

## **Writing in the Language of the Other: A Study of Postcolonial Discourse in the Legacy of Aimé Césaire**

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### **Abstract**

In the 1930s, French-educated writers from many Francophone colonies began the Négritude movement, which was a way for black writers to use the French language to assert their identity. By writing about their experiences in French, they created literature that scholars would later refer to as 'postcolonial' due to issues it raised regarding colonial power. This paper will examine the works of three authors: Aimé Césaire, Mayotte Capécia, and Frantz Fanon. Each of these authors created works that reflect their conditioning as well as their overcoming of French expectations for what a colonized author should write. Césaire was one of the first authors of this movement and he wrote in French but also from the perspective of the subjugated and colonized. He created a work that was intended to be read by other subjugated people to create an individual and collective identity as a product of French colonization in Martinique. These works incorporate issues of oppression, colonization, and marginalization that are still important today.

**Keywords: Postcolonial Theory, Négritude, Martinican Literature**

### **1. Introduction**

Postcolonial theory is the study of the cultural effects of colonization, especially the consequences of imperialism and exploitation. This thesis will examine how three 20<sup>th</sup> century Martinican authors used their writings as a platform for solidarity between all francophone audiences and to understand the limitations placed on colonized authors. They had to adhere to the expectations of the colonizer and have some part of their linguistic identity formed by a language that was not their own. Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) was one of the first authors of the Négritude movement in the 1930s. He began a tradition of literary emancipation that related to the shared struggles of all colonized people. In 1939 he wrote *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/ Return to my Native Land*, which explains his personal experience with becoming aware of how he had been conditioned to accept inferiority and how he found renewed pride in being black.

Mayotte Capécia (1916-1955), the author of *Je suis Martiniquaise/ I am a Martinican Woman*, began writing in the decade after Césaire first published his works. Her writings complicate Césaire's understanding of racial and linguistic identity because she wrote in French about the struggles that black women dealt with both because of colonization and of the power imbalance of gender inequality. Capécia's book countered prior assertions that Négritude was inclusive, because her works show that solidarity was not extended to black women. Her narrative explains a marginalized perspective that had not been considered either by the colonizer or by black men who were so adamantly trying to end racial oppression without realizing they were oppressing women.

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) was a psychiatrist and revolutionary leader who concerned himself with the decolonization of the self. Specifically, Fanon wanted to change how people of color dealt with internalized inferiority caused by centuries of colonial trauma. In his books, *Les damnés de la terre/ The Wretched of the Earth* and *Peau noire, masques blancs/ Black Skin, White Masks*, he expanded on the very personal narratives from these past authors and raised their concerns to a comprehensive discourse that explained the collective psychology of the colonized. All

three of these writers used French because it was the language they had been taught and it was the only way to reach such a wide audience. However, they all realized that they only knew French because colonization and imperialism had destroyed any connections to their original languages. Along with this, they understood that by writing in French they were participating in the linguistic hegemony that had for centuries been used to silence their experiences and enforce dependence on validation from the colonizer.

Martinique is an island in the eastern Caribbean Sea and a part of the French Antilles. In the 1600s it was partly colonized by France and Britain. The original population, the Carib, was almost entirely killed by invading Europeans. In 1636, the French king Louis XIII authorized the use of African slaves on the island. The population slowly changed to become comprised of French plantation owners and African slaves.<sup>1</sup> In 1848, slavery was banned in the French Caribbean. However, even after slavery, Martinique's economy remained agricultural and most of the work done on the island was to produce exports like sugar.<sup>2</sup> In 1871, all people living in the French Antilles were granted full French citizenship after a labor strike led by black workers.<sup>3</sup>

In 1946, Martinique changed its status from colony to an Overseas Department of France and in 1974 became a Department of France.<sup>4</sup> Martinican history has been recorded from the perspective of the French and that has caused its identity to be based on oppression: "Martinique's history begins with trauma. There is no other past. The aboriginal population was exterminated by the first settlers. Everything began with the coming of the slave ships."<sup>5</sup> This description removes autonomy from the people living there because they are reduced to a relational existence; their place is only validated by their relation to the metropole. France's colonies in the West Indies were extraction colonies, not places of settlement. Extraction colonies were created only to exploit the population for labor and to take as much raw material from a place as possible. These places were ruled by a colonial government and did not have much immigration from the metropole, but the profits from the extraction colonies went directly to France. This made France only value the islands for what they could produce and the financial gain the land would bring while having no regard for the well-being of the land or its people. There exists an unequal balance in what Martinique receives from France and what France expects and takes from Martinique, because most of the island's agricultural products are exported to France. Everything the island needs must come from France because it has no agency over its trade economy. Since being colonized, Martinique has been completely dependent on France financially because the original economic structure was destroyed. Culturally, the French language and the customs the metropole imported were not meant to become part of the population, but rather to create and reinforce boundaries of class and race.

