Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*: the Scientific Irreducibility of Black Bodies and Inscribing the Psychological and Social experiences of the African Diaspora in the Western Sciences

by

Vivaldi Jean-Marie

This piece argues that Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* inscribes the social and psychological experience of the African Diaspora within the conceptual purview of the Western sciences by the means of psychoanalytical and philosophical concepts. The upshots of Fanon’s goal are twofold. Its first implication is that in employing psychoanalytical and philosophical lingo to account for the non-European dimension of the social and psychological experience of the African Diaspora, Fanon commits to delineate a distinct tenet of self-determination for the African Diaspora as well. Such tenet of self-determination consists in a set of norms, beliefs, socio-cultural and political practices. Secondly, besides the stated goal in the *Introduction*, namely to ‘liberate the black individual from herself’, Fanon is attempting to alter the European perception of black communities as sexual and biological threats. Fanon thinks that such empirical perception confines the humanity of black communities to their bodies. Accordingly, this piece concludes that Fanon’s successful inscription of the psychological and lived experiences of the African Diaspora in the western sciences via his psychoanalytical and philosophical rendition is hampered by the European perception of black bodies which prevents their complete scientific conceptualization. The impediment that black bodies presents to the scientific conceptualization of the social and psychological experience of the African
Diaspora is referred to as the scientific irreducibility of black bodies. One of the implications of the scientific irreducibility—non-scientific conceptualization—of black bodies is that it hinders Fanon from drawing out the distinct system of values, beliefs, and norms to secure the recognition of the African Diaspora as an equal group in European society.

I begin by showing that In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon’s project is framed in philosophical and psychoanalytical semiotics. By the semiotics of philosophy and psychoanalysis, it is meant the terminologies and meaning-making procedure through which the terms and premises of their research projects are logically related. It is by relying upon philosophical and psychoanalytical semiotics, that Fanon can inscribe the psychological and social experience of the African Diaspora in the conceptual purview of the Western sciences. Furthermore, in adopting the semiotics of these western disciplines, Fanon indirectly commits his account to the inherent Aristotelian syllogistic logic of these disciplines.

**Inscribing the African Diaspora in the European Sciences**

The organization of the chapters of *Peau noire* is telling of the various roles Fanon assumes throughout its composition. From the *Introduction* to chapter three, Fanon behaves as a phenomenologist of the French Caribbean experience in France. Fanon’s account of French Caribbean people’s attitudes and dispositions toward the French language and romantic relationship with White French people are meant to show the expectations of French Caribbean communities and their conformist penchant toward French ethos. The account of the empirical expressions of
French Caribbean people’s expectations and attitudes while emphasizing their psychological incentives constitute Fanon’s phenomenology of the French Caribbean experience in France. *Peau noire* unfolds upon this phenomenological-psychological premise which Fanon establishes as the grammar of the psychological and social experiences of French Caribbean communities in French society. In adopting this phenomenological-psychological axis, Fanon thus sets up an empirical axis for his account of the French Caribbean experience while simultaneously bringing to the fore their psychological incentives.

The driving psychological theme of Fanon’s phenomenological account is the inferiority complex of French Caribbean communities. The first three chapters of *Peau noire* lay out the behaviors which stem from inferiority complex as it is omnipresent in the psychological and social experience of French Caribbean communities. Fanon states that:

> Aussi pénible que puisse être pour nous cette constatation, nous sommes obligé de la faire: pour le Noir, il n’y a qu’un destin. Et il est blanc. Avant d’ouvrir le procès, nous tenons á dire certaines choses. L’analyse que nous entreprenons est psychologique. Il demeure toutefois evident que pour nous la véritable désaliénation du Noir implique une prise de conscience abrupte des réalités économiques et sociales. S’il y a complexe d’infériorité, c’est á la suite d’un double processus: économique d’abord; par intériorisation ou, mieux, épidermisation de cette infériorité ensuite.¹

This passage sheds light on the structural purpose of the first three chapters of *Peau noire*. Fanon lays bare the socio-cultural expressions of the inferiority complex and the relentless strive to reach ‘le destin blanc’. Fanon reads French Caribbean communities’ relentless attempt to master the French language, appropriate French culture, and marry white French people as expressions of the complex of inferiority.

In chapters four and five, Fanon engages in polemics with Octave Mannoni’s psychoanalytical account of colonized Malagasi communities and Sartre’s philosophical rendition of Jewishness and anti-Semitism. In chapter four, Fanon attacks Mannoni’s *Prospéro et Caliban: Psychologie de la colonisation*. Fanon behaves as a psychiatrist engaged in providing a virulent critique of a colleague’s account of the experience of colonized Malagasi communities. Fanon’s contention with Mannoni’s account is that he holds inferiority complex to be an intrinsic feature of colonized communities. In contrast to Fanon’s observation that inferiority complex is an acquired psychological feature, Mannoni asserts that such complex is innate and can be observed through the colonized person’s infantile need to depend upon the colonizer. Fanon summarizes Mannoni’s take in the following: “C’est d’ailleurs M. Mannoni qui le dit: ‘Au début de la colonisation, chaque tribu voulait avoir son blanc” (p.78). According to Mannoni, the colonizer’s presence in Madagascar is justified in fulfilling an innate deficiency of the indigenous people, namely the need to depend upon the white colonizer.

