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**Prophetic Religion, Violence, and Black Freedom:  
Reading Makandal's Project of Black Liberation through  
a Fanonian Postcolonial Lens of Decolonization  
and Theory of Revolutionary Humanism**

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This essay analyses prophetic religious discourses of the famous maroon leader and black prophet-messiah François Makandal of Saint-Domingue-Haiti who led a devastating slave revolt in 1757 in the so-called prerevolutionary period resulting in 6,000 deaths. We shall attempt to reread imaginatively and creatively François Makandal's program of systematic violence against white oppressors in the French colony of Saint-Domingue through Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory of decolonization and revolutionary humanism. The goal here is to underscore simultaneously the pivotal role of prophetic religion and the radical theory of "cathartic" violence in the cause of black freedom and independence from the colonial system.

The essay is divided in three equal parts. First, we shall establish and briefly comment on the relationship between slavery and freedom in hope that would help us understand historically Makandal's desired goal of black freedom as well as develop an understanding of his decisive determination to put an end to black slavery in Saint-Domingue. The second part engages the Makandalian rhetorical strategies and program of decolonization and black independence through the rhetoric of violence. We shall conclude the essay with a creative reading of Makandal's project of black liberation through the Fanonian logic of human freedom through decolonization as violence. I argue that Makandal envisioned imaginatively a radical project of decolonization and pursued black liberation through the means of therapeutic violence.

Understanding their ideas in our postcolonial moment, we might infer that both Makandal and Fanon worked from what we might term today a "Black Radical Tradition of Human Freedom and Human Justice," having been critical observers of the oppressive systematic structures of the institution of slavery, the colonial order, white oppression, white supremacy, racism, and the capitalist exploitation of black labor in the making of the modern world. Yet, Makandal began the journey—or paved the way for Fanon's discourse—of freedom (or worked toward it as the ultimate goal) some two hundred years before Frantz Fanon. Makandal articulated a politics of postcolonial-decolonial imagination prior to Fanon. While both men are separated both by the historical past and large historical gaps, they understood that human oppression in various forms or manifestations were unacceptable to human dignity, threatened the very existence of the individual person and the collective ethnic group or race, and dehumanized the human condition in the modern world. They fought to foster and achieve a better and more human world, and it is from this point of view, we can perceive Makandal and Fanon as "Prophets of Freedom." Toward this goal, let us now explore the first part of the essay.

## The Crisis of Modernity: Slavery and Freedom

Some historians of slavery and theorists of the theory of freedom have perceived slavery and freedom as two forces in conflict revealing the condition of modernity—the socio-economic and cultural development, and the political crisis—and characterize the age of democratic revolution. Certain philosophers and political scientists such as Georg Hegel in the high period of European Enlightenment had argued that slavery was the antithesis of freedom, the supreme pathology of the age of reason and revolutionary progress. Whereas, democratic freedom had been articulated as the guiding principle of Western societies as observed in the works of Diderot, Montesquieu, John Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, etc. Other individuals such as slave abolitionists had contended that the institution of slavery contaminated the collective consciousness of its supporters, shaped the social fabrics of Western civilization, and ultimately revealed the dark side of modernity and the bad conscience of colonial Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup>

According to historian Robin Blackburn, the invention of black slavery in the New World in particular was an “unthinking decision.”<sup>2</sup> The enslaved lived permanently in what philosopher and anticolonial theorist Frantz Fanon theorizes as the “zone of nonbeing,” an insidious concept of colonial barbarism and the recurrent exercise of incredible violence and ruinous subjugation upon the unfree. The moral choice of enslaving indiscriminately a distinctive group of the human race and the ethical judgment of practicing racial slavery were eternally wrong. This basic

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morals: Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “the bad conscience is an illness; there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness,” Walter Kaufman (ed), *On The Genealogy of Morals: Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 11. Hence, I use “conscience” here in the Nietzschean sense.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1996), 230.

premise, although historically justified both by moralists and enlightened men, robbed the enslaved of his dignity, and ultimately of human life of humanity. The greatest challenge for the enslaved was not slavery itself but to remain human in an inhuman condition. As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has observed, this man-made inferno dehumanizes its victims before it annihilates them.<sup>3</sup> Substantially, David Davis articulates that chattel slavery socially degraded man in various forms of servitude.<sup>4</sup> Observably, slavery was a terrifying thing that was made normal, which disappointingly was sanctioned by the legal codes of colonial societies, such as the famous 1685 Code Noir (Black Code). The peculiar institution was the chief enemy of the principles of justice, freedom, and the welfare of man. Ultimately, slavery repressed the possibility of articulating alternative visions of freedom and emancipation, and deferred the dream of becoming holistically human. Yet the Haitian Revolution had shaped our understanding about freedom and human rights from the perspective of the oppressed slaves, and those dwelling in the margins of modernity. The African slaves were among the real actors and champions of universal emancipation and the basic rights of man.

Haitian historian Michel Trouillot advances the idea that the Haitian revolution<sup>5</sup> interrupted the institution of slavery in the most “unthinkable” way and challenged its very

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<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 209.

<sup>4</sup> David Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40.