## 2. Aimé Césaire

Négritude was a movement started in the 1930s by black francophone authors who used the French language to redefine their identity and to promote pride in black culture. They wrote to gain more agency over their identity, because in the past their identities had been defined by colonizers. "In addition to exposing the cultural weaknesses of Martiniquean life- an inevitable product of the imposition of a foreign culture- it introduced the idea of a return to African sources as well as the appreciation of indigenous folklore."<sup>6</sup> One of the founders of this movement, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), wrote about how every colonized person had their identity taken and destroyed by colonization. In 1939, Césaire wrote *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/ Return to my Native Land*, which tells his story of returning to Martinique after going to Paris to be educated. He spent several years in France, completing his secondary and post-secondary education. While he was there, he met African writers like Leopold Senghor and Ousmane Soce who showed Césaire how to be proud of being black. In Martinique, Césaire was raised under a colonial mindset and believed that black people in the West Indies were somehow better than black Africans.<sup>7</sup> After he met Africans in France, Césaire had a moment of reconciliation with his identity and saw how disconnected from African languages and customs the French West Indies were.<sup>8</sup> This made him realize that Martinique was a place deprived of an independent linguistic identity, because slavery had destroyed it. Césaire wanted to create solidarity between all black francophone authors and unite their efforts against external racial oppression while promoting pride in black identity and culture.

When Césaire was writing, he wanted people to see that freedom would not come from France, because the metropole would never grant freedom in the revolutionary way. Instead, France enforced an economic and cultural dependency that trapped writers like Césaire into accepting the French language. Césaire's works are emblematic of colonized authors educated in the metropole, or the colonizing country. Césaire's book was written both for people like him, French-educated black men, as well as for white French readers who may or may not have ever read anything by a Martinican author. He could access this audience because he had been educated in Paris and had learned their ways of writing. Although he was against colonization, Césaire created a product that was easy for the metropole to

understand, or else it would not have been published or read. Césaire had to change the existing representations of his nation and race, because he was trying to create an identity free from the stereotypes and limitations that colonization had created. It was only after he had obtained a French education that he knew it could not make him an equal to them and then he stopped trying to gain permission to have the status he had for so long wanted. After that, he realized that he had lost a connection to his homeland because he could not remain oblivious to how deeply colonized he was.

After his five years in Paris, Césaire returned to Martinique feeling like he did not belong either in France, where he had to contend with racism and prejudice from white French people, or in Martinique, where people no longer trusted him because he had abandoned his home and used French to write his book, therefore embodying the language of oppression. Martinicans perceived him to want to emulate the written culture of the colonizer instead of reflecting the linguistic roots of his own people because Martinique's spoken language is Creole, but the official language is French. Martinican Creole is a language that blends French, Carib, and numerous African languages. During colonization, speaking Creole was tied to a lower socioeconomic status since it was mostly spoken by non-white people who were generally not landowners or in control of large amounts of capital and who did not speak French, the official and written language.<sup>9</sup> The process by which French became the written language in Martinique was systematic and planned. Part of the island's colonization was the erasure of original languages and the establishment of French as an official and therefore more widely read and respected language. In the literature emanating from colonized places, the memory of subjugation by a colonial power remains evident in the language choices an author makes. In French colonies, authors can only write in French because it is the language they are expected to use in order to have their works validated by the dominant French culture. However, these authors are not accepted as French writers; they are outsiders, because they are less valued than French writers.

In Césaire's book, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Return to My Native Land)*, one of the most prevalent themes is estrangement. The narrator passes the entirety of the poem set apart from the events and scenes he witnesses, as he has become an outsider. Even though he is from Martinique and grew up there, his perspective has changed because he left. This poem is Césaire performing the task of explaining his homeland in ways that can be understood by the metropole. Césaire describes Martinique knowing he had to leave the island in order to appreciate the landscape and the environment that shaped him. *Cahier* describes a transformative journey because the island has become foreign to the author and remains present mostly through memory. The narrator goes through a moment of initial recognition, where he sees the island as a broken and empty place that drove him away in the first place. He describes it as such because in France he was taught that sort of language to describe colonies, and he was taught to measure success by how similar something was to the metropole. Now, he is gauging the land using the vocabulary he has been taught and that tarnishes the memories he had from before. Césaire was conditioned to want to distance himself from anything that would define him as black, like speaking Creole.

