

Psycho-Politics and Identity in the African American Diasporic Novel:**A Study of Wright's *Native Son*****Hanan Khaled Al-Jezawi**

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Abstract: This article aims to highlight diaspora and diasporic identity in the African American novel. It examines Frantz Fanon's critical theory of psycho-politics and its application to a selected African American novel to uncover the effect of slavery and colonization on the African American psyche that leads to psychological trauma and alienation. This article explores how African American writers emphasize the politics of the relationship between whites and blacks in the US, which mimics the colonial relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and thus the novel can be interpreted in terms of the relationship between post-colonial theory and critical psychology as explained in Fanon's definition of anti-colonial struggle, combining politics with psychology or "psycho-politics". The article sheds light on the effect of diaspora on the identity of the African American since identity construction and equality are the crux of the concern of African Americans. Identity and trauma are intertwined and thus Africans in diaspora live in a traumatic and apocalyptic age. This article emphasizes that the multi-layered, hybrid identity of the African American is an effective and inevitable coping mechanism within the context of this individual's traumatic experiences.

Keywords: Fanon, Identity, Psycho politics, Trauma, violence

السياسة- النفسية والهوية في رواية الشتات الأفرو أمريكية: دراسة لرواية ريتشارد رايت "الابن الاصلي"

يهدف هذا المقال إلى ابراز الشتات و هوية الشتات في الرواية الأفرو امريكيه/الابن الاصلي للكاتب الأفرو أمريكي ريتشارد رايت. يدرس المقال نظرية فرانز فانون السياسة النفسية للكشف عن تأثير العبودية والإستعمار على شخصية الأفرو أمريكي والتي تؤدي إلى الصدمة النفسية و العزلة. كما يوضح المقال كيفية كشف الكاتب الأفرو أمريكي سياسة العلاقات بين شخصية الأبيض والأسود في أمريكا والذي يحاكي العلاقة الإستعمارية. الرواية التي ستتم دراستها يمكن أن تفسر من حيث العلاقة بين نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار والنقد النفسي كما هو معرف بمصطلح فانون لمواجهة الاستعمار والتي جمع بها بين السياسة والنفسية بما أسماه السياسة- النفسية. يلقي هذا المقال الضوء على تأثير الشتات على شخصية الأفرو أمريكي حيث أن بناء الهوية و المساواة تبقى في جوهر اهتمامه. بما أن الهوية والصدمة النفسية يتداخلان فإن الإفريقيين في الشتات يعيشون

عصر الصدمة النفسية. يؤكد هذا المقال أن شخصية الأفرو أمريكيي المختلطة والمتعددة أو المهجنة هي آلية تكيف حتمية وفعالة في سياق تجارب الصدمات النفسية للأشخاص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فانون – الهوية- السياسة النفسية- الصدمة - العنف

The African American diaspora is caused by the catastrophic historical event of slavery. The concept of diaspora can be used to describe the history of the Africans since the beginning of the slave trade, which continued for four centuries, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Since “[s]lavery was not abolished, it evolved into colonization” (27) as Nadine Gordimer declares; the violence of slavery (and racism) can be seen to be linked to the violence of colonization. Therefore, Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth*, like Michael Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, tackles the basic assumptions that underlie society. In chapter one of his book entitled “Concerning Violence”, Fanon questions whether the colonized world should copy the West or develop a whole new set of values and ideas. He calls for a radical break with colonial culture, rejecting a hypocritical European humanism for a purely revolutionary consciousness. He posits violence as a necessary pre-condition for this rupture. Fanon also classifies many colonized people as mentally ill. In his last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, he discusses countless cases of children, adults, and the elderly who have been driven mad by colonialism. In one instance, he classifies two children who kill their white playmate with a knife as insane (270). In isolating these children and classifying their disorders as insanity caused by colonialism, he is ironically using the very thought systems and technologies that Foucault points out are symptomatic of western disciplinary society. Foucault explains the power relations; for the oppressed, he should either obey the rules of the oppressor or to be punished by being sent either to prison or asylums.