Fanon’s counterclaim is that: “L’infériorisation est le corrélatif indigène de la supériorisation européenne. Ayons le courage de le dire: c’est le racist qui crée l’inférieurisé” (p. 77). Indeed, the polemics between Fanon and Mannoni revolves around
their mutual assertion of inferiority complex in colonized communities. It is reasonable to claim that in providing a psychoanalytical discourse about the experience of colonized communities, both Fanon and Mannoni want to inscribe their psychological and socio-cultural experience in the purview of the western scientific psychoanalytic tradition. Fanon and Mannoni share the conclusion that inferiority complex affects colonized communities; their disagreement consists in the root of the inferiority complex. The contention between Fanon and Mannoni is whether the inferiority complex is innate or acquired. For Mannoni, it is innate and intrinsic to the psyche of colonized communities. Whereas Fanon believes that colonialism instills the inferiority complex in the psyche of colonized groups. Fanon saw the inferiority complex as an effect of colonization: it is created in a colonized people when their local culture is sacrificed for the culture of the mother country. For that reason, Fanon pays particular attention to Octave Mannoni’s attempt to locate the onset of the inferiority complex prior to colonization. In providing the phenomenology and critique of French Caribbean people’s pathological behaviors vis-a-vis French people, Fanon is committed to render colonized people’s experience transparent to the psychoanalytical gaze while drawing out the manifestations of their inferiority complex as an acquired pathology. Unlike Mannoni’s, Fanon’s psychoanalytical discourse strives to integrate the experience of colonized communities in the psychoanalytical discourse from the perspective of one who is both an insider and outsider.

In *L’expérience vécue du Noir*, Fanon’s quarrel with Sartre revolves around the fact that Sartre deliberately assigns a discursive space to the Jewish experience in his

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2 Robert Bernasconi, “Eliminating the Cycle of Violence: The Place of a Dying Colonialism Within Fanon’s Revolutionary Thought,” *Philosophica Africana*, no. 2 (August 2001):18
philosophical discourse while remaining silent about the systematic marginalization of Black communities and anti-black racism. In his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Sartre provides a philosophical account of the psychological and social experience of Jewish communities in Europe. For Fanon, Sartre’s central claim is that the expectations of anti-Semitic prejudices configure the psychological and social experience of Jewish communities. These expectations determine the self-perception of Jewish communities as well. The psychology and self-perception of Jewish communities are thus shaped by the attempt to either conform or resist European anti-Semitic prejudices. The Jewish experience in Europe is thus driven by either the transcendence or fulfillment of such prejudices. Another aspect of the Jewish experience that Fanon contrasts to Black communities’ experience is that Jewish people need not be concerned with their physical perception by Europeans. Fanon reproaches Sartre mainly for his indifference to the marginalization and oppression of Black communities in Europe and the colonies. Echoing to Sartre the necessity to acknowledge ‘le Nègre’ Fanon states:

… bien entendu les juifs sont brimés, que dis-je, ils sont pourchassés, exterminés, enfournés, mais ce sont la petites histoires familiales. Le Juif n’est pas aimé à partir du moment ou il est dépisté. Mais avec moi tout prend un visage nouveau. Aucune chance ne m’est permise. Je suis sur-déterminé de l’extérieur. Je ne suis pas l’esclave de ‘l’idée’ que les autres ont de moi, mais de mon apparaître (p. 93).

In claiming that ‘le Nègre’ unlike the Jewish person is overdetermined from without, Fanon is not merely juxtaposing the experience of the Jewish and ‘le Nègre’. If pressed, Fanon’s point is that the emphasis upon the bodies of Black communities precludes the validation of their psychological and social experience. In stating that ‘Je suis sur-
déterminé de l’extérieur’, Fanon means that unlike the Jew, the precedence of his black body impedes recognition of his humanity and intellectual prowess. The basis of Fanon’s dispute with Sartre is the ease with which Sartre conceives and depicts the psychological and social experience of Jewish people. Fanon’s contention with Sartre is the fact that his rapprochement and empathy with the Jewish communities is feasible upon the assertion of their humanity and intellectual prowess. This fact is plain in Fanon’s emphasis on Sartre’s reinforcement of the Jewish communities’ acute rationality. “Chez le Juif, dit Jean-Paul Sartre, il y a ‘une sorte d’impérialisme passionné de la raison: car il ne veut pas seulement convaincre qu’il est dans le vrai, son but est de persuader ses interlocuteurs qu’il y a une valeur absolue et inconditionnée du rationalisme” (p. 95).

Fanon takes Sartre’s claim as a subtle corroboration of Jewish people’s belonging to the purview of the western sciences as a rational people. What is at stake for Fanon is that in remaining silent about the experience of Black communities, as an oppressed group, in European society, Sartre involuntarily reinforces the marginality and alterity of black communities vis-à-vis Europe. In *Du prétendu complexe de dépendance du colonisé*, Fanon poses as both the psychoanalyst and subject of study; he behaves as a psychoanalyst and ‘un Nègre’ in French society. Fanon assumes such dual role as the result of the inherent conflict between the objective expectation of psychoanalysis and his subjective predicament as ‘un Nègre’. He states: “Je me suis attaché dans cette étude à toucher la misère du Noir. Je n’ai pas voulu être objectif. D’ailleurs, c’est faux: il ne m’a pas été possible d’être objectif” (p.70).