He feels an obligation to ameliorate his homeland but can only use French to do so. His appreciation for Martinique came after he saw that there was no place for him in France, at least no place that would give him the same acceptance as a white French man. In Martinique, even though he left, he can still belong and not be devalued the way he was in France. His position is problematic because if he had not left, he would not be as aware of the problems of colonization, but upon his return he can only see the deficiencies of his homeland, because that is what he was taught to see in France:

Partir. Mon coeur bruissait de générosités emphatiques. Partir... j'arriverais lisse et jeune dans ce pays mien et je dirais à ce pays dont le limon entre dans la composition de ma chair : «J'ai longtemps erré et je reviens vers la hideur désertées de vos plaies ». Je viendrais à ce pays mien et je lui dirais : « Embrassez-moi sans crainte... Et si je ne sais que parler, c'est pour vous que je parlerai »

[To flee. My heart was full of generous hopes. To flee... I should arrive lithe and young in this country of mine and I should say to this land whose mud is flesh of my flesh: «I wandered for a long time and I am returning to the deserted foulness of your wounds». I should come back to this country of mine and say to it: "Embrace me without fear... If all I can do is speak, at least I shall speak for you"]<sup>10</sup>

'Partir' means 'to leave'. Since the narrator is saying 'to leave', it is a choice, a conscious decision to get away from something. More importantly, the narrator is leaving something in anticipation of arriving somewhere. He is leaving something out of choice and arriving where he wants to be, but not somewhere where he is necessarily wanted. The next sentence says 'bruissait', which means a rustling or jostling that causes superficial damage or pain, usually referring to bruised fruit. Then 'Mon coeur bruissait de générosités emphatiques' means 'my heart was superficially hurt by kindness or helpful generosity'. This can apply to the reception he received upon arriving, but also the weight of his own choices. He is coming to a place wanting to find an identity and a reaffirmation of himself as a black

Martinican man. His words are hopeful and positive, because he is past the stage of valuing Martinique in the ways of the colonizer; now he is valuing Martinique as a place that can bring him salvation. His expectations are that Martinique will now provide what he is missing, and that he will provide for Martinique a better identity, one that is not defined by inferiority.

The speaker is using the conditional tense in French, which conveys unsureness and something that might happen potentially in the future. Césaire's use of the word 'lisse', which means smooth or unblemished, shows how upon arrival, the narrator expects to suffer, because he knows that the unblemished, young, smooth surface he presents will be hurt. He expects rejection from this land. Then there is a repetition of the word 'pays', which in English is translated as 'country' and 'land'. This separation is important because the first 'pays' is about the author's possession of an idea, like claiming the nation itself. He can only claim the idea of the country, something legally tangible like a nation, but he cannot claim the land itself. This is referencing how Martinican people do not have autonomy and real ownership of the land because the entire island is a part of France and not independent. The next 'pays' is the physical land, the earth itself. The word 'limon' means river silt or sandy soil that has been turned up in a flooded riverbed. In French, 'entre dans la composition de ma chair' means the silt becomes/ enters/ penetrates/ infiltrates/ the composition/ makeup/ formation of my flesh. By arriving in this place, the narrator accepts the conditions of being part of the land. The land is producing a crop or a product that is the narrator's flesh and he is a product of the land. This is a transformative scene, because the narrator wants the land to infiltrate him and make him part of it. This passage also challenges the narrator's perceptions of who belongs in Martinique and who is a foreigner or an outsider. His own belonging is called into question, because of the violent scenes that comprise his perception of the land, as well as the place the colonizer has made by taking and destroying, leaving behind the damage and violence Césaire describes.

In the next sentence 'la hideur désertées de vos plaies', 'hideur' means something worse than 'foulness', and is a deep reaching attribute. 'Plaies' means 'wounds', which can be deep but also might just be on the surface. 'Hideur' is a subjective word which could either be the narrator choosing to see something new or reiterating the judgemental value he has been conditioned to see. In both instances, the wounds are repulsive, yet the narrator wants to come back to them. This word 'reviens' means the narrator had prior knowledge of what he left and is again making a conscious choice to come back.

