



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Psycho-Existential Displacement in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: A Fanonian Study**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> July 07, 2021 <b>Accepted:</b> October 17, 2021 <b>Online:</b> October 20, 2021	This research presents a critique on William Shakespeare's <i>The Tempest</i> (1623) by using Fanon's idea of 'Psycho-Existential Crisis'. Unlike the traditional western criticism that enshrines Shakespeare as the champion of human values and universality, Postcolonial Criticism dethrones and subjects him to Critical Race Theory, Feminist and New Historicist Analogies. Fanon's <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> (1967) and <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (2004) have been used as primary texts with the particular focus on 'Psycho-Existential Crisis' that permeates the ideology where whiteness is associated with humanity and one is also required to meet white standards if one wants to be a human. Caliban and many other characters in <i>The Tempest</i> have been depicted with this racist mentality. This research, therefore, puts a lens at the power relationships tracing out the torturing effects of this racist tendency upon the mental and physical health of the people of colour. It challenges Shakespeare's representation by arguing that Shakespeare was complicit in racial politics.
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**Introduction**

"Postcolonialism makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature what we are made to take for granted" (McLeod, 2000, p.142)

This research paper tends to see William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623) in contrast to the traditional Western criticism. Under Fanon's theoretical notion of Psycho-Existential crisis, it examines issues of psychological and physical displacement and challenges Shakespeare's position as an unbiased writer. Shakespeare's writings have continued to assert a tremendous influence upon the world of readers and it is very obvious that the people, who go through these books, take the described information or concepts as truth mostly because they rarely and

sometimes never get a chance to visit those places in person. Resultantly, they get an impression that the blacks are really the savages and they are totally devoid of any sense, ethics and culture. That is why, it is very necessary to challenge the literary works which represent any culture falsely so that they world may get to know the real version of the story and these stereotypes may be dismantled.

A frequently aroused question is that why do not we stop discussing the colonial prejudices and move further because colonialism is a thing of past and the world has changed to a greater extent now. But the fact is that the colonial factor is still involved in our academies. We still continue teaching colonial literature with the same lenses. There is a crucial need to apply the different methodologies in order to examine it in the true sense. As Shakespeare's works are being taught in our academia, there is a dire need of postcolonial reading of his works. Ruchika Jain (2015) explains these concerns and throws light on the importance of negotiating the identities by arguing that even today the foreign factors influence us to a larger extent and continue to interfere in our socio-economic system, hence Colonialism still affects us (45). The only difference is that it is now functioning in "changed apparel" in the guise of globalization (p.45).

In this way, this study is using the postcolonial theory to deconstruct *The Tempest* as a romance or tale of a duke who is betrayed by his own brother and then banished from his own land. But the possession of the island and the treatment of the natives of island are such questions that cannot be taken for granted. On the basis of appearance, none should judge and dehumanize others. But, throughout the course of the play, we see that Shakespeare has shown the character Caliban in a disgusting way just to prove that *blacks* are not capable of any good. Another question is that who on earth gave Shakespeare the right to use the animal vocabulary for any creature that is human. These are critical assertions that challenge Shakespeare's position and the world is no more ready to enshrine him as the champion of human values.

Shakespeare's era in history was a time when colonial enterprise started to germinate. It was British Colonialism's infancy stage but even then was threatening and its imprints can be seen on culture and literature. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (1998) in their book *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, exposing the things in real form, have drawn our attention towards the influence of the age on Shakespeare. It is obvious that the literature of any part of the world is influenced by its age. It is said that the writer is the product of the age. It is not possible for a writer to stay indifferent over what is happening around him. Loomba and Martin Orkin write: "Literary Scholarship offered a Shakespeare who celebrated the superiority of 'civilized races' " (p.10). Moreover, in the age of Shakespeare, theatre was one of the major mediums to convey something to the masses and there was a trend of supporting the writers by the court so that they might use them according to their needs and situations to form a public opinion. So, critics assert that Shakespeare's plays were used by the authorities of the time as a means to establish their colonial authority as Loomba and

Orkin (1998) delineate: "Colonial masters imposed their value system through Shakespeare" (p.7).

