework to colonialism. As Naicker acknowledges, the concept of resentment has produced many valuable contributions to anti-colonial thought. Moreover, thinkers like Mbembe, Fanon, and Said, mentioned by Naicker, have not confined themselves strictly to a Nietzschean framework, and neither does this thesis. In fact, we will partially step out of Nietzsche and into Fanon. If this shift means Nietzsche would argue we have moved from one type of resentment to another, so be it.

The sole aim of this thesis is not to transcend resentment or transition from slave morality to master morality, but to seek a way to address oppression that fosters health and authenticity. Furthermore, this is not Nietzsche's project either; he does not advocate for a complete shift to master morality but seeks a way to navigate resentment within its own context. My critique of Césaire is not merely that his philosophy is rooted in resentment, but that it appears to be an inauthentic and unhealthy way of dealing with oppression. Using Nietzsche's concepts of master/slave morality and resentment, we can better understand why it is inauthentic and what the consequences are.

It is possible that Fanon too falls into resentment; however, whether or not resentment is present should not be the sole criterion for evaluating a philosophy's authenticity or value.

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<sup>25</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martín (2004). Schutte's Nietzschean Postcolonial Politics, page 147.

<sup>26</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martín (2004). Schutte's Nietzschean Postcolonial Politics, page 148

## **Chapter 2 Césaire: Negritude and Ressentiment.**

This chapter seeks to explore the relationship between ressentiment and Negritude, particularly through Aimé Césaire's Negritude and his work, *Discourse on Colonialism*. I have chosen to focus on Césaire for two reasons. Firstly, his philosophy has been profoundly influential, shaping and influenced by other major anti-colonial black political thoughts. Consequently, many elements of Negritude can be found echoed to varying degrees in numerous post-colonial and anti-colonial black movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, the Black Panther Party, Black Power, and Black Nationalism. Secondly, Césaire was not just a philosopher but also a poet and a political leader. His attempt to reconstruct black identity was not merely an academic exercise but a practical endeavour with real implications—it was meant to be lived, not just read.

In this chapter, I will argue that Césairean Negritude's ultimate aim is to ground black epistemic liberation and identity in a "return" to African ancestry. This choice of Africa stems from a similar ressentiment that Nietzsche describes in *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. This has the same consequences Nietzsche warns of, namely a denial of the self that results from self-abnegation, a refusal to live authentically.

To make this argument, I will first discuss how black identity was born from European colonialism. The second section will examine Césairean Negritude as a counter to the standard conception of blackness created by this colonial history. In the final section, I will argue that this reaction aligns with a morality of ressentiment and explore the potential consequences of this resentment. While Césairean Negritude is but one strand of Negritude, it will be the primary focus of this thesis as it is arguably the most prominent and exemplifies the uncritical association of black identity with Africa. Therefore, while this critique is primarily



directed at Césaire's work, it also has broader implications for other liberatory philosophies that take the black identity as gospel.

To discuss Nietzschean philosophy in the context of colonialism, we must first define what colonialism is. Some scholars argue that colonialism is not a distinct historical phenomenon but rather a continuation of European imperialism beyond Europe. They suggest that conquest, occupation, and exploitation of foreign nations have been occurring globally since time immemorial<sup>27</sup>. The difference, they argue, is not in the practice but in the scale of conquest. While the Roman Empire encompassed millions, the British Empire at its height ruled over hundreds of millions, and Europe as a whole nearly achieved world domination<sup>28</sup>.

However, even if one were to endorse this view, which I do not, the difference in scale between pre-colonial and modern European empires necessitated substantial changes in social, economic, and technological systems to maintain them compared to their pre-15th century counterparts<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, it is still worth examining the mechanisms of the modern European empire as a distinct phenomenon. This does not mean that colonialism emerged from nothing or that imperialism did not inform colonialism; one phase inevitably bled into the other. While there are numerous differences between these stages, what is relevant here is the need for the social invention of race and its effect on our contemporary understanding of race.

As Eric Williams argues in his book *Capitalism and Slavery*, early colonial exploitation was quite varied in terms of the labourers' backgrounds. Poor white individuals toiled alongside indigenous, Asian, and black labourers, all united by their exploitation by wealthy white landowners. None of these labourers were particularly free or well-treated<sup>30</sup>. This dynamic began to change with a decrease in indentured servitude and an increase in slavery. The process of industrialization in Europe at the time led to the creation of large-scale monocropping farms, which required vast amounts of land and labour. Smaller independent farms were pushed out, leaving space only for large corporate farms whose labour needs could not be met by indentured servants alone<sup>31</sup>. Consequently, exploitation intensified, and the colonial elite increasingly relied on slave labour—initially indigenous but, as that supply diminished, eventually African.

How, then, do these nations, which claim to uphold Christian values of justice, equality, and sympathy, justify the mass mistreatment, brutalization, and exploitation of entire groups of people? While many European colonists and Christians, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, sympathized with the plight of black and indigenous slaves, this was not the prevailing attitude. Some colonists cited scripture to justify and even endorse slavery<sup>32</sup>, but many others turned to Greek, specifically Aristotelian, philosophy<sup>33</sup>. This philosophy posited that some races were born to rule and others to be slaves. From the perspective of the white ruling elite, it was clear who belonged to each group: they were the white masters, and the

<sup>27</sup> MacQueen, Colonialism. Page 24 and "Western Colonialism | Definition, History, Examples, & Effects."

<sup>28</sup> James Carlyle, "The Population of Augustan and Severan Rome" (2016), <https://doi.org/10.11575/prism/28276>. And Flinders et al., The Oxford Handbook of British Politics.

<sup>29</sup> Lenin and Tridon, Imperialism : The Final Stage of Capitalism.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, Capitalism and Slavery. Page 9-14

<sup>31</sup> Williams, Capitalism and Slavery. Page 6

<sup>32</sup> For example, Colossians 3:22, Exodus 21: 2-7

<sup>33</sup> Tom Holland, Dominion. Chapter 12

Africans, who now comprised the overwhelming majority of enslaved labour in the colonies, were the black slaves<sup>34</sup>.

Again, it is difficult, if not impossible, to attribute the cause of colonialism, and by extension slavery, to a single factor. We should be cautious not to overemphasize the role of European malice or hatred towards those being enslaved or colonized. Similarly, we should avoid attributing it entirely to a moral deficit in European culture, as Cedric Robinson does in *Black Marxism*, suggesting an innate European predisposition to conquest and slavery<sup>35</sup>. Instead, we should understand it as the result of multiple factors. One significant factor was the drive for increasing profit through colonial expansion. The concept of blackness emerged from this colonial exploitation; in other words, the black identity originates from the values and material interests of European colonial elites from the 15th to the 19th century.