The narrator is using this language to describe the atrocities that are in plain sight but have been abandoned. This refers to the historical wrongs perpetrated against the land and the people by the colonizers and those wounds have been disregarded because he knows that those atrocities have been accepted by the subjugated inhabitants of the island. The narrator calls attention to the pain and visible reminders of suffering because he knows nothing new can happen until they are recognized. He encourages the nation to return to what has been abandoned. The deserted wounds are a glaring reminder of the past, and he is careful to show that those wounds have not healed. 'Je viendrais' means 'I would come', and it is still conditional which means it has not happened. In both instances the narrator speaks about the land he uses 'mien' which indicates possession. The narrator knows the land is his, but he is asking the land to claim him so that he can become a part of it. When Césaire writes about the non-reciprocity and feelings of goodwill the narrator tries to use when addressing the country, he is making a point to use the word 'crainte', which is a combination of fear, revulsion, cringing in disgust, and some amount of loathing. This means the narrator knows he is already held at a distance and that he is not welcomed by either the idea of the nation or the physical land. He knows the initial perception about him will be of distrust and fear. This is because he is an outsider and is not a part of what constitutes either the land or the nation. He knows he is a potential threat to the 'pays' because he is too foreign for the land to recognize him as part of it. However, the possessive words about the land indicate that he does have some reason for being there, even if the ownership is a manifestation of colonization.

Then, 'Et si je ne sais que parler, c'est pour vous que je parlerai' means 'If the only thing I know is speaking/ if all I know is to speak'. The narrator in French only speaks in the formal way, which is a distance that can either express reverence for the land or an estrangement that makes it impossible to speak in the informal without overstepping a boundary. Even though he wants to be welcomed, he is aware of the apprehension that awaits him and knows that he must plan to be partially rejected and hurt. 'Pour vous que je parlerai' means he intends on being the voice for others. This is problematic because part of Négritude was forming identity as individuals, but Césaire collectivizes the Martinican identity.

After Césaire wrote his book, he was criticized for trying too hard to be like the French: "the most radical criticism of Césairean literature is the work of the Antillean nationalist movement, anchored in the struggle of national liberation that is marked by the rejection of anything Metropolitan and the instruments of any cultural and intellectual hegemony."<sup>11</sup> Césaire was part of the first step in the process of literary separation from France. His writings follow French decorum for how to be read, while still not being so abrasive that they will be disregarded. More importantly, Césaire created an avenue for future francophone writers to have a literary space a little less controlled by the metropole. His writings do promote some nationalism, but not so much that they would incite revolution. Césaire was

not arguing for a complete separation from and disavowal of Martinique's colonial past. He understood that a colonized nation cannot go back to how things were prior to being colonized.<sup>12</sup> Césaire in some ways replicates the same tactics of oppression that he exposed in *Cahier*. He tries to speak for Martinique and wants to be a benevolent source of salvation for those who were less fortunate than him. In 1984, Homi Bhabha wrote that people who live in colonies try to become like the oppressors in order to get autonomy and power, "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power."<sup>13</sup> Although he was able to start a legacy of cultural emancipation for Martinique and other predominantly black francophone places, Césaire only achieved that by acting within the racial and linguistic hierarchy imposed by France.

### 3. Mayotte Capécia

As much as Césaire envisioned a future where more people in Martinique would be enlightened and aware of subjugation, his writing is not inclusive and specifically does not address the marginalization of women. His attempts at solidarity between francophone black writers in some ways recreated the power imbalance of racial oppression, but with gender. Unfortunately, the voices of Martinican women are not present in Césaire's writings. The few times women make an appearance in *Cahier* they are only present as mothers or as stationary features of the land.<sup>14</sup> He is speaking for the Other because they do not yet have the ability to represent themselves, so Césaire feels they must be represented.<sup>15</sup> Just like colonists spoke for people of color to try and control their narratives and the physical places, men of the Négritude movement excluded women and dictated the extent of their presence in literature.<sup>16</sup> Colonization itself is described in a very gendered way: "Masculinity of empire was articulated through the symbolic feminization of conquered geographies, and in the erotic economy of colonial 'discovery' narratives."<sup>17</sup> This is apparent in the way both white and black men have written about Martinican women because they fetishize women of color and view them as exotic parts of the landscape, not as individual people.<sup>18</sup>

Women in Martinique in the early 20th century often did not have access to a formal French education, which meant they were excluded from participating in literary discourse as Césaire had the opportunity to do. Unfortunately, it was upper class and educated black men in Martinique who were first able to write against colonization. Their education gained them status and proximity to the metropole, which meant they were better equipped to write about their experiences in a way that would be heard. After their preliminary efforts, other equally or more marginalized people were given space to contribute. However, before any of these writers could speak for themselves, they were spoken for by groups who had more status and a wider audience. This linear trajectory of decolonization gives voices first to those closest to the metropole and eventually to others who could not get there. In post-colonial writing, there is a structure and hierarchy of who can speak and when. This means that many of the writers, like Césaire, who were so completely invested in ending racial oppression became oppressive in the way they depicted women and in the way they had expectations of what women should do.

