

Frantz Fanon: A Voice for the Third World

By Orville De Silva

INTRODUCTION

“Is there an African philosophy”? A question often asked by many individuals. Any discourse on philosophy is necessarily guided by some presupposed conception of philosophy. Over the years philosophy has come to be identified with western philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre etc. Since there are no names associated with Africa, one may be inclined to deny philosophy to Africa.

At the end of the nineteenth century the whole of African continent came under the imperialist rule of Europe. The colonial conquest and the imposition of violent European rule destroyed and suppressed the indigenous societies. Africa came to serve the growing needs of the European capitalist world. The African historical existence was suppressed and Africa was forced to become the negative underbelly of European history. What is paradoxical is the fact that Europe undertook the domination of Africa and the world not in the explicit and cynical recognition of its imperial might, but in the pretext of spreading civilization.¹ Kant thought that the European humanity is the ideal and the true humanity and is superior to all.

The European colonialism which eventually came to be associated with the ‘golden age’, in the name of universality of values, violently universalized its own selfish interests and denied historicity to the colonized Africans. In this context, though the Western philosophy claims to be objective and transcendental remains at the mercy of European conquest.

¹ Tsenay Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings* (Minnesota: Paragon House, 1991), 4.

During the twentieth century, countries such as India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal and other African countries won independence from their European colonizers. The African anticolonial struggle not only expelled the physical presence of colonialism but it also questioned the smoothly borrowed assumptions of the social hybrids (Europeanized Africans). The new African bourgeoisie class made every attempt to garner power but had to face severe resistance from the anticolonial movements. The present day African realities are thus constituted partly by the ossified remnants of European colonialism or neocolonialism.

The basic and the most fundamental fact in Africa today is the misery the continent is immersed in and the varied struggles in different aspects of life to overcome the wretched condition. It is in this view that a philosophical reflection of African society becomes more meaningful. In today's contemporary African society, philosophy cannot strictly be bracketed to be a mere intellectual entity; it should enable us to break through the make-belief world. This however makes the task of today's philosopher all the more challenging.

In this background, the course on African Philosophy offered in the third semester has aroused my intellectual curiosity. It has been a long search to understand the different philosophical aspects of African thinkers. In this study I have tried to unravel the thought pattern of Frantz Fanon and grasp from his writings the colonial situation. Frantz Fanon is rightly called as one of the leading post colonial African philosophers and one of his most important works of postcolonial literature includes *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon aims at deconstructing the speculative metaphysical underpinnings of the Eurocentric world that has held the Africans under bondage for the last five centuries. In the ensuing pages an attempt has been made to understand the colonial situation, its effects on the people of Africa and the last chapter is concerned with Fanon's central thesis of 'emancipation through violence'. Fanon does not shy away from suggesting the use of force to achieve

freedom. He believes that decolonization is a violent phenomenon. It is in the light of the two original works of Fanon- *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* that one needs to understand his philosophical convictions. The following study is an attempt in this process.

CHAPTER I

FRANTZ FANON: THE MAN AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself (Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952)

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist and a revolutionary writer, whose writings had profound influence on the radical movements in the 1960s in the United States and Europe. He was perhaps the preeminent thinker of the 20th century on the issue of decolonization and the psychopathology of colonization. His works have inspired anti-colonial liberation movements throughout the world for the past five decades.

1.1 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fanon was born in Fort-de-France, on 20 July 1925, in the Caribbean island of Martinique which was then a French colony. He was a black man, the descendent of slaves carried off from Africa to the Antilles. Despite the racial discrimination to which they were subjected, the situation of these Negroes differed from that of the blacks in other African colonies. In the Antilles a black bourgeoisie had already evolved which strove for assimilation rather than national independence. He was the fourth and youngest of 4 boys among the eight children. Five of the eight children after having finished their Secondary School went on to study in French universities. He was born into a middle class black family and received a typical assimilationist education.

Fanon's father Casimir worked in the customs service; he died in 1947. Frantz Fanon grew up in Martinique amid descendants of African slaves, who had been brought to the Caribbean to work on the island's sugar plantations. At the *lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France*, where Fanon studied, one of his teachers was Aimé Césaire who had a profound influence on his thinking. In his

teenage Fanon became politically active and participated in the guerrilla struggle against the supporters of the pro-Nazi French government.²

His mother was of Alsatian origin, herself the illegitimate daughter of parents of mixed blood. Fanon's mother appears to have been of rather difficult temperament, not overly affectionate and with a tendency to be domineering. She seems to have favored her daughters, knowing that skin color was not an irrelevant subject.

Fanon's mother apparently had a surfeit of boys by the time Frantz was born, and that she came to consider Frantz as a junior troublemaker. Thus one may conclude that in the best of all worlds, Fanon's mother must have been a formidable challenge for Fanon.³ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon noted that in the Antilles, there is nothing surprising, within a family, in hearing a mother remark that 'X' is the blackest of my children-it means that 'X' is the least white. To know the meaning of whiteness in the Antilles among non-whites is to understand the full range of identity-confusion that was in store for Fanon and for others like him.⁴ The writings and ideologies are influenced by the colonial experiences of his childhood. His works reveal the deeper reality of a Black man in the colonial world. As a boy he grew up being sensitive to the calumnies that a black had to suffer under the colonial rule.

At the age of 18, Fanon enlisted in the French army and volunteered to fight with the French in World War II. At Bougie, near Constantine he attended an officers' training course. This brief stay was his first contact with Algeria, which was later to become his adopted country. In 1944 he was wounded in action near Swiss border and awarded a reward for bravery; the *Croix de*

² Krijasto Keegan, *Frantz Fanon*, <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/fanon.html>.