In his coinage of psychology and politics, Fanon demonstrates the effect of colonial violence on the mind and behavior of the colonized. Fanon uses "black" and "white" as synonyms for 'colonized' and 'colonizer'. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he focuses on the experience of diaspora and the way the colonized feel alienated whether they are in their homeland or in the colonizer's country. Fanon states in “The Lived Experience of The Black Man” in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “The truth is that the black race is dispersed and is no longer unified” (8). Africans in diaspora are restricted from feeling a sense of community, and this inevitably results in their becoming alienated from their identity and history.

The African diaspora, as a concept, is used to analyze the migration of Africans from their native continent to different parts of the world, such as America and Europe. George Shepperson was the first to introduce this concept in an article entitled "The African Diaspora or the African Abroad" in 1965; he explains that there is a phenomenon in the African context that can be called "African Diaspora" (qtd. in Dufoix 2016, 232). It is the rebirth of a new cultural identity, a hybrid self. Diaspora has emerged as a favorite term among scholars who are associated with contemporary postcolonial studies. African diaspora is created by the slave trade

and "by factors within the system of imperialism and colonialism" that forced Africans to leave their homes (Walters 1997, 15). This concept comes with important political connotations. The word diaspora when used with the adjective "Jewish" has come to mean a "return" to a sacred land of origin. However, the African diaspora is used in a different context. It is worth noting here that in our modern history, a "true" diaspora, which entails a justified return to a land based on historical fact, most appropriately, describes the Palestinian people whose land was physically and forcibly taken from them by Zionist occupiers in 1948. However, the concern of this article is the African diaspora.

In his essay entitled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall writes:

'The New World' presence--America, Terra Incognita—[the unknown or unexplored land] is therefore itself the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference, what makes Afro-Caribbean people already people of a diaspora. I use this term here metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea" (235).

This quotation by Hall is important in terms of emphasizing the *cultural* aspect of the African diaspora in contrast to the one mythologized by Jews. The African diaspora, unlike the mythical Jewish diaspora, does not entail a return to a sacred land. Rather it takes into account the historical process and the birth of a new cultural identity based on a new hybrid self. Hall offers two important descriptions of identity. The first is identity as a pure essence that does not change; it is fixed. The second is dynamic and "subject to the continuous play of history" (225). The first one is important in giving the individual a sense of unity against his historical fragmentation; this can be noticed in different African American movements, such as Malcolm X and, more recently, the ideas of Afrocentricity. However, the African American's existence in America is now different from the first moment (the first understanding of identity) and represents the birth of a "new" man/woman, a hybrid self as a result of a long historical process. Describing the second understanding of identity, Hall writes: "Diaspora is identified by identity which lives through differences"(235). These identities reproduce and reconstruct themselves over time and space. He emphasizes the idea that to understand the trauma of slavery and colonialism, one should properly understand the past and present together. Therefore, history and time become meaningful in the African diasporic context.

In the same essay, Hall mentions that the rediscovery of a great past African identity is what Frantz Fanon calls a:

passionate research ... directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others (qtd. in Hall 1990, 223).

Therefore, according to both Fanon and Hall, the first understanding of identity is important in building up the confidence and dignity of the “wretched of the earth,” to borrow the title of Fanon’s book. However, Hall asserts that cultural identity is not fixed; it is neither universal nor unchangeable; instead, it is subject to change. Besides, “there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (Hall 1990, 226).

The term diaspora is accompanied by memories, past experiences, and knowledge; it always carries the feeling of loss and longing; “This experience [of living in diaspora] is constituted through [the] encounter with racism, alienation, marginalization and exploitation” (Awad 2011, 66). Yousef Awad explains that one cannot mention diaspora without considering “historical and current debates on the different integration policies in the host countries” (37). The African diaspora was marked by extreme physical, emotional and imaginative violence as it was not only about violently and forcibly separating people from the homeland, but also about transporting them thousands of miles away (on very difficult journeys where hundreds of thousands died) to work as slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean on white owned sugar and cotton plantations.

