

**Philosophy and Progress**

**Vols. LXXI-LXXII, January-June, July-December, 2022**

ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), DOI : <https://doi/10.3329/pp.v71il-2.66524>

**MANICHAEISM IN FANON'S *THE  
WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*: ITS  
IMPLICATIONS FOR POSTCOLONIAL  
NATIONS**

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**Abstract**

In the course of his groundbreaking work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon has employed a splendid array of metaphors to reflect on the essential fabric of a colonized society. However, the Manichean metaphor is the best of them, which he has used to forge a comparison between colonialism and Manichaeism, a dualistic religious movement founded in ancient Persia sometime during the third century CE. This metaphor is singular in the sense that both colonialism and Manichaeism have in common a dichotomic vision to look at the world, a stupendous effort to exert their influences on the better part of the world and

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a messianic zeal to preach their enlightenment values at every opportunity. In this article, I am going to elucidate the way Fanon has made use of the metaphor to designate the identity formation of both the colonizer and the colonized in addition to critically analysing their similitude in vision, will and enthusiasm. In so doing, I will bring into play the recent accretions of Manichean religious and postcolonial studies in order to situate Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in the framework of post-colonial praxis.

**Keywords:** *Manichaeism, colonialism, postcolonial nations, literary theory, Frantz Fanon, African studies, comparative literature.*

## Introduction

In his remarkable preface to the 1969 edition of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre—in his characteristic playful yet ceremonious tone—says:

*Il n'y pas si longtemps, la terre comptait deux milliards d'habitants, soit cinq cents millions d'hommes et un milliard cinq cents millions d'indigènes. Les premières disposaient du Verbe, les autres l'empruntaient.* [It is not long ago that the world had two billion inhabitants, that is to say, five hundred million men and one billion five hundred million natives. The first group had the verb of their own while the second would borrow it from them.] (2002, p. 17).

As always, Jean-Paul Sartre exempts from his scathingly deadpan humor neither the colonizers nor the colonized. Even though Sartre does not spell out any of their names in the preface, his use of the expression “not long ago” [*Il n'y pas si longtemps*]

only as a red herring and his statistical indication of human populations will surely disabuse his readers of the least possible doubt about the contemporaneity of the two groups of world inhabitants fictitiously portrayed in the prelude. It would be very much clear to his readers even during their first reading that the five hundred million men [*cinq cents millions d'hommes*] and the one billion five hundred million natives [*un milliard cinq cents millions d'indigènes*] are in fact none other than the colonizers and the colonized of the recent European colonial setup.

It is no doubt that this sort of feigned masquerade leaves a foretaste of the real pleasure of a reading of the book *per se*; however, the pithiest line of the quotation happens to be the one where he aptly lampoons the travesty of the so-called colonial mission making a grand pretense of giving voice to the alleged voiceless. Indeed, this travesty of the putative civilizing mission of colonialism is exactly what Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) intends to debunk in his seminal book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); he accomplishes the task through the use of any number of sustained metaphors to critique the deceptively simple contours of colonial enterprises in the world. One such instance is his tremendously ingenious comparison between colonialism and Manichaeism, a third century CE religion that prevailed somewhere in and around ancient Persia.

a. *What is Manichaeism?*

As already described, Manichaeism is a religion concocted by Mani, a Persian visionary man. A further description of the characteristics of his invented faith will enlighten our understanding of the religion. Manichaeism has at least three important characteristic traits. For Obolensky, “the most rigid and classical form of dualism in historical times is to be found

in Manichaeism, invented in Babylonia in the middle of the third century A.D. by the Persian Mani” (1948, p.5). He goes on to explain that the votaries of the religious faith believe in the eternal existence of the “opposite and mutually independent principles, God and Matter, represented respectively on the physical plane by two natures, Light and Darkness” (p. 5). The second predominant feature of preponderant importance, Obolensky continues (1948), is its ruthless spread “over the large parts of Europe and Asia, extending from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans.” (p.5) It now leads us to the other strong trait of the religion: a messianic zeal to surmount every barrier standing in the way of its unremitting lunge forward.