### **Literature Review**

Postcolonial reading of Shakespeare's works is not particularly an altogether new field. There have been many critical assumptions and assertions which highlight the hidden factors. In the light of formerly existing critical notions and researches, this study asserts that *The Tempest* is burdened with the imperialist ideology.

Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (1998) claim that Shakespeare's plays share postcolonial concerns because they provide a certain kind of vocabulary with which to implement the imperialist ideological framework. Character of Caliban is the best example of it. Prospero's way of treating Caliban is a solid proof to enlist this play as a work of colonial play because all the colonial traits can be seen at work. Ashis Nandy has defined the colonial tendency in her book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), by saying that "colonialism colonizes minds in addition to the bodies and it releases the forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural preferences once for all" (p.11).

Colonization of mind and the alteration of culture are very much visible in *The Tempest* as there is an obvious colonial intention in the play where the characters' native culture is seen as disgusting and their language as obnoxious talk. They are made slaves, not only at physical but mentally level too. After capturing the physical resources and getting hold of everything, mindsets and cultures are forcefully changed.

Jane Hiddleston, in *Understanding Post-Colonialism*, has defined the term in its true form by saying that "colonialism should be conceived as the conquest and subsequent control of another country, and involves both the subjugation of that country's native peoples and the administration of its government, economy and produce" (2009, p.2). This definition offers an insight to understand which colonialism has actually to do with the natives and what it takes as its subject matter. The west uses the term white men's burden in order to hide their lust for material gains and to keep this process of exploitation confidential as he says that "the act of colonization is a concrete process of invasion and a practical seizing of control" (p.2).

Leila Gandhi elaborates colonial agenda by arguing that in the process of representation of people as savages "The West systematically attempts to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the non-West" (1998, p.16). Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin also highlight that all the bad and negative connotations like "laziness, aggression, violence, greed, primitiveness, and irrationality" are associated with "Africans, Native Americans, Jews, Indians, the Irish and others" (1998, p.107). Edward Said holds the view that the "European culture gained the strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient" (1978, p.3). So, this process of *othering* is actually working with the intention of using the black or colored skin people as a background in order to make their *whiteness* prominent.

Gayatri Spivak, a highly ranked critic in the postcolonial field of studies, narrates that knowledge is produced and it can never exist without involving producers' personal interests. Her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" is the true expression to these ideas which records that literature of the colonial masters is not free from their personal interests because they use literature to exert their supremacy over other cultures and nations.

Homi K Bhabha is an influential theorist in the discipline of postcolonial studies because his voice is considered profoundly original in the discipline of colonial and postcolonial academia. The terms explored by Bhabha has become formative. Bhabha holds the view that colonial discourse is constructed to create racial types and presents the colonized or native as anything with fixed reality as other.

Fanon is one of the notable theoreticians of this theory. His works hold a vital significance in this field of study. His *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004) are prominent works to influence this theory to a great extent. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon presents a picture of violence upon non-Wests. He holds that the colonial rule is maintained through violence which leads to the physical and mental displacement of the native. His status is reduced to a mere animal. Fanon strongly emphasizes that this colonial authoritative rule is "the bringer of violence" (Fanon, p.38). He believes that the colonized subject is inscribed by the colonizer with a lack of sense, empathy and ideas of backwardness are associated with them.

In the introduction of *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. (2012) talk about the place and displacement that is dealt as psycho-existential displacement in case of colonized subject. He believes that one of the major concerns of postcolonial literatures is place and the issue of displacement. Identity crisis with postcolonial respects begins here with place and displacement. Oppression, either it is conscious or unconscious by a model which tries to maintain itself as racially and culturally superior, leads to this traumatic condition which is termed as psycho-existential displacement in general sense. This displacement, believes Ashcroft, produces many negative and damaging effects as the vision alienates and the native goes through a crisis in his image of the self. Enslavement is one of the major reasons in this regard which leads to this displacement or depersonalization. He states that "a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement..." (p. 9).