The African diaspora can be understood as the displacement of people through slavery; it is the product of a transnational exploitative endeavor rooted in a system of inequality that resulted from a violent history such as African slavery and the Atlantic slave trade (Clifford 1997, 315). A group of people in diaspora is recognized either as a specific community that shares a similar history or as a political community that shapes the formation of identity. The two complete each other since diaspora signifies transnational movements and exhibits political connotation. Paul Gilroy in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, points out that “the black diaspora is a cosmopolitan, Atlantic phenomenon, embroiled in and transcending national antagonisms [...]. It reinvents earlier strands of pan-Africanism, but with a postcolonial twist” (qtd. in Clifford 1997, 261). Clifford adds that the black Atlantic’s history is committed to strive for freedom and emancipation to investigate the dilemma of identity and historical memory (263).

Diaspora is a continuing process of displacement and migration through which diasporic identities are generated (Falaus 2014, 19); things begin with displacement since one cannot travel to a place of origin to discover who he is. Within the context of a diasporic identity, one would ask where you are at instead of where you are from (Kropiwnicki 2017, 163). The African American discovers himself and forms his identity between in the different host countries. Thus, identity is shaped by the tension between them and this brings about a “diasporic consciousness” (Smith 2014, 6).

In “The Role of Violence in the Works of Wright and Fanon,” Wilmot explains that the violence both Fanon and Wright describe is not their production; however, it evolves from the violence upon which their societies have been built. Wilmot points out that both Fanon and Wright experienced violence in the Caribbean or the American South respectively. The brutality, as Fanon explains is seen in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which is

marked by violence. Both Wright and Fanon maintain that the colonized or the enslaved are deeply affected by violence, and thus the violent identity emerges (18).

The creation of a new identity does not only mean freeing oneself from colonization, but also erasing an identity that is constructed by colonization and reconstructing a new identity with a philosophical outlook, which revolves around resistance and revolutionary violence. In *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison comments that Wright felt oppressed by his family and community and thus his writings were shaped by violence; he responds in a violent way and it becomes “his need to give that violence significance” (83).

Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) explores what it means to be black in America by illustrating the effect of the Jim Crow segregation laws upon black individuals. These laws allowed white Americans to continue exploiting the African Americans. The protagonist Bigger Thomas accepts to work as a chauffeur for the white family, the Daltons. Bigger kills the Dalton’s daughter Mary accidentally while he is trying to keep her silent by smothering her with a pillow, which leads to another crime and a rape. Bigger accuses Mary’s friend Jan who was with her the previous night; however, he is later caught and put in jail. In jail he hires a white lawyer, Max who defends him by accusing the American society which does not give blacks any option in life and denies them their rights. This systematic discrimination leads to violence and crimes. At the end, Bigger wishes to have a chance to live a life with his new knowledge and experience which moulds him into a new person, a hybrid one. When Max is about to leave, Bigger asks him to say goodbye to Jan who forgives him and for the first time without using the antagonizing “Mr.”; he finds that his motive for violence is justified. He wants to live “in order to find out” and to “feel it more deeply” (363), and at the same time understand the role of white society in his psychological and social trauma. After killing the white girl Mary accidentally, he feels ecstasy: “He had murdered and had created a new life for himself. It was something that was all his own. It was the first time in his life he had had anything that others couldn’t take from him” (105).

Wright’s *Native Son* is an excellent example of a text that explores how the life of black Americans and their existence are suppressed by violence and a racist system. Therefore, the violence presented in his writing is begot by the violence of the American system, which was founded on slavery and systematized racism. Wright shows and represents how black identity was moulded by these catastrophic events, resulting in a hybrid identity.

When the Africans left their homeland as slaves and were shipped by force to the United States, the problem of identity became a crucial issue in the African’s minds since they were regarded as inferior. Wright who was deeply affected by segregation and his African American racial past broke with the literary tradition which defines the black as a savage; instead, he concentrated on violence and alienation. When Wright explored the imaginative and fanciful probability of literature, he said: “I vowed that as soon as I was old enough, I would buy all the novels there were and read them to feed that thirst for violence that was in me” (qtd. in Bloom 2006, 42).

What makes Wright's *Native Son* a landmark in the history of "Negroes" is its influence on the novelists of the coming generations of thinkers and writers, such as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry and Gwendolyn Brooks. In this novel, the corrupted society is responsible for the cruelty and criminality it breeds. All the crimes that are committed by the main character Thomas Bigger result from the idea "either to kill himself or someone else." (4). Fear and violence surround his life and invade his mind, especially his fear of white people. Fanon discusses the phobic object; he believes that the phobic defies rational thinking, the person does not only have the feeling of fear and hatred but he also feels a paranoid anxiety. One begins to have evil intentions.