*b. Nexus between Manichaeism and colonialism*

Just like Manichaeism, colonialism also has at its heart three overarching features. Like Mani’s principal adage, too, that promotes the dualistic ideal “[w]hat was good would always be good; what was evil, always evil” (Gitlin, 2014, para. 4), colonialism banks on “ambivalence”, “hybridity” and “mimicry” (Bhabha, 1994 pp. 85-92), rending asunder the world order into “us” and “them”. As for its spread over the face of the globe, colonialism has proved itself unrivalled as far as the conquest of the far-flung territories of the world is concerned. If the Commonwealth, an association of the former British colonies scattered over different parts of the world, boasts 54 member countries (The Commonwealth, 2022, para. 1), l’Organisation internationale de la francophonie has as many as 88-member states, almost all of them former colonies of France (L’Organisation internationale de la francophonie, 2022, para. 3). While delving into the inner recesses of Oriental studies in his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said

(1935-2003) gave the impressions of the messianic zeal of colonialism and identified it as:

A study of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”. Thus a large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, custom, “mind”, destiny and so on.

Indeed, once the gulf between the East and the West is taken for granted, literally countless disciplines and their paraphernalia sprout into existence. As a matter of fact, the breath of colonialism is so wide-ranging that it would be difficult (and if I may say, impossible) for any scholar to chart out the sweeping terrain of colonialist ventures.

It is probably for this reason that in the very first chapter of his book *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon contrived a comparison between colonialism and Manichaeism. Drawing on this parallel Frantz Fanon had noted between the two completely disparate phenomena belonging to two different worldviews, this paper intends to associate the implications of the metaphoric comparison to once-colonized nations around the globe. We would also like to investigate the process of the identity formation of colonized individuals by passing in review the will, vision and ebullience of the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor. In carrying out this research investigation, we would primarily draw on some of the latest works on the postcolonial studies in addition to those of Middle Eastern religious studies so

that we can bring out the best of the implicit comparison between world's two greatest phenomena at the origin of innumerable watershed events in history.

### **RECEPTION OF FRANZ FANON'S *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH***

There is a plethora of literature written by erudite scholars particularly conversant in the *négritude*, *littérature maghrébrine* and, in particular, Frantz Fanon's anticolonial studies questions. Almost all of them invariably focus their critically informed attention on the disinterment of the deceptively simple grand narratives deeply buried beneath the surface of the split colonial world order. However, only a few scholars have used on the titles of their works words like "Manichean" or "Manichaeism". One such versatile academician, for example, is Alvaro Reyes who wrote "On Fanon's Manichean Delirium". In this paper, he analyzes Fanon's cerebral use of Manichean metaphor as an example of his "appropriations of a classically Hegelian inflected narrative of alienation and disalienation" (p. 14). In the same article, he also compares the colonial ambivalence to a set of "zoological categories... [impregnated with] a hierarchy of value." (p. 14) Overall, he uses the word "Manicheanism" as many as twenty-one times while employing its adjective form "Manichean" more than eighteen times. However, never does he explain adequately what the terms would designate nor does he even apportion a passing commentary whatsoever to his allusion to one of the foremost religious movements in vogue in ancient Mesopotamia.

Besides Alvaro Reyes, Jane Hiddleston examines Fanon's Manichean comparison of the colonial enterprises in her

celebrated book *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Bent on a well-thought-of exposé on the European colonial apparatuses, she makes a comprehensive case of the postcolonial condition as far as the immediate liberation of the French occupied Algeria is concerned. In the second chapter of the book, titled “Fanon and Sartre: colonial Manichaeism and the call to arms”, which foretells the critical engagement that the author went on to make later in the chapter, Hiddleston dubs Fanon as “a highly militant thinker”, “self-consciously Marxist”, and sees his book *The Wretched of the Earth* as “no less than ‘a handbook’ for revolutionary action” (2009, p. 26). A few pages later, she corrects herself and comments, “*The Wretched of the Earth* is without doubt from the outset a more overtly committed and militant text than *Black Skin, White Mask*.” (p. 37) In the line that follows, she rationalizes her critical evaluation of the book’s being and the becoming of Fanon’s self by saying, “Fanon opens [*The Wretched of the Earth*] quite starkly with a clear call to arms.” (2009, p. 37) However, despite the appellation of the chapter, “Fanon and Sartre: colonial Manichaeism and the call to arms”, Hiddleston neither devotes any amount of attention to an examination of the intimations of what she calls “colonial Manichaeism”, nor to an explication of the fabled allusion.

