

## FANON'S ROLE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PAN-AFRICAN IDENTITY

*FANON'UN PAN-AFRİKA KİMLİĞİNİN İNŞASINDAKİ ROLÜ\**

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**Abstract:** The Pan-African ideology, which had matured with the ideas of Africans in the diaspora, gradually found a response throughout the continent. As a flower blooming amid concepts such as independence and neocolonialism, this ideology has also included many African and non-African thinkers. Frantz Fanon, a Martinican philosopher, is one of the people who provided an important background to this idea. Fanon, who saw himself as French and then sought to rediscover and redefine his own identity after seeing the French behavior in the French colonies and especially in Algeria, is a remarkable thinker for subsequent African thinkers and researchers. In this article, I will examine the Pan-Africanist perspective that he sprouted with his anti-colonial thoughts.

**Keywords:** Fanon, Pan-Africa, Neocolonialism

**Öz:** Diasporadaki Afrikalıların fikirleriyle olgunlaşan Pan-Afrika ideolojisi yavaş yavaş kıta genelinde karşılık buldu. Bağımsızlık ve yeni sömürgecilik gibi kavramların ortasında açan bir çiçek olarak bu ideoloji, Afrikalı ve Afrikalı olmayan birçok düşünürü de içine almıştır. Martinik asıllı filozof Frantz Fanon, bu fikre önemli bir arka plan sağlayan kişilerden biridir. Kendisini Fransız olarak gören ve daha sonra Fransız sömürgelerinde ve özellikle Cezayir'de Fransızların davranışlarını gördükten sonra kendi kimliğini yeniden keşfetmeye ve tanımlamaya çalışan Fanon, sonraki Afrikalı düşünürler ve araştırmacılar için dikkate değer bir düşünürdür. Bu makalede, sömürgecilik karşıtı düşünceleriyle filizlendirdiği Pan-Africanist perspektifi inceleyeceğim.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fanon, Pan-Afrika, Neo-kolonyalizm

### Introduction

Although some books and articles on the colonial period have recently been added to the literature, the colonial-African relationship is often described in terms of the same factors. Nevertheless, it should not be seen as a problem that African history, which is quite old, was first understood through the suppression of anti-colonial movements. The anti-colonial movement reflects the very character of the African people and the spirit of resistance is hidden in the actions of those who want independence.

While examining the leaders who have embedded the spirit of independence in the

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research conducted especially in Africa. Omar Mukhtar and Thomas Sankara may have ideological or religious differences. Apart from these differences, the reason why they are evaluated in the same study is simply their common attitude towards independence. This attitude is the movement to oppose the great powers of the period and the imperialist mentality that wants to swallow Africa in one fell swoop. Nkrumah or Lumumba should be seen as leaders whose names and nationalities are different but who carry the torch of freedom with the same enthusiasm.

It is not possible to say that today's representatives of these names show the same reflex. This point becomes clearer when we talk to voters in many countries and see how strong this opinion is. The ostensible elections held in some countries, the leaders who won these elections with large vote rates, the bureaucrats who stayed in office for more than a quarter of a century and did not hesitate to give the resources of their country to the former colonial countries show that today's conditions have completely changed.

It is questionable how many senior executives, who have been trained by the Western system to love their country and hold very important positions in the elite group of executives formed by Westerners, are aware of the former leaders. The fact that the independence gained with great difficulty in many countries has fallen into the hands of cadres living in the style of the Western elite has a great place in the discussions on neocolonialism.

The fact that rich African resources can now flow unarmed to former colonial countries is likely to be one of the first moves the leaders in this book would oppose if they were alive today. Apart from the current situation, the thesis here is not that African countries are insular, that they relate only to each other, or that they take a completely negative line on foreign aid. On the contrary, such an organization is complicated to accommodate globally. Extreme examples such as North Korea cannot serve as an example for a continent as large as Africa. What is needed is a bilateral relationship that is equal in all respects between African countries and other countries.