³ Carol Polsgrove, *Reclaiming Frantz Fanon*, <http://www.prospect.org/print-friendly/print/V12/15/polsgrove-c.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

Guerre medal. In 1945, after recovering from his wounds Fanon returned home to Martinique, 'a decorated war veteran'. He began to support the election campaign of Aime Cesaire- his teacher at *Fort-de-France*. He was a Communist Party candidate for the first National Assembly of the IVth Republic, together with his brother Joby.⁵ This was his first concrete direct encounter of a political experience.

Already disillusioned with colonialism and the black man's place in it, Fanon stayed long enough to complete his baccalaureate and then returned to France where he took up the study of medicine and psychiatry on a scholarship in Lyon. During these first years of his stay in France, he had to choose between his attraction for medicine and on the other hand Philosophy and Literature. He attended the lectures of Jean Lacroix and Maurice Merleau-Pontry and read Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. During his first years at University he wrote some plays which remained unpublished.⁶ Later he turned especially to neuropsychiatry and neurosurgery since these subjects best answered his need for humanist commitment. He gradually shifted his attention on political problems. While at Lyons he also studied extensively the conditions under which the North African immigrants in France were living.

⁵ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. vii-viii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

1.2 FANON: A PSYCHIATRIST

In 1951, he obtained his qualification as a psychiatrist with a dissertation on ‘A Case of Friedreich’s Disease’ and for the last time returned to Martinique. On his return to Martinique, he worked in the Clinic of *Saint Alban de Losere*, together with the Spanish emigrant, Dr. Tosquelle from whom he learned a great deal in the field of social therapy.⁷

In October 1952, Fanon married Marie-Joséphine Duble, a French girl he had known since his studies in Lyons. At that time he had made up his mind to work for a few years in Africa and then to return to Martinique. He wrote a letter to Senghor asking for a job in an African hospital which remained unanswered. He later accepted the offer of the French Governor General in Algeria, and worked as the director at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric clinic.

At Blida, it was the most important psychiatric hospital on African soil. He now applied the ideas of François Tosquelles, an innovative practitioner of social therapy. In his treatment he tried to develop new forms of corporate life infused with a democratic spirit in order to put in motion the process of socialization which would enable the patients to find their bearings in society again. He endeavored to establish a close link between psychotherapy and political education. But his project met with limited success since he failed to understand the social conditions under which the patients (Arabs) were accustomed to living. The failure of the experiments led to a fundamental reorganization of his thinking and practice. In 1954 the National Liberation Front (FNL) started its open warfare against French rule, a year after his arrival in Algeria. Finding it increasingly difficult to practice psychiatry in the context of increasing militarization, violence and torture, Fanon resigned his position and left Algeria.

⁷ Ibid., ix.

1.3 FANON: A REVOLUTIONARY

Renouncing French citizenship, he became a full time revolutionary and allied himself with the Algerian liberation movement that sought to throw off French rule. Fanon traveled guerrilla camps from Mali to Sahara, hid terrorists at his home and trained nurses to dress wounds. In 1959 he was severely wounded on the border of Algeria and Morocco. Fanon then worked briefly as an ambassador of the provisional Algerian government to Ghana and in Tunisia, he edited the magazine *El Moudjahid*.⁸ During this period he also founded Africa's first psychiatric clinic. Much of his writing concentrated on the Algerian revolution, including the several essays in which he calls for armed struggle against the French imperialism. Fanon himself did not live long enough to witness Algeria's independence. Finally, Fanon suffered from leukemia and died in Washington, DC, on December 12, 1961. After negotiations, his body was flown back to Algeria to be buried on Algerian soil.

1.4 DECONSTRUCTION OF THE BINARY SYSTEM

Though Fanon's formal training was in medicine and psychiatry, he also studied philosophy, and throughout his life he continued to grapple with the thought-patterns of European modernity such as Hegel, Marx, Freud, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. He embarked on a journey of testing their ideas through a confrontation with the dehumanized situation created by racism and colonialism. Fanon launched a humanist project to understand the divisive and hierarchical zones that divide, fragment and destroy human beings.

His project and goal was to go beyond manicheanism both in its colonial form and as an anticolonial reaction. By manicheanism, is meant "a binary system of thought that paints the world as split between good and evil. Its roots go back to the religion of Mani (third century of the common era), which viewed the

⁸ Nigel Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Great Britain: Polity Press, 2003), 4-6.

creators of the world, God and the Devil, as still fighting it out.”⁹ The roots of racial and colonial manicheism in the modern period are found in the European Enlightenment, which viewed Europe as the center of the world and the transmitter of light to distant regions. This was the view held by many European Enlightenment Philosophers including Kant and Hegel.

In the colonist’s eyes the native black was thought to be childish, lazy, indolent and slow, lacking in history and humanity, and needing coercive measures such as chattel slavery to force them to be productive. Hegel says, “the negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him we must put aside all our European attitudes... all that is foreign in man in his immediate existence, and nothing constant with humanity is to be found in his character.”¹⁰ The colonial literature too viewed the Africans with the help of enlightenment categories. It painted the native as the ‘quintessence of evil’, and the colonizer as the effigy of good. According to one author who inquired into a revolt in Haiti in 1792:

The Negro is a being, whose nature and disposition are not merely different from those of the European, they are the reverse of them. Thus blacks needed to be treated only with violence and abuse, kindness and compassion excite in his breast implacable and deadly hatred; but stripes, insults and abuse generate gratitude, affection and inviolable attachment.¹¹

1.5 IMPORTANT WORKS OF FANON

Fanon's first major work, “Black Skin, White Mask”, appeared in 1952. In this book he tries to analyze the impact of colonialism and its deforming effects. Fanon argued that white colonialism imposed an existentially false and degrading existence upon its black victims to the extent that it demanded their conformity to its distorted values. The colonized is not seen by the colonizer as a human being; this is also the picture the colonized is forced to accept. The

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 207.