As Fanon observes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, black in the collective unconscious signifies bad, while white signifies good. To say "that is a fair child" implies both goodness and racial whiteness. In contrast, noting that a child is black implies both racial blackness and that they are deplorable or wrong<sup>36</sup>. The Western world's subjective unconscious has been employed to increase the social distance between white colonists and black slaves.

This Manichean dualism evolved within the European political unconscious to justify slavery and the de-subjectification of non-Western peoples, long outliving the institution of slavery itself. Moreover, it was further reinforced by developments in philosophy and the sciences. Phrenology, for instance, became a branch of science that cemented the differences between the races, while social Darwinism served a similar purpose in philosophy<sup>37</sup>.

As colonialism grew in scale between the 17th and 20th centuries, nearing complete world domination by European powers, it was increasingly seen not just as an economic venture, but as a civilizing and humanitarian necessity. As the oft-quoted titular line from Rudyard Kipling's poem suggests, colonialism had become "the white man's burden" to civilize the "Half devil and half child" savages of lesser nations<sup>38</sup>. By the 20th century, to be Black was to be African, and to be African was to be savage, primitive, and uncivilized. The only possible hope of redemption for the descendants of African slaves was their proximity to Europeans, and the only salvation for Africans remaining on the continent was their rule by Europe. In short, the black identity was something to be ashamed of, to be feared, and to be hidden at all costs, not something to be proud of.

It is under this context that three black students from Paris in the 1940s—Aimé Césaire, Léon Gontran Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor—exploded onto the scene of black intellectualism.

Césaire and his comrades, raised intellectually in an environment that granted more epistemic validity to whiteness and white supremacy, were frustrated by their black peers who felt they had to shed their black identity to gain recognition from their white counterparts. Césaire, in particular, observed that the Caribbean petty bourgeoisie denied

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, page 19

<sup>35</sup> Watson, "The Cult of Cedric Robinson's Black Marxism: A Proletarian Critique - the Philosophical Salon."

<sup>36</sup> Fanon, *Black skin White masks*, page 166

<sup>37</sup> Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science*. Chapter 2 it's a small world

<sup>38</sup> "The White Man's Burden," The Kipling Society, May 16, 2024, [https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems\\_burden.htm](https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm).

their African roots, which whites regarded as savage and primitive. This denial grounded their work and their "being in the world" in the rejection of an essential part of their identity. His solution was undeniably radical and arguably an eruption of revolutionary fervour that had been simmering since W.E.B. Du Bois. He embraced his African heritage and encouraged others to do the same. He wrote of Africans not as savage and primitive, but as people with rich ideas and philosophies that, once reintroduced to black thought, could be liberating and revolutionary<sup>39</sup>. It should be noted that Césaire was not fabricating an idealized, fictitious African history from nothing; rather, he was reacting to the dominant European notion of Africa as a place with "no history," as Hegel so eloquently put it<sup>40</sup>.

This movement for the black diaspora to embrace their African heritage and thereby achieve both social and epistemic liberation, Césaire called Negritude. While Negritude was not the first movement to advocate for black pride, Reiland Rabaka notes that it was the first to blend a wide range of white and black radicalism, positioning itself as an aesthetic movement with the spiritual and cultural redemption of continental and diasporan Africans at its core<sup>41</sup>. Although there are many strands of Negritude, many share this key feature: pushing back against the prevailing narrative by embracing the 'Africanity' of black people as a path to social progress.

Césairean Negritude places a significant emphasis on the idea of a 'return' to Africa. By this, Césaire does not mean a literal physical return, but rather an intellectual and spiritual reconnection with Africa<sup>42</sup>. Through this 'returning,' the authentic black self can be created. 'Returning' to Africa involves recognizing the historical importance that the African continent has had for the black diaspora. It also entails examining certain aspects of traditional African society and practices, learning from them to better organize our own society<sup>43</sup>. Césaire viewed the discarding of African history as a dismissal of important lessons that Africa could teach the world.

Additionally, part of this historical reclamation involves scrutinizing how European civilization has destroyed nations, societies, and ways of life, a theme Césaire articulates in his work *Discourse on Colonialism*. This essay is crucial for understanding Césairean Negritude, especially through a Nietzschean lens. Nietzschean resentment is fundamentally about the social relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor: the master does not resent the slave, but the slave resents the master, which lies at the core of their difference in values. In other words, the masters value creation starts with themselves, where as the slaves values stems from the resentment of the master<sup>44</sup>. Nietzsche sees this resentment as the hidden core of Christian values, characterizing it as slave morality. Therefore, to determine if Césairean Negritude could be characterized as a reactionary morality of resentment, we need to examine whether Césaire's relationship to his oppressor is rooted in resentment.

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<sup>39</sup> "Négritude (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," January 24, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/negritude/#Bib>.

<sup>40</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing The Black Radical Tradition*, From W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral. Page 128

<sup>41</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*. Page 112

<sup>42</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*. Page 130.

<sup>43</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*. 129

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Aphorism 260.

*Discourse on Colonialism* opens with a reflection on the impact of fascism, specifically Nazi fascism, on Europe. Broadly, Césaire argues that the phenomenon of the Nazis—a genocidal fascist power intent on world domination—is not new; rather, it is the result of the legacy of imperialism. The horrors perpetrated by the Nazis were not unique; what was unique was that this was the first time European imperialism turned inward on Europe itself. In his own words, "before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them."<sup>45</sup> Césaire then cites numerous European thinkers and supporters of colonialism and imperialism to demonstrate the rhetorical similarities between the Nazis and European colonizers. One particularly relevant citation, given the current discussion on master and slave morality, is from the French soldier in Africa, Ernest Psichari. It reads as follows:

I know that I must believe myself superior to the poor Bayas of the Mambere. *I know that I must take pride in my blood.* When a superior man ceases to believe himself superior, he actually ceases to be superior. ... *When a superior race ceases to believe itself a chosen race, it actually ceases to be a chosen race.* (Page 50)

Césaire presents other quotes from Europeans who speak of their perceived superiority over black people and express indifference or even pleasure at the suffering they inflict. In Césaire's view, this reveals that Europe is "morally and spiritually indefensible."<sup>46</sup> The entire project of colonialism, he argues, turns men into monsters, encouraging or forcing them to commit heinous acts and providing them with the rhetoric of racial superiority to justify it. Europe and capitalism have only brought slaughter and exploitation, making them indefensible. To create a just world, Césaire insists, we must move away from both<sup>47</sup>. His alternative for the black diaspora is to "return" to their pre-colonial African traditions, which can remind the world of more egalitarian ways of organizing society<sup>48</sup>.

