

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 17
Fanon – Black Skin, White Masks (Part - V)

So hello and welcome to this lecture Introduction to Cultural Studies this NPTEL Course which we are studying and at the moment we are looking at Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks and this would be hopefully the concluding lecture of this particular text. So we were talking about, in the last lecture we were talking about how Fanon was critiquing Mannoni's idea of dependency complex.

And looking at that kind of a reading of the black man's psychology as a very essentialized kind of reading which sort of legitimizes imperialism, legitimizes racism because that "proves" very empirically that the black man depends on the white man to be rescued, to be redeemed, to be civilized etc. And that is the job of the white man to satisfy the expectation, to satisfy the psychological need on the part of the black man to be you know rescued and led.

Because the black man is not good enough to lead himself in his particular culture. So he needs to be rescued and redeemed by the presence of the white colonizer.

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After having described the Malagasy psychology, M. Mannoni takes it upon himself to explain colonialism's reason for existence. In the process he adds a new complex to the standing catalogue: the "Prospero complex." It is defined as the sum of those unconscious neurotic tendencies that delineate at the same time the "picture" of the paternalist colonial and the portrait of "the racialist whose daughter has suffered an [imaginary] attempted rape at the hands of an inferior being."³⁵

Prospero, as we know, is the main character of Shakespeare's comedy, *The Tempest*. Opposite him we have his daughter, Miranda, and Caliban. Toward Caliban, Prospero assumes an attitude that is well known to Americans in the southern United States. Are they not forever saying that the niggers are just waiting for the chance to jump on white women? In any case, what is

So towards the end of this particular section, the dependency complex section this is page 80 on your screen which should be highlighted in yellow where Fanon goes on critiquing Mannoni and he says after having described the Malagasy psychology, M. Mannoni takes it upon himself to explain colonialism's reason for existence. In the process he adds a new complex to the standing catalogue, the Prospero complex.

So this is a very interesting complex that Mannoni theorizes and this is something that Fanon explains and then critiques quite naturally. It is defined as the sum of those unconscious neurotic tendencies that delineate at the same time the picture of paternalist colonial and portrait of the racialized, racist whose daughter has suffered an imaginary attempted rape at the hands of an inferior being.

So the Prospero complex over here as the complex that Mannoni very conveniently theorizes in colonialism it is the complex which combines a paternal instinct, a paternal colonial instinct at the part of the colonizer as well as the fear, a neurotic fear of the colonizer that his daughter is going to be raped or going to be violated or molested by the colonized.

So this is you know obviously a reference to Shakespeare's *Tempest* where there is this constant fear that Prospero has that his daughter Miranda could be molested, could be embarrassed, or could be violated by the savage Caliban who ironically actually is the original inhabitant of the island.

So the fact that Prospero is coming from outside and territorialize and taken over the island is very conveniently glossed over and what we have instead is a very long and sort of psychological depiction of Prospero of Caliban's savagery and the associated fear that he would use the savagery to violate the innocent Miranda who is obviously the white woman and needs to be protected.

So Prospero complex over here is a combination of paternalist sentiment and the obsession of protection that Fanon sort of examines you know and this is obviously attempted to theorize by Mannoni at the very interesting confluence of colonial racist, okay. So Prospero as we know is

the main character of Shakespeare's comedy, *The Tempest*. So interestingly Fanon sort of treats *Tempest* as a comedy although in normal parlance, in normal Shakespeare's (()) (03:39) we use the word romance for *Tempest* you know it is an idealic romance.

It is something which is not comedy or tragedy but a different kind of genre but you know Fanon's description of *tempest* as a comedy probably carries a bit of a ironic undertone. He uses the term comedy I think quite deliberately looking at how the entire idea of *tempest*, the entire story of *tempest* is basically about the white man's territorialization and the anxiety and the fear on the part of the white man to be violated by the black person in his island.

So opposite him, this is on your screen, opposite him we have his daughter Miranda and Caliban. Towards Caliban, Prospero assumes an attitude that is well known to Americans in the southern United States. Are they not forever saying that the niggers are just waiting for the chance to jump on white woman? So the Prospero complex that you know Mannoni theorizes in which Fanon critiques over here is related to the fear that your children will be violated by these savage colonial people, the colonized people, the natives over here.