<sup>5</sup> The most important and recent studies on the Haitian Revolution in the English language include the following: Thomas Ott (*The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804*. Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1973); David Geggus (*Haitian Revolutionary Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), and his edited volume (*The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Bloomington: Indiana Press, 2001); Carolyn Fick (*The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution From Below*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990); David Gegus, Patrick David (eds) (*The World of the Haitian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Laurent Dubois (*Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2005); Michel Trouillot (*Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

logic.<sup>6</sup> The events leading to the Haitian revolution were the most transformative events in the history of slavery and democracy that turned a slave colony into a free republic, unfree men into free men, and slaves into citizens. “These events represented the most radical political transformation of the “Age of Revolution” that stretched from the 1770s to the 1830s. They were also the most concrete expression of the idea that the rights proclaimed in France's 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen were indeed universal.”<sup>7</sup>

The Haitian Revolution was one of the few successful achievements in the human struggle toward freedom—the right to life and to live—which in its own unique way contributed potentially to the forward flow of human emancipation and a better world, especially the affirmation of the basic rights of dignity, respect, and equality for all men and women and its impact in eradicating slavery both in North America and Latin America. Makandal was one of the earliest architects of human justice, black freedom, and a proponent of black dignity in his various efforts to eradicate slavery and put an end of black suffering at Saint-Domingue.

For the African enslaved in Saint-Domingue, freedom as a value was never a hopeless enterprise. In 1757, in pre-revolutionary Haiti, maroon leader Francois Makandal prophetically

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(Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Jeremy Popkin (*Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Popkin's groundbreaking new study on the Haitian experience is worth mentioning here (*You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); C. L. R. James's 1936 *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) is the classic work on the Haitian Revolution. James advances a compelling argument that the Haitian Revolution stands on its own right. He contends that the system of slavery as the exploitation of black labor in the island of Saint-Domingue and equally the French Revolution created both the climax and context for the unfolding and evolutionary events leading to the Haitian Revolution. Yet James is careful to articulate that the Haitian Revolution is not an appendix to the French Revolution, as eighteenth- and early nineteenth- centuries scholarship maintained.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 3.

forecast that the new masters of the island would be the blacks.<sup>8</sup> Freedom from the perspective of former slaves and ex-slaves at Saint-Domingue was both an imagining process and a reality. The kind of freedom they envisioned which led successfully to general emancipation out of slavery was ideologically constructed and culturally nurtured. This way of thinking of human moral capability and autonomy exercised through collective self-expression was first imagined through language or performative utterances. As will be observed in subsequent paragraphs, Makandal as a religious leader-prophet employed prophetic utterances and magic coupled with physical force to achieve black freedom.

In her insightful reading of Georg Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Buck-Morss observes that Hegel believes that freedom "cannot be granted to slaves from above. The self-liberation of the slave is required through a 'trial by death.'"<sup>9</sup> She expounds by quoting Hegel, "And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained...The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness."<sup>10</sup> Buck-Morss insists that "the goal of this liberation, out of slavery, cannot be subjugation of the master in turn, which would be merely to repeat the master's 'existential impasse,' but, rather, elimination of the institution of slavery altogether."<sup>11</sup> For Patterson Orlando, freedom has its origin in the lived experience of the

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<sup>8</sup> Quote in Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death* (New York: Edward Blyden Press, 1981), 320. Fouchard's groundbreaking study in French *Les Marrons de la liberté* was originally published in 1972.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 55; Georg F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of The Spirit*. A. V. Miller. Trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 233.

<sup>10</sup> Buck-Morss, 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

enslaved.<sup>12</sup> Orlando suggests that freedom began its career in the slave plantation on the lips of hopeful slaves whose sole commitment was to be free and live free in a society without slavery, as the maroon communities were perceived to be political communities of freedom in various parts of New World slavery. For example, for many enslaved Africans in the colony, the process of marronage was parallel with the very idea of freedom, in which they became the author of their own freedom, a practical liberty “from below.” The desire for freedom was central to slaves’ daily experience and marronage provides that catalyst. Freedom in the sense of independence and the eradication of the institution of slavery has always been the expression of the enslaved in the colony.

Slaves at Saint-Domingue manifested the aspiration for freedom in various forms of resistance to slavery including marronage, infanticide, consistent slave insurrections, religious superstition or sorcery, on-going abortions among slave women; slave committing suicide in large numbers, slave nurses poisoning newly-born babies; slaves poisoning their masters and their children, and the decimation of livestock by deliberate sabotage.<sup>13</sup> C. L. R. James in his class work on the Haitian Revolution observes:

On certain plantations the slaves decimated their number by poison so as to keep the number of slaves small and prevent their masters embarking on larger schemes which would increase the work. For this reason as slave would poison his wife, another would poison his children, and a Negro nurse declared in court that for years she had poisoned every child that she brought into the world... The slaves poisoned cows, horses, and mules.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> For further research on the plot of enslaved Africans at Saint-Domingue, see James, *The Black Jacobins*, 14-20; Otto, *The Haitian Revolution*, 17-18; DuBois, *Avengers of the New World*, 51-58); and more recently, Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> James, 16.



Orlando Patterson describes the institution of slavery and the existential conditions which enslaved Africans experienced on a daily basis as social death, natal alienation, and collective annihilation.<sup>15</sup> Patterson argues that slaves in the New World were a people without honor and value to whom the Euro-American bourgeois principles of liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness, and human rights did not reach or apply. Seen as a deracinated group, the enslaved had no legal status or public affiliation and were powerless in the ruling relationship between master and slave. They did not belong socially; shame was the value imposed on their lives. As Patterson reminds us, the enslaved people were socially dead. His definition of the institution of slavery as concurrently a denial of the humanity of the enslaved and their freedom, inherently and inventively, might shed light on the black condition at Saint-Domingue and elsewhere in New World slavery.