Having discussed the origins of black identity in European colonialism and Césaire's attempt to reclaim and redefine it, we can now apply a Nietzschean lens to this dynamic. We must ask if European colonialism is analogous to master morality and if Césaire's reaction is comparable to slave morality.

Firstly, let's address something Césaire implies but does not make explicit: why did Europe generally care about the Jews but not the black peoples of Africa or the indigenous societies that colonial imperialism decimated? Why is it that, even today, the Holocaust of European Jews remains a pivotal event in Western history, while the genocide of the Herero and Namaqua people—committed in the same century, justified with similar rhetoric, and perpetrated by virtually the same people—fades into historical obscurity?

It would be easy to over-complicate this answer with factors like geopolitics, differences in time periods, proximity, technological differences in the ability to convey information, and scale. While these factors undoubtedly played a role, they do not address the heart of the issue. Simply put, there is a double standard: one level of acceptable behaviour towards white Europeans and another towards black Africans.

<sup>45</sup> Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Page 31

<sup>46</sup> Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* page 32

<sup>47</sup> Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Page 77

<sup>48</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*. Page 122 -124

As we have already discussed at length in this thesis, and as Césaire mentions in *Discourse on Colonialism*, Europe had spent much of its history conquering lands and committing atrocities in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Thus, why would we expect their atrocities upon black bodies to cause any more moral friction than it did back then? Throughout European history, race became the dividing line to distinguish the nobles from the peasants. Born out of economic convenience and further solidified by science and philosophy, differences in races were accepted as fact by the time of the Second World War.

In fact, this development of the idea of race laid the groundwork for Nazi Germany to justify their genocide of the Jewish people. What makes Germany different is not necessarily a different moral compass but rather a different conception of race<sup>49</sup>.

Therefore, as Césaire has demonstrated, Europeans generally consider the white race superior and those not belonging to the white race inferior. The boundaries of who is considered white may shift over time and place, but the black African has consistently been deemed the inferior race. This distinction allows for the disregard of rights afforded to Europeans. The Nazis simply narrowed the definition of white European to the chagrin of the rest of Europe.

White Europeans, much like those with master morality, look down on those outside their group, if they acknowledge them at all. They trample entire peoples and civilizations without a second thought, considering themselves superior not because of their actions but because of their race. This value system of superior and inferior races, developed throughout Western imperialism, enabled Europe to colonize almost the entire world and also justified the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews. As Nietzsche describes, for the masters or nobles, morality only applies within the in-group; they can do whatever they want to everyone else.

This value system is not unique to European history—examples can be found across different places and time periods. However, it is Europe's particular conception of racial superiority that has become dominant worldwide through the totality of Western imperialism.

However, one might counter that master morality does not apply to Europe. As Nietzsche emphasizes at great length, the problem with European culture is precisely the lack of master morality and the spread of Christian slave morality<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, other characteristics of European colonialism do not align neatly with Nietzsche's description of master morality. For instance, a central aspect of master morality is the belief that those considered lesser are incapable or undeserving of the values and morality upheld by the masters. This contrasts sharply with European colonialism, which invested considerable effort in 'civilizing' the societies they encountered, attempting to make them more European. Such an endeavour is more indicative of slave morality<sup>51</sup>.

A perhaps simplistic but sufficient explanation is that Nietzsche suggests master and slave morality can coexist within a single individual<sup>52</sup>. I believe this means we can accept that slave morality has dominated European culture while recognizing that the values justifying colonialism are analogous to those of the masters as described by Nietzsche. Recall our

<sup>49</sup> Stein, George J. "Biological Science and the Roots of Nazism." *American Scientist* 76, no. 1 (1988): 50–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27854963>.

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Page 30, aphorism 11.

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Aphorism 272

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Aphorism 260

discussion about the double standard in European morality—one set of values for black bodies and another for white ones. This is significant because it shows that colonized black bodies are reacting to what seems to be the same arbitrary wielding of power, arrogance, and cruelty faced by the Jews in *The Genealogy of Morals*.

It is not the aim of this thesis to label definitively European culture as literally master morality. History and cultures are far too complex for such broad categorization. What is important is to demonstrate that when Europe interacts with non-European peoples, particularly African peoples, there is a similar pathos of distance as described by Nietzsche between the master and slave.

This brings us back to Césaire and Negritude. Césaire argues that Black people need not only material liberation, as offered by Marxism and other white radical thought, but also epistemic liberation from the psychological effects of white supremacy<sup>53</sup>. He contends that Black people should ground their epistemic liberation in the re-elevation of Africa as the ancestral home of the black diaspora. Since Europe is morally and spiritually bankrupt, Black people should move away from European thought and look to the practices of pre-colonial African societies to create a more egalitarian future. By recognizing and embracing Africa as a critical part of their historicity, an authentic Black or African self can be created. The question we must ask at this stage is simple: why Africa?

To reiterate, Césaire is not merely calling for a "return" to Africa to find examples of building an egalitarian society. Instead, he selects Africa because he believes it offers special epistemic liberation for the black diaspora. But why is this the case? How does acknowledging that, over 400 years ago, a tribe in modern-day Nigeria organized their society in a more egalitarian manner provide epistemic liberation to a Black Brazilian, a Surinamese immigrant in the Netherlands, or even those currently living on the African continent? Why does Césaire place African ancestry at the focal point of black identity and authenticity?

Recall, as previously discussed, that the racialized black identity originated from Europe's desire to enslave and exploit Africa and its peoples. The social distance the European elite created between themselves and Africa allowed for two different moral standards of behaviour to coexist. It is from Africa that the black identity is literally created. However, if we dig deeper, we see that Africa as an identity is not coherent either. Africa encompasses a multitude of societies, tribes, kingdoms, empires, practices, and religions. There is no single attribute or characteristic that can be definitively and universally pinned down as African.

In other words, the African identity was not created by Africans, but by European colonizers; the black identity was not created by Black people, but by European slave drivers. The connection between the black person and the African identity (not specific tribes or countries, but the entire continent) is that white supremacy does not distinguish between the two. This is why a black person who has never lived in or seen Africa for hundreds of years, whose language is not an indigenous African language, and whose culture is different from those practiced in Africa, is nonetheless still considered African<sup>54</sup>.

We see an expression of this resentment in *Discourse on Colonialism*. In it, Césaire dedicates pages to demonstrating how morally bankrupt European colonialism has been and

<sup>53</sup> Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory*. Page 124

<sup>54</sup> I.e African Americans, Afro Latinas, Afro Caribbean.

how indefensible it remains<sup>55</sup>. He suggests that fascism and Nazism serve the same function for Europeans as Hell does in Christian mythology—an inevitable punishment for the oppressors' moral wrongdoings, almost divine in its certitude and totality.