And the Prospero complex becomes neurotic complex according to Mannoni and that is one of the psychological complexes that he builds out of the study of colonialism which obviously is rejected and deconstructed by Fanon in this particular episode. So when he come to the end of this particular section what Fanon obviously does is he looks at the available scholarship, the dominant scholarship on colonialism and psychology.

And notices how this kind of a psychological study is heavily racialized, is heavily biased towards a certain kind of race obviously the white race and the black race is completely subjugated is completely described in a psychological study as potential and people with violence, people with anarchy, people with bloodthirsty impulses etc. and that obviously you know classifies him in a very convenient way according to the dominant narrative of colonialism.

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THE FACT OF BLACKNESS

“Dirty nigger!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro!”

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.

So next we come to what is perhaps the most famous chapter of this particular book, chapter 5 which is The Fact of Blackness which should be on your screen. Now the fact of the fact of blackness over here is a very interesting chapter because what it does it is antidotal. Fanon talks about experience that he himself has suffered as a black person in the streets of France where a white child, a white female child looked at him and thought of him as a cannibal.

As someone who is a monster. As someone who is a dangerous person. So she called out for protection from her mother because the very sight of the black person instilled in her fear, fear and the possibility of violence. So the black person over here becomes a walking embodiment of the potential for violence. So he is it becomes the signifier for the potential of violence and this of course is part of the success story of colonialism or the success story of racism.

Because that is what racism or colonialism aspire to do to create certain stereotype about a certain race, a certain denigrating, derogatory stereotype about violence, anarchy, laziness, hypersexuality, lust, etc. which he use as convenient tools, convenient parameters, convenient markers of inferiority in the longer narrative of colonialism which obviously is related to the entire legitimizing mission; The fact that this is actually a part of the legitimizing narrative.

It seeks for legitimized colonial and territorialization. So obviously classifying a particular race as inferior or violent would help in the legitimizing mission. So this particular section is very

experiential as something which is antidotal, something which is subjective, something which is almost phenomenological and deeply psychological as well.

And so Fanon talks about how being looked at or being gazed at as a black person by a white child is a very reifying, objectifying experience because then that particular gaze is a gaze towards a monster. That gaze expects monstrosity from the black person. That gaze expects savagery from the black person and as a result of which, the human being who is black over here is unsettled cognitively as well as schematically.

So the entire cognitive scheme crumbles under this particular gaze which is essentially essentializing which is commodifying, reifying, as well as alienation, okay. So it is a very problematic and disturbing kind of a description that Fanon provides over here but we will read it in detail with Fanon what really goes on. So the opening lines over here are quite suggestive, Dirty nigger or simply, look a Negro; so any of these statements would do. Look a Negro.

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things. My spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. So this process of objectification is obviously part of the package of racialization which is operative over here. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, so this degree of sealing, this degree of claustrophobia, this degree of you know being confined into that objectification which happens over here. Sealed into the crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others.

So you know he turns employed into others expecting to find sympathy, expecting to find empathy which obviously does not exist. Their attention was a liberation running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing. So this is a process of becoming a nonbeing which is operative over here, the process of becoming an object of hatred, an object of you know revulsion of disgust etc.

Endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought I thought I lost and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which I was a

chemical solution is fixed by a dye. So again the whole process is described using very chemical metaphors over here.

This is almost like a permanent change where something is chemical change by dye. So he becomes something else. So of course dye over here carries a metaphor of color which becomes a very crucial signifier in this particular experience. So you know it is used as a metaphor with the chemical you know corollary which is happening over here. So it is a chemical solution, it is a chemical change.

And since that it is actually permanent but at the same time there is a degree of coloration which happens over here because it is all about color and epidermalization is at work here. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now from the fragments I have been put together again by another self. So what we see over here is a process of unselfing, is a splintering of the subject, a splintering of the self which takes place due to this particular objectifying gaze which the human subject is you know subjected to, suffers in this particular experience.