Proceeding through the dual function of the psychoanalyst-subject casting his scientific gaze upon the conscious and unconscious experience of Caribbean communities
and his own, Fanon delineates a scientific-discursive space for colonized communities in the psychoanalytical discourse. Such scientific-discursive space stands upon the underlying assumption of collective trauma as the result of slavery and colonialism. Another implication of Fanon’s assertion about the impossibility of a black psychoanalyst to carry out an objective investigation of Black people’s predicament suggests that such scientific attempts culminate in self-deconstruction; an objectivesubjective exposé in which the Black psychoanalyst reveals herself as both subject and object. In addition, Fanon’s position suggests that it is challenging for an oppressed scientist to objectify the members of the same oppressed group. The resulting challenge of Fanon’s attempt leads Gordon to observe that: “He will show that psychoanalysis cannot explain the black by attempting to explain the black psychoanalytically. This failure will compel a re-evaluation of the context of inquiry itself.”

*Le Nègre et la reconnaissance*, provides Fanon’s philosophical rendition of the psychological and social experience of colonized communities in relying upon Hegel’s account of *Lord and Bondsman* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegelian self-consciousness and struggles provide another set of scientific semiotics to Fanon’s discourse. It is noteworthy that Fanon switches comfortably from classic Freudian, and Adlerian psychoanalytical concepts to Hegelian philosophical concepts to relate the psychological and social experience of black communities. In using Hegelian semiotics, Fanon is defining a philosophico-discursive space for slave’s consciousness in the Western

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sciences via his reading of Hegel’s *Lord and Bondsman*. Fanon’s central claim is that the slaves as *Bondsman* remains bound to slave’s consciousness despite willfully accepting their freedom from the colonizers as *Lord*. Slave’s consciousness persists underneath the superficial enactment of freedom because the slaves did not stake their life to be free. In his words:

Le Nègre est un esclave à qui on a permis d’adopter une attitude de maître. Le Blanc est un maître qui a permis à ses escaves de manger à sa table…Le bouleversement a atteint le Noir de l’extérieur. Le Noir a été agi. Des valeurs qui n’ont pas pris naissance de son action, des valeurs qui ne ressortent pas de la montée systolique de son sang, sont venues danser leur ronde colorée autour de lui. Le bouleversement n’a pas différencié le nègre. Il est passé d’un mode de vie à un autre, mais pas d’une vie à un autre (p. 178).

The key difference between the Hegelian *Bondsman* and Fanon’s slave is that the death struggle instills the conviction of freedom in the former whereas the latter fails to develop the conviction of herself as a free being since she did not risk her life. For Fanon, freedom is a pseudo form of self-consciousness that the slaves assume occasionally when allowed by the masters. *Peau noire* can thus be interpreted as a phenomenology of the psychological and social experience of French Caribbean communities and Fanon’s subsequent attempt to situate colonized communities’ experience in the Western sciences via the means of psychoanalytical, Sartrean, and Hegelian philosophical semiotics. Furthermore, in *Peau noire*, this process is concurrent with Fanon’s attempt to demarcate the possibility of self-determination of colonized communities vis-à-vis the tyranny of French socio-cultural norms and scientific practices.
Blackness and Inferiority Complex

Now that it is established that *Peau noire* unfolds upon a psychoanalytical and philosophical axis, it is fit to explore the ramifications of this approach upon Fanon’s main goal: ‘libérer l’homme de couleur de lui-même’ (p.6). It is noteworthy that Fanon’s use of his observations as empirical evidence to deduce the psychological incentive of Caribbean communities’ experience is informed by European methodology specifically, Aristotelian syllogistic logic. Fanon infers inferiority complex, as the lynchpin of *Peau noire*, via the means of Aristotelian syllogistic logic. The empirical observations provide the premises upon which the conclusion of inferiority complex among French Caribbean communities is inferred. Fanon infers inferiority complex as the conclusion of a major and minor premises. Fanon elaborates the logical structure of his conclusion in the following: “S’il y a complexe d’infériorité, c’est à la suite d’un double processus: économique d’abord; par interiorisation ou mieux épidermisation de cette infériorité ensuite” (p. 8).

Economic inferiority, as a materialist situation, stands as the major premise of Fanon’s syllogism. The missing premise of Fanon’s claim is that economic inferiority shifts onto selfconsciousness. It is on the basis of these two premises that Fanon draws the conclusion of inferiority complex, which manifests itself as a form of consciousness—*épidermisation* or blackness. Internalization of economic inferiority is the minor premise—one’s self-consciousness as a black person (*épidermisation*). Fanon then draws the conclusion of inferiority complex upon the transition of the major premise as a materialist situation in self-consciousness, which yields the inferiority complex.

Furthermore, Fanon is cognizant of the inherent commitment of his project to European methodology despite his overt denial of methods. He states:
Il n’y aura d’authentique désaliénation que dans la mesure où les choses, au sens le plus matérieliste auront repris leur place. Il est de bon ton de faire précédé un ouvrage de psychologie d’un point de vue méthodologique. Nous faillirons à l’usage. Nous laissons les méthodes aux botanistes et aux mathématiciens. Il y a un point où les méthodes se résorbent” (p. 9).