"Whether one likes it or not, at the end of the blind alley that is Europe, I mean the Europe of Adenauer, Schuman, Bidault, and a few others, there is Hitler. At the end of capitalism, which is eager to outlive its day, there is Hitler. At the end of formal humanism and philosophical renunciation, There is Hitler."<sup>56</sup>

Further, like the Jews in Nietzsche's *genealogy*, instead of depicting a society too weak to fight back and overthrow European colonialism, the victims of colonialism are portrayed as egalitarian, cooperative, and peace-loving societies. According to this view, these societies chose to be peaceful and chose not to be imperial powers. Thus, Europeans, by choosing to be imperial and oppressing the world, are blameworthy.<sup>57</sup> Césaire writes of Europeans' "false objectivity, their chauvinism, their sly racism, their depraved passion for refusing to acknowledge any merit in the non-white races, especially the black-skinned races, their obsession with monopolizing all glory for their own race."<sup>58</sup>

It is this constant association with Africa that Césaire is reacting to. Because of this association, he insists that the roots of authentic black identity lie in the vague concept of pre-colonial Africa. White supremacy has made him black and African and told him he should be ashamed of both. In response, he declares pride in both, whatever that means. This is why it could be correct to characterize Negritude, at least Césairean Negritude, as a movement of resentment. Placing Africanity at the center of black identity is not the result of an authentic reflection on the lived experiences of black people and their being in the world, but rather it is a reaction to the values created by white supremacy.

Césaire claims that he is turning towards Africa, "returning." However, it seems that what he is actually doing is turning away from Europe, regardless of what the alternative is. By declaring European culture morally bankrupt and advocating for its rejection, he generates an internal conflict within black Europeans. He replaces one form of inauthenticity—stemming from white supremacy forcing black people to be ashamed of their African heritage—with another, compelling black people to embrace an identity distanced by hundreds of years of history. Why? Because Europe has harmed him, his culture, his ancestors, and his very psyche, leading him to resent it. He reacts to their hatred with a hatred of his own, which he then justifies as egalitarianism, righting past wrongs, and creating an authentic black self<sup>59</sup>.

Negritude, as Césaire presents it, actually devalues Africa. It reduces the history and complexity of its many cultures to a mere tool to oppose European culture and grafts it onto

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<sup>55</sup> Discourse on colonialism. Pg 72, 73, 61, 62, 60, 51, 50, 42. This is not a comprehensive list, as it is almost the entire essay.

<sup>56</sup> Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism page 37

<sup>57</sup> Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism page 44

<sup>58</sup> Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism page 56

<sup>59</sup> These are not definitive claims about his motivation or his psyche. I am not arguing that these thoughts consciously came to Césaire and that was the 'real' reason for coming up with negritude. Neither I nor anyone else has access to that kind of information. Rather I am arguing that this is a potential logical progression that can be made in order to justify this orientation towards Africa and away from Europe.

black identities in a similar way that being black was grafted onto the identities of African slaves.

Much like in my analysis of European rhetoric, it is not my intention to label Negritude definitively as a case of slave morality. However, I believe it is significant that we find many traits Nietzsche describes as indicative of slave morality—founded in resentment—appearing in Negritude. But what of it? Suppose that this does demonstrate slave morality, that Césaire's emphasis on Africa in black identity stems not from love for Africa but from hatred for Europe.

The aim of Césaire is not to create an authentic identity within a Nietzschean framework. If his Negritude were characterized by slave morality, it would mean little or nothing to him. Furthermore, Césaire is not wrong—Europe has brutalized much of the world and devalued the lives, history, and intellectual contributions of black people. It is only natural (or at least understandable) that Césaire would turn away from Europe and towards those cultures and people that Europe devalues, such as Africa. As Nietzsche acknowledges, there is utility in slave morality; it allows for survival.

The problem, as I see it, is twofold. Firstly, grounding black authenticity in African identity is too nebulous a concept to generate any real epistemic liberation, at least outside the halls of academia. Admittedly, this is a subjective claim, as what provides epistemic liberation will inevitably vary from person to person. A more substantial problem with Césairean Negritude is that the idea of a 'return' inherently generates inauthenticity. A 'return,' even if not physical, implies that one is not where they belong, or at least there is a place where they would be more at home. Thus, the black person is always lost: in Europe, living in European culture, they are lost; in the Americas, they are lost; and even in post-colonial Africa, which now has significant European influence upon its cultures, they are lost.

Under Césaire's conception of black identity, the black person cannot achieve authenticity without acknowledging that their roots are in Africa—they must always be African. This cuts to the heart of Nietzsche's issue with slave morality and resentment, which require a constant abnegation of the self, a denial of who you are. The African American, whose music, culture, and dialect are unique and specific to them, must turn away from their American identity and uniqueness and recognize it as being rooted in Africanness. Thus, every black culture is seen as merely a derivative of pre-colonial African culture. Black culture cannot be the result of European, Asian, indigenous, and African influences blended in a unique way but must be viewed simply as another form of African culture.

So what is the alternative, how do you construct a black identity without Africa?



### **Chapter 3 Fanon: Recognition and Revolution**

In this chapter, I will explore the creation of a black identity that does not center Africanity, examining whether such an understanding of blackness can simultaneously transcend resentment and lead towards liberation. To achieve this, we will engage with the work of Frantz Fanon, specifically his seminal works *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. I will provide a summary of Fanon's psychoanalysis of the colonial subject.

Fanon's psychoanalytic framework leads him to a different origin for resentment than Nietzsche, yet I will argue that this remains consistent with Nietzsche's understanding of the concept. Fanon's analysis of colonial conditions leads him to perceive blackness as a contingent, branded identity, as described by Connolly. This perspective allows individuals to be aware of and understand their own history and social context without becoming enslaved by it. Furthermore, I will argue that this outlook offers a healthy way to resist oppression by interpreting Fanon's demand for recognition through agonial hermeneutics.

We can understand Fanon's project as more psychoanalytical and genealogical than Césaire's Negritude, which is more polemic. Much like Nietzsche, Fanon is not searching for truth but for health. Thus, Fanon identifies the main pathology created by colonialism, arguing that "an individual who loves black is as 'sick' as someone who abhors them ... Conversely, the black man who strives to whiten his race is as wretched as the one who preaches hatred of the white man."<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the pathology is at least partially, if not wholly, due to the invention of race itself, the power imbalance it creates, and the feelings of resentment born from that imbalance.