¹¹ Ibid., 7.

colonized begin to accept and interiorize these distortions and suffer from grave inferiority complexes. Fanon demonstrates how the problem of race, of color, connects with a whole range of words and images, starting from the symbol of the dark side of the soul. Fanon examines race prejudices as a philosopher and psychologist although he acknowledges social and economic realities. The text is however a genuine analysis of a philosopher striving to unravel the deeper connotations of being terrorized and humiliated by the rule of white men.

Another important work of Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in the year 1961, is a brilliant analysis of the psychology of the colonized and their path to liberation. Sartre in the preface mentions that the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through the voice of Fanon. Bearing singular insight into the rage and frustration of colonized peoples, and the role of violence in effecting historical change, the book intelligently attacks the twin perils of post independence colonial politics: the disenfranchisement of the masses by the elites on the one hand, and intertribal and interfaith animosities on the other. Fanon's analysis of the colonial situation in Africa serves as an authentic handbook of social reorganization for leaders of emerging nations. It could also serve as a manual for the present-day African society that is plagued with corruption and violence. *The Wretched of the Earth* has had a major impact on civil rights, anticolonialism, and black consciousness movements around the world.

CHAPTER II

COLONIALISM AND ALIENATION

There is no white world, there is no white ethic and no more there is white intelligence

(Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952)

Karl Marx in *Das Capital* has proposed a theory of alienation. It is however important to note, whether Marx theory of alienation can be applied to the colonial situation, and whether the colonies or the countries of the Third World in general, can be aptly analyzed with reference to the economic categories alone. For Marx, it is the economic factor that plays a significant role and is at the root of alienation.

2.1. MARX'S THEORY OF ALIENATION

According to Karl Marx, pre-capitalist forms of production are characterized by the fact that the individuals as members of community own the means of production, primarily the land. Under pre-capitalist conditions of production mainly articles of utility are produced, and payment in kind outweighs payments in money. Marx arrives at the concept of alienation as a result of objectification, as the reification of man in the capitalist society based on commodity exchange.¹²

Marxian understanding of alienation is based on the relation of the producer to the product of his labour, as well as in the relation of the worker to his own activity. In capitalist society the workers produce commodities, the production of which requires capital. The commodities are placed on the market by private entrepreneurs and sold with a view to increasing their capital through profits and enhancing further production of commodities. The worker, through his wage he earns surrenders to the capitalist the product of his labour which

¹² Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 4.

having become a commodity is subsequently made available to him on the market as an exchange value. Thus according to Herbert “a worker, who is alienated from his product, is at the same time alienated from himself. His labour itself becomes no longer his own, and the fact that it becomes the property of another bespeaks an expropriation that touches the very essence of man.”¹³ Marx conceives of alienation as reification, through which capitalist society causes all interpersonal relations to take the form of objective relations between things: “relations such as those between capital and labour, capital and commodity, and those between commodities are understood as human relations, relations in man’s social existence”¹⁴

In the capitalist mode of production, man is alienated from himself, since he is incapable of objectifying himself through labour. The worker is alienated by the very fact that the means of subsistence belongs to another. It is dominated by an inhuman power and the worker is alien to his own activity. Marx calls the process of alienation as ‘the fetishism of commodities’.¹⁵ This process of alienation can be put to an end only through the abolition of capitalist class society by the socialist revolution. But in order to be able to make a revolution, the working class from being a class ‘in itself’ must become a class ‘for itself’. It has to become aware of its own proper self-existence and hence develop a class-consciousness. Through this process each of the working class members becomes conscious of his alienation and its underlying economic cause.

2.2 FANON’S INQUIRY INTO ALIENATION

A question however arises, whether the notion of alienation as understood by Marx can be adequately applied to the colonial conditions? In order to answer

¹³ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2nd ed., 1955), 277, quoted in Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 4.

¹⁴ Karl Marx *Capital* Vol. I (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 75, quoted in Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 4

¹⁵ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 5.

this question, we must first understand the level of economic development and the kind of capitalism that was prevalent in the so called underdeveloped countries that were under the colonial domination. In the pre-capitalist modes of production, the producers own the means of production but the situation is not the same in the colonial economies according to Fanon. In the colonial countries the natives were reduced to the status of proletarians who had to work in mines and on plantations. This cannot be considered to be a process of transition to a wage-labour relationship since in most cases it was actually a forced labour relationship, and the payment was frequently made only in kind.

Though there prevailed, some form of feudal society in some regions, it was of secondary interest to the colonial power. There was no economic development that took place in these countries during the colonial rule. It only led to the exploitation of the dependent countries. Colonialism has only provoked structural changes and one cannot apply the same yardstick of pre-capitalist European society. The surplus in the underdeveloped countries does not benefit them; it is mainly transferred to the metropolitan countries. In the words of Zahar:

The several capitalist contradictions and the historical development of the capitalist system have generated underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated, while generating economic development in the metropolitan centres which appropriate that surplus.¹⁶

The world-wide process of capitalist development leads to a polarization between highly developed, industrialized metropolitan countries and on the other hand, stagnating satellites. The metropolitan countries expropriate economic surplus from their satellites and appropriate it for their own development, while the latter stagnate in their underdevelopment. The natives lack access to their own surplus and secondly they have to bear the brunt of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

metropolis/satellite polarization and the exploitative contradictions introduced by the colonial economic structures.