It seems that in Fanon’s mind, the denial of psychological methodology stems from the conflict between the materialist constraints of the goal of his project to ‘libérer l’homme de couleur de lui-même’ (p. 6) and the non-materialist nature of Aristotelian syllogistic logic which underpins psychology as a western scientific discipline. Fanon’s position hints at the inherent conflict between the empirical nature of the subject’s social experience and the formality of research methods. Moreover, in making this claim, Fanon provides an empirical axis to the experience of French Caribbean communities which is framed in the logical parameters of philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

The complexity of *Peau noire* thickens as Fanon carries out his project through syllogistic logic and the semiotics of philosophy and psychoanalysis. The semiotics of philosophy and psychoanalysis stands for the terminologies and meaning-making procedure through which the terms and premises of their research projects are logically related. As it turns out *Peau noire* unfolds within an inherent conflict; namely its goal to ‘libérer l’homme de couleur de lui-même.” as an empirical-materialist quest (in virtue of the economic dimension that Fanon sets up as the major premise of his inference of inferiority complex) which is framed in Aristotelian logic and the semiotics of psychoanalysis and philosophy. Put differently, Fanon relies on the methodological
principles of Western disciplines to inscribe the social and psychological experience of
French Caribbean communities as non-European in the western disciplines.

The structure of *Peau noire* suggests that it is influenced by the intellectual trends of postwar Europe; it was published in 1952. As shown above, the dominant philosophical trends that inform Fanon’s project are phenomenology, existentialism, and Hegelianism which were prevalent on the French intellectual scene of the 1950s. Fanon’s existentialist and phenomenological bents are obvious in the following statement: L’homme n’est pas seulement possibilité de reprise, de negation. S’il est vrai que la conscience est activité de transcendance, nous devons savoir aussi que cette transcendance est hantée par le problème de l’amour et de la compréhension. L’homme est un OUI vibrant aux harmonies cosmiques” (p. 6). The account of man as ‘possibilité de reprise, de négation’ suggests Fanon’s influence from Sartre’s existentialist account in *Being and Nothingness* (1943).

Fanon was influenced by Sartre and borrows his account of man as infinite possibility. Thus, Fanon’s account of French Caribbean communities experience in *Peau noire* is informed by existentialism. Fanon’s view of the French Caribbean subject is informed by the Sartrean paradigm of the self. If pressed Fanon’s appropriation of Sartre’s existentialist paradigm of the self shows that he is engaged in a critique of Sartre’s account of the self as well. In borrowing Sartre’s paradigm of the self, Fanon expands it to account for Caribbean communities as non-Europeans. This expansion can be read as a latent critique of the inherent eurocentrism of the Sartrean self. Fanon’s indirect critique exposes its inherent conceptual insufficiency to account for the socio-cultural experience of non-Europeans, specifically French Caribbean communities.
Moreover, such shared account of the self puts both Fanon and Sartre under the aegis of Soren Kierkegaard’s corpus which postulates the self as an anguished entity toward its infinite possibilities of realization in *Sickness Unto Death* (1849). Even though both Fanon and Sartre relinquish the religious dimension of the Kierkegaardian self, the anguish of infinite possibilities permeates their accounts of the self. In addition, Fanon declares his allegiance to Kierkegaard’s account of freedom in positing it as the freedom that the slave fails to achieve in his later discussion of Hegel’s *Lord and Bondsman*. In his own words: “L’ancien esclave qui ne retrouve pas dans sa mémoire ni la lutte pour la liberté ni l’angoisse de la liberté dont parle Kierkegaard, se tient la gorge sèche en face de ce jeune Blanc qui joue et chante sur la corde raide de l’existence” (p. 179).

The continuity of Fanon’s project with existentialism through both Sartre and Kierkegaard reveals his underlying assumption about the French Caribbean subject as one who is fit to shake off colonial complexes upon choosing to be free of them. For Fanon, the Caribbean person – like the Kierkegaardian and Sartrean self – is one who can embrace her infinite possibilities after transcending the impediments of her inferiority complex. This fact is latent in Fanon’s claim that: “Nous estimons qu’un individu doit tendre á assumer l’universalisme inhérent á la condition humaine” (p. 8). By ‘l’universalisme inhérent á la condition humaine’, Fanon has in mind the Kierkegaardian and existentialist concept of infinite possibilities of self-realization.

In addition, Fanon is committed to the belief that: “la conscience est activité de transcendance (p.6), Fanon’s characterization of consciousness as transcendence is informed by the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty who elaborated such account in his
Phenomenology of Perception (1945). Merleau-Ponty’s major work attempted to establish a French breed of phenomenology which started in the works of German philosophers like Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger. Fanon was deeply influenced by the wave of existentialist literature and philosophy that was current in post-war France. It was in this period that Fanon turned to Sartre, Heidegger, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, and Merleau-Ponty…On the one hand Sartre’s political orientation was to exercise a considerable influence on Fanon; on the other hand, Présence Africaine, with its quest for a definition of African uniqueness, exerted a pull in another direction.\footnote{Irene Gendzier, \textit{Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 20-1} Peau noire unfolds via the semiotics of these philosophical schools and their intrinsic Aristotelian logic.