These observations on black suffering provide substantial insights into why Makandal was compelled to carry out his program of violence through poisoning, as we shall see below. Complementarily, David Geggus's remark on the exploitation of black labor also serves as an important key in understanding Makandal's motivation. Saint Domingue as the most prosperous colony substantially boosted up the economy of the Americas and Europe:

In the period between the American and French revolutions, Saint Domingue produced close to one-half of all the sugar and coffee consumed in Europe and the Americas, as well as substantial amounts of cotton, indigo, and ground provisions. Through scarcely larger than Maryland, and the little more than twice the size of Jamaica, it had long been the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean and was hailed by publicists as the 'Pearl of the Antilles' or the 'Eden of the Western World.' ... By 1789 Saint Domingue had about 8,000 plantations producing crops for export. They generated some two-fifths of France's foreign trade, a proportion rarely equaled in any colonial empire. Saint Domingue's importance to France was not just economic, but fiscal (in customs revenue) and

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<sup>15</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).



strategic, too, since the colonial trade provided naval stores from northern Europe (hemp, mast trees, saltpeter). In the Mole Saint Nicolas, the colony also contained the most secure naval base in the West Indies.<sup>16</sup>

The atmosphere for slaves' revolt at Saint-Domingue was presupposed by the unbearable nature of slavery and the agonizing treatment of blacks worse than animals. Not only slavery had disfigured the image of God in African men, women, and children, it had also violently affected them psychologically and mentally. Yet, the dream of freedom was also expressed in their clandestine religious meetings; particularly, through the rhetoric of a revolutionary freedom song, 'their favorite song' which the slaves usually sang in their "midnight celebration of Voodoo, their African cult; they danced and sang:

*Eh! Eh! Bomba! Heu! Heu!*  
*Canga, baftio té!*  
*Canga, moune de lé!*  
*Canga, do ki la!*  
*Canga, li!*

[We swear to destroy the whites and all that they possess;  
let us die rather than fail to keep this vow.]<sup>17</sup>

The language of this song is radical. It explicitly discloses the "black rage" against the oppressive institution of slavery, and assuredly reveals about the collective determination of the enslaved community: to reverse the colonial order and to obtain freedom from the bondage of slavery. Freedom can mean different things to different people. Its significance or implication might be influenced by ideology, religious beliefs, culture, identity, sex, gender, etc. The meaning of freedom might be crafted on historical events, contingencies, and various other things. Here, I define freedom in the historical context of the Haitian Revolution as well as in the

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<sup>16</sup> Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 18.

Makandalian freedom program as simultaneously the decisive pursuit to escape the bondage of slavery and independence from the colonial system. But it has various implications: religious, political, culturally, psychologically, and philosophical. We now turn to the role of black religion in the achievement of black freedom as we introduce Makandal: The Prophet of Freedom.

### **Forecasting Liberty: Makandal's prophetic rhetoric of freedom**

As he gathered around a large crowd of slaves, a vase full of water was presented to him, and the maroon leader Makandal spoke in a revolutionary tone this religious prophetic statement: "This represents the original inhabitants of Saint Domingue. They were yellow. These, he said, pulling out the white scarf, are the present inhabitants. Here, finally, are those who will remain masters of the island; it is the black scarf."<sup>18</sup>

According to contemporary accounts, François Makandal was a maroon organizer and pre-revolutionary radical who was burnt at the stake in March 1758 for distributing poisons to African slaves to destroy their white oppressors.<sup>19</sup> He operated in a permanent state of marronage for eighteen years.<sup>20</sup> The Makandal 1757 conspiracy was the first organized slave revolt before the general revolt of 1791, one that clearly exhibits a collective pre-revolutionary consciousness<sup>21</sup> and early sentiment for independence. I am using the idea of "collective pre-revolutionary consciousness," in parallel to what French historian George Lefevre has phrased

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<sup>18</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Fick, *The Making of Haiti*.

<sup>20</sup> Fick, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Previous revolts in the colony occurred in 1691 and 1697. For example, David Geggus, in an important article, "On the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Slave Runaways in Saint Domingue in the Year 1790," *Slavery and Abolition* 6:3 (1985), 112-28, contends that large-scale slave revolts or conspiracies did not exist prior to the general revolt of 1791.

“collective revolutionary mentality,” an outstanding feature describing the 1789 aristocratic plot in the French Revolution which was “central to the system of notions and actions that constituted the revolutionary phenomenon itself.”<sup>22</sup> As a charismatic leader, Makandal inculcated a sense of communal solidarity among the slaves in their struggle to fight colonial oppression. He also developed an extensive cross-plantation network of resistance; and within a three-year period Makandal and his followers were said to have successfully killed some 6,000 individuals in the colony by means of poisoning.<sup>23</sup>

Born in West Africa’s Guinea, Makandal was sold to slave merchants as a war captive. We do not know the exact year of his birth. Though, Makandal knew how to read but left us with no substantial written words. What we know about him is from oral traditions and contemporary eyewitness testimony such as reported by the prominent colonial historian and lawyer Moreau de Saint Mery in his mammoth 1796 three volume work, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue*. The nineteenth-century Haitian historian Thomas Madiou says that he was a practicing Muslim “who had instruction and possessed the Arabic language very well.”<sup>24</sup> Prominently known as an eloquent

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<sup>22</sup> George Lefevre, “Foules revolutionnaires” in *Etudes sur la revolution française* (Paris: PUF, 1954); François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (New York: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1981), 63.

<sup>23</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 55-57; Lesli Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 34; John Garrigus, “The Cultural Construction of Resistance: The Legend of Makandal the Poisoner,” (June 2011), 3-9. This is an unpublished paper. The author was gracious to send me a personal copy. I reject Garrigus’s skepticism about the Makandalian 1757 Revolt expressed in this same essay. He begins the essay by arguing unconvincingly that “Makandal did not cause the thousands of deaths attributed to him.” Rather, Garrigus attributes the large scale of human deaths in the colony to other natural phenomena such as illness and food poisoning independent from Makandal’s successful violent strategy of decolonization. One must interpret this revisionist account as a departure of the traditional scholarship on Makandal.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 151.

orator, Makandal exercised considerable influence on his followers and was able to form alliances across various ethnic groups. He terrorized the whites in the colony during the 1750s and was seen as a central symbol of any potential mass uprising. John Garrigus tells us that his “charisma and maroon status made him the personification of master’s fears.”<sup>25</sup> Moreau de Saint-Remy concludes that by 1789, the inaugural year of the French Revolution, Makandal the mythical figure was remembered by the slave community for his supernatural powers.<sup>26</sup>

As a *marabout* (prophet) and a spiritual leader, he acted as intermediary between God and man, and predicted the future and was perceived as having revelations; he also fearlessly preached independence to slaves and “death to all *blancs*.”<sup>27</sup> Makandal was the “Black Messiah” of the New World and is arguably the progenitor of Haitian independence. Even after his death, the spirit of freedom he inspired never deserted the enslaved. Of utmost concern for this study is Makandal’s use of radical rhetoric of freedom to disseminate revolutionary thought.