Once women were able to recognize their own space in postcolonial discourse, their relationship with the French language was different than that of men like Césaire. They were able to use French, which was still the language of the colonizer, but without the same weight and expectations that had been in place a generation before: "For these writers, the French language is neither an object of reverence nor a source of existential anxiety. It has not yet reached the luxurious status of a personal enemy in need of masterful deconstruction, but rather functions as an unfamiliar road to new forms of power."<sup>19</sup> In 1948, several years after Césaire wrote his book, Mayotte Capécia, born Lucette Ceranus, an author also from Martinique, wrote her first person semi-autobiographical memoir, *Je suis Martiniquaise*, (*I am a Martinican Woman*). This book is about a black woman's life in Martinique and her personal quest to do better for herself. During the narrator's childhood, she recounts how much she enjoyed the simplicity of her life and the natural beauty of the island. As she grows, she describes her frustrations with organized authority, like her parents, school, and the church. To protect herself from being trapped by other people's expectations, she vows to always be independent and never need anything from anyone:

Moi, dont les ancêtres avaient été des esclaves, j'avais décidé d'être indépendante; et, aujourd'hui encore, bien que je n'aie pas toujours pu en jouir comme j'aurais voulu, je pense qu'il n'y a rien de mieux au monde que l'indépendance.

[I, whose ancestors had been slaves, had decided to be independent, and even today, although I have not been able to enjoy it as I would have liked, I believe that there is nothing better in all the world than independence.]<sup>20</sup>

This is from the beginning of the book, before she recounts her life, so she retrospectively feels that she should have done better with the independence of her youth. Most of the choices Mayotte makes in the book are based in this desire for independence, her motivation is self-preservation because she does not live her life by other people's expectations. In the story, the narrator moves out from her parents' house soon after the death of her mother because she wanted to earn her own income and not have to support her father. This choice separates her from her immediate community because in their opinion she should have stayed with her family. In Capécia's book, women make choices that are their own, but are not the choices others would have made for them, which is her definition of freedom.

Capécia was very educated by the Martinican French school system and she wrote in French while making a strong effort to write about the individuals living in Martinique. The characters in her book all speak in Martinican French and some Creole rather than the polished French of the narration, and each person is an individual and is never given a collective identity. These choices show how Capécia's writing gives women agency. She also addresses the hierarchy of shadism, which is when people of color are described by their skin tone. In the last part of the book, Mayotte goes through a phase of self-realization where she feels not only estranged from her immediate community, but also from her entire race because her child was white passing: "Les mois qui suivirent, je me sentis très seule ... Si mon enfant me séparait de ma race, il ne m'en donnait pourtant pas une autre [During the months that followed, I felt very much alone ... If my child was separating me from my race, nonetheless, he did not give me another one]."<sup>21</sup> Since her child did not look like he was black, Mayotte was alienated by the people around her. *Je suis martiniquaise* addresses rejection differently than Césaire did.

Capécia also describes the different places she found oppression in her personal life. She learned to be disenchanted by the church in her town because she finds no reason to follow the scripture, she does not continue school because it was filled with unhappy memories, and then she leaves her father because he was economically oppressing her by taking her income and restricting her spending. In a scene from the narrator's childhood, one of her friends is banished from her home for spending too much time with a man, but the friend does not want to ruin Mayotte's innocence by revealing details. Instead she warns her for her future, "-La vie est difficile pou' une femme, tu ve'as, Mayotte, su'tout pou' une femme de couleu' [Life is hard for a woman, you'll see, Mayotte, above all for a colored woman]."<sup>22</sup> In this line, Mayotte's friend is rejected and completely alienated by her community for deciding who to be with, yet she warns the young Mayotte that her life will not be easy, regardless of what choices she makes.

Capécia's book challenged the narrative put in place by male authors of the Négritude movement like Césaire because she used the French language not to try and become like the colonizer, but to explain her own position separate from the metropole. Like Césaire, Capécia had to contend with the expectations put in place by the colonizer about what experiences she was supposed to write about. Along with this, Capécia was writing to create a literary space for women that was not solely based on their race or their relations with men. Capécia wrote to show an individual and singular story that was not representative of all black women in Martinique, which had not been done before.