Fanon further states that "the white man is locked in his whiteness" and the "black man in his blackness,"<sup>61</sup> and he seeks to free people from themselves. Achieving this requires a

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<sup>60</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page Viii

<sup>61</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page X

combination of psychoanalysis, a genealogy of values, and an analysis of the society in which the black and white races exist.

Fanon argues that the black person must come to realize their blackness, a realization that occurs when they enter or come into contact with the white world. Furthermore, this realization entails understanding that being black means being associated with Africa, which carries the additional burden of stereotypes such as being uncivilized, scary, and backward<sup>62</sup>. He recalls being called a nigger by a child, an experience that stripped his body of its personal identity and imposed a racialized dimension upon it. His body now occupies more space and he must constantly consider the gaze of the white other. Being racialized means bearing not only the weight of oneself but also that of one's ancestors and other black people.

This racialization alters the way one understands and relates to their own body, as the aspect of blackness is thrust upon it. The black person is not just black; they are black in relation to the white other. Through the white gaze, the black person is to be feared, hated, or even fetishized, but not humanized. They are treated as an object among other objects. Fanon argues that this realization of one's race and their perceived racial inferiority is a traumatic inciting incident for the black person, causing them to become tense and untrusting as soon as they enter a white space<sup>63</sup>.

The black person is made to feel inferior, attacked in their very corporeal being; their skin and biology mark them as lesser. To survive, they must orient themselves towards the white other. The challenges of being black extend beyond living among white people; they are also exploited by a colonial capitalist society that happens to be white<sup>64</sup>. The world demands that the black person behave as a black person "or at least a Negro." Fanon argues that, because of this, the Antillean<sup>65</sup> must choose between blackness—associated with their home culture, family, and community, developed outside the white gaze—or adopting the ways of Europe's so-called society.

Neither option yields good results. The black person who rejects their blackness and culture might ascend socially and economically in the white world, but they become alienated from other black people, their own family, and, most importantly, themselves. Conversely, the black person who embraces their blackness becomes alien to white society, suffering the social ostracism that entails.

However, Fanon is aware that defenders of Negritude, such as Césaire, would argue that choosing one's blackness is the more authentic option. Thus, he takes time to deconstruct this assumption as well. Initially, black individuals admit their blackness in an attempt to be left alone, believing that conformity will provide safety<sup>66</sup>. When trying to go unnoticed fails and convincing the white person that their race does not make them unequal also fails, the black person finally stands tall and declares their blackness<sup>67</sup>. Fanon writes, "On the other side of the white world there lies a magical black culture. Negro culture! I began to blush with pride. Was this salvation?"<sup>68</sup> Rejected by the white world, they reach for something else, and by embracing their blackness, they embrace their Africanness as their ancestral roots<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 92 and 126.

<sup>63</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 127

<sup>64</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 178

<sup>65</sup> Fanon is specifically talking about the black Antillean and so uses the term Antillean and black interchangeably.

<sup>66</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 96.

<sup>67</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 100 to 101.

<sup>68</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 102

<sup>69</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 106

Fanon reflects that perhaps being European is synonymous with being civilized, but there is a unique beauty in being uncivilized, in being close to nature, embracing spirituality and emotion over the rigid constructs of civilization. The white world dismisses this as a phase—a phase that European civilization has already surpassed. Then, the black man points to the forgotten empires and civilizations of African society. Yet, these achievements are relegated to the past, rendered redundant by the dominance of European imperialism<sup>70</sup>.

Regardless, as the black person attempts to embrace their black culture, it fails to gain them recognition or understanding from the white world. One might argue that the embrace of blackness is not meant for the white world; it is supposed to serve as an internal epistemic liberation divorced from the external validation of white people. However, as we will see with Fanon's argument for recognition, unless one plans to completely separate from white society (something Fanon sees as unhealthy and inauthentic), the black person must inevitably contend with the gaze of the white other. This approach essentially amounts to asking the white world to recognize their blackness as a valid identity—something Fanon believes will never truly happen.

This follows the critique of Negritude that I presented in the last chapter, but from a psychological and phenomenological perspective. According to Fanon, the black person has no choice but to attempt to reconstruct the identity imposed on them by white supremacy in a positive light. Unable to deny their blackness, they embrace it; unable to deny their association with Africa, they embrace that as well. This is analogous to Nietzschean resentment, a way of thinking and deriving values that constantly orients the self towards the other. Fanon explicitly engages with this concept, referring to Antillean society as a "comparison society."<sup>71</sup>

Fanon suggests that the white world has created these racial categories for oppression, and embracing them will not liberate the black person from objecthood into authentic human relations. The pathology Fanon seeks to address is the power imbalance between black and white people that creates an inferiority complex. He even questions whether blackness is politically useful. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he recalls reading Sartre's *Black Orpheus*, an essay that argued racial consciousness was just a temporary step towards class consciousness<sup>72</sup>. In other words, movements such as Negritude will eventually become redundant, leading to the rise of a class-based movement and the end of race altogether.<sup>73</sup>

The black person was forced to embrace their blackness and then chose to be proud of it. However, Fanon argues that blackness offers little in terms of liberation, epistemic or otherwise, calling it a "bitter brotherhood."<sup>74</sup> Whether one chooses to embrace blackness or reject it and appeal to Europeans, the black person finds inauthenticity and resentment at the end of each path. His solution, then, is to reject both and embrace the universal from the standpoint of the particular<sup>75</sup>. He argues that what black people want—what everyone wants—is for their individual personhood to be recognized: "I am Narcissus, and I want to see reflected in the eyes of the other an image of myself that satisfies me."<sup>76</sup>

This lack of recognition is at the heart of the pathology. Recognition can only be taken by force, or at least, it can only be certain when it has been forced upon the other<sup>77</sup>. Without this

<sup>70</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 108

<sup>71</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 105 to 106

<sup>72</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 112 to 114

<sup>73</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus* (Editions Présence Africaine, 1976).

<sup>74</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 102

<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 175 – 177

<sup>76</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 187

<sup>77</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 193

recognition of personhood from the other, the black person remains an object, unable to move through the world validating their own particular experiences. Therefore, they are denied a being-for-self. In other words, without the recognition of one's personhood<sup>78</sup>, one struggles to live for oneself as a person and a human. Without this imposed recognition, the black person remains frustrated and resentful, even when white people end slavery or declare that black people are no longer inferior. Without this visceral imposition of their will upon the other, they remain in a state of unrecognition, a "zone of non-being."<sup>79</sup> As Nietzsche understood, unable to vent their will upon the other, the black person slips into resentment.