The other scholar dedicating himself to Fanon’s conceptualization of the Manichean metaphor is Nigel Gibson. His article is an excellent reading of Fanon’s understanding of the dehumanizing colonial relation. Gibson (1999), for example, says, “the colonised and [the] coloniser as two different species... subsist in a relationship of *mutual manichean exclusivity* [his italics].” (p. 340) In order to explain what he calls “[the] relationship of mutual manichean exclusivity”, Gibson

broaches the idea of Hegelian dialectics, which he is convinced, culminates in “complete disorder” in a colonial setting (1999, p. 340). He also terms “Manichean medical models” the process of anticolonial violence which he believed has the potential to lead the whole colonial structure to the brink of an irreversible collapse. (1999, p. 343) Like Alvaro Reyes, Gibson does not seem to make any headway in the unravelling of the Manichean metaphor despite his overt pledge to “reconstructing Fanon.” (1999, p. 353)

It is thus manifest through Alvaro Reyes, Jane Hiddleston and Nigel Gibson’s works, where all of them adduce Fanon’s colonial Manichean question, only to plunge themselves into an investigation on one side of the problematic. This paper intends to address the fissure existing between the promise of the works and their outcomes. In what follows, therefore, I propose analyzing not only on the complex nature of postcolonial condition and the delineation of the background paving the way for the emergence of the religion of Mani, but also on the correlation existing between the tenor and the vehicle of the ubiquitous metaphor. I style it ‘a ubiquitous metaphor’ because it prevails throughout the better part of Fanon’s *oeuvre*, which will warrant some rigorous attempt on my part to forage a few other texts, beyond the limit of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in the hope of reaching a far more comprehensive conclusion on the metaphoric comparison.

As I have already commented, the objective of this article is not only to discuss the postcolonial import of the literary comparison constructed with the telling allusion to the religion of Mani but also to direct the attention of readers to the source of the religion vis-à-vis the comparison, I am compelled to perform



a two-prong methodological engagement in the article. I shall draw on the recent yields of postcolonial studies and Middle Eastern religious studies alike in order to fill the intellectual void left agape by Fanon experts' dismissive attitude, and to a great extent their propensity to making sweeping generalizations.

While I shall principally depend on innumerable scholars, including Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha etc. to demythologize the occidental myth-making proclivity in vogue in Fanon's contemporary *maghrébine* and Martinican societies, I shall make frequent references to such Manichean religious experts as Fracine Culdaut, Dmitri Obolensky, Fernando Bermejo Rubio, Iain Gardner, Madeleine Scopello, Michel Tardieu etc. to benefit from the latest research investigations into the field. Because most of the Manichean and Fanon scholarship are not still widely available in languages other than French and Spanish, I myself have to do all the translations that you will encounter during your reading of the article. Unless they are otherwise indicated, all the translations are mine.

### **FANON'S METAPHORIC MANICHEAN VISION**

Sometime in 1961, Frantz Fanon's seminal book *The Wretched of the Earth* saw the light of day in an unwelcome world. First of all, Frantz Fanon was suffering then from all kinds of physical ailments related to leukemia and fighting for his life in Bethesda Health Clinic, Maryland, USA. Indeed, he would die only a few weeks after the publication of the book. Moreover, the book found itself in a hostile environment where the terror of colonial sanctions was reigning supreme. As a matter of fact, the French colonial government banned *The Wretched of the Earth* under the pretext of "[une] atteinte à la sécurité intérieure de

l'État" [*an attack on the internal security of the State*]. (Cherki, 2002, p. 5) In spite of the initial backlash, however, the book proved itself as one of the outstanding reference texts of Fanon's contemporary Africa and beyond.