Most commentators interpret the above religious prophecy which Makandal delivered to an assembling group of slaves as reflecting his “solid understanding of the racial origins and development of Saint Domingue.”<sup>28</sup> Though this might seem to be an appealing explanation, it falls short of the intended meaning of the prediction. Most clearly, the word “masters” deserves some attention. While the term provides an explanation for the human experience and interaction, highlights the various racial identities (i.e. yellow, white, and black) and groups both

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<sup>25</sup> Garrigus, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Mederic Louis Elie Moreau de Saint Mery, *Description topographie, physique, civile, politique et historique De la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue* (Charleston: Nabu Press), 630-1; David Geggus & Norman Fiering (eds), *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Neill and Nancy Neill (eds), *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> Fick, 62.

in the past and present in this colonial geographical space, it unequivocally points to the enslaved existence under a white scripted-world. Makandal forecasts a radical break with the colonial order and slave life that will result in the ultimate fall of the colonial system when he pronounced “those who will remain masters of the island; it is the black scarf.” Given the potential of this project, the need for the slaves to be future-oriented is an imperative, not a choice. The yellow handkerchief represents the “first” inhabitants of the island, the Indians who ruled the land. Consequently, the white handkerchief symbolizes European whites’ imposed hegemonic imperialism, and the black handkerchief anticipates the African black masters who will be.

The Makandalian program of extinguishing the slaves’ oppressors, embedded in the prophetic vision, must be seen as a rhetoric of reversal which looks forward to a completely new rule, new masters, and independence. This militant rotation would not merely destroy the institution of slavery but also uproot the colonial regime. Assuredly, this rhetoric of freedom is intended to provide sustaining and future hope to the disinherited in the struggle for liberty. Yet, the language of the utterance is surprisingly a direct anticipation of the inauguration of an “African” kingdom in Saint-Domingue, which was said to be Makandal’s messianic mission.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, we can interpret Makandal’s logic of the relationship between masters and kingdom, and the idea of totalization.

Makandal’s projected vision sought to recreate new diasporic communities in the New World—particularly at Saint-Domingue—and to form a diasporan self as a plural self, as he stated in the prophecy “Those who will remain masters of the island; it is the black scarf.” In other words, the slaves will be the new masters in Saint-Domingue. J. Lee Green notes that “the diasporan subject inhabits or comes to inhabit a psychological space configured by a set of

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<sup>29</sup> Garrigus, 1.

historical and cultural experiences the diaspora induced.”<sup>30</sup> In this framework, as Makandal had hoped, the enslaved Africans would avoid the constraints and limitations of their past by creating an alternative life for themselves.<sup>31</sup> These new citizens of the New World would also be the masters of the island and the masters of their own destiny. Inevitably, common solidarity would be the impetus of this new apocalyptic age; a process which Makandal began to work toward as a maroon and itinerant mobilizer who facilitated cross-plantation communication and network of resistance. The slave Hilliard d’Auberteuil who worked in liaison with Makandal acknowledged that he “was himself a distributor of poison;” other names included “Assam, a young slave woman belonging to the planter M. Vallet of la Souffriere, and Pompee, a free black and farmer on the plantation of Sieur Deseuttres, who served as intermediacy.”<sup>32</sup> As Pierre de Vaissiere notes, “Macandal was more than simply a leader of maroon bands. Not that he disdained the pillaging and ransacking of plantations, or the theft of cattle and other ordinary exploits of fugitive slaves; but seemed at the same time to have sensed the possibility of creating out of marronage a center of organized black resistance against the whites.”<sup>33</sup>

Makandal “knew the names of every slave of each plantation who supported and participated in his movement. He had an exact list of those slaves who, once the poison had struck panic throughout the town, were to organize in contingents from le Cap and spread out

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<sup>30</sup> J. L. Green, *The Diasporan Self: Unbreaking the Circle in Western Black Novels* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2008), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Nuruddin Farah, “In Praise of Exile,” in Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Eds) *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 18.

<sup>32</sup> Fick, 63. It is good to note here that these slaves and others confessed the crime relating to poison upon their arrest in 1757.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*. A. Faulkner Watts. Trans. (New York: Edward Blyden Press, 1981), 320.

into the countryside to massacre the whites.”<sup>34</sup> Hopefully, the projected black rulers of the new republic would also claim this sacred song as theirs, as James Weldon Johnson did for African Americans on the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation:

This land is ours by right of birth,  
This land is ours by right of toil;  
We helped to turn its virgin earth,  
Our sweat is in its fruitful soil.<sup>35</sup>

Makandal’s prophetic preaching “Death to all whites” is probably consistent with C. L. R. James’s observation that “the slaves worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors.”<sup>36</sup> This idea of freedom meant black ownership of the land and the cultivation of that land. Its implication in post-revolutionary Haiti’s peasantry presented the opportunity for farmers to produce their own governments and drastically constructed an independent society. The process of land nurturing was a deliberate act of subjectivity, as that was a belief system in African cosmology.<sup>37</sup> As Fick points out, “Freedom for the ex-slaves would mean the freedom to possess and to till their own soil, to labor for themselves and their families, with no constraints other than their own self-defined needs, and to sell or dispose of the products of their labor in their own interest.”<sup>38</sup>

So far, I highlighted that freedom for Makandal signified the creative action of independence, that is, the apocalyptic inauguration of a black-ruled republic in the colony.