The novel starts with an alarm of the clock that Wright points to in the introduction as a call to awaken Americans from their slumber and force them to face the reality of racism. A shouting match erupts amongst Bigger's family concerning the killing of a mouse in the house, a house which consists of one room, reflecting the miserable life in which African Americans live. After killing it, Bigger starts singing "life is like a mountain railroad....we must make the run successful...from the cradle to the grave" (10). This song exhausts him. The mentioning of the word "railroad" takes us back to African American slaves who used to escape with the help of abolitionists who sympathized with their cause. These abolitionists "hoped to expose the inhumanity and injustice of a system that bought, sold, and brutalized people solely on the basis of skin color" (Landau 2006, 22). Moreover, when Max asks him about things he thinks he would have liked to do if he lives, Bigger replies: "we [blacks] ain't no money [...] no railroads, no nothing. [...] They make us stay in one little spot" (354). Bigger means railroad segregation laws, which indicates that whites and blacks are "Separate but equal" (Danver 2011, 677). However black passengers were not equal with whites and did not get the same accommodation and this leads them later to protest to end railroad segregation and discrimination

In Book One of the novel entitled "Fear", Bigger's identity is depicted as a product of his society; all his behaviors develop from his fears and his fears lead him to violence. He starts hating himself, his family and his friends for fearing the white society, and he transfers his fears to his people as a kind of defense mechanism that protects from troubles of confronting weakness; he starts blaming others instead of blaming himself for his fears. He beats his friend Gus who is afraid of helping Bigger to burglarize the white man's store, and he describes him as a coward although he knows inside of him that Gus is afraid "as even he was" (25). He hates his mother and his sister whom he feels fear the whites, and he hates himself for that, too. He criticizes his family for not rejecting their life, and he feels ashamed of the way they act.

In Book Two which is entitled "Flight," Bigger starts to identify himself and frees himself from the fear he feels in Book one. He is no more oppressed by the society; he believes that he is a hero: "His being black and at the bottom of the world was something which he could take with a new-born strength [...]. No matter how they laughed at him for his being black and clownlike, he could look them in the eyes and not feel angry." (150); this feeling that suppresses him has gone. For Fanon, to assimilate the culture of the oppressor, the oppressed should assimilate the way the colonialist and the bourgeoisie think and act (Morrison 2014, 49);

however this assimilation is not an acceptance of white society, but a tool to cope with the trauma of drastic change (Morrison 2014, 50). Bigger starts to embrace the role of the whites by fooling the white folks. In playing the role of the ignorant “Negro”, Bigger fools Mr. Dalton and the white detective Britten after the disappearance of Mary; he misleads them into suspecting her boyfriend Jan and asserts that he left them that night alone in the car and that Jan was the last one who saw her; this made the detective believe him and arrest Jan.

Book Three marks Bigger’s future as revealed in this quotation: “Go home, Ma” and “forget me Ma” (299). He realizes that he is becoming a new person. The question in Book Three is whether Bigger will die with hope or hatred after being arrested for his crimes; he is struggling to find his identity and he gets into conflict with people. He rejects white society because of the oppression they inflicted upon his people and he rejects black people because he feels ashamed of their weakness. Thus, he feels alienated from the society and his own community.

Before he starts Book One of the novel, Wright quotes from the Book of Job in the Bible: “Even today is my complaint rebellious, My stroke is heavier than my groaning” (xxiii) in order to make a comparison between Job and Bigger. In Job’s story, Satan challenges God by telling him that the Faithful Job would be unfaithful to God if he takes everything from him. God accepts the challenge and takes from Job his wealth, health and children; however, Job refuses to curse God and all that he did was to question the justice of God since he is convinced that he did not sin in order to be punished. Bigger, like Job, was affected by the circumstances around him. Bigger questions God’s justice throughout the novel; he is the victim of the forces such as racism, poverty and injustice, and this is what makes him rebel against God. Bigger even wants to escape from their beliefs; he refuses religion because he believes that it is a sign of weakness.