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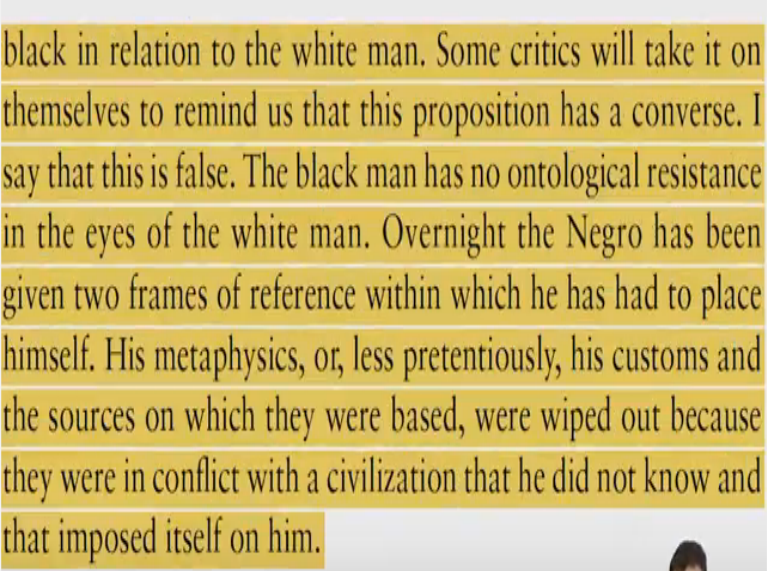
have discussed the question. In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be

So in the *Weltanschauung* of colonized people in the world view of the colonized people, in the world of the colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. So the colonized people come with flawed people by default that resist any kind of a ontologization. Any kind of ontological liberation, any ontological explanation is denied to them

because precisely because of the impurity and racialized flaw which is you know which is something they are classified with.

Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside does not permit us to understand the being of the black man.

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black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.

For not only must the black man be black, he must be a black in relation to the white man. So again this is a very relational kind of an experience, a very relational kind of an identity which is at work over here. So blackness and whiteness are relative categories and is corresponding to civilization, corresponding to lack of civilization, corresponding to savagery, sophistication, culture, and cultural identities.

Some critiques will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. So there is no ontology which is offered to the black man. So the black man does not have the luxury of ontology. The black man is just an object, a reified dead object which is heavily racialized, heavily commodified by this kind of a gaze on the part of the white man.

So overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself. His metaphysics or less pretentiously his customs and the sources on which they were based were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him. So his reference points are gone. So there is no reference point for the black man.

There is no original reference point for the black man as well because he is completely consumed by the new reference points which are imposed on him by this kind of a white gaze, by this kind of a culture of colonialism which is at work over here. So it is actually a very existential experience that Fanon describes and the whole point is one of unsettling. The whole point is being you know losing itself, losing yourself, losing your ego, losing your sense of self, your ownership on your body, your ownership on your self in the gaze which is commodifying and heavily racialized, okay.

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And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the

And then he goes on to say, in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. So what is bodily schema? Bodily schema is bodily image, the image you have of your own body which is related to your ego, which is related to your agency, which is related to your sense of self and that bodily schema completely crumbles according to Fanon.

And is obviously a psychological study of what happens when this kind of a racism reifying racism is at work. So the bodily schema crumbles on this kind of a racist gaze. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is the third person consciousness the body is surrounded by atmosphere of certain uncertainty. So look at the oxymoron over here. Uncertainty is certain over here.

You are completely, this is what I meant when I said a little while ago that this is a loss of reference. So you do not really have any reference to clutch on to. You lose your whole references. You lose your own sense of self and you have a new kind of references imposed on u. you do not quite know how to navigate it. So the uncertainty around you is absolutely certain. So you are immersed in the uncertainty with the loss of the bodily schema which happens due to this racism, due to this reifying racism of the reifying racist gaze in which he was subjected, okay.

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“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

“Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me.

“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.

I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware

So this particular episode becomes very crucial and is often quoted in studies of colonialism and post colonialism especially in relation to identify and cultural politics, right. So you know he goes on and describes this episode in more graphic details in page 84 on your screen where little child, a little female child cries off for help just because she has seen a black person and the very sight of a black person is evocative of fear for her. Is evocative of disgust for her.