One reason Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* fared so well with his readers is because of his use of innumerable metaphors to facilitate an easy access into its deceptively simple interior. Fanon, for example, has used the expression "*la table rase*" or *tabula rasa* in the first chapter of the book to designate the palimpsest of the colonial condition on which ruler after ruler left their indelible imprints of administration. (2002, p. 39) He has also compared a colonized country to a psychologically demented patient who needs medical care in order to recuperate from its cultural confrontations. (2002, p. 239) But, for me, the most important metaphor that Frantz Fanon has used in *The Wretched of the Earth* is the Manichean metaphor in which he compared the ruthless spread of colonialism across the face of the earth to that of Manichaeism, a dualistic religion founded in ancient Persia during third century BC. In subsequent discussions, I shall shed light on at least three aspects that colonialism and Manichaeism have in common in the hope of explaining the quintessential nature of the metaphor.

#### *a. An all-effacing vision*

The most obvious point of convergence between colonialism and Manichaeism is their all-effacing vision. They translated into reality this all-effacing, absolute and total vision in at least three different ways. First of all, Manichaeism divides everything into two extremities. The proponent of this religious philosophy Mani, for example, "spoke of two realms: that of Light and that of Darkness." (Widengren, 1946, p. 15) By

extension, the dichotomic system of the Manichean thought tries to oversimplify such complex ideas as “bad viz-a-viz good/ *el principio del Mal al principio del Bien*”, “the sky and the Earth/ *el Cielo y la tierra*” etc. (Rubio, 2008, pp. 83-85) Smagina (2011) opines that the Manichean ideology was so torn between theology and cosmogony, angelology and demonology, eschatology and apocalypse that it is next to impossible for an individual to escape this binary opposition-infested world (p. 202).

Much in the same way, colonialism envisaged a colonized world cut into two [*couper en deux*, Fanon, 2002, p. 41]. In “The Ballad of East and West”, the controversial British poet Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) says, “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”; for sure, the world of the colonizers and the colonized did not promise to coexist in peaceful harmony. As a matter of fact, “the dividing line between them, the frontier is indicated by the cantonments and police posts” [*La ligne de partage, la frontière en est indiquée par les casernes et les postes de police*]. (Fanon, 2002, p. 41) This *ligne de partage* or the dividing line was strictly guarded by the *gendarme* and soldiers, who were “the veritable institutional interlocutors, the spokesperson of the colony and of the oppressive regime.” (Fanon, 2002, p. 41) However, such a divide between the unmistakably distinct societies is so mercilessly drawn that Fanon (2002) in *The Wretched of the Earth* says:

In capitalism-style societies, education, religious or secular, the training of moral reflexes transmitted from father to son, the exemplary honesty of decorated workers adequately recompensed after fifty years of good and loyal service, the encouraged love of harmony and wisdom, these aesthetic

forms of respect for the established order create around the exploited an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which considerably lightens the task of the forces of the order. [*Dans les sociétés de type capitaliste, l'enseignement, religieux ou laïque, la formation de réflexes moraux transmissibles de père en fils, l'honnêteté exemplaire d'ouvriers décorés après cinquante années de bons et loyaux services, l'amour encouragé de l'harmonie et de la sagesse, ces formes esthétiques du respect de l'ordre établi, créent autour de l'exploité une atmosphère de soumission et d'inhibition qui allège considérablement la tâche des forces de l'ordre*]. (p. 41)

Indeed, education, service, love, aesthetics, wisdom—however naïve and artless they might appear to be—are all finally put under stringent surveillance by the colonizers in order to maintain “an atmosphere of submission and inhibition” in colonies. In consequence, the colonial dichotomy that supplants the indigenous values never breaks, despite the alleged virtues of the liberal education bequeathed to the colonized under the aegis of the Western colonizers.