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<sup>34</sup> Fick, 62.

<sup>35</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Fifty Years,” in Rudolph P. Byrd (Ed) *The Essential Writings of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: The Modern Library, 2008), 153.

<sup>36</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Haitianist historians inform us that 60% of the slave population in Saint-Domingue during the time of the Revolution (1791-1804) would have been born in Africa.

<sup>38</sup> *The Making of Haiti*, 180.



Further, I suggested that independence was intrinsically linked with black ownership of the land and the cultivation of that land for their self gain. The rhetoric of reversal in Makandal's freedom project was contingent on the whole collapse of the entire edifice of whiteness in the colony. Practically, the plan was compatible with Makandal's messianic mission. The latter ordained that he was sent to the colony by God to free the blacks and exterminate the white oppressors.<sup>39</sup> This Jeremiadic logic is in line with greater Black Atlantic's religious rhetoric. Wilson J. Moses describes the black jeremiad as the "constant warnings issued by blacks to whites concerning the judgment that was to come from the sin of slavery."<sup>40</sup> The Black Atlantic jeremiad must be construed as a rhetoric of indignation expressing deep human dissatisfaction and equally divine discontent. Simultaneously, this particular black religious style forcefully challenges the structural order of the political state and the nation to reform.<sup>41</sup> Makandal was not seeking to reform the colonial order or the institution of slavery, but he was working diligently toward a new social order where his people could live free and independent and regain their dignity and collective agency.

Makandal as "Black Messiah" was determined to advance the project of race vindication. As the colonial French historian and lawyer Médéric Moreau de Saint-Rémy reports, "...*Dans son vaste plan, il avait conçu l'infernal projet de faire disparaître de la surface de Saint-*

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<sup>39</sup> Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *The Breached Citadel* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Inc., 2004), 60-1.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson J. Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of A Religious Myth* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 198), 30-1.

<sup>41</sup> From a Duboisian perspective, see the excellent article by David Howard-Pitney, "Civil Religion and the African-American Jeremiad in W.E.B. Du Bois's Thought and Rhetoric, 1905-1963," in Edward J. Blum and Jason R. Young (eds), *The Souls of W.E.B. Du Bois: New Essays and Reflections* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 135-159; Howard-Pitney has also penned the classic work on the Jeremiadic tradition from the perspective of African Americans, *The Afro-Merican Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

*Domingue tous les hommes qui ne seraient pas noirs*” (“In his comprehensive plan, he [Makandal] had conceived the infernal project to disappear from the face of Saint-Domingue all men who are not black”).<sup>42</sup> In a 1779 memoir, Makandal is presented as a “Mohammed at the head of a thousand exiled refugees” who, in imagining ‘the conquest of the Universe,’ had planned to annihilate all the whites in Saint-Domingue.<sup>43</sup> According to Moreau, Makandal occasionally “invoked Allah, Jesus Christ, and God when he created magical pockets” and ritual talismans for the cause of black freedom for which he was condemned.<sup>44</sup> He declared to the slaves that it was “He the Creator had sent to Saint-Domingue to effect the destruction of the whites and to free the blacks.”<sup>45</sup> Makandal’s social messianism linked religious conviction and nationalist discourse, and mixed theological themes such as God, redemption, deliverance, and, indirectly, French political ideas of human rights, liberty, equality, and fraternity. We also observe this religious tradition in African American’s twentieth century religious thought. Such an approach was common also in Du Bois’s religious imagination, and his use of civic faith in the tradition of pragmatic religious naturalism.<sup>46</sup> In a recent work, Jonathan Kahn intelligently

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<sup>42</sup> Moreau, *Description*, 630.

<sup>43</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 56-7.

<sup>44</sup> Moreau, 631; Dubois, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Fouchard, 320.

<sup>46</sup> Howard-Pitney, “Civil Religion and the African-American Jeremiad,” 135; For further research on this topic, I recommend these excellent works on Du Bois’s engagements with religion: Herbert Aptheker (ed), *Prayers for Dark People* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Manning Marable, “The Black Faith of W.E.B. Du Bois: Sociocultural and Political Dimensions of Black Religion,” *Southern Quarterly* 23:3(1985): 15-33; Barbara Savage, “W.E.B. Du Bois and ‘the Negro Church,’” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (2000): 235-249; Phil Zuckerman (ed), *Du Bois on Religion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000); Edward J. Blum, *W.E.B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Jonathan S. Kahn, *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009)

demonstrates that Du Bois's use of religious modalities was aimed at social uplift, political protest, national reform, and the development of moral ideas.<sup>47</sup>

Religious modalities such as biblical parables depicting the lynching of an African-American Christ, the presentation of a black God, the traditional African American archetype of the Exodus as a triumphant and progressive story of God leading the slaves out from Egypt, religious moral concepts of self sacrifice and piety, biblical crafted narratives and practices are central to Du Bois's corpus such as articulated in *The Souls of Black folk*, *Prayers for Dark People*, *Darkwater*, and *Dark Princess*.<sup>48</sup>

Kahn also posits that Du Bois deploys religious rhetoric to associate himself with the tradition of black Christian thought, to mobilize the African American community culturally and politically, and finally “in order to craft a moral and political sensibility attuned to the finite needs of selves and communities (most often black selves and communities, but not exclusively) struggling against concrete social and political realities” (11). Along the same line of thought, I contend that both Makandal and the religious leader Dutty Boukman—who began the Haitian Revolution with a prophetic and radical prayer in 1791—who succeeded Makandal used religious vocabularies for similar goals. In Black Atlantic rhetoric, pragmatic religious naturalism lies at the crossroads of religion, culture, politics, and identity. Makandal's radical religious belief aimed at the ultimate freedom of the enslaved Africans.