#### 4. Frantz Fanon

After Capécia published her book, it immediately gained attention from another Martinican Author, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). In *Peau noire, masques blancs/ Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon says that black women adhered to colonial power structures even more than black men because the only agency women had was through their choices in men. Fanon thought that all black women sought their validation from being with white men, but he never acknowledged how restrictive the choices available to women were. He never spoke of women of color as his compatriots in the struggle against racism. *Je suis martiniquaise* received an immense amount of criticism from Fanon because he thought Capécia was a traitor to all black women and to the entire black race. Fanon writes that Martinican women have been mentally colonized and want to whiten the race: "In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon relegates women to their traditional role in nationalism and community formation as maintainers of order through their reproductive capabilities."<sup>23</sup> He feels that the rejection of black men is contrary to everything Négritude promotes. For him, women are defined by who they chose to be with, and they are only reacting to what would provide more economic and social benefits.<sup>24</sup> However, Capécia's story proves that the choice to be with a white man was extremely detrimental to the narrator's life. It also shows that the same internalized inferiority that Fanon speaks of is present in how black women have been conditioned to think whiteness was good. The alienation the narrator must go through in the book is not self-inflicted like it was for Fanon and Césaire; rather it was her own community that turned her away.

Fanon wrote that Capécia was a traitor to her race because she was not ashamed of writing about her relationship with a white man.<sup>25</sup> One problem with his reaction to Capécia's book is his assumption that she is representative of every black woman in the Caribbean. He believes that every Martinican woman would make the same choices she

did. Fanon's disdain for Capécia's book is another manifestation of how subaltern voices are distorted to fit the roles assigned to them by whatever power structure is in place. The term 'subaltern' was first used by Antonio Gramsci in the early twentieth century to describe any non-hegemonic group or class, usually referring to politically unaffiliated and underrepresented peasants.<sup>26</sup>

In 1988 Gayatri Spivak wrote "Can the Subaltern Speak?", which explains how the marginalized can speak but will never truly be heard because any interpretations by those in power will not be authentic. To be heard by the oppressor, the colonized must perform the identity the colonizer has created for them. For example, Césaire explains what it means to be from Martinique for his French audience. Spivak explains how people in colonized nations have their narratives told only in relation to being colonized and are therefore prevented from having an identity of their own.<sup>27</sup> The identity of the colonized exists mainly as an opposite or addition to a Western identity. Based on this, they have no autonomy or existence separate from the colonizer.

Spivak is critical of postcolonial studies because the field was created mainly by Western men who used their power to further reinforce the divisions between the voiceless subaltern and the oppressors who controlled their narratives. Westerners who shared no experience with the colonized were trying to dictate what being subjugated meant. Another critique she has of the field of postcolonial studies is how Third-World Women are only used to fill spaces in narratives where they are useful to the usually Western audience. This was especially true when non-Western women had their narratives told for the intellectual consumption of Western feminists who used Third World women to support their positions.<sup>28</sup> During the 20th century, when Fanon and Césaire were writing, women in Martinique had to contend with both racial discrimination by the white population and gender oppression by black and white men.<sup>29</sup> Capécia's reactionary book made a space in literature that had been made by men, "Since official historical discourse tends to privilege men as the main actors of revolutionary politics ... Spivak suggests that literature can provide a different space to articulate subaltern women's insurgency and resistance in the social text of postcolonial."<sup>30</sup> Authors like Césaire and Fanon who so vehemently oppose white colonial structures write in ways that oppress women because they consider women agents without independence or personal choice. Capécia does not see race as a binary because her book describes how women were judged based on who they reproduced with and the color of their children. Fanon wanted to create an identity completely free from the West yet when presented with a black woman's story of her own oppression, he described her with the same demeaning and agency-reducing language that the metropole used when controlling their colonies.<sup>31</sup>

Fanon's writings are about the deeply ingrained inferiority that every colonized person suffers because of the degrading definitions placed on their identities. Like Césaire and Capécia, he was also raised in Martinique and was taught that speaking French was better than speaking Creole: "Fanon recounts admonitions from his childhood against speaking Creole and advocacy of speaking 'real French', 'French French', that is, 'white' French."<sup>32</sup> He was brought up thinking that a measure of his education, status, and success was how well he could act French. Fanon was never taught in Creole, nor was he shown any authors that wrote exclusively in Creole for a Creole audience. Fanon exclusively wrote in French because he never thought of himself as anything but French. In Martinique, all people are constitutionally French, regardless of anything else including race. It was only when Fanon left Martinique during WWII to be a soldier and later a student in France that he learned to identify as black before identifying as French, because white French citizens reminded him that he was not one of them.<sup>33</sup>