In the colonial situation the majority of the workers were separated from the means of production and there existed the division of labour only to a limited extent. The colonized people were compelled to gear their production to the demand of a market-economy, i.e. to cultivate products which they were no longer able to use for their own subsistence. In colonial situation unlike other European capitalist countries, there is neither a developed commodity production nor a developed commodity exchange which integrates people's society.

The alienation brought about by colonialism is thus a double one. While in capitalism the exploitation takes place in the realm of production and while the exchange keeps at least a semblance of equivalence. In contrast, the colonized is exploited twofold: first in his conditions of production by the colonial overlord, and secondly in his exchange relations by the metropolis.¹⁷ The alienation causes an alleged racial feeling of inferiority in the natives and the superiority of the colonizers is often manifested through brute force.

We can here take note of French assimilation policy. Although it claimed to be non-racial in its basic assumptions, it offered only relatively few people the opportunity of rising from the level of natives to the status of human beings through a process of Europeanization, i.e. complete alienation from their own history and culture. It thus caused frustrations, compensatory phenomena and cases of psycho-somatic illness, all of which can be viewed as a result of colonial alienation.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF INTELLECTUAL ALIENATION

In the process of alienation an individual is unable to recognize himself and his own potentialities, thus alienation has both economic and intellectual aspects. Fanon's primary focus is on the analysis of intellectual alienation. All people are subjected to economic conditions of alienation, which are the constitutive elements of psychological phenomena of alienation. However there can also exist certain type of intellectual alienation in various forms in most of the colonized countries. The intellectual alienation of the colonized shows itself in their identification with a racial stereotype and causes all kinds of frustrations and complexes. It prevents the exploited from gaining an insight into their economic plight and gauging it in terms of their own position as a class. As long as their consciousness is structured by racist norms the colonized would remain incapable of developing a revolutionary class-consciousness.¹⁸

An individual can grow in self-consciousness when he moves from being-in-itself to being-for-itself. In this process the being acknowledges and recognizes itself. According to Fanon, this recognition is lacking in the relationship between the white master and the black bondsman. The white man accepted the black when he abolished slavery, but no true emancipation has taken place since the black did not emancipate himself: "Historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom".¹⁹ As long as the Negro has not worked for his own freedom, he will continue imitating his white master; as long as his fixation to the white man exists, he cannot turn freely towards the world. The reciprocal relation between the white and the black man is missing because no struggle has taken place between them. The blacks know nothing of the cost of freedom, for he

¹⁸ Ibid., 15

¹⁹ Fanon Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 219, quoted in Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 6.

has not fought for it.²⁰ Thus we see that Fanon tries to understand the real mechanism of alienation and tries to arrive at praxis-oriented political intentions.

2.4 COLONIAL SITUATION

A short description of the colonial situation will throw light on socio-psychological aspects which are characteristic of the phenomena analyzed by Fanon. The term ‘colonial situation’ is used in a similar way by such authors as Memmi, Sartre or Balandier.²¹ It refers to the reciprocal structural dependence of metropolis and colony and serves as a backdrop to a valid analysis of the interdependence of colonizer and colonized.

The colonial situation is marked by two antagonistic poles: the colonizer and the colonized. The prosperity and privileges of the former are directly based on the exploitation and pauperization of the other. In order to maintain this condition the colonizers constantly reproduce the act of oppression. According to Fanon “it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system.”²²

2.4.1 The Ideology of Racism

The colonial situation is marked by an important characteristic feature of racism, which underpins ideologically the division of society into ‘human beings’ and ‘natives’ caused by the colonial process of production. The privileged one makes himself a man by freely exercising his rights; on the other hand, ‘the other’ is denied of all rights and is condemned to misery, hunger,

²⁰ Fanon Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 219.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18

²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 30.

ignorance and reduced to subhuman status.²³ Racism endows the colonial system with cohesion. By reducing the native to a natural object, a chattel, it enables the European to cleave to the ideals of Western democracy while at the same time exploiting the natives in the most inhuman fashion. It is the terror and exploitation which dehumanizes the natives, and the exploiter uses this dehumanization as a pretext to step up his exploitation.

The exploitation of the natives is carried out in a systematic manner. The exploitation has its limit in the colonial system itself. The oppression must not lead to the negation of the colonized, to his physical annihilation, since such a state of affairs would also imply the negation of the colonizer. He denies the colonized with all his strength but at the same time the existence of his victim is indispensable to the continuance of his own being. If the colonizer pushes too far the colonized will disappear and this would mean that the whole of colonization including the colonizer would disappear with him. The privileges and the profit of the colonizer depend on the misery and the exploitation of the colonized. In the colonial countries, the higher the standard of living of the colonizers, the lower is that of the colonized; the more deeply he breathes the more the other suffocates.²⁴

In the colonial situation, any assimilation accompanied by the granting of equality to the natives would deprive colonial society of its very foundation. He considers the native to be an untutored savage and justifies his own actions by calling himself promoter and protector. The white man takes upon himself a moral responsibility of civilizing the black through mission activities. The racial discrimination is also perpetuated by the foreign missionary activities. The Christian missions by condemning the customs and religions of the natives as heathen and inhuman, they bolstered and upheld colonial racism

²³ Ibid., 19

²⁴ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 20

ideologically. Fanon is of the view, “the church in the colonies is the white people’s church, the foreigner’s church. She does not call the native to God’s ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor.”²⁵

2.4.2 The Psychology of Oppression

In the colonial countries, the native becomes a victim of oppression only when s/he internalizes the colonized design as perpetuated by the colonizer. In social psychology this can be explained with the help of distinction between out-group and in-group. Usually the out-group which becomes the object of prejudices, eventually leading to self-hatred, is a minority. But in the case of colonialism, the repression is directed against the great majority of the population. It is practiced by a minority, which is a minority only in terms of numbers but not in a sociological and political sense. The adoption of racial stereotype by the colonized themselves is the example of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The members of the out-group though resemble majority, surrender to the constant pressure of discrimination, both institutional and personal, and end up by actually developing the features ascribed to them by the racial stereotype. The members of the in-group see themselves confirmed in their prejudices. What began as a figment of the imagination eventually becomes a reality. In this process the colonizer fulfills ones own economic and emotional functions. Excluded from all social institutions, cut off from his own history, deprived of his own language and of all possibilities of untrammelled self-expression, the colonized is left with only two alternatives: open revolt or withdrawal to his own traditional institutions and values, such as the family and religion.