Moreover, an account of blackness is latent in Fanon’s ambition to inscribe the psychological and social experience of the African Diaspora in the Western sciences. This content needs to be spelled out. One of the running themes of Peau noire is the denial of humanity. The panoply of pathological behaviors that Fanon considers is the outcome of the denial of humanity by both White French and French Caribbean communities. The colonial elaboration of the manicheist structure black people and white people illustrates the failure to be humane. Fanon proceeds with the assumption that as racial categories, blackness and whiteness are pathological categories. Blackness stems from the experience of collective inferiority vis-à-vis whiteness and anti-black racism. On the other hand, whiteness lies in a complex of superiority. “Le Noir veut être Blanc. Le Blanc s’acharne à réaliser une condition d’homme…Le Blanc est enfermé dans sa blancheur. Le noir dans sa
noircœur. Nous essaierons de déterminer les tendances de ce double narcissisme et les motivations auxquelles il renvoie” (p. 7).

On this view, for Fanon, race is indeed a social construct which manifests itself as a system of sociopathological relationships between black and white peoples. Fanon asserts then that on the basis of such sociopathological relationships, the psychological evolution of black people is driven by the goal to become white. On the other hand, White communities wish to remain in their pathological privilege, (the belief in their superiority) while aspiring to be humane. Given Fanon’s assertion that economic inequality is the dominant factor which instills the inferiority complex in black communities, his account suggests that blackness is a materialist-pathological state which prevents the self from embracing its infinite possibilities of self-realization. The internalization of economic inequality and relentless strive toward whiteness thus constitute blackness. On the other hand, whiteness is also materialist-pathological because the superiority complex in white people is rooted in material wealth. It is plain that the characterization of whiteness and blackness as materialist-pathological categories guides Fanon’s observations in the chapters of *Peau noire.* Fanon’s concerns are the psychology, materiality, and ontology of the colonized subject; thus he reinterprets psychoanalysis, materialism and existentialism in *Black Skin White Masks* to thoroughly scrutinize the colonial subjects lived experience of racism.\(^5\)

Moreover, Fanon’s emphasis on the fact that the black person’s goal is to be white suggests that their behaviors are motivated by social transcendence. For Fanon, French

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Caribbean communities are always extending themselves for approval by white French people. Blackness is a form of consciousness whose activity is monopolized by continuous attempts to emulate white ethos. Self-extension is the means for the French Caribbean subject to secure social acceptance in French society. If we accept Fanon’s account, it follows that blackness is a state of perpetual strive toward whiteness. Fanon’s account suggests that being black is always to be out of oneself toward whiteness; Blackness is a continuous yearning to be other than itself.

Fanon’s existentialist and phenomenological views of French Caribbean communities culminate in a psychoanalytical rendition of Blackness as a pathological category. If we accept fanon’s account of blackness and whiteness above, then the question that looms over his project is how to free the black individual from herself by means of the methods and semiotics that deem her inferior? How does Fanon reconcile his inscription of French Caribbean people as non-European in the European sciences by means of Aristotelian logic and the semiotics of psychoanalysis with freeing the black individual from herself? Unless we are sensitive to Fanon’s latent aim to delineate a tenet of self-determination for Caribbean people, Peau noire may seem to be merely framing the African Diaspora experience in the Western sciences by using the semiotics of philosophy and psychoanalysis to secure discursive space in the western sciences. This latent dimension salvages the autonomy of Peau noire.

That Fanon has such latent ambition, to postulate a system of values, beliefs, and practices of the African Diaspora, can be deduced from Le Nègre et la psychopathologie. Also, in this chapter, Fanon’s goal—to make the African Diaspora experience transparent to Western scientific practices—is plain. Fanon asserts that: “On devrait, pour obéir à une
exigence dialectique, se demander dans quelle mesure les conclusions de Freud ou d’Adler peuvent être utilisées dans une tentative d’explication de la vision du monde de l’homme noir” (p. 115). The topics of the previous chapters have foreshadowed this question which confirms that Fanon’s intent is indeed to inscribe the African Diaspora’s experience in the methodological and conceptual practices of the western sciences, specifically psychoanalysis, while attempting to demarcate the distinctive aspects of the African Diaspora’s experience as well. Wondering in what measure can the theories of Freud and Adler account for the black person’s experience makes it plain that Fanon is cognizant of aspects of the experience of black communities which elude the psychoanalytical frameworks of Freud and Adler.

This question informs the structure of the chapter in which Fanon sets out to frame the African Diaspora’s experience in the western sciences while salvaging its non-European dimension. The twofold nature of the above question suggests that Fanon wishes to set aside aspects of the African Diaspora’s experience which elude western scientific conceptualization. Fanon’s aim to define the distinctive values, beliefs, and practices of the African Diaspora becomes obvious in his contrast of the identity formation of European and Caribbean peoples. To do so, Fanon anchors the key distinctions in the identity formation of Caribbean and French peoples through their respective attitudes toward the family, as the most fundamental institution.