It is evocative of monstrosity for her. So the black person is monstrous by default according to her and this is what she goes on to say. Look a Negro. It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. Look a Negro. It was true. It amused me. Look a Negro. The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. Mama, see the Negro, I am frightened, frightened, frightened. Now they were beginning to be afraid of me.

I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. I could no longer laugh because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity which I had learned from about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema.

So this entire idea of being encircled by this economy of stereotypes, this entire idea of being encircled by this economy of racist stereotypes is something which is at work over here and that encircling obviously creates or constructs a claustrophobic condition under which the bodily schema or the corporeal schema crumbles. Your sense of your body crumbles, your sense of your self crumbles, your ownership on your body crumbles completely.

And what you have in its place taking over is a racial epidermal schema. So you are just your race. You are just your skin color. So that becomes your sole identity and obviously that identity is a monstrous identity. That identity is sort of a, a savage, is that of an uncivilized person who can be potentially violent. So your sense of self, your sense of civilization, your sense of culture, your ownership on your body which is what the corporeal schema is all about.

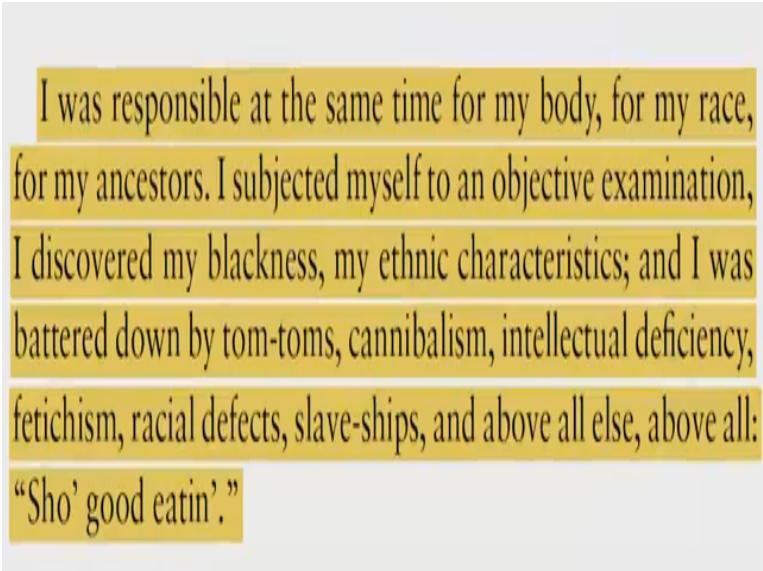
And knowledge of your body that goes away completely and only knowledge you have is that racist, racialized and reifying knowledge of your skin. The epidermal schema becomes your sole signifier, your sole identity which is projected around you and according to which you are measured and gazed at and then you are subjected to this kind of a racialized reification.

So this is a very good example, a very disturbing example actually. A very complex psychological situation which crumbles your sense of self, which shatters your sense of self, which shatters your sense of your body, your ownership on your body and what you have you are

reduced actually to a very small and slender signifier which is that of your race, of your skin color. So obviously this is a process of reduction and this extreme reduction is which is operative over here but this has a profound psychological impact on the human subject who is converted into an object, a very shallow object who is just a skin color and nothing else.

So all the complexity, all human emotion, all ambivalence, all empathy everything is denied for this particular person and only has the only possession he has over here is the skin color which is used as a racist stereotype against which he is measured and obviously the measurement is that of a savage, right. So the quotient over here is that of savagery. To what extent is this person savage? That is the key question over here.

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I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."

So Fanon goes on to say, I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination. So the human subject examines itself objectively now. I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics and I was battered down by my tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships and above all else, above all, "Sho good eatin'."

So you know this, these are the markers. These are a very racist stereotypes against which the human subject over here is marked, the black subject is marked. So cannibalism, fetish, black magic, etc. So that comes back to him, you know that idea of the black person. So he is

objectifying himself over here. Because he is aware of this objective apparatus of racist stereotypes with which the black person is measured.

And those stereotypes come back to him over here and his sense of subjectivity crumbles completely and his sense of history erases away completely. His sense of legacy erases away completely. His sense of family of kinship, of knowledge, of culture suffers a complete and absolute erasure and what he has instead over here is the objectifying signifiers or cannibalism, fetish, black magic you know savagery, violence etc.

