

The Construction of the Other and the Self in  
André Gide's *Travels in the Congo*  
and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*

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In the mid-1920s, the writer André Gide joined the filmmaker Marc Allégret for an exploratory tour in Africa. Gide's travel diaries were published soon after his return under the titles *Voyage au Congo* (1927) and *Le retour du Tchad* (1928).<sup>1</sup> Gide's account of his expedition constitutes a precious source of information not so much for those who are interested in Africa, but rather for those who want to understand colonial thinking. Gide's perception of African peoples and civilizations reflects a biased view of the black continent. His opinion is fashioned by his own culture—imperialist France. Gide is never able to detach himself from the *a priori* of his dominant culture. To the contrary, he willingly embraces the role of the superior being, and his journey, allegedly undertaken as a tourist, becomes a "mission." Gide feels suddenly compelled to devote his time to the civilizing cause, which corresponds to the gift of the caring, paternal white colonizer to the underdeveloped and immature non-white colonized. It is clear that Gide was not officially endowed with such a task, but he makes it his duty to fulfill it. He is so zealous and concerned by such responsibility that the natives call him "Governor," and even "Government," a title he does not relinquish. In Africa, Gide the tourist-traveler transforms himself into Gide, the agent of colonization. Through his report, we will examine

the way the white colonizer constructs the black character and how he defines himself in this relationship.

Two decades after Gide's *Travels* appeared, a young Martinican intellectual named Frantz Fanon tackled the same issue of race relations from a different perspective. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) explores colonization from the point of view of the colonized. Fanon's approach radically contrasts with Gide's. Fanon rejects the benefits of colonization and endeavors to show how colored people have been psychologically destroyed by the civilizing machine Gide supports. In this essay, Fanon's analysis of his people's subservient mentality will be used to contrast with Gide's depiction of Africans. *Black Skin, White Masks* can be read as a manifesto for black emancipation. Fanon's minute description of the mechanism of racism aims at showing that there are solutions to counterbalance what he calls a "crushing objecthood." According to Fanon, the potential to reverse the racial imbalance lies in the restoration of a Hegelian dialectic in which consciousness is given the opportunity to retrieve its "objective truth" by vying with another consciousness for recognition. The Fanonian interpretation of this struggle will allow us to reflect on the broader question of Otherness.

### The World According to Gide

"Look, a Negro!"

—Frantz Fanon

In 1957, the Tunisian thinker Albert Memmi wrote *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, in which he portrays the protagonists of colonial tragedy. His reflection leads him to conclude that the colonial institution debases both the dominant European and the colored man under his yoke. The following analysis about Gide's *Travels in the Congo* confirms many of Memmi's conclusions. In his depiction of the colonizer, Memmi contends: "If every colonial immediately assumes the role of colonizer, every colonizer does not necessarily become a colonialist" (19). In other words, the colonial, simply by living in the colony, finds him/herself in a position of domination and implicitly enhances colonization.

Furthermore, if the colonial plays some sort of role in the colonizing enterprise, he becomes a colonialist—an active colonial, as it were. At the beginning of his account, Gide declares that unlike the other passengers on the boat entering Brazzaville, he and his friend Allégret “are the only ones traveling ‘for pleasure.’” His use of inverted commas suggests that he agrees with Memmi’s views, and it indicates that the concept of the colonial, because of the white/non-white relation *de rigueur* in the colonies, is a myth. The colonial is a *de facto* colonizer (and a potential colonialist). It is the same for the European traveler, and Gide is no exception.

In fact, Gide does not travel “for pleasure,” because as soon as he walks upon Congolese soil, he assumes the role of an emissary for his country. He observes, judges, and acts in the name of the imperial power. Throughout his tribulations, Gide oscillates between arrogance and compassion, indifference and concern, now a colonizer, now a colonialist. This is Gide’s first trip to Africa. The 56-year-old intellectual surprises the reader with the shallowness of his discernment. His imagination is filled with pre-established ideas. African people, for instance, are potential anthropophagites: “Naked Negroes run about, shouting, laughing, quarreling, and showing their *cannibal teeth*” (7; emphasis added). The cannibalistic imagery will be used twice more in the novel without any valid foundation. Gide’s initial encounter with the countryside betrays childish expectations: “I must confess I am a little disappointed with the forest. I hope to find better elsewhere. The trees are not very high; I expected more shade, more mystery and strangeness” (28). This good-natured thirst for exoticism is quickly quenched. It augurs, however, a lack of objectivity that turns into overt racism in speech as well as in behavior. Every novelty is worth telling and it pleases Gide to assume the role of ethnologist. To act as a scientist when one is a writer—even a famous one—is no easy task, and Gide has an unfortunate tendency to put his discoveries, each more irrelevant than the last, in the same anthropological basket:

We met a herd of dog-faced baboons (cynocephali) between the M’Brés and Fort Crampel; they let us get quite close to them. Some of them were enormous.

The villages are rather fine-looking, but very poor. In one of them there were about sixty women grinding rubber rhizomes and singing; it is an interminable job and miserably paid. (57)

Such associations may seem unimportant, but they denote an absence of distinction between the human, the vegetable, and the animal, suggesting that Africans constitute a species not highly ranked on Gide's scale of humanity. Earlier in the novel, Gide actually makes an unambiguous statement about "the race that inhabits and over-populates" villages in the Bangassou area. The said race "is not a very fine one" and "before it was subjected two years ago, its members lived scattered in the bush; the old people will not let themselves be tamed; they sit *squatting on the ground like baboons* and hardly glance up as the motor passes by; one never gets a salutation from them" (47-48; emphasis added). Our illustrious guide never wonders why these people refuse to communicate with him. He has a ready-made answer: they are untamable apes. Zealous propagandist for imperialist France, Gide makes observations that often reinforce the idea that Africans are immature and irresponsible. Among the methods the colonial power uses to fuel such stereotypes, Gide mentions a book each village chief is compelled to keep at hand. Such book is reminiscent of a school report in which the local French administrator evaluates the chief's behavior and performance. Thus, the entry for the chief of the Katakouo village indicates: "Incompetent chief; without energy; cannot be replaced; the other natives in the village are no better" (79). A bit further, Gide calls another chief "a stupid man (like the chief of the last village and of the next)" (80), but he does not explain why he thinks the chief is stupid, and he prefers to base his assertion on the book: "Incompetent chief; has no authority over his people" (80). In other words, Gide never questions the annotations he reads in the chiefs' books. Instead, he looks for ways to justify them.

Everywhere he goes in Africa, Gide likes to be saluted, admired, and cherished. For Gide, Africans who behave so are developed. To be developed is to be colonized, and to be colonized is to obey white rulers. The reader soon recognizes that what informs the narrative is the ideology of colonization. In Africa, Gide

becomes—consciously or not—the peddler and the enforcer of his Western values. Thus, he remarks about Coquillatville, a colonial city, that “it is not so much what it is that I admire, as what one hopes it will be in ten years’ time” (26). France is supposed to bring progress to Africa, and Gide is proud to be a protagonist in such a glorious enterprise. Yet he also realizes that colonials behave as an occupying force. France is looting Africa and Gide acts as if he were confronted, for the first time of his life, with the negative effects of savage capitalism. His first encounter with commercial irregularities is at Fort Sibut, on market day, where a small group of white independent traders cheat the natives on the real value of the rubber. These harmful traffickers exemplify the cohorts of petty adventurers who came to the colonies to make their fortunes. The exploitation of Africa, however, operates on a greater scale. The anecdote of the “ball” in Boda corresponds to Gide’s awakening. He comes to realize that French colonialism is not always virtuous. Pacha, the administrator, works hand in hand with the *Compagnie Forestière*, to abuse and even torture innocent victims:

At Bambio, on September 8, ten rubber-gatherers . . . belonging to the Goundi gang, who work for the *Compagnie Forestière*—because they had not brought in any rubber the month before (but this month they brought in double, from 40 to 50 kilograms)—were condemned to go round and round the factory under a fierce sun, carrying very heavy wooden beams. If they fell down, they were forced up by guards flogging them with whips.