Attempting to find recognition by making black identity the focal point of one's identity does little to achieve this recognition, nor does a 'return' to Africa. Such attempts result in a denial of the self and contribute minimally to liberation. As Fanon aptly put it, "[w]hat am I supposed to do with a black empire?"<sup>80</sup> Fanon implicitly suggests, and I explicitly argue, that this is the result of resentment. What the black person truly desires is not recognition of their blackness but recognition of their individual self in its particular state, rather than being seen merely as part of the black masses. It is the racial condition that prevents the black person from being recognized as an individual by the other.

Blackness is an identity branded onto the bodies of those whose ancestors descended from the continent of Africa. It was intended to mark them as available for enslavement, colonization, and exploitation. In other words, it is an invention of Western imperialism and racism. As Audre Lorde masterfully put it, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Fanon argues, the black person must let go. "There is no black mission; there is no white burden. I find myself one day in a world where things are hurtful; a world where I am required to fight; a world where it is always a question of defeat or victory."<sup>82</sup>

The black person will find no liberation in attempting to avenge their ancestors, build a black nation, or demand guilt from the white other. Instead, Fanon argues that the black person can only demand humanity. They should seek recognition not of the black race or the wrongs of white ancestors, but recognition and understanding of their individual self.

This kind of resentment has a different origin from the resentment presented by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche sees resentment as arising from an inability to physically express one's will to power, leading to frustration that glorifies weakness and deems the values of the oppressor evil. However, Fanon argues that resentment stems from the psychological frustration of internalizing the oppressor's values.

Naicker critiques this by suggesting these are two separate issues with separate solutions, which post-colonial thinkers confuse. The response to this is two-fold. Firstly, while Nietzsche does not explicitly focus on the psychological impact of oppression, he does allude to it; Fanon simply places greater emphasis on this aspect. Secondly, physical oppression and psychological oppression are intertwined. We cannot discuss the physical oppression of black people without considering its psychological impact. Fanon, as we will discuss when addressing *The Wretched of the Earth*, also explores how to deal with the resentment of physical oppression. However, addressing physical liberation requires us to first—or perhaps

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<sup>78</sup> I am using the term personhood here separate from the idea of humanity. Personhood ignores the larger taxological question of what is or is not human, rather is about one's own individual life and experience.

<sup>79</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page Vii

<sup>80</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 179

<sup>81</sup> Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (Penguin UK, 2018).

<sup>82</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 203

simultaneously—address psychological liberation. The resentment caused by both is not easily separated, as Naicker suggests.

It seems absurd to argue that oppression is either physical or psychological or that each aspect of oppression exists separately and has no bearing on the other. Therefore, by dealing with one, we can also address the other. The resentment stemming from an oppressed body and the resentment stemming from an oppressed mind intermingle and produce similar results. Thus, it is reasonable and useful to discuss the resentment Fanon mentions as analogous to the resentment discussed by Nietzsche. Simply because Nietzsche starts his analysis from the physical does not mean we cannot extend it to the psychological.

We can understand Fanon's conception of black identity as what William E. Connolly calls a "branded contingency." Connolly recognizes that identities are both chosen by us and branded into us by our social context, meaning that whether we choose it or not, our environment imposes certain identities upon us.<sup>83</sup> These identities create conflict as they establish social and conceptual spaces that can impinge on other identities.<sup>84</sup> This means that the way we choose to live can negatively affect how others, who do not share our identity, choose to live. Often, this results in the subjugation of difference into otherness<sup>85</sup>. Additionally, we tend to scapegoat the arbitrary cruelty of the world onto the other, rendering them not just different but evil, subhuman, and so forth.

Connolly argues that when confronted with identity conflicts, the solution often presented is to call for unification or neutrality. By depoliticizing the issue and aiming to unite all identities, we can seemingly avoid the conflicts that identities generate. However, Connolly contends that this is merely burying one's head in the sand. Humans inevitably create connections and ties with each other, and pretending otherwise will not eliminate the conflict this generates. Difference is valuable, and achieving absolute unity would eradicate difference, forcing people to conform to a single way of living. Instead, we must find a way to accept the differences that identities create without allowing them to devolve into antagonistic otherness that must be eliminated<sup>86</sup>.

Connolly argues that we can address identity conflicts in three ways: developing a healthy relationship with death, understanding identity as contingent, and engaging in genealogy. We will focus primarily on the latter two points, starting with the notion of identity as contingent. Connolly suggests that viewing identity as necessary leads to antagonism towards those who do not share it. There is no true or essential identity; what we call our identity is shaped by several contingent factors—place of birth, genetics, social circles, etc. These factors are largely due to chance, not logic, destiny, or rationale. This means there is no true identity someone is supposed to have, and conversely, no wrong identity someone isn't supposed to have. Additionally, much of our identity is beyond our control and is 'branded' into us by our social circumstances. Reflecting on the contingencies of our branded identities, rather than seeing them as necessary parts of our being, allows us to consider them in a less antagonistic manner<sup>87</sup>. Therefore, I use identity in this sense as a social construct, understood within the realm of political epistemology.

What Connolly aims to avoid is the universal moralization of identity. By doing so, we do not seek to destroy different identities but instead can stand in an agonal relation to them. (We will elaborate on what is meant by an agonal relation later on). Fanon, on the other hand, is not concerned with the universalization of black identity. However, he clearly tries to counter

<sup>83</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Page 174

<sup>84</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Page 160

<sup>85</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Page 159

<sup>86</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Page 162

<sup>87</sup> Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Page 177

the idea that being black is an essential or true part of one's being, along with the antagonism generated by black and white identities. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon states, "It is not the black world that governs my behaviour. My black skin is not a repository for specific values."<sup>88</sup> Understanding blackness as contingent allows us to reflect on, if not entirely move past, the antagonism between the black person and the white other.

The mere fact that someone is black or white does not make them inherently good, bad, or evil, as these are not necessary parts of one's being. Therefore, we need not automatically orient ourselves against the white other, nor toward the black person or African ancestry. Fanon argues for an emphasis on the particular, meaning reflecting upon one's own particular being and circumstances, divorced from a larger dynamic of black and white. It is from this particular standpoint that we can reach out to the other. While being black or white affects one's particular circumstances, it is by no means someone's essence or defining characteristic. This brings us back to Fanon's claim that "an individual who loves black is as 'sick' as someone who abhors them... Conversely, the black man who strives to whiten his race is as wretched as the one who preaches hatred of the white man." Black and white identities are the result of numerous contingent historical factors. To love or hate someone because they are black or white is therefore absurd. Similarly, to love or hate oneself because of one's race is equally absurd.

While Fanon is critical of the role that black history can play in both black identity and black liberation, understanding blackness as a branded contingent identity does not mean discarding black history altogether. To understand who we are and where our values come from, we need a historical perspective on ourselves—a genealogy, as Connolly puts it. However, we should not become enslaved to this history. Connolly is correct that a genealogy allows for a more critical perspective on things we take to be normal or natural, and this is something that Fanon also finds valuable. However, as Nietzsche argues, one can have too much history<sup>89</sup>.