The first and most important condition for the establishment of such a relationship is the coming to power of governments that have gotten rid of neocolonial moves and have adopted the principle of standing on their own feet with their resources. Of course, the rate of those who argue that similar behaviors will be exhibited no matter who comes to power within the current order and that factors such as bribery, corruption, and nepotism will turn the course of the Africa-West relationship in the current direction is not small. My personal opinion is that this point of view, rather than contributing to the solution of the problems, is the point of view spread by countries that are satisfied with the existing order. This point of view is a manifestation of the statement, which we have witnessed for years, that country X makes whomever it wants president of this country. This is what is happening in the current order. However, the racist insults suffered by the new generation in the West and the East, the fact that the old cadres

in the country's administration are far from the perception of today's youth, and the dissemination of information much more easily now may provide an opportunity to prevent this situation.

To realize this dream, I have prepared this study with the belief that it would be useful to introduce to the Turkish academia and public opinion some African leaders who have initiated or been involved in independence movements in the past, or who have had this idea somewhere in their short-term political lives. Without forgetting that the east, west, north, south, and center of Africa have different characteristics from each other, we have prepared such a study by exhibiting the ideological stances of the leaders, but without ideological bias, knowing that there are hundreds and thousands of names like these names in African independence movements. In this article, I wanted to examine the ideas of Fanon, who carried out a political and cultural struggle in the continent, apart from the intellectual struggle in the diaspora, and write what he said about Pan-Africa.

### **1. Pan Africa**

Pan-Africanism is an ideology that initially developed outside the African continent and evolved with an anti-racist discourse. Since its formation, it is seen that this ideology has been based on two pillars: political and cultural. Interpreted differently by different thinkers, Pan-Africa, in its narrowest political manifestation, envisages a united African nation in which all people in the African diaspora can live. Culturally, this perspective, which can be broadened further, suggests that people of African descent have much in common, a fact that deserves recognition and even celebration.

The main reason for the maturation of the idea outside the continent was the abolition of slavery and the rising trend of nationalism in Europe. The abolition of slavery did not resolve all issues; instead, it heightened social tensions, especially in America. This led to the need for blacks to find a safe place to live. This is the starting point of the imagination of a return to Africa. On the other hand, the nationalist wave rising after the fall of monarchies in Europe also triggered African nationalism or black nationalism. These two factors contributed to the rise and popularization of Pan-Africanism at the intellectual level.

Martin Delany, who believed that blacks could not achieve freedom within the black-white conflict, advocated the idea that African Americans should secede from the United States and form their own nation. Delany's contemporaries, Crummel and Blyden, believed that Africa was the best place for this new nation. They argued that Africans should return to their homeland to transform and civilize their inhabitants. Besides these three thinkers, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois made the most significant contribution to the maturation of the idea. Throughout his long career, Du Bois consistently advocated for the study of African history and culture. In the early 20th century, he was the foremost among the few scholars working on Africa.

His statement, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” made at the beginning of the century, was imbued with Pan-Africanist sentiments. Among the most important Pan-Africanist thinkers of the early 20th century was the Jamaican-born Black nationalist Marcus Garvey. After World War I, Garvey championed the cause of African independence, emphasizing the positive aspects of the Black collective past. His organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), had millions of members and developed plans for a ‘return to Africa’. Garvey’s Black Star Line, a shipping company founded to return Blacks to Africa and facilitate global Black trade, ultimately failed. Among the most prominent Black intellectuals advocating Pan-Africanist ideas from the 1920s to the 1940s were C.L.R. James and George Padmore, both from Trinidad. Padmore was one of the leading theorists of Pan-Africanist ideas from the 1930s until he died in 1959. Senghor was another who contributed his ideas. These two names, Senghor and Padmore, will also appear later in the book as thinkers who influenced the intellectual world of political Pan-Africanists. Figures such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are also considered among those who contributed to the development of Pan-Africanism from a broader perspective within the struggle for rights.