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 42.

In the process of colonialism, it is not only the colonized who experiences alienation but also the colonizers. The process which transforms the immigrant from Europe into a colonialist is also alienated from his mother-country. The dehumanization of the oppressed falls back on the oppressor, thus finally leading to his own alienation. There is a vicious circle, as the colonizer falls into the habit of seeing the colonized as a thing or treating him like an animal, he himself assumes inhuman features:

When all is said and done the colonizer must be recognized by the colonized. The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus both destructive and creative. It destroys and recreates the two partners in the colonization process as colonizer and colonized: the former is disfigured into an oppressor, and uncouth, fragmented human being, a cheat solely preoccupied with his privileges, the latter into a victim of oppression, broken in his development and accepting his own degradation.²⁶

Fanon in his analysis, on the colonial situation gives more importance to the psychological factors rather than considering merely the alienation caused by the economic factors as understood by Marx. In his attempt to overcome the alienation he emphasizes the need for psychological and intellectual freedom as an important step in the emancipation process.

²⁶ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 25.

CHAPTER III

ALIENATION OF A HUMAN BEING IN COLONIALISM

It is white man's burden to civilize the rest of humanity - Kant

Racial discrimination which is mediated by all the institutions of colonial society, determines the individual and social conduct of the colonized person both in his living together with the other colonized and in his relations with the colonist. On one hand, the colonial world is characterized by domination and exploitation, and on the other hand it is the imposition of a foreign culture and civilization, which is always a concomitant of oppression. The native culture is being constantly confronted with the imported culture and it causes a certain amount of disharmony and anxiety in native's behaviour.

3.1 ALIENATION CAUSED BY RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

In this process of racial discrimination and interiorization of inferiority complex, the black adopts to a large extent the foreign norms suggested to him by the school, the press, the radio, books, films and publicity and in the country side by the help of Christian missions.²⁷ He reacts to his state of dilemma by mechanisms of compensation, over adaptation and finally self-hatred. According to Meister, "he is a marginal man moving from one world to the next, rejecting and despising in turn the one he has just left or turning violently against the one into which he is increasingly integrated but where nonetheless he still feels like a stranger"²⁸.

²⁷ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 35

²⁸ Meister Albert *L'Afrique peut-elle partir?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), 127, quoted in Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 36

Fanon makes an analysis of the alienated behavior of the colonized as a result of colonial racism. This behaviour is manifested in his attitude toward the institutions and norms of his own traditional society and those of the colonial, mostly industrialized society. His relation to his own as well as the foreign language needs to be viewed from this angle; even the sexual behaviour of the colonized who lives in close social contact with the colonial power is governed by some features of colonial racism. The various psychosomatic illnesses and an abnormally high crime rate that the blacks are prone to can well be considered as consequence of alienation.²⁹

The following are some of the consequences of alienation that the native experiences:

3.1.1 The attitude of the colonized toward culture and technological progress

Fanon deals with the ambivalent attitude of the colonized toward both their own and the foreign culture and civilization in various studies and from different points of view. The traditional social institutions were at the point of extinction due to colonialism. The media constantly keep telling the native people that history happens only in Europe. Thus one can say that the history of the African nations is the history of white men.

Due to colonialism, the traditional rites and customs have long lost their living content. Their contact with colonialism has deprived them of their original functions and often changed them to mere escape mechanism. In order to flee from the pressures of colonial reality, the natives take refuge in weird myths, spirit possession and ecstatic dances. The native tries to run away from the existing reality and tries to persuade oneself that colonialism does not exist and that everything goes on as before, the history continues. This attempt to escape,

²⁹ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 36

distressed flight into old traditions and religious customs, this obsessive reintegration of the individual into structures which have long been deprived of their vital functions has an obvious character of regression. Thus Fanon postulates- retrieving back to the past traditions would not help to overcome the oppressive structure.

Fanon gives an example of how even modern medicine in the colonial countries such as Algeria is not free from this ambiguity. He views Western medicine as part of the oppressive system. The medical doctors are actually agents of colonialism, for instance by never appearing without a police escort even when coming to villages on harmless health visits.³⁰

In course of time, as the individual's contact with the colonial power and its institutions grow closer, he increasingly undergoes process of alienation. He becomes more and more uncertain with regard to the conduct he should adopt. His potential of revolutionary resistance decreases proportionately, since his acceptance of the colonialist ideology prevents him from realizing the causes of alienation. Fanon interprets the tendency of the colonized to reject imported technology as distrust of an instrument capable of increasing the degree of exploitation through rationalization, and at the same time as an expression of inarticulate and unorganized political resistance against colonialism. Fanon's thesis is confirmed by his individual studies of the Algerian revolution.