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<sup>47</sup> Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> For further analysis on these DuBoisian religious reflections, see Kahn, *Divine Discontent*, 49-70, his excellent essays, “Toward a Tradition of African American Pragmatic Religious Naturalism,” in Theodore Louis Trost (ed), *The African Diaspora and the Study of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 213-222, and “The Pragmatic Religious Naturalism of W.E.B. Du Bois,” in Edward Blum and Jason R. Young (eds), *The Souls of W.E.B. Du Bois: New Essays and Reflections* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009) .

In his magical-realist novel, Alejo Carpentier observes that Makandal's messianism was "to wipe out the whites and create a great empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Makandal spoke of freedom in terms of the complete eradication of whiteness or white rule. He effectively executed this plan through deeds (i.e. his conspiracy to overturn the white ruling class resulting in 6000 deaths) and words (i.e. with a rhetoric of reversal, and a rhetoric of violence). According to a 1758 text, during his time as a maroon, Makandal had killed as many blacks and whites—six thousand in three years.<sup>50</sup> He "arranged that on a particular day the water of every house in the capital of the province was to be poisoned, and the general attack made on the whites while they were in the convulsions and anguish of death."<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, black freedom is the antithesis of white oppression, as slavery itself is the antithesis of freedom. Moreover, what is striking was the method by which Makandal and his supporters used to challenge French colonial rule.

### **Makandal and Fanon: Prophets of Human Freedom and Human Dignity**

Violence in the form of poison raised the high mortality of whites in the island.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the Black prophet was decolonizing the Saint-Domingue landscape by means of cathartic violence, a program Frantz Fanon would advocate two hundred years later in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Imperial enslavement or colonialism created the very conditions that

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<sup>49</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 36.

<sup>50</sup> For further details on this point, see Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons*, 320-1.

<sup>51</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Fick elaborates on this phenomenon in great details, *The Making*, 60-72.

necessitated barbarous violence and human suffering; as a result, the repercussions in either case drive the subjugated to use violence as a cleansing agent in the transition to becoming a liberated individual and forging a new identity. Fanon did not glorify violence or made it an end of itself. As Fanon biographer David Macey notes, “The violence Fanon evokes is instrumental and he never dwells or gloats on its effects.”<sup>53</sup> Fanon equates colonialism with disease, and describes the former as a “gangrene germ and the source of an epidemic.”<sup>54</sup> In the decolonization process, instrumental violence is served as a “rehabilitative and healing function” and is necessary to remove the spreading disease.<sup>55</sup> Fanon describes decolonization as the process of “replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species of men’” and contends that it must not involve any period of transition and that decolonization must be total, complete, and absolute.<sup>56</sup>

Decolonization in Fanonian reason is a human project which must engender national liberation, national renaissance, and the restoration of nationhood to the people.<sup>57</sup> He articulates it more bluntly:

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<sup>53</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (New York: Picador, 2002), 475; For critical studies on Frantz Fanon’s ideas on various issues, see the excellent studies by the following writers: Reiland Rabaka (*Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010); Nigel Gibson (*Living Fanon: Global Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 201). Gibson also wrote the influential study on Fanon (*Fanon: A Postcolonial Imagination*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003); Irene L. Gendzier (*Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973); African American existential philosopher Lewis R. Gordon has written one of the most celebrated studies on Fanon’s ideas, situating him as a philosopher in both Black and European philosophical traditions (*Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 1995); The edited volume on Fanon by Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White, is a remarkable piece (*Fanon: A Critical Reader*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> Pal Ahluwalia, *Out of Africa: Post-structuralism's colonial roots* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2005), 35. Fanon also authored

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: The Last shall be first and the first last. Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence. That is why, if we try to describe it, all decolonization is successful.

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence.<sup>58</sup>

So the logic embodied in Fanon's decolonizing praxis makes violence the "fuel of liberation," and an inevitable effect of decolonization that could produce and sustain a new kind of revolutionary humanism and a new national culture and collective identity. It logically follows that freedom as decolonization is the third aspect of Makandal's project of liberation. I argue that we must therefore understand this "colony-wide conspiracy" connecting independence with decolonization. Freedom is not a given; it must be taken or earned at high cost. What was then Makandal's ultimate goal in distributing poison as therapeutic violence to a network of slaves? This question must be answered below.

The first explanation I offer is that the chief goal of Makandal's rhetoric of violence and its practical deeds was aimed at the ultimate independence of the enslaved which would translate in the complete eradication of the colonial order and the future establishment of a black state at Saint-Domingue. This argument is quite compelling but it only serves temporarily. A second reason might be articulated in the following terms: Makandal invoked a rhetorical technique of intimidation to overthrow the entire system of slavery. Both reasons are adequate and persuasive, but I do however want to propose a third option that is consistent with the idea of independence as decolonization, and decolonization as cleansing violence. In the above paragraphs, I invoked

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 37.

Orlando Patterson's theory about slavery as social death, the fact that slaves were socially alienated and did not belong in the social or political community. I want to build on that argument to advance the conversation.

Notably, the institution of slavery was not only an economic exploitation of black labor but also a psychological exploitation of the black mind (Fanon). The culture of slavery degraded the human person and had devastated effects both on the slave and the master (Hegel). The greatest challenge for the enslaved was not slavery itself but to remain human in an inhuman condition. In this line of reason, Makandal's program of independence as decolonization necessarily involved the mental rehabilitation of the enslaved and his dignity. This is compatible with what I call Makandal's theory of revolutionary humanism.