## **2. Fanon as a Man of Struggle**

Fanon is a man of struggle who bravely voiced the silent cries of the suffering endured by Africa during the colonial period. His criticisms, which he began by expressing the sufferings of Algeria under French colonial rule, expanded into a broader framework with a structural critique of colonialism. He offered more comprehensive inferences on culture, ethnicity, and socio-economic structures with a holistic approach rather than just focusing solely on anti-colonialism. In my view, it would be useful to read Fanon first in all studies on Africa in general. This is because Fanon does not only make inferences about the problems of his time. His writings not only reflect the state of the continent during the colonial period. But also capture the realities of the neocolonial point of view. He successfully articulated the situations faced today by those who conduct field research on the continent rather than relying on desk-bound analyses, using the conditions of his day.

He also contributed to Pan-African thought by blending them with the historical background of his predecessors. His frequent references to the concept of elite, national culture, and national consciousness have inspired many writers. Limiting his struggle to the implications of the decolonization process would undermine Fanon’s idea of comprehensive African integration. In this context, it would be a mistake to see Fanon’s statements as having implications only for a particular region of Africa.

Born in Fort-de-France, the capital of the French colony of Martinique, Frantz was the youngest of three sons of a customs officer and a shopkeeper. He grew up as a member of the middle class. Aime Césaire was one of the names that profoundly influenced him. This influence is closely related to the Négritude expressed by Césaire. Frantz

Fanon embraced African cultural values wholeheartedly. At the end of the Second World War, he returned to Martinique, completed his undergraduate studies, and won a scholarship to study in France. Before leaving for Europe, he campaigned for Césaire, who was running for election to the National Assembly in Paris. Initially settling in Paris, Fanon moved to Lyon in 1948 to study medicine and then psychiatry. In 1952 he married Josie Dublé, who supported him in producing his literary works. His research on the living conditions of North African immigrants in Lyon was published as an article in *Espirit* in 1952. In the same year, his first book, *Black Skins White Masks*, was published.

The book was his doctoral thesis, which he submitted to the medical school in Lyon under the title *Essay on the Disalienation of the Black*. It was rejected by the medical school authorities in Lyon, but Fanon persisted and sought to get it published. In the meantime, he demonstrated his intellectual prowess by submitting a different thesis for his medical degree. A left-wing philosopher named Francis Jeanson, who was a leader of a pro-Algerian independence network in France, and also a senior editor at *Éditions du Seuil*, a major Paris publishing house, decided to talk to Fanon about his book. When Fanon first presented the work, Jeanson invited him to his office to discuss the matter. Both men later recalled that it did not go well; Jeanson saw the young Fanon as 'nervous and hypersensitive'. He began to praise Fanon's work, but Fanon rudely interrupted him by saying, 'Not bad for a Negro, is it?' Although their first meeting was marked by poor communication, the two men eventually formed an intense bond. He served in the French army during the Second World War. He explained his voluntary enlistment by saying that he was interested in any situation where human freedom and dignity were at stake, and that he took a stand against all oppression regardless of race (Boumama, 2016: 142). When he went to Algeria briefly for a few weeks to continue his military mission, he began to focus on the concept of race-based colonization with a heightened sense of intellectual awareness. He was deeply disturbed by the soldiers throwing pieces of bread at little Algerian children. However, he had the opportunity to explore the psychology of the colonized people rather than harboring anger towards the colonizer. In his view, colonial rule was based on white supremacy and the existence of a 'civilizing' mission. This situation brought about a desire to be white in some parts of the colony (Fanon, 1952). In his book *Black Skin White Masks*, one of his works in which he expresses the inference that a black person is created who is ashamed of his black identity, he asserts that for the black person to truly escape alienation, he must become acutely aware of economic and social reality. The fact that racism was the most important force of the colonial apparatus should have prevented consciousness from producing reverse racism. According to Fanon, racism was rooted in a giant economic and biological enslavement effort (Boumama, 2016: 147).