3.1.2 The colonized and the Language

Besides the Christian missions, the colonial school system is one of the most important institutions assuring a close personal contact with the indigenous population and creating a greater distance between the colonized and his own traditions and systems of reference. In the words of Fanon it is instrumental in transforming Africans into 'white Negroes'. It is true that only few of the colonized ever had the opportunity of attending a colonial school but it is this

³⁰ Ibid., 40.

minority who had a primary role to play in the colonial revolution and immediately after independence.

In the colonial schools, the children learnt the language of the colonizer, the ideological connotations of the various words, in particular the value judgments attached to the antonyms black and white. In course of time the children identified with what they have learnt and began to apply the racial stereotype, first to other blacks and eventually even to themselves. The books that the Africans studied in school portrayed the Europeans in a favourable light. The qualities allegedly lacking in Africans are strongly emphasized and glorified:

School children were thus led to internalize a set of values that were in some crucial respects at variance with those to which they were exposed in their home environment; values which they heard were characteristic of Europeans and had made them as strong, wise, and powerful as they were. At the same time the children could not help being aware that these virtues were not practiced by their own family and neighbours. This naturally was merely an indirect way of suggesting inferiority.³¹

3.1.3 The Role of Media in the process of Alienation

Fanon also analyses the role that media and other institution plays in this process of socialization. The colonial education helps them to come out of their illiteracy but only to bind them to a new dilemma of linguistic dualism. Learning the language of the colonizer is considered to be a prerequisite for any social development. The mother tongue has only been passed on orally, or it has been deprived of its written form and is completely banned from public life.

On the other hand the colonized who has no opportunity of learning the foreign language becomes a stranger in his own country. Fanon investigates the problem with reference to the Caribbean: “The Negro of the Antilles will be

³¹ Ibid., 42.

proportionately whiter-that is, he will come closer to being a real human being, in so far as he has the mastery of the French language.”³². The bourgeoisie of the colonial countries refused to speak to their children in their mother tongue since it was looked down upon at school. Only a person capable of expressing himself in good French was respected and considered to be an equal. But the colonizer would not easily accept them to be equals despite their proficiency in language.

In the book, *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon’s extensively deals with the influence of language as a factor that causes a feeling of inferiority and ultimately alienation. But this is restricted mainly to French colonies. French assimilation policy unceasingly inculcated into the colonized the idea that he could only escape his underprivileged position by wholly adopting French culture.

3.1.4 The Colonized and Sexuality

The norms and institutions of the colonial conditions lead not only to economic alienation but the personal and sexual relations are also alienated. The relationship with a white partner was considered to be a common ideal, while relationship with a coloured partner was given a comparatively low rating. It was regarded to be a privilege to become fairer by a liaison with a white person.

Fanon holds the view that the blacks need to overcome the racial complexes and refrain from the obsession of always comparing themselves to the white world. He regards this as a behavioral problem and calls it a kind of neurosis. Fanon does not intend to cure individual neuroses through insight; what he is

³² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 18.

concerned with is to elucidate the psychogenic conditions of a collective neurosis in order to remove it together with its formative causes.³³

The white man is considered to be a reference point by the blacks. He always seeks to compare himself to the privileges that the colonial world enjoys. It results in feelings of submission and inferiority complexes: “The Negro is comparison. He is comparison because he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises.”³⁴

The colonized by entering into an alliance with the colonizer seeks a solution to his problems. Through her liaison with a white man, the woman of colour desires to win admittance to the coveted world of the dominators. On the other hand the man of colour by having a sexual relationship with a white woman takes revenge on the colonial master and at the same time proves that he is his equal, a member of the human race.³⁵ In this process the black only succeeds in affirming the inferiority of the black race. In the man of colour there is a constant tendency to run away from ones own individuality, and thus annihilate his own presence. The feeling of inferiority is caused by his fixation to the colonial master.

The colonized man is handicapped in establishing contacts with his environment through his complexes and feeling of insecurity; he becomes in Fanon’s phrase, ‘the prisoner of an unbearable insularity’.³⁶ Being a psychiatrist, Fanon introduces the concept of ego-withdrawal which is borrowed from Anna Freud. Ego withdrawal implies that when the ego has

³³ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 49.

³⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 60

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

become rigid or has already acquired an intolerance of pain, it obsessively leads to a method of flight; such withdrawal is punished by impaired development. By abandoning one position after another it becomes one-sided, loses too many interests and can show but a meager achievement.³⁷

Fanon is of the opinion any form of ego-withdrawal in the colonized person is bound to have neurotic features as long as he requires white approval and is unable to compensate his withdrawal by other activities of the ego. To illustrate this point he mentions the case of an educated Mulatto woman, a student. She says, "I do not like the Negro because he is savage. Not savage in a cannibal way, but lacking refinement."³⁸

3.1.5 Psychosomatic Disorders and Crime as Indices of Alienation

Fanon adopts the psychoanalytic approach of Sigmund Freud in his efforts to study the psychosomatic disorders of the blacks and the white people. His investigation is restricted to North African colonies. The unceasing violent confrontation of the colonized persons with the norms and institutions of the colonial system leaves its imprint on their personality structure and produces defense mechanisms and processes of compensation on their psychic makeup. If the defense mechanisms collapse under extreme pressure, it can lead to psychosomatic disorders ranging from general indispositions to physical changes.

Fanon uses the term *syndrome nord-africain* to designate the whole complex of insufficiently defined disorders with frequently changing symptoms which he came across in his work as a psychiatrist. In his diagnosis, he observed that the patients felt some vague pain which they were first unable to localize until after

³⁷ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defence* (New York: International Universities Press, 1946), 111, quoted in Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 57.

³⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 58-59.

a great deal of questioning, they could localize it in the vicinity of the stomach.³⁹ He also noticed that the cases of psychosomatic disorders were on an increase during a colonial war as compared to calm periods of colonial administration. Fanon lists the following psychiatric symptoms of psychosomatic illnesses which he treated during the Algerian war: stomach ulcers, nephritic colics, menstruation trouble in women, intense sleeplessness caused by idiopathic tremors, hair turning white prematurely and generalized contraction with muscular stiffness.⁴⁰

According to Fanon, the criminal acts of the colonized which is rarely directed against the colonizers but against his own fellow companions is due to the uncontrolled eruption of pent-up aggressivity built up over long periods of unbearable pressure. The native cannot easily display his anger towards the colonizers but it is discharged in unpolitical behaviour patterns of avoidance such as cultic rituals, dances, spirit possession or criminal acts. This tension is reflected in the dreams of the colonized:

The native is being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression.⁴¹

3.2 INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN UNDERSTANDING ALIENATION

In his understanding on alienation, Fanon also makes a reference of how social and economic factors add to the problems faced by a native. With the coming of the colonizers, the traditional economic and social bases of their society have been destroyed; and no attempt has been made to replace them with

³⁹ Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism & Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 30.

adequate new structures since the colonial economy is solely geared to the needs of the metropolis. The colonized has been torn away from his old conditions of production and without being integrated into the colonial society.

Fanon in his analysis adopts an inter-disciplinary approach embracing psychological, sociological and economic methods of interpretation in understanding the problems of colonialism. A purely psychological or psychoanalytical approach would be inadequate to understand the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and consequently the alienation experienced by the natives.

In conclusion one may observe that there are several factors responsible for the alienation of a native as a result of colonial domination and exploitation. The alienation that an individual experiences is not only an economic alienation but it also includes social, cultural, intellectual and psychological alienation. Under such circumstances a native is unable to create oneself and meet the needs of humanity, one also fails to realize ones own worth and becomes a mere object only to be exploited by others.

It is in this context that Fanon incorporates his theory of violence. He holds that by relaying the pressure of the colonial system under which s/he suffers and aiming at his/her fellow-sufferers, the colonized people act against their own interests, i.e. in an alienated manner. But if popular resistance is politicized and organized in such a way as to lead to acts of violence against the true enemy, the colonizer, violence loses its criminal character- it now becomes emancipatory and hence a potential instrument of dealienation. This however does not justify adequately his reason for emancipation through violence. In the pages yet of follow I have dedicated a Chapter on Emancipation through Violence, where Fanon justifies violence as a means to overcome alienation and to attain victory over the colonized.

CHAPTER IV

THE PITFALLS OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Fanon's most acclaimed work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in the year 1961 is the second literary work of Fanon. He views the colonized world from the perspective of the colonized. He makes an attempt to analyze the psychology of the colonized and points out the indicators towards the path of liberation. In this book he tries to reflect and probe into the rage and frustration of colonized people, and the role of violence in effecting historical change.

The book has rightly been called, 'the handbook for the black revolution'. It is based on Fanon's experiences in Algeria during the war of independence. Using Marxist framework, Fanon explores the class conflict and questions of cultural hegemony in the creation and maintenance of a new country's national consciousness.

4.1 THE CRITIQUE OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

One of Fanon's most telling theoretical contribution is his insistence on what he terms the 'pitfalls of national consciousness'. Nationalism, as Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, often fails in achieving liberation across class boundaries because its aspirations are primarily those of the colonized bourgeoisie—a privileged middle class who perhaps seeks to defeat the prevailing colonial rule only to usurp its place of dominance and surveillance over the working-class or the masses living in rural parts of the country.

In his work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon draws distinction between two kinds of nationalist ideology in the context of anticolonialism: there is on one hand a nationalism that wanted to take power by remaining virtually subordinate to external powers; and on the other, a nationalism that wanted a

genuine independence represented by such groups as the FLN. But amidst these two forms of nationalism the ideas of Fanon is grounded in what we may call a new humanism. In most of the African countries the development of national consciousness was dependent on the reaction of the colonialists. Thus Fanon would say, “the degree of resistance to decolonization determines the shape and depth of the nationalist movement.”⁴²

The idea of National consciousness instead of reflecting the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, resemble only an empty shell. This is caused by the fact that the young and the newly independent nations in Africa prefer race over nation and tribe over state. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon attributes the failure of nationalism to the “intellectual laziness of the national middle class”.⁴³ For Fanon, the national middle class which takes power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class.

According to Fanon the elite of the post-colonial society- who consider themselves to be the enlightened section of the new state are in fact characterized by a small number and are concentrated only in the capital. They are mostly engaged in activities such as business, agriculture and liberal professions. But in this national middle class one will find neither financiers nor industrial magnates. They have neither engaged in production nor in invention, neither building nor labor. The national bourgeoisie continues to live in close affinity with the colonizers and perpetuate their domination over the newly independent countries. One may call this process as ‘neo-colonialism’. This new class of colonial bourgeoisie is incapable of governing the state and moving towards the path of development.

⁴² Nigel Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (UK: Polity Press, 2003), 179.

⁴³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched Of The Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 149.

The objective of the new nationalist parties has been strictly national, but they are completely ignorant of the economy of their own country. Their understanding of nation building has remained a distant reality. The middle class are only acquainted with bookish knowledge and have no acquaintance of the actual and potential resources of their country. According to Fanon, the national economy of the period of independence is not set on a new footing. It is still concerned with the groundnut harvest, with the cocoa crop and the olive yield. Similarly there is no change in the marketing of basic products, and not a single industry is set up in the country. The newly independent countries continue to be of service to the colonial powers and the national middle class plays a historic role of that of a intermediary.⁴⁴

4.2 THE CRITIQUE OF NATIONAL BOURGEOISIE

The mission of the national bourgeoisie has not been to transform the nation; nor does it seeks to bring about a radical change in the entire backward poor class but rather it acts as an intermediary and puts on the mask of neo-colonialism. The elite class is content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent and plays its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. In short the national bourgeoisie identifies itself with the Western bourgeoisie and occupy the positions formerly engaged by the foreigners.