We must acknowledge and accept the liberatory limits of black history. Learning about great black and African empires can be enlightening, particularly for the black academic elite, but it does little to create freedom for oppressed and exploited black people in the present. While having a historical perspective is important, it should not overwhelm our efforts to address current struggles.

The term "branded contingency," when discussing Fanon's approach to black identity, conveys that his solution is not to pretend that one is not black, as this is impossible. Instead, he asks us to recognize that blackness is not an internal expression of some inherent truth. This is the mistake Césaire makes—assuming that embracing one's blackness and its relation to Africa will reveal some essential and necessary aspects at the heart of black identity. Blackness is branded onto the body by external forces beyond one's control. Furthermore, blackness has configured itself around Africa not because they are inherently related, but due to many contingent and arbitrary factors meant for a context that is now hundreds of years out of date.

Defenders of philosophies such as Negritude might question how Fanon's conception of blackness as contingent allows for resistance against white supremacy and Western imperialism. Césairean Negritude acknowledges a common struggle for liberation that unites all black people. Reducing blackness to something merely contingent could undermine the momentum of liberation movements based on black identity. Black people worldwide are oppressed for being black, and Africans (particularly sub-Saharan Africans and their descend-

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<sup>88</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Page 202

<sup>89</sup> Nietzsche, *Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations*. On the uses and disadvantages of history for life

ants) are exploited for being African. It is unreasonable to expect a liberatory and anti-colonial movement not to align along these racial and national lines. Therefore, we should understand Negritude not just as an epistemic yearning for belonging, but as a political necessity. A mere desire for recognition by a nebulous "other" falls short of the revolutionary requirements for black liberation.

In response, I would argue that while viewing blackness as a branded contingent identity may discourage finding individual epistemic liberation entirely within blackness, it does not discourage specific acts of liberation against specific forms of oppression. Recognition from the other is not a passive process but an active call to action. It requires the imposition of one's will onto the other and necessitates specific political action. Although recognition might stem from resentment, it is oriented towards a creative, life-affirming goal. To understand this fully, we need to discuss recognition through an agonal model.

Herman Siemens describes the agon as "a specific organization of power, a dynamic tension of equilibrium (Gleichgewicht) between a plurality of more or less equal, active forces contesting one another." The general idea behind the agon comes from a reading of Nietzsche that views conflict not as purely destructive but as something that can enhance and enrich humanity<sup>90</sup>. Crucially, this conflict is not about total war with the aim of annihilating your opponent. The destruction of the opponent ends the conflict and thus halts growth. Instead, there must be limited aggression to maintain a mutual antagonism between both contenders. This mutual aggression necessitates mutual respect. The agon is not about finding a definitive winner and loser; rather, it is a driving force of creative aggression that empowers both parties through challenge and struggle.

Given this framework, we can critique Western colonialism through agonal hermeneutics. Colonialism seeks totality and hegemony, engaging in conflict that is purely destructive. The opponents of Western imperialism are either eradicated or oppressed to the point of being unable to fight back. Furthermore, these opponents are not respected adversaries but are often considered literally sub-human, mere tools for profit if they are considered at all.

Thus, we can understand Fanon's deployment of recognition as an attempt to introduce the agon into the relationship between Europe and its current and former colonies. Constructive and creative conflict requires all parties to respect each other or at least acknowledge the potential benefits of such a contest<sup>91</sup>. It is important to note that Siemens, in his book on the agon, primarily considers it in an intellectual or epistemic context. One could argue that when he discusses conflict as being creative, he does not mean a literal physical contest, as it is difficult to respect someone who seeks to cause real physical harm. Despite this, it is clear that a lack of mutual respect would prevent a healthy contest, whether intellectual or otherwise. Therefore, to have mutually beneficial intellectual conflict, we still require this Fanonian recognition from the other.

The final question we must ask is: what does resistance to colonialism look like, given the consideration of blackness as a branded contingent identity and recognition as an attempt to engage in the agon? Moreover, does this method actually break us free from resentment and affirm life? Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* provides answers to these questions. Written specifically for Algerian resistance fighters seeking to break free from French colonialism in the early 1960s, this text is far more specific to a particular group in a particular situation and is focused on actual radical action and material liberation, rather than merely epistemic concerns.

<sup>90</sup> Siemens, Agonal Perspectives on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Critical Transvaluation. Page 228

<sup>91</sup> Siemens, Agonal Perspectives on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Critical Transvaluation. Page 235 to 236

At first blush, *The Wretched of the Earth* seems to mimic the rhetoric of resentment present in *Discourse on Colonialism*. Fanon writes about the colonizer as "absolute evil, a corrosive element destroying everything within his reach, a corrupting element distorting everything related to aesthetics or morals, an agent of malevolent powers, an unconscious and incurable instrument of blind forces."<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth* includes rhetoric about the depravity of Europe as absolute evil, seemingly reverting to a good/evil dialectic. This appears to contradict the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which seeks to move beyond the concepts of a white burden and a Negro mission. However, if we delve deeper into the framing of this conclusion, we can understand how it subtly yet crucially differs from Negritude.

Fanon argues that violence is an inherent aspect of colonialism, both in its inception and its maintenance<sup>93</sup>. Furthermore, he asserts that colonialism is a type of violence that will only yield to greater violence. Therefore, for the colonized to achieve liberation, they must resort to violence<sup>94</sup>. However, colonial resistance is complicated because the intrinsic desire for freedom and action can lead the colonized to misuse their energy in unproductive ways.

The colonized body is physically restricted, forced to constantly bow its head and stay in its place, leading to dreams of being unleashed and expressing their will to power. Faced with the overwhelming force of the colonizer, the colonized often turn to infighting and blood feuds as a means of releasing their pent-up frustration, thus momentarily forgetting the existence of colonial oppression.

Religion, ritual, and superstition further perpetuate this distraction and serve as outlets for this repressed energy. Instead of worrying about the tanks and guns of the colonizer, the colonized focus on saying the right words and performing the right actions to ward off imagined evils. Rituals involving dance and possession practices help to expunge this built-up energy. Additionally, Christianity, with its promise of a glorious afterlife and its advocacy of turning the other cheek, diverts the colonized away from immediate action, leading them toward docility.