In 1953, he was appointed by the French colonial government to head the psychiatry department at the hospital in Blida-Joinville, Algeria. His new assignment was an

opportunity to delve deeper into the African independence struggles. Algeria had been a French colony since 1830; a million French had settled there and had completely subjugated the Algerians. Extrapolating from the situation in Algeria, Fanon makes the following observation about the way colonial society is perceived by the coloniser:

“Colonial society is not only defined as a society devoid of values. The coloniser is not content to say that these values are absent or even non-existent in the colonial world. The native is declared to be insensitive to morality, not only worthless but also in denial of values. Let’s face it: the native is the enemy of values. In other words, he is absolute evil. It is a corrosive element that destroys everything that comes near it, a destructive element that disfigures everything aesthetic or moral, an instrument of sinister forces, an unconscious and helpless instrument of blind forces” (Fanon, 2007: 48).

When sporadic clashes against colonial rule escalated into a full-scale war of independence in 1954, it became clear that the conflict would be a long and bloody struggle. Unable to envisage defeat at the hands of the ‘natives’, France resorted to mass bombings and machine-gunning; nearly one million Algerians were killed in the struggle. Many were tortured, supposedly to extract information. Fanon believed it was an act of sadistic, racist rage. During the day, he worked with those formally admitted to the hospital and after hours, he assisted independence fighters. He trained hospital nurses and independence fighters on how to control their fears and reactions and provided medical treatment. In addition, he sheltered wounded members of the National Liberation Front-FLN in her home. While trying to establish a close link between psychotherapy and political education, he recognized the importance of culture in the effectiveness of therapy (Adi & Sherwood, 2003: 65).

Fanon’s culture-oriented views are widely expressed in his book *The Damned of the Earth*. The process that begins with the colonizer indoctrinating the natives with a sense of underdevelopment and cultural inferiority can be countered by the efforts of the native intellectuals who engaged in cultural enlightenment. Accordingly, in the first stage, the nation undergoes cultural alienation. According to the argument deliberately put forward by colonialism, it is imprinted in the minds of the indigenous people that if the colonial settlers leave, they will return to a degrading life of barbarism, vulgarisation, and animalism. In this scenario, the colonizer subconsciously wants to be perceived not as a loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who protects her perverted child from committing suicide. The colonial mother protects her child from herself, her physiology, her biology and her ontological misfortune (Fanon, 2007: 206). At this point, Fanon presents a three-stage process of the awakening of the native intellectual from this impositio. In his books, the intellectual first feels compelled to prove that the European has assimilated his culture. In the second stage, the intellectual’s beliefs are shaken and they begin to make a mental journey backwards. However, since he cannot integrate with his people

and remain an outsider, he is content with remembering. Childhood memories are deeply extracted and reinterpreted in the light of the concept of a world discovered under a different sky. This internal confusion reveals different emotions together. In the final stage, the intellectual moves into the stage of war, where he seeks to awaken his people alongside him. Instead of allowing the people's lethargy to prevail, the intellectual becomes the catalyst for their awakening. It is in such a transformation that national literature emerges. After this stage, the intellectual may find himself in prison, resistance or on death row, but he has become the mouthpiece of reality (Ibid., 216). This is how Fanon describes the transformation of culture.

What he saw during his work in the hospital and the situation in Algeria, in general, led Fanon to develop a theory of the struggle for all colonized territories in a broader perspective, and violence became one of the leading instruments of this struggle. In 1960, he delivered a speech systematizing the issue of violence at the Peace and Security Conference held in Accra, the capital of Ghana. In this speech, Fanon addressed the audience as follows:

“The colonial regime is a regime built by violence. The colonial regime has always been established by force. The will of the people has always been imposed against the will of other people who are more advanced in destructive techniques or more numerous. I am saying that such a system, established by violence, will logically be loyal only to itself and that the duration of its existence in time is a function of its perpetuation of violence... Violence in everyday behavior, violence against the past emptied of its essence, violence against the future, because the colonial regime sees itself as existing forever” (Boumama, 2016: 150).