According to Fanon’s psychoanalytical reading, the identity of white French people is forged through the inherent continuity of the family—as the fundamental institution—with the other national institutions. White French people’s identity is shaped by the mutual reinforcement of the family and national institutions. The identity of white French people
is thus uniform and continuous because the national institutions behave as familial emblems, which reinforce citizenship and French cultural identity. In contrast, Fanon holds that the French Caribbean person’s identity is born out of the rupture between the Caribbean family and the European structured institutions in the colonies. Such socio-cultural discontinuity between Caribbean families and the colonial institutions lead Fanon to claim that the classic Oedipus complex ought not to be held responsible for the social maladjustment of the Caribbean person. Instead of the absence of the father, Fanon attributes the socio-cultural maladjustment and identity crisis of the Caribbean person to the discontinuity between the family and colonial institutions. In Fanon’s words:

Or la famille antillaise n’entretient pratiquement aucun rapport avec la structure nationale, c’est-à-dire françaïse, européenne. l’Antillais doit alors choisir entre sa famille et la société européenne; autrement dit, l’individu qui monte vers la société –la Blanche, la civilisée— tend à rejeter la famille –la Noire, la sauvage—sur le plan de l’imaginaire, en rapport avec les erlebnis infantiles que nous avons décrites précédemment” (p.121).

and later that: “Qu’on le veuille ou non, le complexe d’Oedipe n’est pas près de voir le jour chez les nègres…Independamment de quelques ratés apparus en milieu clos, nous pouvons dire que toute névrosé, tout comportement anormal, tout éréthisme affectif chez un Antillais, est la résultante de la situation culturelle” (p.123).

Since Fanon does not elaborate upon the absence of Oedipus complex in Caribbean communities in the chapter, his emphasis upon the European structured institutions in the colonies is thus ground to infer that these institutions assume the paternal figure which usurps the role of the Caribbean family. European institutions symbolize the superego
toward which Caribbean individuality inspires and strives to emulate despite their discontinuity with Caribbean families.

Fanon’s claims suggest that Caribbean identity is shaped by the discontinuity between the Caribbean family and the socio-political institutions in the colonies; the moment of individual choice crystallizes the crisis which defines Caribbean identity.

Moreover, such identity crisis yields an ethics of approval as the normative guideline for the African Diaspora. The discontinuity between the Caribbean family and colonial socio-cultural institutions is lived as a divided and antagonistic self. French Caribbean communities’ social orientation is shaped by an ethics of approval, a system of values, beliefs, and behaviors which rely upon the approval of white French people. Fanon summarizes ethics of approval in the following: “Le Noir cesse de se comporter en individu actionnel. Le but de son action sera Autrui (sous la forme du Blanc), car Autrui seul peut le valoriser. Cela sur le plan éthique: valorisation de soi” (p. 125).

Here Fanon reiterates the central claim of the Introduction, namely that the goal of the Caribbean person is to be white. One of the implications of the ethics of approval is that an inherent dimension of Caribbean identity is the drive to be other than itself. Fanon’s account suggests that French Caribbean identity is thus an ékstasis—a form of displacement—in being always outside of itself and pining for the approval of white French people.

Though what is telling about Fanon’s rendition is the socio-cultural and psychoanalytical incentives of the Caribbean person’s strive after French Whiteness. Fanon’s account of the psychoanalytical root of the socio-cultural orientation reveals the pathological values, norms, and beliefs—as the ethics of approval—underlying the
attitudes and behaviors of Caribbean communities. If pressed, we can infer from Fanon’s claim that French ethos supplies the ethical grammar for French Caribbean communities. The internalization of French ethos as the ideal modality of being by the Caribbean individual is both the basis of the ethics of approval and the logical by-product of colonialism.

Fanon then shifts his focus to elaborate the White French’s perspective upon Caribbean people. Fanon begins by providing the Caribbean perception of White French people while articulating its psychoanalytical root and ethical implication. In the second phase of the chapter, Fanon delves into the White French’s outlook upon Caribbean communities from a psychoanalytical perspective. An important corollary of Fanon’s account in this chapter is the condition of the black body which emerges as an elusive dimension of psychoanalytical conceptualization. To elaborate his argument, Fanon contrasts the European outlook upon Jewish communities with Black communities. The gist of Fanon’s reading is that in the European collective consciousness, the Jewish individual is symbolic of a financial and monopolizing threat whereas the black person stands as a sexual and biological menace. For Fanon: “Si l’on veut comprendre psychanalytiquement la situation raciale, conçue non pas globalement, mais ressentie par des consciences particulières, il faut attacher une grande importance aux phénomènes sexuels.

Pour le Juif, on pense à l’argent et à ses dérivés. Pour le nègre, au sexe” (p. 130).

Fanon’s claim makes it plain that the European perception of black people is strictly empirical; the black individual stands as a mere empirical entity in the European space, a corporeal entity with sexual prowess. Space operates as one of the chief signifiers of racial
difference here: under colonial rule, freedom of movement (psychical and social) becomes a white prerogative. Forced to occupy, in a white racial phantasm, the static ontological space of the timeless ‘primitive’ the black man is disenfranchised of his very subjectivity.\footnote{Diana Fuss, \textit{Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification} in \textit{Rethinking Fanon} ed. Nigel Gibson (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), p. 296}

By pressing Fanon’s claim further it can be deduced that anti-black racism is motivated by the latent belief of White Europeans that black bodies always perform a corporeal violation of the uniformly white socio-cultural scheme of European societies. Fanon states: “A l’extrême, nous dirons que le nègre par son corps gêne la fermeture du schéma postural du Blanc, au moment naturellement où le Noir fait son apparition dans le monde phénoménal du Blanc” (p. 130). It is on the basis of its infringement upon the white postural scheme and its perception by White Europeans that the black body presents the dimension of the African Diaspora which remains elusive to western scientific conceptualization. Fanon’s intellectual understanding of racism that encompasses both the body and the discourse is remarkably current.\footnote{Mireille Fanon-Mendès, “The Contribution of Frantz Fanon to the Process of the Liberation of the People,” \textit{The Black Scholar}, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2012): 9}