The second way Manichaeism effaced even innocuous-looking vestiges of the old social order is essentially through its rigorous introduction of new ideas rocking the foundation of Christianity to its core. While the concept of trinity did take pride of place in the overall configuration of Christendom, Manichaeism superseded the concept with the introduction of a myriad of possibilities to look at the world order. These possibilities include “polarity”, “quinariness” and “polyonymy”, which Tardieu (2008) argues form the kernel of the Manichean pantheon. (p. 81) Mani also thought it wise to elaborate the subcategories of each of the elements of the pantheon. For

example, he conceived of a narrative that include “the first time”, “the middle time” and “the final time”, interspersed with numerous interludes on His part during God’s creation of the universe. (Tardieu, 2008, pp. 75-81) In addition, the religion developed for itself a mythological system which Tardieu (2008) reasons boils down to “quinary and consist, respectively, of (A) undecomposable elements, (B) personified cosmic functions, and (C) personified intellectual faculties.” (p. 86) Though Mani took advantage of the prevailing disorder in his contemporary church administration, he presented before people of his faith a surrogate to get out of the existing episcopal crisis.

As the Manichaeism religion orchestrated an epistemic violence in the established order of society through a minutely detailed counternarrative, so did colonialism rewrite a new social order in place of the old one, which ultimately culminated in the creation of a compartmentalized world [*Le monde colonial est un monde compartimentalisé*, Fanon, 2002, p. 41]. The first thing that colonialism did to jeopardize the status quo of a colonized nation, raising a deeply existential question in the process, was through inflicting “a sort of stiffening, a kind of muscular tetanic” [*une sorte de raidissement, de tétanie musculaire*] in the colonized body. (Fanon, 2002, p. 46) After the first blow, the colonizer would present the colonized with a plethora of choices, “inflicted a dichotomy” [*la dichotomie qu’il inflige au monde*], desperately seeking to fill up the artificially created void through the importation of the European “administrative officers, technical cadres and specialists” [*cadres administratifs, cadres techniques, spécialistes*]. (Fanon, 2002, p. 48) Alluding to the French colonization of the African continent and Algeria, Fanon also said that once the process of colonization took off,

“all the Mediterranean values, the triumph of humanity, that of enlightenment and beauty, become mere trinkets without life or color” [*Toutes les valeurs méditerranéennes, triomphe de la personne humaine, de la clarté et du Beau, deviennent bibelots sans vie et sans couleur*]. (Fanon, 2002, p. 46) Indeed, the intricate framework of the European ideals that we see at work even today is nothing but the slowly dissipating remnant of the former colonial enterprise.

The other way Manichaeism did the spadework for the formation of a ruthlessly all-effacing world was through its promotion of a set of gnostic values. Originating in the reigning heresy outside the second century nascent Christian church, Gnosticism gained currency primarily for its fresh promise of heaven sidestepping the infernos of hell. “The ‘Gnosis’, from the Greek γνῶσις, implies, as its name indicates, a knowledge which wants to save [its adherents] and which reveals to its votaries the secret of their origin and the means to reach it” [*La «Gnosis», del griego γνῶσις, implica, como indica su nombre, un conocimiento que se quiere salvador y que revela a los iniciados el secreto de su origen y los medios para alcanzar*]. (Culdaut, 1996, p. 6) Renowned Persian tribes of classical antiquity, such as the Valentinians, the Cainites, the Ophites, the Basilidians, who used to hold this form of heretical ideas running against the inviolable sanctity of the church, would consider Gnosticism to be a source of “the knowledge of ineffable greatness” [*el conocimiento de la grandeza inefable*]. (Culdaut, 1996, p. 7) Indeed, this source of apocryphal knowledge seems to have empowered its disciples in a strange sort of individualistic way in face of the collective episcopal system.

If Manichaeism inculcated in its adherents a sense of individualism and animated them to confront the collectivism of the church through the alleged revelation of “the knowledge of ineffable greatness”, colonialism instilled the same individualistic ethos in its colonial subjects by introducing them to national bourgeois doctrines. (Fanon, 2002, p. 164) Indeed, the idea of individualism was so strong in the bourgeois psyche of the nation then that it was emasculated of its ability to form parties. Therefore, there was only ‘*the leader*’, said Fanon (2002), “who mobilises, talks to the radio, does a showdown, pacifies, mystifies.” (p. 163) What is even worse, the fledgling political party that fought hard anti-colonial wars “cannot but freeze the people” [*ne sert qu'à immobilizer le peuple*] or simply “decomposes itself” [*se decompose*] in the wake of the independence of the nation. (Fanon, 2002, p. 164) It is an irony that the spirit of individualism that kindled the colonized people who toppled their native cultural monuments left them completely incapacitated in the face of the crumbling of their post-independent nation.