The “ball” began at eight o’clock and lasted the whole day, with Mssrs. Pacha and Maudurier, the company’s agent, looking on. (70)

The cynicism and cruelty of the improvised dictator, whose crimes are commissioned by the French State, appall Gide. Blacks are treated like beasts of burden. They are also dehumanized: the idea of a “ball,” in a French mind, unequivocally echoes the ball of “14 juillet,” i.e., Bastille Day, characterized by its popular rejoicing. Pacha’s ball, with these puppet-like bodies vacillating under the weight of the beams, evokes something excessive and “carnavalesque.” Pacha, the agent of colonization, frees his basest sadistic instincts. Africans are tools for his wildest fantasies. The

“ball” is a key moment in *Travels*. Gide decides to act, and he writes a report to the Governor. He even leaves aside his incurable blindness. He knows that terrorized witnesses, fearing Pacha’s reprisal, will withdraw their depositions as soon as he is gone, and with even more perspicacity, he guesses that his account, “may never come to [the Governor’s] notice” (71). It is surprising, however, that Gide waits for the account of the “ball” to become really alarmed. A week before, on October 21, he had already heard about the notorious Pacha, from Samba N’Goto, the chief of the Bodempéré village. The N’Goto people have refused to obey Pacha’s order to move their settlement to an area already inhabited by a different tribe and remote from their plantations. A local sergeant, Yemba, is sent by Pacha for a punitive raid, which turns into a festival of atrocities:

Twelve men were seized and tied up to trees. . . . Sergeant Yemba and the guard Bonjo then shot and killed the twelve men who had been tied up. Then followed a great massacre of women whom Yemba struck down with a machet; after which he seized five young children, shut them up in a hut, and set fire to it. In all . . . there were thirty-two victims. (65-66)

At this point indeed, Gide does not travel “for pleasure.” Still, a week and more evidence of Pacha’s cruelty will prove necessary to catch Gide’s attention. The truth is that Gide seems more concerned by the malfunctions of colonialism *per se* than by its disastrous effects on Africans. It becomes clear by the end of *Travels* that Gide’s sense of justice and his subsequent interventions are not motivated by the suffering he witnesses, but by the wish to improve the colonial system. Thus, the help he brings to Africans is parsimonious and irregular. It depends mostly on his mood and the degree to which it serves the colonial cause. In fact, he is capable of absolute indifference. Immediately after he has heard the story of the massacre, his truck comes across women who are repairing the road:

These poor creatures, more like cattle than human beings, were in the streaming rain, a number of them with babies at the breast. Every twenty yards or so there were huge pits by the side of the road, generally about ten feet deep; it was out of this that the

poor wretches had dug the sandy earth with which to bank the road, and this *without proper tools*. It has happened more than once that the loose earth has given way and buried the women and children who were working at the bottom of the pit. . . . As they usually work too far from their village to return at night, the poor women have built themselves temporary huts in the forest, wretched shelters of branches and reeds, useless against the rain. We heard that the native soldier who is their overseer had made them work all night in order to repair the damage done by a recent storm and to enable us to pass. (67)

This is a good example of Gide's inconsistency—or is it bad faith? Gide chooses to italicize the phrase “without proper tools,” showing that what worries him is a lack of a colonial infrastructure. Yet the reader is likely to feel more shocked by the state of quasi-enslavement in which these women are held. Gide does not betray particular emotion at such a spectacle, but his account makes clear that colonialism is responsible for such a situation. It is, after all, partly to allow his car to pass that the women have been working all night long in such despicable conditions. Gide switches to another topic without further commentary. It is not clear whether Gide's unbecoming reaction to such misery is contempt, bad faith, or stupidity, but his narration borders on cynicism when he feels compelled to add a footnote which says that only the *Compagnie Forestière* and Pacha use this road once a month. Gide, manages, however, to have Pacha prosecuted.

From then on, the virtuous colonizer turns into an itinerant complaint office. Everywhere he goes, Gide is made aware of embezzlement created by the colonial situation and people come to him for written documents meant to solve their problems. Gide's new function highlights two important occurrences. First, in spite of obvious extortion, he does not firmly condemn the colonial system. He sees the problems he has to face as temporary ones; adjustments must be made to enhance progress. Second, that Africans rush to him for help shows that they have no choice but to adapt to the administrative rules imposed by European customs. Colonization is profit as much as it is the imposition of one culture and the eradication of another. In order to justify such invasion, the white man needs to create a myth of the African. Memmi explains:

Whenever the colonizer states, in his language, that the colonized is a weakling, he suggests thereby that this deficiency requires protection. From this comes the concept of a protectorate. It is in the colonized's own interest that he be excluded from management functions, and that these heavy responsibilities be reserved for the colonizer. (81-82)

It is with such beliefs that Gide justifies the sultan Reï Bouba's extortion of money from his people:

We understood the reason of this custom, which at first sight appears abusive and contrary to the rights of individuals, when we learnt that all our free porters (those from Maroua) had let themselves be cleared out of the whole of their pay the very same evening that they received it, by gambling with some crafty and unscrupulous native soldiers; Reï Bouba's subjects, on the contrary, had refrained from risking pay that had to be handed over to their master. (348-49)

Thus Gide, the advocate of progress and democracy, accepts a feudal system so long as it is applied to beings deemed inferior and unripe for freedom and civil rights.

Memmi notes that in the same manner, the mother country's judicial system is imposed. "Whenever the colonizer adds, in order not to fall prey to anxiety, that the colonized is a *wicked, backward* person with *evil, thievish*, somewhat *sadistic* instincts, he thus justifies his police and his legitimate severity" (82; emphasis added). According to Memmi, all these characteristics constitute the rhetoric of white racist discourse that depicts blacks as potentially dangerous creatures, and they are clearly echoed in Gide's renditions of dance sessions. If excised from the text and read together, the epithets used in these descriptions form an interesting isotopy: pandemonium, frenzy, savage, yells, delirium, lunatics, demoniac, possession, terror. Needless to say, it is almost a humanitarian gesture to tame such beings with coercion. Gide actually betrays such convictions when, toward the beginning of the account, he reports on the Sambry case. Sambry is a young, incompetent agent who is tried for misconduct with the natives. Gide concludes that this is due to the "insufficiency of supervi-

sion." The comments made to Gide by one of the judges are also very revealing:

Sambry used to go to bed with the wives of all the native soldiers under his command. Nothing could be more imprudent. As soon as they get out of hand, *these native guards become terrible. Nearly all the cruelties that Sambry was accused of were committed by them.* But they all gave evidence against him, as you saw. (15; emphasis added)

Thus, Gide's claim to a greater control is reinforced here by the specter of anti white conspiracy. The myth of African inferiority must be kept alive by all means. It is the *sine qua non* of colonialism and it is why racism is, as Memmi puts it, "a consubstantial part of colonialism" (74). Racist theories have grown out of necessity. Pseudo-scientific findings are meant to authenticate the so-called immutable differences between races: "What is actually a sociological point becomes labeled as being biological or, preferably, metaphysical" (74), says Memmi. Gide's text abounds in testimonies reinforcing the stereotype of those who, like the young agent of the Société Wial, approve of "a policy of brutality towards the blacks" (91), because it is the only way to get something out of them. Gide answers: "I am inclined to think that every master has the servants he deserves" (95n). This plea against brutality does not conceal its paternalism. It is also a clear objectification of the black character, for Gide's sentence is inspired by the proverb, "a bad workman always blames his tools."

Gide reveals himself by way of hasty and peremptory observations about Africans whom he usually considers as members of a single category rather than as distinct human beings in all their complexity. After his poor performance as an ethnographer, Gide's other remarks bear witness to his deficiencies as a sociolinguist. Instead of wondering why he is unable to communicate properly with some chiefs, Gide jumps to conclusions. He reports the following interaction with one of them: "Why was the manioc not reaped at the proper time?' As a rule the natives cannot understand the word 'why?' and I even doubt whether any equivalent word exists in most of their idioms" (80). Behind the incapacity to understand the word "why"—i.e., to ask questions—lies the

idea that Africans either lack curiosity or cannot reason at all. Also, Gide leaps from his interest in languages to another hobby—phrenology. “Not that I think [Negroes] capable of any but the slightest mental development; their brains as a rule are dull and stagnant—but how often the white man seems to make it his business to thrust them back into their darkness” (96). By blaming the white man in such a way, Gide reinforces the myth of the black man’s inferiority and need for white guidance. He borrows the concept of the noble savage corrupted by the mean white opportunist. Like a pet, the black individual is docile and full of devotion when well-treated: “The Negroes are perfectly able, no matter what anyone may say, to distinguish between kindness and weakness, and there is no need to terrorize them in order to make oneself feared. It is better to make oneself loved” (348). Earlier, Gide has already completed his demonstration with a statement worthy of social Darwinism: “I do not want to make the black out more intelligent than he is; but his stupidity, if it exists, is only natural—*like an animal’s*. Whereas the white man’s as regards the black has something monstrous about it, by very reason of his superiority” (295; emphasis added).