Fanon was one of Césaire's students in Martinique, and in 1952 he wrote *Peau noire, masques blancs/ Black Skin, White Masks*. This book is about the effects of colonization on him personally and how the collective colonized entity suffers from the ongoing dehumanization and humiliation of being subjugated. In this book, Fanon starts by declaring how enraged he is that the effects of colonization have gotten so far not just within himself but in everyone around him. Like Capécia, Fanon sees that no matter how white he acts, he will always be discriminated against and his identity will always be tied to the metropole. During WWII, when Martinique was under control of the Vichy regime, Fanon was appalled at how racist the white French soldiers on the island were. To help end the war, he enlisted and fought with the French Resistance, even though many black people in Martinique thought WWII was a 'white man's war'.<sup>34</sup> After the war, he studied psychiatric medicine at Lyon, France. Once he finished studying, Fanon went to Algeria where he became involved with the Algerian independence movement and was a psychiatrist for the Front de libération nationale.<sup>35</sup> While there, he used his skills learned as a soldier to train independence fighters. Decolonization is the process where a state leaves a colony and it becomes independent. Fanon wrote that there cannot be any righteous decolonization without violence. Since Westerners used violent methods to obtain and control places, the only way they could be removed was forcefully. Fanon condoned violence for the right reasons and explained how 'violence' in liberation movements only refers to acts against white people. 'Non-violent' movements are the colonized asking permission for freedom and still believing in their own inferiority.<sup>36</sup> Colonizers will accept emancipatory action that does not cause them harm. Since Martinique did not have violent revolutions in the 20th century, he thought the island had failed at de-colonizing and could not ever become equal to France: "What concerned Fanon with respect to the

Martiniquean, was the gradual process of alienation from his culture and tradition ... The rejection of self came as a result of identification with the Other and as a result of the acceptance of the Other's image of one's 'inferior' caste."<sup>37</sup> His disenchantment with Martinique led him to Algerian revolutionary causes, which he saw as an opportunity to prove that a colonized non-white place could overthrow oppression, rebuild an entire nation with its own language and government, and then become self-sufficient.

One of his major concerns was the depersonalization that happened during colonization. People had their identities removed and became alienated from themselves as well as their physical land. Fanon wrote that *Négritude* is a transition, not a conclusion, because authors from colonized nations have to go through a process of becoming aware of their own oppression.<sup>38</sup> After becoming aware, marginalized people were supposed to dismantle the systems of oppression that existed and eventually there would be no need for revolutionary action anymore: "The goal of *Négritude* must be to eventually transcend it; its objective, paradoxically, is to create a consciousness which will render it ultimately unnecessary."<sup>39</sup> Fanon lamented how few black individuals considered themselves equal or even superior to a white person.<sup>40</sup> He was part of the next stages in cultural emancipation that Césaire and Capécia had started a generation earlier. He also contributed to the *Négritude* movement by addressing class struggles in colonies that had similar structures to the metropole. He feared that the upper classes would remain Western in their desires and ambitions and would only want national decolonization if it kept existing social classes in place. This was especially true in Martinique, where as an extraction colony, there existed a land-owning class of French descent that had far more wealth than most others. In Algeria, Fanon saw the same issues, and the ruling class there was hesitant to go through an armed conflict for independence because they would lose their wealth and then not have protection from France. One problem with Fanon's definitions of identity is his desire to have complete individuality while still having solidarity in the proletariat masses. Politically, Fanon believed in the mobility of a unified and homogenized group, whether it be racial or nationalistic. He used French to write but knew that it was not a language made for him, but at the same time he could only have been involved in the Algerian revolution because he had learned French so well that he was able to despise it. Fanon was a little Marxist, but not entirely because that was too Western a political affiliation to have. His idea of alienation both applied to the individual sentiment of depersonalization and to the inability of workers to have true ownership of their labor because it was all for the profit of the ruling class.<sup>41</sup>

Those who had been educated abroad and had the privilege of leaving, like Fanon and Césaire, were threats to decolonization because they owed so much of their status to the colonizer. Fanon advocated for new forms of leadership that were more equitable, that did not favor an educated elite, and that included the common people.<sup>42</sup> Fanon's ideas about how to properly decolonize a group of people are very different than those of Césaire and Capécia. Unlike Césaire, Fanon believed that the problems faced by black people were external, while Césaire to some extent still saw the oppressed being responsible for their own oppression. Césaire blamed the colonized for accepting inferiority, while Fanon turned his rage towards those who perpetuated racism. Fanon wanted to create a system outside of the Western cultural hegemony, because he had not ever seen a time where black and white people could exist as equals in that system. This was contrary to what Capécia wrote about, because she envisioned a life where racial differences were less important than she had been raised to believe. In the end of her book, she feels that race is given more importance than it is worth, while Fanon asserts that race is one of the foundations of identity.