Bigger “hated his mother for the way of hers which was like Bessie’s. What his mother had was Bessie’s whiskey, and Bessie’s whiskey was his mother’s religion” (240). He views his mother’s reliance on religion as a solution to all her problems as a fake hope which keeps her unconscious exactly like Bessie when she is drunk. He believes that religion makes a person unconscious, paralyzed and senseless. One cannot think in the right way and thinks that solutions will come as a magical cure just by believing in God’s justice. As for Bigger he does not have trust in God’s justice; in a conversation between him and the preacher at the prison he says:

“I don’t want you!” Bigger shouted

“Son!” the preacher admonished.

“I don’t want you!” “Take your Jesus and go!”(339).

When the preacher makes the sign of the cross, Bigger shouts “That’s a goddamn lie! For Fanon, violence is the only way to rehumanize the oppressed.

We can see how *Native Son* discusses the issue of capitalism and communism. Jan and Mary are two communists although Mary’s father is a capitalist as she used to call him “Mr. Capitalist”; they believe in the equality of all people, and they want to help the oppressed, including black people. This is why from the time they see Bigger, they insist on dealing with

him as one of them, and they offer him food and do not let him use words such as “Mr.” or “Miss”. However, the question here is why Bigger does not see that they are different from the capitalists. It is simply because he believes that they are defending the blacks since the blacks cannot defend themselves. This takes us to Gayatri Spivak’s question *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She explains that the subaltern or the silenced and voiceless people must speak for themselves. One from the center (white) cannot speak on behalf of the “Others” and this is a kind of epistemic violence in which the colonial power keeps them silenced (76). Bigger perhaps believes that they would not know how to give a genuine image of the oppressed; instead, they would give the same stereotype and the problem will be the same. Therefore, Bigger could not accept such a defense, and he insists to defend himself by himself and to confirm his new identity. Jan declares, as a communist, to Bigger that a revolution should occur and when this day comes “[t]here will be no white and no black, there ‘ll be no rich and poo” (68), yet Bigger said nothing as a sign of not accepting to hear it from him.

Violence is the only tool that rehumanizes the black individual. Fanon believes that it is a cleansing force that purifies the person from his psychological problems. First of all, blacks are haunted by painful memories; however, each of them responds to his trauma in a different way. Violence is the only thing that could help Bigger identify himself. Wright proclaims that Bigger is “an American product, a native son of this land, [who] carried within him the potentialities of either communism or fascism.” (15). This product is a reaction to discrimination and inequality. Jan declares when he gets out of jail:

If I say you got the right to hate me, then that ought to make things a little different, “oughtn’t it? Ever since I got out of jail I’ve been thinking this thing over and I felt that I’m the one who ought to be in jail for murder instead of you. But that can’t be Bigger. I can’t take upon myself the blame for what one hundred million people have done (287).

Jan was in jail lamenting Mary and then he thought of all the black men who’ve been killed, the black men who had to wail when their people were snatched from them in slavery and since slavery. He “thought that if they could stand it, then [he] ought to” (288). Although Bigger causes Jan troubles, Jan defends him believing that he is a product of such a society.

Jan has the chance to get revenge for his lover Mary; however, he decides to help Bigger because he knows if he exacts revenge, violence will be repeated and will never stop. Bigger is shocked since this is the first time he feels a white man is a human being. Jan is a communist; he tries to defend African Americans as well as the lower class. When he is in jail, he feels more with the oppressed, and he comes to realize how the oppressed could act in a violent way toward others even if they are innocent like himself.

Bigger always carries a gun or a knife, especially when he is passing through a white neighborhood; he is afraid of being attacked by them. His hatred toward the whites turns him into a violent person. Bigger criticizes black people who are submissive, passive and cannot oppose the discrimination imposed upon them by white society. After Bigger commits his crime, other blacks become afraid to lose their jobs: “nigger Bigger Thomas made me lose mah job He

Made the white folk think we's all jus' like him" (235). This is what Bigger hates about the blacks; they depend on the whites to survive although they are supposed to be "natives" and should have equal rights.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall asserts that the diasporic identity comes from somewhere and has a history; this identity goes through transformation and is not fixed in the past; this identity is "subject to a continuous play of history". Bigger is aware of the collective experience within the framework of understanding history as a dynamic process. He is aware of the past as well as the present; he complains about segregation and that his life is like a prison, and he predicts that since he is a black man, something bad is going to happen to him: "sometimes I feel like something awful's going to happen to me" (20). Wright foreshadows his terrible future.