The flipside of Fanon’s attempt to inscribe the psychological and social experiences of the African Diaspora in the Western sciences is the acknowledgment of the European perception of the black body which relegates it to the margin of Western sciences. The following claims suggests that in Fanon’s discourse the black body presents an empirical substrate that western sciences cannot fully integrate in its theoretical purview: “Mais c’est dans sa corporéité que l’on attaïnt le nègre. C’est en tant que personnalité concrète qu’on le lynche. C’est en tant qu’être actuel qu’il est dangereux” (p. 133).
The underlying incentive of lynching is that the black body alone encompasses blackness; that there is no humanity beyond the black body. What’s at stake in Fanon’s claim is the irreducible empirical nature of the black body (être actuel), which unlike the black person’s psychological and social experience, lies beyond the boundaries of psychoanalytical theories and the larger scientific discourses.

Fanon is cognizant of the inherent difficulty that the black body poses in virtue of its biological-empirical perception for incorporation within the western sciences, specifically psychoanalysis. As an illustration, Fanon grapples with the responses that the body, as a stimulus, triggers in the European collective unconscious. He states:

Avant de continuer, il nous semble important de faire la remarque suivante: en admettant qu’il y ait tendances inconscientes à l’inceste, pourquoi ces tendances se manifesteraient-elles plus spécialement à l’égard du Noir? En quoi, dans l’absolu, un gendre noir diffère-t-il d’un gendre blanc? Dans les deux cas, n’y a-t-il pas affleurement des tendances inconscientes? (p. 133).

On the basis of these questions, Fanon sets out to argue that the European perception of the black body as the symbol of orgies, rape, and incest projects the repressed dimension of the European collective unconscious upon black bodies. For Fanon, such perception suggests the projection of the European collective Id upon black bodies. The repressed wishes that the European collective unconscious had to repress in order to conform to the superego are projected to black bodies. Fanon’s reading suggests that black bodies present an ambivalent psychoanalytical technique for Europeans to preserve and deny simultaneously their deepest desires. To the gaze of white French communities, black bodies attract and repel at once. In Fanon’s words:
Toute acquisition intellectuelle réclame une perte du potentiel sexuel. Le Blanc civilisé garde la nostalgie irrationnelle d’époques extraordinaires de licence sexuelle, de scènes orgiaques, de viols nonsanctionnés, d’incestes non reprimés. Ces phantasmes, en un sens, répondent à l’instinct de vie de Freud. Projetant ses intentions chez le nègre, le Blanc se comporte <<< comme si >>> le nègre les avait réellement. Quand il s’agit du Juif, le problème est net: on s’en méfie, car il veut posséder les richesses où s’installer aux postes de commande. Le nègre lui est fixé au génital; ou du moins on l’y a fixé. Deux domaines: l’intellect et le sexuel ( p. 133-4).

Ultimately, Fanon provides a psychoanalytical reading of European society. In such reading of European society, Fanon associates the superego of European society with whiteness and the Id, as the repressed dimension, is associated with Blackness and Jewishness. Black and Jewish communities are simultaneously attractive and repulsive vis-à-vis White Europeans because symbolically they are bearers of sexual desires and immoral indecencies. Le nègre est genital… Le nègre est autre chose. Ici encore, nous rencontrons le Juif. Le sexe nous départage, mais nous avons un point en commun. Tous deux nous représentons le mal. Le Noir advantage, pour la bonne raison qu’il est noir. Cette logique, le Blanc la réalise quotidiennment. Le Noir est le symbole du Mal et du Laid” (p.145), and further regarding the perception of the Jew: “Le Juif, authentique ou inauthentique, tombe sous le coup du ‘salaud’. La situation est telle que tout ce qu’il fait est appelé á se retourner contre lui. Car naturellement le Juif se choisit, et il lui arrive d’oublier sa juiverie, ou de la cacher, de s’en cacher. C’est qu’il admet comme valable le système de l’aryen. Il y a le Bien et le Mal. Le Mal est juif tout ce qui est Juif est laid” (p. 147).
Fanon’s psychoanalytical rendition of European society yields a power relation. By associating the superego with white Europeans, the power to discipline and regulate Jewish and black communities becomes an intrinsic feature of whiteness. Categorizing Black and Jewish communities under the aegis of the sexual and intellectual allows White French communities to exert disciplining and regulating power over them. Moreover, despite their symbolic similarity in the European collective unconscious, Jewish and Black communities differ in the fact that the former has the freedom to transcend his empirical perception as mere body by white Europeans. Fanon believes that the white physical features of Jewish people allow them to either affirm or hide their Jewishness. On the other hand, Black people can never escape their European perception as an empirical entity endowed with sexual prowess. From Fanon’s elaboration of the European perception of Black communities in the chapter, as symbols of sexual and biological prowess, it can be inferred that the black body is scientifically irreducible; it remains opaque and at the margins of psychoanalytical conceptualization despite Fanon’s successful psychoanalytical rendition of the experience of post-colonial Black communities.