*b. An indomitable willpower*

The second point of convergence between Manichaeism and colonialism is their individual indomitable willpower. Thanks to it, both enterprises spread over a huge expanse of lands around the globe. Manichaeism, for example, traversed a huge stretch of land from its locus of birth as far as China and India on the one hand and Baghdad on the other! In his famous book on comparative religious studies, Reeves cites a certain Taqīzādeh-Šīrāzī as saying:

Factions of his followers remained in areas populated by the  
Turks and China and regions of ‘Irāq and Kirmān until the

time of Hārūn al-Rashīd. He burned his book, and there was a hat (*qalansūwa*) with it which was a relic from Mānī that he also put to the flame. He carried out many executions among them and stamped out their tradition. (p. 231)

As is evident from the preceding quote, the religion of Manichaeism as a sect of “vitiating faith” reared its ugly head in China, Turkey and Baghdad. As a result, the Muslim caliph Haroon Or Rasheed (Harun al-Rashid as he spelled it) had to intervene to forestall its unwanted widespread contamination of Muslim society. Besides, Reeves quotes Ibn al-Nadim’s *Kitab al-Fihrist*, explaining how the Manicheans reached the seemingly impenetrable and inhospitable mountainous regions of the Indian subcontinent to exert some form of influence on *Sumaniyya* or Buddhism. (p. 227)

Likewise, the British colonialism, or for that matter French and Spanish colonial ventures, enmeshed the whole world. If the proverbial expression “The sun never sets on the British empire” is often uttered to designate the endless demesne of the British Empire, it might just as well be true of its colonial rivals. When Fanon (2002), therefore, says that there is infighting among the colonized of diverse races, colors and countries of origin, he testifies to the truism of the global network of colonial dominion. (p. 284) At another place, Fanon (2002) also prophesies, “We will have for many years to come to dress the multiple and in some cases incurable wounds that the colonial enterprise has done to our people [*Et nous aurons à panser des années encore les plaies multiples et quelquefois indélébiles faites à nos peuples par le déferlement colonialist*]. (p. 239) In case his readers miss the moot question, Fanon adduced the crucial point of difference between colonialism and imperialism.



Even after a colonial venture is formally wound up, what lingers is imperialism, which Fanon posits “continues to stand in the way of the real freedom of humankind, [and which] throws here and there the germs of putrescence.” (p. 239) It all points to the extant global spread of colonialism.

The second proof of the Manichean indomitable will is what Rubio (2008) calls “the idea of Living Soul” [*la idea del Alma Viviente*]. (p. 127) At the heart of the Manichean philosophy resides this principle, often renewed with solemn affirmation: “My soul is the soul of the whole world” [*Mi alma es alma de todos los mundos*]. (Rubio, 2008, p. 127) This idea accorded the adherents of Mani the essential prowess, seemingly emboldening them to defy almost everything they would come across. This idea also explains the *raison d'être* of will power for their irresistible penetration into the major religions or religious denominations of the contemporary world. In the process, it exerted an enormous influence on the formation of other religious communities' credo. For example, BeDuhn (2009) undertook in his much-acclaimed critical article, “Augustine Accused: Megalius, Manichaeism, and the Inception of the *Confessions*”, a thorough investigation to unravel the truth to the extent Manichaeism influenced such formidable Christian thinkers as Augustine, Megalius and Petilian etc., and said, “Augustine had never made any secret of the fact that he had once been a Manichaean.” (p. 95) Indeed, the Manichean mobilization was so ruthlessly marauding that it admitted of no obstruction—social or theological—on its way to progress.