To describe the historical process, Wright describes the ghetto saying: "Never in history has a more utterly unprepared folk wanted to go to the city; we were barely born as a folk [...]. We who were landless on the land. [...] we who had had our personalities blasted with two hundred years of slavery. [...] We men who were struggling to be born-set out awkward feet upon the pavements of the city" (204). Mr. Dalton whom Bigger works for owns much of the property in the ghetto where Bigger and his family live a miserable life. Bigger believes that all the places in the world except the "Black Belt" ghetto where he lives and Harlem are the alien white world.

Fanon asserts in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "it is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject" (2); he adds that throughout the process of liberation, the colonized people become men and thus new men become a creation of decolonization. Bigger struggles to create his new identity. Violence becomes a tool of rehumanization after the dehumanization of slavery and racism. Violence, within this context can be reconsidered as a way of rebirthing the identity and recognizing the self. When Bigger realizes that his family is blind to the reality, he feels ashamed and refuses to accept his identity as less than human. He is ashamed of the way his family relates to religion; his mother believes in God's mercy which Bigger finds to be quite unrealistic. Thus, violence frees him from blindness and shame. Wright seems to understand that violence is needed for rehumanization.

Neelam Srivastava studied violence in Walter Benjamin's term "pure violence" which is compared to mythic violence. Srivastava writes: "It [pure or divine violence] is not a violence that seeks the domination of the other, but rather the liberation of the self" (317); however mythic violence is violence for the sake of violence. I think this can be applied to Bigger's character. Each time he commits violence, he starts to think of its effect on him and on others, whether this violence is against the whites or the blacks. For example, when he fights Gus in Doc's poolroom, he thinks about how he feels: "I laughed so hard I cried" (41). His emotions are mixed since his aim is not violence for its own sake but rather for liberation. His feelings cannot be separated from his psychological status since his ethnic identity and psychology are inseparable.

If Bigger wants to assert his new identity, he should resist the dominating world. This is why Bigger is glad that violence makes him feel alive although he does not want to kill. He wants to discover himself and things around him more and more, and this is why he wants to live: “He felt he wanted to live now- now escape paying for his crime- but live in order to find out, to see if it were true, and to feel it more deeply [...]But there was no way now. It was too late” (363). At the same time, he realizes that they would not let him live and there is no exit for a Negro in such a crime:

“We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t. It’s just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence” (20).

This is how Bigger feels from the beginning; he is in jail although he was not in it; therefore, it does not matter if he is physically in it or not. What matters is finding his identity even if this is done through violence and the society is to blame. In *Native Son* violence is the only way that helps people become independent and construct a new identity. At the end, when Bigger finds his new identity, he feels at peace and thinks that everything is going to be fine: “I’m all right, Mr. Max just go and tell ma not to worry none, see? Tell her I was all right and wasn’t crying none” (429). Although he would be executed, he realizes “What [he] killed for must’ve been good” (429). In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes that “there is a permanent outpouring in all the villages of spectacular generosity, of disarming kindness, and willingness, which cannot ever be doubted, to die for the “cause” (132); he suggests that the masses, proudly choose death in the struggle for freedom. For Bigger to live, he “created a new world for himself, and for that he was to die” (285).

Srivastava explains the difference between Fanon’s violence which is “a weapon of the poor and Ghandi’s non-violence which is “the weapon of the poor and the oppressed” (305). The writer believes that Ghandi’s willingness to die is a kind of violence that brings the two thinkers together. Violence of the imagination is a form of rupture. For Ghandi, to kill is better than to show cowardice; he claims:

If the choice is set between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. I praise and extol the serene courage of dying without killing. Yet I desire that those who have not this courage should rather cultivate the art of killing and being killed, than basely to avoid the danger”. (qtd in Srivastava 2010, 317). Ghandi adds that those who are afraid of confronting death by killing, comment mental violence. Therefore, he prefers violence than “the emasculation of a whole race” (qtd in Srivastava 317).