Gide seldom grants black individuals the privilege of being judged by their personal deeds or according to the criteria of their own culture. Allegedly, it is because of two young native brothers, Pierre and Madoua, that Gide and Allégret miss their “last farewell to the forest.” Gide comments:

We have refused to take them any farther. These two are the wretched products of a large town (Yaoundé); they are thieves, liars, and hypocrites, and would justify the irritation certain colonists feel against the blacks. But that is just it—they are *not* the natural products of the country. It is contact with our civilization that has spoilt them. (372)

In Gide’s language, this means that colonization must be reinforced and improved: more supervisors, more money, greater institutionalization of the country. Memmi argues that this need to justify anything the colony does is implicated in the colonizer’s awareness that his enterprise is not legitimate, that he is a usurper. Memmi calls it the “Nero complex.” The usurper knows that his

success in Africa is in conflict with the values he normally defends: "His true victory will therefore never be upon him: now he need only record it in the laws and morals. For this, he would have to convince the others, if not himself. In other words, to possess victory completely he needs to absolve himself of it and the conditions under which it was attained" (52). Memmi's words echo what Gide works on throughout *Travels*—namely that the depersonalization of the black character combines with the constant legitimation of the colonial enterprise. Thus, Gide makes it clear to the reader that non-colonized Africa is chaotic. People are rude, dirty; they have skin and sexual diseases; and they starve. As evidence, Gide describes the French part of Impfondo as "cheerful, tidy, and prosperous-looking," whereas native dwellings around are "wretched dilapidated huts" (34). His most blatant example remains his description of Governor Lamblin's circumscription. Gide portrays Lamblin in the following terms: "He is a man of great modesty, but the admirable work he has accomplished shows what might be achieved by an intelligent and conservative administration" (40). Everything Gide sees on Lamblin's land enchants him. "The road is admirable"; "the tree trunks, no longer muffled in undergrowth, are visible in all their native nobility"; the natives do not fail to salute him; and children to whom he waves are "in a frenzy of delight, jumping and dancing about wildly in a kind of delirious rapture" (41-42). Gide concludes that under Lamblin's administration, "everyone looks prosperous and the people seem happy" (42). As he leaves Lamblin's administrative estate, in which native huts are "being built according to almost a single type adopted by the administration," he notices that huts are now "much less fine, less clean, and often, indeed, actually sordid" (63).

When Gide visits a region where the colonial order and uniformization have not yet taken place, he finds it "formless, embryonic, inexistent" (135), and finally frightening. Signs of his hegemonic culture reassure him. Memmi contends that the usurper needs to feel that he is a true patriot, a fine ambassador of his country: "He loves the most flashy symbols, the most striking demonstrations of the power of his country" (59). Memmi's definition again evokes Gide's words:

It is the greatest joy to find oneself again in a village that is tidy, clean, and prosperous looking; a decent chief, dressed in European clothes that are not ridiculous, in a freshly whitened helmet, speaking correct French—a flag run in our honor—all this moves me absurdly—almost to sobs. (135)

Gide's call for material reform in the colonies is coupled with an inveterate contempt for the natives. *Travels in the Congo* is a striking illustration of colonialist thinking. It shows what the white man thinks of himself in relation to the one under his yoke. One wonders, then, how the colored man reacts to such debasement. Frantz Fanon, in plain language, provides us with a powerful answer.

#### Fanon and the Point of View of the Oppressed

“How does it feel to be a problem?”

—W.E.B. Du Bois

In her article on Fanon, Natalie Melas endeavors to show that colonial power is founded on a faulty system of comparison. Drawing on Jean-François Lyotard's work, she argues that traditional cultures and modern cultures are incommensurable since each is governed by “rules [that] are specific to each particular kind of knowledge.” Therefore, it is “impossible . . . to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge, and vice versa; the relevant criteria are different” (275). Gide's bad faith resides in his comparison of two worlds that cannot be measured by the same token. Melas borrows from Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 the syntagmas *comparatio* and *similitudo* to distinguish two types of comparisons: the former “can only occur in isotopic context, determining value according to rigidly defined realms” (276), the latter “posits new resemblances, stretching the limits of a code” (277). *Similitudo*, she adds, “flaunts the flexibility of existing categories, though its intelligibility too depends in the final analysis on cultural norms” (276-77). Fanon's approach reminds one of the *similitudo*. He tries to demonstrate that the black man is caught in the nets of the *comparatio* mentality.