John McLeod is also one of the significant postcolonial critics who in his book *Beginning Post-colonialism* (2000) throws light on these colonial tendencies. He believes that any literary work can be challenged and disagreed. McLeod believes that colonizers teach their literature in order to establish their superiority in cultural as well as moral ways and aim at devaluing the native culture and its values hence "Post-Colonialism makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted" (p.142). He is of the view that any piece of literature that was written during the time of germination of colonialism can be variously interpreted by postcolonial critics for the exploration of colonial issues and discourses in it.

Meredith Anne Skura (1989), in her essay "The Case of Colonialism in the *Tempest*" adds to the debate of tracing colonial issues in this play. She adds that the play "has its origin and effect on a historical event, specifically English Colonialism" (p.43). She throws light on the issues in the realistic manner by saying that "Europeans were at that time exploiting the real Calibans and *The Tempest* was part of the process" (p.45).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to critically evaluate *The Tempest* with the postcolonial lens, Frantz Fanon's notion of Psycho-Existential Crisis is of prime importance. Focusing on Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), we call into question the racist epistemologies which are the reason for the creation of those factors that result in perpetual colonization. Fanon's ideas have been used as close analysis to reveal how this racial confrontation subjugates the people of colour in terms of difference and otherness.

The dilemma of being totally ignored and unrecognized is explored by Fanon. He portrays the traumatic scene where the black person is turned into an object and also suffers from psycho-existential crisis. Caliban's character is the biggest example of this trauma. This inferiority complex is the product of psychic structures which are designed and implemented by the dominant authorities. The division that specifies the people and puts them into different man-made categorizations works fundamentally on the grass root level of racial prejudices. The colonized, in a racially prejudiced society, is perceived as an infection or a threat to the society and here black man's confidence shakes consequently which throws him in an inferiority complex. Fanon argues that "A normal negro child will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (1967, p.143).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses this crisis at length and throws light on this displacement that occurs at both psychological and physical levels. He says that "the native is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values" (2004, p.6). Fanon seems embracing psychoanalytic theory in Freudian fashion but with some discrepancies with the later. A clear difference which cannot be ignored is that Freud and Fanon came out of two different contexts, the former belonging to the bourgeois class and the latter emerged out of a colonized context. As Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, (1985) in his book *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* states that "he had a firsthand knowledge of what it meant to be black and downtrodden" (p.71). Fanon's psychoanalytic critique turned different when he emphasized that "It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (p. 72). There is also a misconception that Fanon used Jung's notion but to consider it complete adaptation would be misleading. There are, like Freud, many limitations. Bulhan's statement is useful in this regard as he says that "Fanon turned to Jung in order to explain the unconscious processes by which blackness is associated with migrating and sado-masochistic symbolism" (p.75).

Fanon was also truly influenced by Marx and his theory of alienation was used by him in the description of psycho-existential crisis. One thing to be kept in consideration is that he did not follow Marx in the same way but rather appropriated his ideas at some points. Dennis Forsythe (1973) in his article 'Frantz Fanon--- the Marx of the Third World' states that "When taken as a whole, in the context of colonial societies, Fanon is a "Marxist" but a different kind of "Marxist"(p.160).

Fanon puts it in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied against the same object man" (1967, p.88). So, Fanon's concept of alienation had an influence of Marx but he emphasized psychological as well cultural aspects more than the other ones like class and economy. Eurocentric psychology is also elaborated in Fanon's work as he tends to show how the colonizers produce and modify theories according to their own interests. Fanon says that "The colonial world is a Manichean world" (p.6).

A psychological approach towards the difficulties faced by the oppressed is what Fanon thought was necessary. The factors involving the oppression of these people of color attacked their psyches and to get rid of this inferiority complex, a psychological investigation and remedy of the problem is direly needed. As he elaborates that "Indeed, I believe that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of effect that are responsible for the structure of the complex" (1967, p.12).