Given the central role of the body as a sexual and biological threat in Fanon’s account, it becomes imperative that he provide the genealogy through which the perception of people of African descent mutated into physical entities with sexual prowess for the European gaze. Close reading of Fanon’s discussion of Hegelian recognition and Negroes, in the concluding chapter, provides the platform to deduce such genealogy of the perception of Black communities as sexual and biological entities. In his account of the failure of the slaves of French colonies to secure recognition from their French masters Fanon states that:
Historiquement, le nègre, plonge dans l’inéssentialité de la servitude, a été libéré par le maître. Il n’a pas soutenu la lutte pour la liberté...Le bouleversement a attaunt le Noir de l’extérieur. Le Noir a été agi. Des valeurs qui n’ont pas pris naissance de son action, des valeurs qui ne résultent pas de la montée systolique de son sang, sont venues danser leur ronde colorée autour de lui. Le bouleversement n’a pas différencié le nègre. Il est passé d’un mode de vie à un autre, mais pas d’une vie à une autre” (p. 178).

It is then plain that, for Fanon, slavery is the historical event which led to the reification of people of African descent while constituting their perception as sexual and biological functions.

In positing the historical ground of the slave as ‘inéssentialité’, Fanon acknowledges the role of slavery as the defining historical event which reifies and conditions the prevailing European perception of Black communities in European society. Moreover, Fanon shows that when read in the purview of Hegelian *Lord and Bondsman* dialectic, the Caribbean slave emerges as ‘inessentialité’. Close reading of Fanon’s position suggests that the slave’s body emerges as the vessel of such ‘inessentialité’ and that it is as embodied ‘inessentialité’ that the master ridicules and denies recognition to the slave.

As sexual and biological entities, Black communities are then defined from without. Fanon’s take suggests that one element of blackness is to be constituted from without by the gaze of the masters while internalizing foreign values which are not derived from their experience and struggles. Essentially, the black person stands as an entity which is constituted by mores and beliefs that are dictated by White Europeans initially as masters and then as social counterparts during post-colonialism. The slave wants to be like the
master and he is fixated with becoming subject. It is in virtue of this historical moment that as stated above, blackness is an ekstasis, it is always out of itself as it yearns for white Europeans’ approval. The Black body is the impediment which maintains the contrast in the black skin white masks relationship. The scientific irreducibility of the black body hinders the all-white uniformity of the skin and mask that French Caribbean communities strive after; the resistance of the black body is the basis of the Black Skin White Masks misrelation.

In addition, Fanon’s position in this chapter casts new light upon the aim of Peau noire; essentially the crux of the project turns out to be twofold. As stated in the Introduction, Fanon is striving to free the Black person from her existential and racial pathologies. This text also represents Fanon’s most serious attempt to understand the Caribbean psyche in relation to a wider community suffering from a common pathology. Secondly, as it is now obvious by exposing it, Fanon wants to redress the European perception of the Black person as a sexual and biological threat. The system of values which constitute the self-determination of the African Diaspora ought to emerge after the realization of this twofold goal. The outcome of Fanon’s phenomenological scientific investigation can be summarized as the internalization of inferiority complex by a group which is deemed merely sexual and biological. ‘libérer l’homme de couleur de lui-même’ consists in the transcendence of inferiority complex, which frees both the African Diaspora from its psychological detriments and White French communities as well given that the

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9 Daynali Flores-Rodriguez, “Language, Power and Resistance: Re-Reading Fanon in a Trans-Caribbean Context,” The Black Scholar, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2012): 27
liberation of the oppressed being, by a familiar liberationist formula, the liberation of the oppressor as well.\textsuperscript{10}

In concluding, the main challenge of Fanon’s project in \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} turns out to be the scientific irreducibility of black bodies. Fanon’s attempt to inscribe the psychological and social experiences of the African Diaspora in the western sciences via his psychoanalytical and philosophical rendition is hindered by the European perception of black bodies. The challenge of the black body for psychoanalysis consists in its perception as an ambivalent psychoanalytical means which attracts and repels the European collective unconscious. The challenge of the black body for philosophy is twofold. First, despite Fanon’s deliberate expansion of the Sartrean existentialist self to account for the social experience of the African Diaspora, the perception of the black body precludes validation of its humanity and intellectual disposition. Secondly, Fanon borrows Hegel’s \textit{Lord and Bondsman} dialectic to show that part of the failure of the slave to secure recognition from the masters is the fact that the black body emerges as the embodiment of ‘inessentialité’ which draws laughter instead of recognition.

One of the implications of the scientific irreducibility—non-scientific conceptualization—of black bodies is that it hinders Fanon from supplying the distinct system of values, beliefs, and norms to secure the recognition of the African Diaspora as an equal group in European society. The challenge of the European perception of black bodies can be transcended unless, as Fanon suggests, there is a struggle for recognition. Fanon’s observation that failure to engage in violent struggles is responsible for the

\textsuperscript{10} Arthur Danto, \textit{The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art} (New York: Columbia University Press 2005), p.8
European perception of the African Diaspora, in his reflections about Hegel’s *Lord and Bondsmen* suggests that violent struggles is the sole means to secure recognition and redress the European perception of the African Diaspora. Fanon sees in the Lordship and Bondage (or master and slave) relation of G. W. F. Hegel’s Phenomenology the life-endangering, yet life-affirming risk that the slave must take in order to transcend the reality that the other has imposed on him—the reality of being seen and known by the master strictly as an object.  

11 It is thus why Fanon’s mature work, *Wretched of the Earth*, begins with a discussion of violence as the means to secure recognition and generate the system of values, norms, and beliefs that he attempts to elaborate in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

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