Which all come back and consume as an object. So we have a sense of an auto commodification at work, an auto objectification at work. So he is objectifying himself as a person over here, right. So he becomes, he ceases to be a subject and becomes an object even in his own gaze. Thanks to this economy around him, the economy of stereotypes around him in which he you know he is suffering in that kind of economy.

So he becomes a suffering subject in that kind of an economy which consumes him and he consumes it as well at some point.

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In *Anti-Semite and Jew* (p. 95), Sartre says: "They [the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype. . . . We may say that their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside."

All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go

So this particular section is one of the most important sections of the whole book, perhaps the most important section of the whole book and is often quoted as I said and is a very good

example of the idea of othering which is at work over here. Othering through racialization, othering through epidermalization, othering through foreground in the skin color as the sole signifier, the sole identity of a human subject.

The human subject is entirely reduced to the skin color as a process of absolute and extreme objectification at work and at some point it becomes auto objectification. You begin to objectify yourself because you are aware of the stereotypes that you trigger as a person in the audience around you, right. So that becomes a very extreme example, almost pathological example of the collapsed of the corporeal schema and the rise and overdetermination of the epidermal schema, okay.

And so you know the corollary the relationship with the you know the Jew comes back over here again and again the sense of racialization, the sense of othering is similar structurally but then Fanon also delineates the examples of the differences between the Jew and the black person over here. So if you go to page 87 on your screen which should be on your screen, the highlighted sections over here.

And he quotes Jean-Paul Sartre where he says in *Anti-Semite and the Jew* in page 95, Sartre says they the Jews have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype. We may say that their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside. All the same, and Fanon here marks the difference between the Jew and the black person.

All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man and apart from some rather debatable characteristics he can sometimes go unnoticed.

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unnoticed. He belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one's father! Simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger. Granted, the Jews are harassed—what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. But these are little family quarrels. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance.

He belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one's father. Simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger. Granted, the Jews are harassed, what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. But these are little family quarrels. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance.

I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave of not of the idea that others have of me but of my own appearance. So this is you know so he highlights the superficiality in this racism. So it is called literary superficial. It is on the surface, right. So the black man is an other because he is black. So it is immediately epidermalized and this epidermalization has an immediacy to it as opposed to the condition of the Jew who is a Jew not because he has a different skin color, not because of different religion, because of different rituals, different habits, different customs etc.

So what has to go deeper in order to sort of mind the otherness of the Jew but when it comes to the black person the otherness is immediate, it is visual, it is superficial, it is epidermal and it is permanent. It is the skin color and that creates otherness, that generates the otherness which is permanent as well as superficial in quality. So you know it all comes on to appearance. It all comes on to idea.

It is not a deep idea, it is a shallow idea and you know the color of the skin is related to cannibalism. The color of the skin is related to savagery and is a process of otherness which is a production of course in which the black man is subjected, right. So this concludes this particular text. So we find very interestingly a very psychological study of corporeal schema you know bodily schema, you know cognitive schema and how that these things go away and the only schema available to the black man is the epidermal schema.

And along with that we have a critique of the overarching idea of you know the psychology of the black person, the psychology of the African which is obviously a very Eurocentric kind of a psychology which invents theories like dependency complex, invents theories like the Prospero complex, invents theories such as you know the black person's inferiority complex etc. which obviously is used as a legitimizing instruments to legitimize the grand mission of imperialism, the grand mission of colonialism.

And Fanon gives a very provocative critique of that, a very resentful critique of that and in its place it gives you a very candid and honest and unsettling and disturbing example of what it feels to be a black person consumed by a gaze, consumed by a racialized, reifying gaze which crumbles the schema, the cognitive schema, which crumbles your identity, your cultural identity and reduces you to one kind of identity alone that the black person who by extension is a cannibal, who by extension is a monster and who by extension is a savage.

So *Black Skin, White Masks* becomes or remains a really important text for us interested in cultural studies especially the relation to how the cultural identities are produced in colonial conditions and it is the reason why we keep returning to this particular book over and over again. So we conclude this particular text. I hope you enjoyed reading with me. Go, do go to the sections which you have studied in close details and we will move on to the new text in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.