Quite the contrary, colonialism had a wide array of motives as it embarked on its so-called civilizing mission. “The ‘civilising mission’,” observed Pekan (2016), “is a broad ideology that

combines *four main ideals*; Enlightenment ideals, Christian/Evangelical ideas of pre-destination, racist ideas about white superiority and Liberalism.” (p. 1) Whatever the motives, Fanon assumes that since the process of colonization had been a violent one, toppling the established colonial order would be equally difficult. He (2008), therefore, says:

*Libération nationale, renaissance nationale, restitution de la nation au peuple, Commonwealth, quelles que soient les rubriques utilisées ou les formules nouvelles introduites, la décolonisation est toujours un phénomène violent.* [National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of the country to its people, Commonwealth, whatever rubrics are used or whatever new formulae are introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon]. (p. 39)

Through a reverse process of logical analysis, Fanon came to the conclusion that the lived experience of colonialism—an experience *à posteriori*—points to the brute forces used to subjugate the people of the far-flung nations. If you wish, Fanon seems to be saying, you can always exercise your mental faculty to see for yourself the destructive will power at work in every colonizing incident around the world.

### *c. A messianic zeal*

Other than its all-effacing vision and indomitable willpower, colonialism and Manichaeism share a messianic zeal that was at the roots of their unprecedented success. As it happens with prophetic mission, a prophet comes with a divine revelation, ‘a metanarrative’ (to borrow a Derridean term) that poses an existential question, destabilizing previously accepted social norms. Often, in the process of their prophetic office, prophets succumb to blows emanating from different vested quarters

of society. Much in the same way, the Manichean religion encountered a growing spate of violence perpetrated against it. However, it did not close out on a sudden. One such martyrdom story called “Naẓm al-jawhar” is narrated in Taqīzādeh-Šīrāzī's *Mānī va dīn-e-ū* and recounted in “Martyrological Traditions” in Reeves' *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism*. The story goes as follows:

It was during his reign that a Persian who called himself Mānī appeared and he promulgated the religion of Manichaeism. He claimed that he was a prophet. Bahrām b. Bahrām, who was king of Persia, seized him and cut him into two pieces. He also took into custody some of his sect and those who were propounding his doctrine: (it was) about one hundred people. He planted their heads upside down in the soil until they died. He said, ‘I have made a garden and have planted it with people instead of trees!’ (Reeves, 2013, p. 231)

The central idea of the story is resilience, fortitude and the ability to regrow after the reception of a heavy blow. This spirit of fortitude buoyed up the Manichean votaries in the course of innumerable barriers throughout its journey to modern times.

Just like Manichaeism, colonialism had to quell the violent rebellion of native insurgents. In the face of sporadic bouts of mounting colonial riots, colonial officers across the world—in the Indian sub-continent as in Australia, the Americas, the African continent, the Polynesia—had to flex their muscles, endure hardships instigated by the indigenous people and become eventually inured to most of the generalized political violence. As a matter of fact, they never crumbled even under the mounting pressure of violent colonial administrations. Explicating one such example from the African continent, Fanon (2008) notes,

“The agitation of the common mass vigorously opposed the occupying military forces” [*La violence des masses s’oppose vigoureusement aux forces militaires de l’occupant*]. (p. 71) Bent on the vulgarization of the psychosomatic complications of the colonized in simple terms, Fanon resorted to imagery. Despite the fact that “the situation festers and becomes filthy” [*la situation se détériore et pourrit*] (Fanon, 2008, p. 71), it was only normal for the colonial officers to stay at the helms of business. It was as if the colonial officers, French, English and Spanish, were poised to die at the hands of the agitating colonized subjects, championing the cause of the West.

Besides, the disciples of Mani overtaxed their brains for the dissemination of their religious dogmas. If we avert our attention to the life of Mani, the founder of the Manichean religion, we will find in him unmatched missionary zeal to rebut questions tossed at him, combat other opinions and, in some cases, deal a crushing blow to his opponents. “He frequented,” note Gardner and BeDuhn (2020), “the courts of the Persian Empire, debating with rivals from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, philosophers and gnostics, Zoroastrians from Iran and Buddhists from India.” (p. 1) Gardner and BeDuhn (2020) go on to say, “The community he founded spread from north Africa to south China and lasted for over a thousand years” (p.1). While his future disciples would be busy thinking out ways for a global outreach of his religious ideas and practices along the trade routes of Eurasia, in China, the Balkans, and among the Bogomils, Encratites, Montanists, Novatians etc., the center of the religion could not hold its influence in one piece on the locus of its origin. However, the religion had many accretions along the way of its progress towards the uncertainty of a hitherto unforeseen future. Indeed,

“Mani was remembered by his followers, caricatured by his opponents, and has been invented and reinvented according to the vagaries of scholarly fashion” (Gardner and BeDuhn, 2020, p. 1). The religion, or for that matter its founder, has been many things to many people.