Fanon's theory of displacement challenges that no one upon the planet could be made inferior on the basis of their bodily scheme, their intellect or their race. The mistreatment in the name of civilization leaves the colonized in pain, as the narrator in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* says "I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, my ancestors and I subjected myself to an objective examination" (p.112).

### **Analysis**

Fanon's ideas of psycho-existential displacement, depersonalization and dehumanization of natives are major notions to be applied in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Fanon (1967) discusses that the black person is considered an instrument and he is not at liberty to do anything with his own choice. Similarly, in *The Tempest*, from the very beginning of the play, Ariel is seen in a forced servitude and helpless creature in front of his master Prospero who forces him to obey all his orders. Any refusal to this may result in severe punishment. The way Ariel is treated is very much astonishing because the words like *servant* are used for him frankly. This epistemological violence results in depersonalization of natives and they feel isolated.

In the task of raising storm in the sea, Ariel does all what Prospero says and at the end he is bound to tell each and every bit of the details. This is because he is so scared of Prospero and his magical violence which could harm him too much. Fanon (1967) says that the black is not recognized at all. Difference in opinion is used as a

justification for this physical and psychological violence. Fanon says that "Black person does not possess any destiny other than 'White' " (p.12). Similarly, Ariel is constantly suffering from this forced servitude and he is promised again and again that he would be free from this imprisonment. He is in much pain and cannot serve the power-drunken master anymore but he is unable to free himself because he is helpless in front of Prospero. Ariel's own remarks serve as a proof to show how he actually feels:

"Ariel: Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,

Let me remember thee what thou hast promis' d...." (I, ii, 240-43: p.12)

It shows that Ariel is constantly in trouble and wants to get rid of master's violence as early as possible. The colonialist is concerned only with establishment of his domination and subjugation of people of colour to a level that they are no more human beings. Consequently, this leads to depersonalization because the imposed restrictions and constant threats are such violent acts that leave the oppressed slave frightened and dislocated. As Prospero threatens him in Act I that if Ariel complains about anything, he would be imprisoned in an open oak tree and as Prospero warns him:

"Peg thee in his knotty entrails...." (I, ii, 295: p.14)

Then it comes to Caliban's psycho-existential displacement which is actually about the colonizer's journey that begins with the colonization of land and ends at the mental enslavement of inhabitants of that land. This mental colonization becomes a basic hurdle in the advancement and progress of colonized subjects. The colonial system is established by the colonizers in a way that all negativity is associated with black people. In addition, inferiority complex, rejection and alienation become the fate of colonized people.

Before even Caliban's first appearance in the play, Prospero's hatred for him becomes obvious from his words. He talks of him so scornfully as if he is not a human being but an animal or an object without any kind of feelings. Animal vocabulary, used for addressing Caliban, serves as evidence in this case. The colonizer does not care about its effects on the psyche of Caliban. He is only interested in exercising his own superiority and power. But, meanwhile, Caliban's status is reduced to animal level. As the reader finds that Prospero calls him so scornfully as:

"Prospero. Come forth.....

Come, thou tortoise!" (I, ii, 315-16: p.14)

This use of language to torture the oppressed is Fanon's concerns as he says that "when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms" (2004, p.7). Fanon further tells that colonizer does not feel satisfied by physically having a control over the land and people. Using the natives for his benefits does not make him fully

happy. His actual target is to hit the colonized mentally. For this purpose, he first controls law and order agencies and limits the space for the native people. After being successful in this, he further aims at presenting the colonized as capable of all evil and negativity. They are shown as they do not possess even a little sensibility.