Just like decolonization, true independence must involve a radical mutation of consciousness to the degree that the colonial system that produced the colonized personality and dehumanized the colonized man should be together altered and offer the possibility of self-expression. In Makandal's program, decolonization as violence was the proper way to attain a new consciousness, and the right move was to eradicate the old man to make space for the new one. By new consciousness, in Fanonian logic, decolonization involves

the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution. It is true that we could equally well stress the rise of a new nation, the setting up of a new state, its diplomatic relations, and its economic and political trends.<sup>59</sup>

However, a liberated consciousness is the first marker of a new humanism which is a call "to educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 35.



constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act.”<sup>60</sup> Makandalian revolutionary humanism will first entail self-recovery or self-reflection; social reconstruction only comes secondarily. As Fanon insists, “But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another ‘species’ of men and women: the colonizers.”<sup>61</sup> The defined self-rule will develop a single consciousness resulting in mental emancipation at the collective level. The ultimate goal therefore is to develop and attain a single-minded consciousness in the new man, which provides mental liberation, in contrast to a double-consciousness, which alienates and enslaves the mind.

Fanon contends that the colonized people suffer double-consciousness. He defines the concept as a psychoexistential condition inherent to the colonized soul—as a result of the process of colonialization and racialization—in the context of the colonial program and its imposed mechanisms on the colonized.<sup>62</sup> Fanon tells us that “Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?”<sup>63</sup> As a haunting melancholy, Fanonian double-consciousness is an enduring phenomenon in the mental state and evolution of the colonized. It exhibits “rational conflict” and “anxiety” in the thought process. As in Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Fanon seems to define double-consciousness as the double-aimed struggle of the black being, the struggle of

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<sup>60</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, Grove Press, 1952), 222.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>62</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 250.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

twoness, and the split self, that African Americans and colonized people commonly share.<sup>64</sup> In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explains:

Overnight the Negro has been given two frames within which to place the self.

His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Fanon locates the social reality of the Caribbean man phenomenologically in the process of universalizing the black experience.

The Negro is comparison. There is the first truth, He is comparison: that is, he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own; they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one's own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other.<sup>66</sup>

Compare the above statement to the Duboisian double-consciousness doctrine:

... The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks in amused contempt and pity.<sup>67</sup>

Both Fanon and Du Bois interpret the double-consciousness phenomenon—though,

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<sup>64</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 45-6. For a comparative analysis on the Du Bois's and Fanon's doctrine of double-consciousness, I refer the reader to one of the essays already mentioned above: T. Owens Moore, "A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness" (2005); another equally important work worth mentioning here is Charles Peterson (*Du Bois, Fanon, and Cabral: The Margins of Elite Anti-Colonial Leadership*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>67</sup> Du Bois, *Souls*, 45.

working from different historical context, social location, and cultural experiences—as a Black global reality. Therefore, the need for the colonized man and the black man to attain and actualize a coherent humanity through a radically single consciousness is significant and urgent. Unlike Du Bois, Fanon as a radical postcolonial theorist distinctively held that the new consciousness would emerge only at the complete rupture of the domination and bondage relationship, the dialectic of master and slave in the Hegelian sense. In the same vein, for Fanon as articulated above, effective decolonization happens only if the colonial system and its inhuman and violent mechanisms are radically uprooted which would necessitate a totally new framework in the human experience and relationship, what we have identified as “revolutionary humanism”—the absolute negation of double consciousness and colonization—in Fanon’s thought.

In Hegel’s writings, in which many scholars have traced some of Fanon’s revolutionary ideas, and in the context of slavery which we locate Makandal’s thought and his radical agenda of black freedom and independence,

The self-liberation of the slave is required through a ‘trial by death,’ and it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained....The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person [the agenda of the abolitionists!]; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.<sup>68</sup>

Buck-Morss, in her reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, argues that for the philosopher of freedom (Hegel), “The goal of this liberation, out of slavery, cannot be subjugation of the master in turn, which would be merely to repeat the master’s ‘existential impasse,’ but rather, elimination of the institution of slavery altogether.<sup>69</sup> Surely, only through a

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 55-56.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

‘trial of fire and death’—which would eventually result in the practical reversal of the colonial oppressive system and the extermination of slavery, and ultimately the total emancipation from bondage altogether—the collective slaves would then realize self-consciousness by demonstrating that they are not things, not objects in the masters’ perception, but subjects and agents of freedom who transform material nature and the despotic social arrangement.<sup>70</sup> I have argued above as Fanon, given the violent nature of slavery and the oppressive structures of the colonial system at Saint-Domingue and the way the institution of slavery had degraded or dehumanized the African man, Makandal probably anticipated a single-mindedness consciousness as the practical result of being free, decolonized, and independent. Makandal’s violent program through the method of poison and through radical rhetoric entails the process of disalienation and the process of self-determination. In the context of the enslaved Africans, single consciousness is the achievement of personhood, and the autonomous capacity for collective self-expression and communal newness. The idea can also be conceived as the deliberate act of shaping one’s own destiny as well as the act of humanization. A critical component of single consciousness is the power to rescue the mental self. Power translates into the ability to define one’s own reality and it creates the environment to deliver a revolutionary humanism in the struggle to obtain independent consciousness, individual political will, and freedom. A double consciousness can delude a person to believe that he can mentally fixate himself into someone else’s reality. A single-minded consciousness, on the other hand, will bring about total decolonization, will help to lessen the delusion, and will allow the individual to look