The essence of this speech suggests as that colonialism only understands the relationship of forces and that violence should be a natural part of the struggle against exploitation. Indeed, in some of the independence processes of African nations, violence became a liberating factor. Violence served as a means to release the colonizer from a sense of inferiority and self-destructive violence against both himself and those with him. Violence acted as an antidote and rescued the coloniser from a closed and hopeless situation (Fanon, 2007).

Two important factors in the oppression of the people under the colonial mentality and in the new post-independence period are the economy and culture. The economic problem is one of the main culprits because all financial circuits during the colonial period were directed towards resources that served to enrich the metropolises, new nation had to continue transferring its goods to the metropolises on which it was dependent. Thrown into a competitive system by the settlers, the nation continued the exploitation of its workers and peasants while exploiting its land to survive within the global economic system. The ruling caste revives the game of colonization at the expense of the laboring classes. Lands that were previously useless in colonial times are abandoned, while the rest are strangled by the economic machine. The nation

becomes controlled by the formerly colonized elites, who now suppress all political opposition. It is not possible to build a bourgeois society in due time, both because it would take time and because it would lag behind the capitalist giants. The minority in power inherits the entire legacy of the past economy and enriches itself through corruption. The illusion of its economic splendor is manifested in the grandiosity of the buildings, stadiums, and luxury within its capital, and the mirage of its political character in the spectacle of its grand meetings. The trajectory Fanon describes is inexorable: ‘The postcolonial nation rapidly transforms into a dictatorial system that must represent itself through a ‘leader’ to ensure its sovereignty. Politics collapses into a vacuum and threatens a country, their culture and their lives’ (Watelet, 2023). Fanon, who conveyed the concepts of the colonial period, the independence process, and neo-colonialism based on their relations with each other, likewise expressed his Pan-African view on a historical plane. According to him, a cultural Pan-African discourse was a great form of resistance in the struggle against colonialism. The people found their resistance in a reunion with their past. However, this phenomenon cannot be expressed only in a cultural struggle. Pan-Africanism had to leave the purely cultural sphere to gradually transform into an economic, military, and political Pan-Africanism (Boumama, 2016: 157). Accordingly, it would not be possible to lay the foundation for Pan-African thought without national independence and an independent state. For this reason, cultural emancipation was also dependent on state and independence in his mind. He believed that this independence would come with a common resistance (Daban, 2023: 32-36). He spoke of supporting the peoples of the Sahara and bringing Africa together; let Malians, Senegalese, Guineans, and Ghanaians fill our lands; let us make it meaningless and impossible to go back. Let us create a continent against the last attacks of the colonial fortress (Fanon, 2006: 862).

The meeting in Accra had fuelled his hopes for a united Africa. In his opening speech, Nkrumah said, ‘Africa must be free. We have nothing to lose but our chains, but we have an enormous continent to conquer.’ He used this sentence in his writings. One of the important points about the meeting is Fanon’s statement that ‘Africans pledged allegiance and solidarity in Accra. No alliance will be rejected and colonialism will have a darker future than ever after the Conference’ (Fanon, 2016: 154).

In 1961 he identified Africa’s enemies not as colonialism and its remnants, but as the lack of ideology. His firm conviction that the continent would be liberated led him to worry about a bigger problem: What would be the direction of the continent after liberation? Pan-African ideology could be a model of unity against neocolonial discourses, just as it had united African peoples during their struggle for independence. Fanon’s most important contribution to this ideology was to propose an integrated solution. To do this, he perhaps framed the problem more broadly than those who advocate the same thing. The influence of his profession might also be mentioned as a factor in expanding the dimensions of the problem. Regardless of the reason, Fanon moved the issue out of the independence of African nations and integrated it with the

post-independence concerns. He connected true independence to integrating African nations with their culture, eliminating politicians who would serve neocolonial moves, and the coming together of nations united by these characteristics.

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