Almost exactly in the same way, successive waves of colonial ventures ever since its onslaught on the rest of the world left Europe debilitated in the wake of its upkeep outside home. “The Great War,” notes Abedin (2014), “was a momentous event...But as soon as the war ended, [the West] could understand that the war left England rather incapacitated, depleting its imperial vigor and rocking its colonial enterprise to its foundations.” (p. 164) The scenario was not much different for France either. Fanon (2008) quotes a certain Cartier as being riddled with “disillusioned bitterness in the face of France’s obstinacy to attach itself to its subjugated people.” (p. 199) It is because Cartier knew very well that “She [France] has to feed its colonized outside the European soil while any number of French citizens live under straitened circumstances.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 199) Indeed, Cartier was so vexed with this state of political affairs in France that he insisted, “It [the colonial irony] translates the impossibility in colonialism, [and] is turning into a disinterested program of aid and support.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 199)

As is evident by now, given all these theoretical, stylistic and ideational complexities, understanding Frantz Fanon in entirety is contingent on plumbing the concept of his Manichean metaphor. This is probably why Reyes (2012) opines, “For many readers, entering Fanon’s first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* can be a bit disconcerting, not only for the positions expounded there concerning violence, but also for what

appears as an implicit affirmation of the very Manicheism that according to Fanon subtends the colonial order.” (p. 13) Although it might not be immediately clear to them in a first reading of the opening section, readers will gradually come to terms with its quintessential import in the course of their readings. A plunge into the historical archives such as the works explicating the nexus between Manichaeism and colonialism will therefore prove itself a resourceful way in rereading Frantz Fanon’s masterpiece *The Wretched of the Earth*.

## Conclusion

How is Frantz Fanon still relevant to us so many years after his demise? Why should we lucubrate his masterpiece *The Wretched of the Earth* so many decades after the colonial enterprises have formally been wound up? In response to a series of such seemingly simple yet eventually revealing questions, Oto (2003) makes an educated attempt to extrapolate the lasting pertinence of Fanon’s oeuvre in the overall configuration of the postcolonial studies in the contemporary world, and says:

*Un uso vinculado a problemas tales como la figura del sujeto pensada en el espacio histórico de su posible redención, la figura de la alienación como proceso que no permite, debido a su trama, pensar sujetos fuera de la historicidad, la historicidad misma de ese sujeto, y los escenarios de la imaginación cultural frente al problema del confinamiento y la apertura. [A use linked to problems such as the figure of the subject thought of in the historical space of its possible redemption, the figure of alienation as process that does not allow, due to its plot, to think subjects outside historicity, the very historicity of that subject, and the scenarios of the cultural imagination facing the problem of confinement and openness]. (p.18)*

Indeed, the colonial subject with all its sense of alienation, 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence' is a figure thought born out of the wrenching experience of colonial ventures; as a result, it is impossible to envisage its 'possible redemption', emancipation and eventual decolonization 'outside historicity' [*fuera de la historicidad*]. Any form of intellectual exercises in so far as the independence of 'the cultural imagination' [*la imaginación cultural*] is concerned must be grounded in 'the historicity of that subject' [*la historicidad misma de ese sujeto*]. It is one of the most important reasons for the existence of the Fanon studies even in recent times.

The other "reason"—Oto of course uses the Spanish word "uso" [use or benefit]—why we should still study Frantz Fanon is his uncanny prescience to realize the historical duality embedded in the very quintessence of the postcolonial question. While some other formidable scholars, including Homi K. Bhabha, gave an intimation of the hybrid status of postcolonial subjects, it is Frantz Fanon who demystifies the two-prong difficulty of defining the postcolonial "subjects outside historicity" and "the very historicity of that subject." (Oto, 2003, p. 18) This is what forms the crux of Oto's argument in the quotation and what surely underscores the enduring relevance of Frantz Fanon to political, philosophical and literary studies in today's world.

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