Violence of the imagination includes the creative ability to imagine and act, to change and overturn the status quo, to be able to face death bravely. Bigger at the beginning wishes to fly a plane, and he uses his violent imaginations when he says: “if I took a plane I’d take a couple of bombs along and drop’em as sure as hell...” (17). Later, his thoughts and imagination come true, he becomes this violent man who does not fear death at all.

Both Jan and Max sympathized with Bigger; we have already realized that Jan is a communist, and he works for the oppressed whether they be white or black. Max, the lawyer, is a

Jew. As known, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Jews were subject to racism and oppression. Fanon relies on Paul Sartre debate that both blacks and Jews are victims. Talking about the core of identity, Sartre writes that “[t]he Jew must first become aware of his difference from the non-Jew and the black of his difference from the white” (Mcbride 1997, 330). This justifies Max’s behaviors with the black Bigger for he lives the embodied inferiority. When Bigger’s mother falls down, asking for help to save her son “Max and Jan ran to the black woman and tried to lift her up” (301). Through his discussion with Mr. Dalton, Max defends Bigger saying: “This boy comes from an oppressed people. Even if he’s done wrong, we must take that into consideration” (294). It looks like Max knows very well what it means to be oppressed. Max explains that he defends Bigger because he knows that this boy is a product of the society: “If I can make the people of this country understand why this boy acted like he did, I’ll be doing more than defending” (292). What Max is doing is more than defending as he says; it is clear that he is not working as a lawyer who wants to win the case. He is rather defending a public opinion that affects him and his people. In fact, this defense is for all people who are fixed under the gaze of white society.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon’s narrator confronts a white French boy who cries “Look, a Negro! Mama, look, a Negro; I’m scared”. The gaze as Fanon describes fixes the Negro. This gaze “is already dissecting me. I’m fixed”. Fanon says, “When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an actional person” (154). This contact is only enough to arouse anxiety. Bigger refuses to interact with Mary and Jan; he feels anxious whenever they ask him to sit or eat with them. In Book One “Fear”, Bigger fears whites and prefers to isolate himself even when he is doing his jobs. He prefers to sit in the car when Mary and Jan go to eat and he closes the window to feel relaxed. He fears their gaze; when he enters the Dalton’s house, he does not let his eyes meets Dalton’s eyes and he hates the gaze of the white cat “looking at him with wide placid eyes” (47). This makes him realize that he is insecure with white people. However, for a “new man” to emerge, and for the old order of corruption to be replaced with a new one, he should join forces with other postcolonial subjects, and he should get used to interacting with them.

Although he might be considered as a tragic hero who makes a mistake out of ignorance and is punished according to this flaw as Aristotle defines in his description to the tragic hero, Bigger believes that his real tragedy is not death; it is rather the fact of never having been visible to anyone. In the introduction of *Native Son*, it is mentioned how “[b]lack had hailed McKay’s 1919 sonnet “If We Must Die” as a call to militant self-defense against marauding whites” (xi). In this poem, McKay who believes that blacks should be independent, encourages the blacks to take their rights by violence even if they are going to die; however, this death is a noble one: “Not like hogs. Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot” (1-2). Therefore, dying through fighting back is not “shed in vain” (6) as Bigger Thomas believes too; instead, it is self-assertion.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon refers to psychological formations to emphasize the 'identity trauma' of blackness in the colonial context and to express the persistence of the psychical intrinsic part of racism. Therefore, "seeing Fanon through the lens of trauma rather than that of fantasy or repression helps us understand more about the phenomena of trauma and about what are often seen as Fanon's conflicting poles--the psychiatrist and the revolutionary" (Alessandrini 2005, 155). Fanon's criticism is interpreted through the understanding of power and violence; therefore, he examined the character of the black person through the system of values of the white culture. Accordingly, he brings "politics into psychology" and "psychology into politics" by analyzing power within a series of psychoanalytical conceptions (Hook 86).