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 54. For further interpretation of Hegel’s Lordship-bondage dialectic and his notion of self-consciousness, see the insightful commentary by the Russian-born French philosopher, Alexandre Kojève (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

at himself in a productive or healthy manner.<sup>71</sup> As Fanon reiterates, decolonization in the expression of a single consciousness is in effect the veritable creation of new men and women.<sup>72</sup>

Liberation and the quest for independence characterize the new existential sphere and the experience of the new humanism. The latter underscores Makandalian phenomenology and his vision of revolutionary humanism through a Fanonian reading of decolonization. Indeed, the blacks as new masters of the land will preside over their own destiny. It is good to underline here that Makandal did not just intend to create “independent people” but former slaves with new consciousnesses who have been in the labyrinth of colonization and slavery, as we have applied Fanon’s idea of revolutionary humanism. Suggestively, the enslaved Africans must remember chiefly it is *in* the struggle that millennial hope will come, the sphere wherein they will be united and where new cultural forms will emerge. By applying a Fanonian reading to Makandal’s program of decolonization, I propose an ideological link between the thought of these two men and demonstrate that Black Atlantic intellectual thought, both in content and form, is a rhetoric of possibility and a rhetoric of reaffirmation, in the interest of humanity, especially the most disheartened and marginalized.<sup>73</sup> This statement confirms Fanon’s closing words: “For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> T. Owens Moore, “A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness,” *Journal of Black Studies* 35:6 (2005), 759.

<sup>72</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched*, 36.

<sup>73</sup> I borrow both concepts from Maulana Karenga, “Nommo, Kawaida, and Communicative Practice,” in Elain B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II (eds), *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched*, 316.

In short, Makandal as Prophet-Messiah knew that destructive words had the power to obliterate both the oppressor and colonial rule; in the same way magical words can breathe new life into dead bones and give birth to a free republic (“The slaves will be the masters of the land” and his idea that he was sent by the Creator to “establish an African kingdom”). We should understand both predictions as Makandal’s desire to establish a black state in Saint-Domingue and his efforts through the method of poison to put to “death all whites.” When he voiced the prophetic rhetoric of freedom in 1757, the language must have had a penetrating effect on the slaves’ psyche. If this were so, then the slaves would be mentally free, acting as liberated agents, individually and collectively. As one observer remarks,

He [Makandal] had succeed in persuading the blacks that if would be impossible for the whites to have him killed in case they caught him, and that the Creator would change him on the point of death into a mosquito to reappear more terrible than ever. As chance would have it his neck ring was poorly secured to the stake so that with the first torments of fire brought him he pulled it out. No more was needed to persuade those of his color that the prophecy was fulfilled; so much so that three quarters of the blacks are still steeped in this belief, and are daily expecting to see him return to his promises, and the first black who dares to call himself Macandal can a second time imperial the dependency of Cap.<sup>75</sup>

As Fanon suggests that the agent of decolonization, the process by which a revolutionary humanism would be attained, would be *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). The enslaved Africans were the “wretched” in colonial Saint-Domingue. As the most disfranchised group, they were in the most dynamic position to effect revolution. They were also the most radically-driven revolutionary forces and the most spontaneous class in the larger colonial society. Looking toward the new break of freedom and collective orientation, the enslaved population was indeed looking forward to the day they would be masters of the land. Finally, the

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<sup>75</sup> Fouchard, 321.

Makandalian vision of liberty for the slaves is dependent on the absolute absence of white oppressors in the island.

Paradoxically, this logic would contradict Toussaint Louverture's—one of the most skilled and capable military leaders of the Haitian Revolution—cosmopolitanism and his project of racial unity in the new republic; the Makandal's revolutionary thesis challenges the notion that the *telos* of history is the triumph of the strong, the Anglo-Saxon race as Georg Hegel wrongly conceives. Makandal's prophetic hope and project for independence forecast that a new page in the history of world map would be written by African masters of the land when they made their way from slavery to emancipation in 1804. On January 1, 1804, Louis Boiron-Tonnere crafted the Declaration of Independence of the new nation of Haiti established by former slaves where everyone was declared free and equal. Aimé Césaire was correct in his assertion that “The first epic of the New World...” was written by Haitian slaves.<sup>76</sup> Whether Makandal's philosophy of abolition was gradual remains a scholarly speculation, but his goal was emphatically clear: absolute independence for enslaved Africans.

Thirty-four years after Makandal's violent death by colonial oppressors, Dutty Boukman, his successor, would continue the same vision and talk about freedom in a comparable manner.<sup>77</sup> The religion of the slaves and Makandal's preaching independence as a theological conviction strategically helped to unite Saint-Dominguan slave population against slave masters and the institution of slavery. As his project of black liberation and decolonial imagination through

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 199), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere, I have written about the role of religion in the making of the Haitian Revolution: Celucien L. Joseph, “[The Rhetoric of Prayer: Dutty Boukman, the Discourse of “Freedom from Below,” and the Politics of God](#),” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 2:9 (2011): 1-33; my forthcoming essay addresses similar concerns, “Memory, the Spirit of the Revolution, and Slave Religion: The Representation of the Haitian Revolution in Langston Hughes's Emperor of Haiti.”



cathartic violence will be carried out by another influential religious leader, Dutty Boukman, Makandal's rhetoric of reversal of slavery and the colonial system in Saint-Domingue-Haiti would foster a spirit of liberation and a spirit of resistance in the new generation of black revolutionaries who had sworn to declare their humanity and reclaim their rights of men. The legacy of François Makandal and his radical religious rhetoric is substantial, as it would influence and foresee the rise of black radical and anticolonial-imperial leaders and movements, Third World postcolonial theorists and revolutionaries in various forms and expressions beyond the Haitian borders including the Black Power Movement, Black Liberation Theology, anti-Black and Human oppression forces, and anti-racism powers.