For Fanon, these distractions serve only to divert attention from the real struggle. His critique of such practices aligns with Nietzsche's critique of slave morality. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon shows that, like the slave, the colonized must vent their will to power; since they cannot do it in reality, they do it in their minds<sup>95</sup>. This results in an aversion to life and reality, with both the slave and the colonized finding solace in imagined revenge. Fanon's solution is to turn from imagined revenge to actual revenge. He recognizes the visceral catharsis of violence and seeks to channel this into something creative<sup>96</sup>. Instead of devising complex rituals, he advocates for complex strategies of resistance. Instead of fighting each other, the colonized should fight the colonizer, the actual source of their harm<sup>97</sup>.

Like Nietzsche, Fanon recognizes that there is no conscious purpose or choice behind power—it simply is. However, resistance also creates its own necessity to act, driven by anger, frustration, and resentment<sup>98</sup>. These are the emotions and energies Fanon seeks to harness for a liberatory purpose. To this end, Fanon, like the slave in Nietzsche's *Genealogy*

<sup>92</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 32

<sup>93</sup> Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*. Page 100.

<sup>94</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 35-56

<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. 'Good and Evil', 'Good and Bad'

<sup>96</sup> Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*. Page 100

<sup>97</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 35

<sup>98</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 37



of *Morals*, emphasizes comradeship and unity rather than individualism<sup>99</sup>. This is because resistance requires a collective movement and cannot be accomplished by an individual alone. Furthermore, the good and evil dynamic is useful in evoking the necessary emotions to inspire action.

Where Fanon differs from Negritude is in his acceptance of the realities of oppression and how to resist that oppression. While Césaire praises the peaceful practices of cultures trampled by colonialism, Fanon is incredibly critical of them, labelling such practices as distractions from the true aim of anti-colonialism. Moreover, Fanon does not base any of his arguments around an essential black identity. He supports resistance along racial or national lines as long as the goal remains the same.

Fanon does not look to past African civilizations or societies for guidance; instead, he looks to other contemporary anti-colonial resistance movements to learn from their experiences<sup>100</sup>. For Fanon, liberation—both mental and physical—must be rooted in one's particular situation. Acknowledgement and acceptance of one's specific circumstances are essential steps toward liberation and self-acceptance. Only through the particularity of the self can the universality of the other be reached. Thus, it is not black liberation that is central to Fanon, but liberation in general.

Fanon does not move out of resentment; rather, he seeks to deal with it and use it for liberatory ends. However, doing this requires critical and honest reflection on resentment. Césaire, on the other hand, seems to deny resentment and entrench himself in the categories of humanity imposed by colonialism. Through the lens of Nietzsche and Fanon, we may understand this as, at best, an understandable reaction within resentment, yet it still has negative consequences that need to be addressed. I do not mean to suggest that Césaire is foolish in his endeavours. Without a doubt he was a revolutionary, it is undeniable that he greatly benefited the black liberation and anti-colonial movement. However, this does not mean we should take him completely uncritically.

Moreover, Fanon's solution is not an instant fix to the problems of resentment. As he acknowledges through both the language and methodology of *Black Skin, White Masks*, it is a process—a constant tension between authenticity and inauthenticity, self-hatred and self-love. However, it is a process that necessitates critical reflection on race, resentment, nationality, colonialism, and history to begin.

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<sup>99</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 40

<sup>100</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Page 43

## **Conclusion**

So, who are we? And more specifically, who is the Black person? The Black person encompasses a variety of genders, gender expressions, sexualities, cultures, classes, languages, accents, nationalities, and histories. In other words, there is no singular way to express Black identity; there is no essence to Blackness. When we search within ourselves and seek the core of Blackness, its beating heart and soul, we find nothing. When we find ourselves at the end of the royal road of our souls, staring into the lake of our dreams and desires nothing black stares back at us. Nothing that is universally true or necessary, nothing that can be seen in the eyes of others as fully satisfying our sense of self.

Fanon argues that we do not perceive ourselves as Black; rather, we see ourselves in a world that has defined us as Black and has imposed this identity on others. Consequently, this world has inflicted suffering on Black people, driven by economic motives or the desire to make white Europeans feel superior, or even out of pure malice. The specific reason is unimportant and buried in the past. We can debate it endlessly, but how does this liberate the Black person in their current existence? Demanding revenge or guilt from white individuals merely perpetuates a rigged game against Black people. Fanon contends that to be healthy, liberated, and free, we must transcend the binary of Black and white, reaching both within ourselves and outward to others.

Nietzsche, in a similar vein, argues that we cannot rely on the notion of the other being evil for us to be good. We should not need the European other to be evil for the African self to be good. Taken to the extreme, we cannot depend on colonialism being evil for liberation to be good. We must look within ourselves and focus on our own well-being to construct an identity capable of existing autonomously and authentically. This is not to suggest we should discard Africa; undoubtedly, African history and philosophy play crucial roles in post-colonial and anti-capitalist thought. Nor does it mean we should deny the reality of Blackness and race—they are real. However, to live authentically within a Black body, we do not need to define ourselves solely by our Blackness.

I have argued that we can apply a framework of master and slave morality to colonialism and post-colonial thought. Additionally, I have demonstrated that Césaire's *négritude*, particularly when examined in his discourse on colonialism, reflects the resentment characteristic of slave morality. This approach to the Black self and the white other is epistemically harmful, leading to inauthenticity and self-denial. I have further shown, through Fanon, that an anti-colonial movement can grapple with resentment in a more self-affirming way. This involves embracing elements of both slave and master morality. Moreover, by demanding recognition of the self in its particularity rather than merely seeking recognition of Blackness, we can strive to create more authentic, constructive, and healthy relationships with one another.

What is evidently missing is a clear understanding of what this demand for recognition actually looks like. Furthermore, it's crucial to consider the potential material harm that might arise from methods of self-understanding such as *négritude*. Additionally, we must ask whether all or most Black liberation philosophies fall into the same pitfalls as Césaire's *négritude*.

tude. Which ones avoid these pitfalls and demand a Fanon-like recognition? These questions could easily form the basis of many multiple theses. However, I believe I have demonstrated the importance of addressing these questions for any post-colonial philosophy or Black political epistemology and also the need to look at blackness through a more critical Lens.

We must now look at and beyond the past, we must look upon ourselves—what we need and desire, how we see ourselves, and how we wish to be seen by others. It is from this standpoint of particularity that we can meet the demands of universal liberation. What that means and where that will lead us is yet to be seen. This black future is uncertain, down this path nothing is guaranteed. Justice, Happiness and equality? Hopefully, but for certain lies liberty, the freedom try to be as one wishes in world that would want to make you otherwise. You will struggle, you might even fail, but you will struggle to fulfil your own happiness, your own dreams and desires. Reach not to the past, reach not to time or place long gone, do not avenge long lost innocence. Become who you want to be, in this body, this world, this reality and this life. It is this life that we struggle for, this world that we seek to change.

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