Fanon (2004) says that native is considered “a kind of quintessence of evil” (p.6). In this situation, according to Fanon, the world becomes Manichaeic for the indigenous and they lose their self-confidence. They start looking down upon themselves and it deconstructs their indigenous social system on the whole. Act I provides plenty of evidences where power drunken settler is doing all that Fanon says the colonizer does. When Caliban refuses to accept his orders, Prospero expresses his resentment for him and warns him of the punishment to be inflicted upon him if he does not obey him. Prospero’s says:

“Thou shalt be pinch’d

As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging...” (I, ii, 328-29: p.15)

As a result, the victim feels so scared that he cannot revolt and all his ideas of advancement and progress die deep somewhere. There is another reality to be exposed. At one hand, the colonizer associates all the negative capabilities with him and considers him an embodiment of evil. He is addressed scornfully and tortured mentally. He is constantly threatened of more torture and reminded that he is of no use to anyone. But, on the contrary, the reality is that the colonizer is unable to manage his living himself. He needs the support and help of indigenous people to manage his living. After saying that Caliban is ugly and ‘animal’, Prospero himself confesses in front of his daughter that he cannot manage without Caliban. He says:

“We cannot miss him.....

That profit us” (I, ii, 311,13: p.14)

Fanon (1967) discusses the effects of coming into contact with colonizers. He tells that the colonizer’s gaze makes them feel no more a human being. Fanon stresses that even a Negro child who is brought up by his family, will not remain normal after coming in contact with colonizers or white world (p.143). Thus one can easily understand that if a slightest contact with settlers can damage a child’s psyche so much then how Caliban could remain normal when he is in service of the colonizer and gets tortured both physically and psychologically.

Similarly, in Act I, Prospero commands Caliban to do household tasks like gathering and bringing firewood and at the same time threatens that in case of any disobedience, Caliban would meet a tragic and tormenting punishment. And what does it actually results in is the stage which Fanon discusses as *psycho-existential crisis*. Caliban’s reply to Prospero’s threat is evidence which shows how he starts feeling scared and inferior due to the colonizer’s mistreatment and hatred. Caliban here



expresses his fear and requests Prospero not to punish him because he knows that Prospero's magical violence would trouble him most severely. He explains:

"I must obey. His art is of such pow'r" (I, ii, 372: p. 16)

In the same way, Caliban has been put in a colonial web where Prospero can treat him whatever way he wants. In case of rebellion, there are power threats which make the victim feel more insecure. In Act II, Caliban's psychological condition is more visible when he is getting firewood and thinking constantly of the violence that Prospero inflicts or will inflict on him in future. This torture damages his psyche along with physical tormenting effects. He is so displaced due to this torture that everything makes him feel frightened. Seeing Trinculo and Stephano, he thinks that it is again a spirit which has appeared to harm him on Prospero's command. His mental condition is so obvious that he wants to lie down there so that he may not be seen. He expresses his fear as:

"Here comes a spirit of his, and to torment me..." (II, ii, 15: p.35).

Caliban's unmerciful imprisonment also plays the same role in his psycho-existential crisis. He is completely dislocated and wants any shelter. After seeing Trinculo and Stephano, he thinks that they might be his saviors and he may get rid of Prospero if he kneels to them. This is because he has no alternative option to choose as Fanon (1967) believes that the black man does not have any destiny other than white. He has to confront white eyes ultimately. Caliban is ready to serve anyone to get rid of Prospero and painful servitude. This shows that Prospero's magical violence has made him suffer psychologically along with physical torture. His words are a true expression of it. As he says:

"Caliban. I'll kiss thy foot: I'll swear myself thy subject" (II, ii, 153: p.39).

Now, when a subject is considered totally evil and he is said to be fully devoid of human qualities, his all values are rejected. To impose colonizer's language is one of the major steps in this regard. This totally snatches the individual way of perceiving things. When one cannot use his own language and practice his indigenous customs, the world does not remain a comfort zone for him. On the contrary, this becomes a stage where one feels himself out of place. This change of horizon in Caliban's case creates a situation which leaves him alienated.

## **Conclusion**

This research has analyzed Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which was published around 1611 and acquired a seminal importance in literary circles. But, keeping aside all European views and claims of universality, this study has explored that Shakespeare has presented people of colour as inferior beings and white as educated and civilized people. It has focused on how this work of Shakespeare has contributed in the European racist and binary construction. In addition, it has revealed how the colonial period proved to be the worst for people of color who were caught up in

colonial web and forcibly put to enslavement. This study has exposed how colonialist's actions torture the natives mentally and they feel displaced.

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