Our reflection on Gide reveals his preconceived knowledge about Africa. Once there, he does not greatly modify his opinion according to the reality of the world he discovers. On the contrary, he compares Africa and its inhabitants to the ready-made image he has of it. Gide fuels the myth by picturing the natives as irresponsible people, and the consequences are important for the colonized: "Nationally and civically he is only what the colonizer is not" (Memmi 96).

Fanon clearly exposes this binary opposition meant to ratify the superiority of the white man. The colonized has no alternative but to deny his own values and to adopt the mother country's cultural standards: "For the black man, there is only one destiny, and it is white" (10, 228), says Fanon, in both the introduction and the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon uses Jean-Paul Sartre's theory that the Jew is a construction of the anti-Semite, and he adapts it to the colored individual: the white man has "woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (111). The example of Mayotte Capétia, a Martinican writer, illustrates to what extent the forced identification with the white colonizer is alienating. After a failed attempt to "negrify" the world when she is a child (she emptied an inkwell over a white classmate's head), she tries, as an adult, to bleach it by becoming a reputed laundress in Fort de France. Then, continues Fanon, "she proceeds to turn [her blackness] into an accident" (46), and, on learning that her grandmother was white, writes in her autobiographical story:

I found that I was proud of it. I was certainly not the only one who had white blood, but a white grandmother was not so ordinary as a white grandfather. So my mother, then, was a mixture? . . . I found her prettier than ever, and cleverer, and more refined. . . . I made up my mind that I could never love anyone but a white man, a blue-eyed blonde, a Frenchman. (Fanon 45-47)

Fanon is unsparing in such striking examples, and if he agrees with Memmi that the economic discrepancies are a factor of racial humiliation, he insists that an inferiority complex is also the outcome of "the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority" (11). As such, black people

accept their own mystification, and in so doing, they contribute a gloss of reality to the racist discourse. To Capétia's wish for "lactification," Fanon adds Jean Veneuse's sorrow. He is the main character in René Maran's *Un homme pareil aux autres*. Veneuse, an introverted black thinker, lacks the courage to declare his love for an impatient Andrée Marielle. Andrée is a white woman, and her whiteness is Veneuse's main obstacle. In spite of Madame Coulange's warm assent and encouragement, he has scruples. He does not want to pass for one of those Negroes who wants "to revenge [themselves] on a European woman for everything that her ancestors have inflicted on [his] throughout the centuries" (70). Memmi comments on the consequences of such self-debasement: "The crushing of the colonized is included among the colonizer's values. As soon as the colonized adopts these values, he similarly adopts his own condemnation. In order to free himself, at least so he believes, he agrees to destroy himself" (121-22). Fanon shows how Martinicans, for instance, consider themselves less savage than their Guadeloupien neighbors on the grounds that they are closer to white civilization than Guadeloupiens are.

The success of colonialism at imposing the myth of inferiority is also due to the fact that this myth "is supported by a very solid organization; a government and a judicial system fed and renewed by the colonizer's historic, economic and cultural needs" (Memmi 91). In any case, the colonized are not masters of their destiny. They have no control over the organization of their society. Fanon demonstrates the impact of such a system on the younger generations. At the end of the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, he comments on the Negroes' frustrations and supports his argument with the help of Adler. According to Adler, there exists an intimate relation between the psychology of an adult and what he experienced as a child. Adler speaks of a "behavior pattern" whose essential content, energy, and meaning "remain unchanged from earliest childhood" (61). In other words, what was learned and experienced during childhood is anchored in everyone's psyche during adulthood.