Psychological trauma results from a traumatic event, which destroys one's ability to cope with life. Trauma has been used in different ways by researchers of different disciplines: "in the psychological literature the term [trauma] is redefined to refer to the state of mind resulting from the shock, which disconnects the person involved from their relationship to the world" (Leydesdorft 2017, 2). African American racial identity is molded by psychological and historical factors. In the case of Africans in diaspora, racial trauma results from experiencing racial violence, and it causes the feeling of humiliation and low self-esteem. African Americans suffer a cultural trauma, which "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity" (Alexander 2004, 1).

Cultural trauma, which is defined as "a memory accepted and publically given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (Eyerman 2001, 44), coincides with the concept of collective memory since it is a memory that is accepted by a relevant group that recalls a specific catastrophic event or situation and is considered as a threat to the existence of a society (Eyerman 2001, 44). This collective memory, which contributes to unifying people and bringing them together, refers to historical events that are familiar to others in which the past becomes present. The past is shaped collectively and helps to create a new individual. Thus, collective memory becomes a tool to form the collective identity.

Cultural trauma has led to the emergence of the New Negro movement; out of this movement "emerged the idea of African Americans, which reinterpreted slavery as it renegotiated the borders of the collective and its memory (Eyerman 2001, 58). The ghettoization of the life of African Americans Africans, and their extreme poverty are important causes of the African Americans' cultural trauma; these factors have led African Americans to represent themselves in a new way, and to refuse laws of segregation. On the other hand, cultural trauma and postmemory are sometimes used interchangeably. Marianne Hirsch, who introduced the term "postmemory" in 1992, points out:

"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to the experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew

up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right (5)

Therefore, it is not just the event that causes the trauma, but the remembrance of the event, especially when this catastrophic event is repeated in different forms of oppression, such as ghettoization, systemic racism and extreme poverty and unemployment which Bigger's family suffers from. In Wright's work, African American are afraid of the whites who lynch and segregate them. They are afraid of the way they fear the whites, which keeps them inferior.

Psychologists, such as Freud, believe that people who face traumatic experience especially in childhood repress the memories and push them to the unconscious, and thus symptoms that appear as a result of the unconscious repression of the traumatic experience is a defense mechanism, and he gives an example of sexual abuse. This shocking experience might be forgotten yet not forgiven; it survives under consciousness and results in a numerous psychological and physical problems that push traumatized people to committing suicide. What distinguishes Fanon from other psychoanalysts is his concern for blacks. He criticized Freud, Alder, and Jung for not paying attention to the black experience. Besides, Homi Bhabha argues that Fanon's contribution is his capability to interweave the "psycho-affective realm" to different issues like colonialism and nationalism (Bhabha/Fanon, 2004, p. xviii). He is able to associate the psychological vision with the disciplinary domains of politics, colonialism, economics, and geography.

Historical traumas that result from colonization and slavery lead to psychological traumas that remain latent. Fanon links psychology and politics in his term "psycho-politic" to clarify the effect of colonial violence on the mind and behaviors of the colonized. He brings psychology into politics by analyzing racism through psychoanalytic notions. Therefore, colonization is here understood in its broad definition which is 'colonizing the mind' as many critics suggest. All the characters in the novels suffer from psychological damage that drives them to act in an unstable way. In the novel, the construction of the African Diaspora in the Americas comes as a result of an unsettled time in world history; Africans were dispersed abroad in order to be forced into plantation slavery, which is reflected in their psyches, making them exhausted physically as well as spiritually.

At the end of Bigger's story, we can say that he accepts what life made of him. Throughout the three books, Bigger's character keeps developing; he discovers his new identity, and this is why he wishes to live more and more "I don't want to die... I don't want to die" (363). His identity develops through difference. It is not fixed; instead, it is a dynamic one. However, we cannot ignore the fact that he was able to construct his identity by means of a functional and purposeful violence. Violence shapes and helps him to define himself; it leads him to become a new person who can deal with the new circumstances although his life is about to end.

James Baldwin criticizes Wright's *Native Son*, saying that "Wright failed because Bigger Thomas was less a character than a categorization unable to transcend the status of stereotype" (175). I think that Baldwin's accusation is not convincing enough; Baldwin does not want the African American to appear as less civilized; however, we can see that Bigger transcends the stereotype. He transcends the idea of violence in the way that Fanon understands it, as Ward points out, "Wright was indeed writing back" (qtd. in Baldwin 173).

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