Fanon wanted the *Négritude* movement to use French less often, because it hindered the formation of a new linguistic identity, but he did not offer an alternative. Using French also meant that the writers have lost and abandoned all ties to the non-European languages they could have used if slavery and colonization had not happened. While he was able to see the benefits of using French to reach a wider audience, he knew that the only reason so many people spoke French was because of colonization. Therefore, he thought it was wrong for black people to continue using French because it kept any non-colonist language from having validity. Fanon wanted a reality that was in no way tied to a relational existence to the metropole, because he wanted to remove the trauma of colonization from the self-definitions people had. Self-awareness would destroy the cycle of dependency because the colonized looks to the oppressor for definitions.<sup>43</sup> Fanon described how white people define themselves as culturally superior to the non-white world. This perpetuated colonization and made the West believe it was its responsibility to control, educate, and define the rest of the world. He described the power dynamic both as fear of economic competition as well as the feeling of superiority Westerners gained by knowing they controlled and degraded other people. The West existed because it defined itself as superior to other places. According to Fanon, the colonized are only given permission to exist because of their relation to the metropole. Similarly, a colonized nation's history is only allowed to exist because it held some worth as a possession of another nation: "C'est le colon qui a fait et qui continue a faire le colonise. Le colon tire sa verite, c'est-a-dire ses biens, du systeme colonial [For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system]."<sup>44</sup> In this passage, Fanon equates the colonizer's existence to how much he owns and controls.



In 1996, Jacques Derrida wrote about linguistic disenfranchisement and why some people had to erase their original languages in order to be heard. His work described how no one ever speaks one way; rather one's language changes based on the audience and the political reinforcements that exist. In the case of colonization, people who want to be heard by the oppressor must speak their language:

Et si, pour sauver des hommes en perdition dans leur langue, pour délivrer les hommes eux-mêmes, exception faite de leur langue, il valait mieux renoncer à celle-ci, renoncer du moins aux meilleures conditions de survie « à tout prix » pour un idiome ? ... Sur la terre des hommes aujourd'hui, certains doivent céder à l'homo-hégémonie des langues dominantes, ils doivent apprendre la langue des maîtres, du capital et des machines, ils doivent perdre leur idiome pour survivre ou pour vivre mieux. Économie tragique, conseil impossible.

[What if, in order to save some humans lost in their language, it was better to renounce the language, at least to renounce the best conditions for survival "at all costs" for the idiom? ... Today, on this earth of humans, certain people must yield to the homo-hegemony of dominant languages. They must learn the language of the masters, of capital and machines; they must lose their idiom in order to survive better. A tragic economy, an impossible counsel.]<sup>45</sup>

The first line tells people their original language has no value and no worth when compared to the more dominant languages. 'Vivre mieux (live better)' also means that the status and quality of life will improve when a person chooses the dominant language or allows their original language to be removed from their identity. Derrida explains that there are more benefits to accepting linguistic colonization and that any resistance would be futile. Derrida describes the dominant language as the one that brings progress and a better life. It also explains the precarious state of not claiming a dominant language as an original language. This means that in Martinique, the only way to claim a voice and to have a right to speak French, authors had to prove their Frenchness by mastery of the colonizer's language. Césaire was one author who followed this 'impossible advice' and gave up his own idiom to save himself. Within subaltern populations, a linguistic hierarchy still exists that favors those that use the language of the colonizer to begin movements towards cultural emancipation.

## 5. Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Valérie Loichot, "Between Breadfruit and Masala: Food Politics in Glissant's Martinique," *Callaloo* 30, 1 (2007): 125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30135878>.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Church, "« Strikingly French »: Martinique, Agitation Ouvrière Et Politique Métropolitaine Au Tournant Du Siècle," *Le Mouvement Social* 248, (2014) : 111.

<sup>4</sup> David Macey, "Frantz Fanon, or the Difficulty of Being Martinican," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 58 (2004): 215.

<sup>5</sup> David Macey, 218.

<sup>6</sup> Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Panteon Books, 1973), 41.

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