How is the black child's psychology shaped in such a mutilated society? Memmi argues that the child's father no longer in-

cludes the idea of citizenship in the child's education. Being deprived of such citizenship himself, why would he instill such values into the head of his offspring? As a result, the child will not feel civically responsible, and in the long run his asocial nature will lead him to revolt. Memmi wrote *The Colonizer* in 1957, and he probably had in mind the burgeoning movements of emancipation throughout the colonized world. Revolt, then, was not such a bad idea. Fanon, who wrote *Black Skin* in 1951, had only the bloody revolts of Madagascar (1948) to reflect on, and his interpretation is not as optimistic as Memmi's. Inspired by diverse psychoanalytic theories, Fanon contends that in the civilized world, "the family is a miniature of the nation" (142). In other words, there is a *continuum* from the family to public life. The child faces the same rights and prohibitions, the same morals and laws in his private and public life. However, the same experience will produce a schism in the life of the black youth for, as Fanon argues, "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (143). The social inadequacy of the black child is determined very early and in all aspects of his life. Fanon points out that white children find a collective outlet for their aggressiveness in comic books. By contrast, the black children have to identify with a victor who always triumphs over a bad creature that often symbolizes Negroes and Indians. The young Negro learns to be afraid of the wicked Negro, and has to identify with white heroes. With such conditioning, manifestations of Negrophobia among Negroes come as no surprise.

The Negro is the uncanny—somewhat dangerous—Other for the white. Fanon's analysis suggests that the gaze of the white man on the Negro is inquisitorial in nature: "I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (109), he confesses about his years of maturation. He did not feel comfortable in Antillean society: "the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye" (109). Memmi makes a relevant point about such dehumanization: In spite of its virulence, it cannot be materialized by a real, physical eradication for an obvious reason. "The

colonialist's existence is so closely aligned with that of the colonized that he will never be able to overcome the argument which states that misfortune is good for something. With all his power he must disown the colonized while their existence is indispensable to his own" (54).<sup>2</sup> Thus, there is no real desire to integrate the Negro into white society. The Negro is only the instrument of white supremacy and must stay in his place. Black intellectuals and activists, like Du Bois and Fanon, have made the painful experience of being educated colored people: their knowledge is interpreted as insolence. In order for white power to operate, the Negro cannot depart from the "good nigger" image; otherwise, he becomes immediately suspect. When André Gide expresses his satisfaction at being saluted or celebrated, it is not the whim of an aging man. It is the confirmation of social and racial hierarchies and prerogatives: blacks must be docile, smiling "pickaninnies." It is imperative for white colonialists that Negroes understand their role and stick to their position in the world.

At the same time, however, the Negro's only way to exist in the colonial context is to compete with the white man. Thus, the black individual finds himself in a catch-22, which reminds us of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness. "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45).<sup>3</sup>

Although he imitated Du Bois and others in his praise of the black specificity and right to a difference, Fanon would certainly replace the notion of "double-consciousness" by "no-consciousness-at-all." In his final chapter, "The Negro and Recognition," Fanon declares: "The Negro is comparison" (211). Fanon revises Adler's individual psychology by applying it to the Antillean context. Melas explains that the Negro is here considered as a collectivity, and he is depersonalized since he is like a "comparison." He is made the element of a system. He is transformed into an instrument which has no ego-ideal and whose function is to establish white superiority. This is the reason the Negro is forced to remain under the bar of the Adlerian equation: "The Martinican

does not compare himself with the white man *qua* father, leader, God; He compares himself with his fellows against the pattern of the white man" (215).

Thus, in his struggle for recognition, the Antillean is frustrated: by fighting with peers who are similarly humiliated, he does not elevate himself to real manhood. His efforts are in vain because he is still shaped by his social environment which has already assigned him a position—the walk-on part of the inferior being. For Fanon, the Antillean is a neurotic, but not an incurable one. Although he asserts that “the Martinican is a man crucified” (216), Fanon believes that this desperate situation is not immutable, and he actually proclaims it in the first lines of his work: “Manhood, I believe in you” (7). This message of hope is important because it includes everyone, black or white. In order to achieve what Fanon terms “subjective security,” one needs a confrontation with others. This is why blacks cannot remain in the “sealed” objectification imposed on them. Their dying culture needs to regain vitality, which means that they must get rid of the myth of inferiority constructed by the white conqueror. Such undertaking implies a challenge and, above all, it demands reciprocity. “Relying on Hegel,” Robyn Dane contends, “Fanon avers that the oppressed and the oppressor are each other’s key to sanity” (78). It can be argued that the “white mask,” as a distortion of Truth, is borne by blacks as well as by whites, and it may explain why Fanon puts it in the plural—white masks.

In Hegelian rhetoric, the idea of truth is central. The self-assertion of existence is not satisfactory to self-consciousness. One needs recognition, as much as the other does: “Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and hence its own certainty of itself is still without truth” (Hegel 232). To exist purely for oneself implies conflict with the Other. Indeed, this quest for pure abstraction of self-consciousness induces a pure negation of one’s objective form, and therefore the destruction of the other. This dual fatality means “a life-and-death struggle” for each “self-consciousness.” It is the necessary condition to attain what Hegel calls “objective truth” and, as he puts it, “it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained” (233).

As a black man, and in the perspective of a pursuit of reciprocal recognition, Fanon declares that, "in a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible" (218). According to Fanon, this passage from passivity to action is essential. In Hegelian terms, the "trial by death" is the key step toward freedom. Fanon deems it a vital ordeal in real life, and argues that the deprivation of it accounts for the fate of the colored world: "Historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom . . . The Negro has not become a master . . . The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master" (219). In other words, the Negro—in the manner of the bondsman in Hegel's dialectic—was never given the opportunity to father freedom through his own action. It is this pseudo-liberation that Fanon denounces. He questions the colonizer's indifference or his condescending "paternalistic curiosity." The colonized needs to know the cost of Freedom to enjoy authentic freedom. When the colonized fought for Liberty and Justice, concludes Fanon, it was always "white" liberty and "white" justice. The subjugated colored individual must be the architect of his own freedom and truth.

By not inscribing itself in the Hegelian dialectic against the black subject, the white subject denies the latter access to a vital constitutive process. Fanon's aim is to antagonize the white Other because, "when it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire—the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit" (218). The outcome of the Hegelian dialectic corresponds to a reversal of the roles: in a piecemeal fashion, the bondsman rediscovers himself, whereas the Master realizes that he has only achieved a dependent consciousness. Since the bondsman is only an object that "embodies the truth of [the lord's] certainty of himself" (Hegel 236), the Master understands that self-existence is not his truth. To the contrary, the fear that the Master inspires in the bondsman is beneficial to the latter, because it helps him to shape his individual existence. According to Hegel, labor and toiling under duress of fear are positive for the slave: "Without the discipline of

service and obedience, fear remains formal and does not spread over the whole known reality of existence. Without the formative activity shaping the thing, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become objective for itself" (239).

Our initial analysis of André Gide's travels in Africa shows that colonialism's violence is generated by a contemptuous attitude that deprives the colonized of the Hegelian opportunity of self-achievement. Fanon shows how his peers are unable to take off their white masks, and these are precisely the impediments he wants them to get rid of. Once aware of the crushing order that casts them into subjection, the colonized are ready to recover their lucidity, and later fight for their dignity. As long as the Antillean individual remains under the bar of the Adlerian ratio, he cannot have access to the Other that controls him. The right to participate in the Hegelian dialectic is the key to the racial question discussed in this reflection. As a colonizer/colonialist, Gide prevents the colonized from participating in the Hegelian dialectic. On the contrary, Fanon's priority is to reactivate such a dialectic because it is the *sine qua non*, for the colonized, to retrieve his/her humanity.

## Notes

1 These two publications are combined in the 1994 Ecco Press Edition under the title *Travels in the Congo*, translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy. I refer to this edition in my paper.

2 The original, in French, makes the author's use of Hegelian terminology obvious: "L'existence du colonialiste est trop liée à celle du colonisé, jamais il ne pourra dépasser cette *dialectique*. De toutes ses forces il lui faut nier le colonisé et, en même temps, l'existence de sa *victime* lui est indispensable pour continuer à être" (emphasis added). Memmi, Albert, *Portrait du colonisé*. Paris: Nrf-Gallimard, Editions Corrèa, 1957, 78.

3 I am thinking here of the "Négritude" movement. Fanon actually refers to some of its leaders such as Césaire or Senghor. As for Du Bois, he even advocated Pan-Negroism in *The Preservation of The Race*, an address preceding *The Souls of the Black Folk*.

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