In the post colonial African countries the middle class fails to attend the needs of the large masses due to their attitude of mistrust and empty political promises. Their sole motto is 'replace the foreigner,' and since it hastens in every walk of life to secure justice for itself and to take over the posts that the foreigner has vacated, the small people of the nation – taxi drivers, cake sellers will be equally quick to insist that people belonging to other nations or tribe has

⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

no place in this country.⁴⁵ This attitude eventually leads to a conflict based on the obsessed loyalty to ones own tribe.

In the chapter 'The pitfalls of National Consciousness', Fanon holds the view that the nationals who live in the more prosperous regions realize their good luck, and show a primary and profound reaction in refusing to feed the other nationals. The districts which are rich in natural resources come to the forefront and dominate the empty panorama which the rest of the nation presents. The people of rich regions look upon the others with hatred and find in them envy and covetousness. The national bourgeoisie though fundamentally racist, often manages to mask this racism and portrays itself as the protector and saviour of the nation. Fanon adds by saying that the racial feeling is also perpetuated by religious factor. In the big towns one comes across two great revealed religions, Islam and Catholicism. The history of Africa tells us that the tribal wars were chiefly fought on the line of religion.

The native bourgeoisie rises to power only insofar as it seeks to replicate the bourgeoisie of the 'mother country' that sustains colonial rule. In the following passage, Fanon suggests that the opportunist native bourgeoisie mistakenly attempts to survey and control the colonized masses to the same extent as the colonial bourgeoisie it attempts to displace:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 159.

and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country.⁴⁶

Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the intellectual elite leaders often betray the national working-class:

Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty, and national dignity. but as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie.⁴⁷

4.3 THE PSEUDO ROLE OF THE POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE STATE MACHINERY

The contact of the leaders with the masses is unreal. Instead of working toward the development of the nation, they indulge themselves in activities that are contrary to nation building and seek to satisfy their own selfish motives. The people become stagnate in unbearable poverty. The bourgeoisie class which annexes for its own profit by amassing the wealth of the country, by a kind of manipulative logic passes reproachful judgments upon the other blacks and the other Arabs that more often than not are the reminiscences of the racist doctrines of the former representatives of the colonial power. And according to Fanon such threats can lead to reaffirmation of authority and the appearance of dictatorship.

The leaders of the newly independent countries fail to keep their promises. Every time he speaks to the people he calls to mind his often heroic life, the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 166.

struggles he has led in the name of the people and the victories that in their name he has achieved, thereby intimating clearly to the masses that they ought to go on putting their confidence in him. In retaliation the masses begin to sulk; they turn away from the nation in which they have been given no place and begin to lose interest in it.

Fanon further indicates the role that is being played by the police and the army in perpetuating the cultural hegemony and plundering the nation into deep economic crisis. In these poor, underdeveloped countries, where the rule is that the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty, the army and the police constitute the pillars of the regime; they are being advised by foreign experts.⁴⁸

As prevalent in every society, even in the underdeveloped countries, there are certain members of the elite, intellectuals and civil servants, who sincerely feel the necessity for a planned economy. They confirm their commitment by fighting for the mass participation of the people in the ordering of public affairs. Fanon is of the belief that closing the road to national bourgeoisie is certainly a means whereby the vicissitudes of newfound independence may be avoided and with them the decline of morals, and corruption within the country. It will also put an end to economic regression and will bring to light the anti-democratic tendencies based on force and intimidation. It is only then that a nation will move toward progress. But the task seems to be rather great, since the colonial bourgeoisie try to assert their strength and subjugate the multitudes. The bourgeoisie is regarded to be the direct product of precise economic conditions. Fanon further says, “the bourgeoisie of an underdeveloped country is a bourgeoisie in spirit only. It is not its economic

⁴⁸ Ibid., 172.

strength, nor the dynamism of its leaders, nor the breadth of its ideas that ensures its peculiar quality as bourgeoisie.”⁴⁹

In his analysis, Fanon states that the only way to come out of stagnation and to move towards the path of development and progress is by nationalizing the middleman’s trading sector. In a colonial economy the intermediary sector is by far the most important. Nationalizing the intermediary sector means organizing the wholesale and retail cooperatives on a democratic basis; it also means decentralizing these cooperatives by getting the mass of the people interested in the ordering of public affairs. One can achieve this only through adequate political education. Progress and attitudinal change is possible only when one arms himself with proper education. It will allow free flow of ideas from the people necessary for nation building but the national bourgeoisie forms a screen and forbids such ideas. The party leaders behave like common sergeant-majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for ‘silence in the ranks’.⁵⁰

Fanon further elaborates the role of a party. The party according to him is not a tool in the hands of the government. On the contrary, the party is a tool in the hands of the people; it is they who should decide the policies that the government should carry out. The party ultimately mirrors the aspirations of the masses and the powers vested to the party should be decentralized. It is the only way to bring life to regions which are dead, those regions which are not yet awakened to life. The success of a nation is possible only when the citizens of the underdeveloped countries seek for occasions to establish contacts with the rural masses. The national policy should be in favour of the masses and should improve the conditions of their existence.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 178-179.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 183.

4.4 DECOLONIZATION AND ANTICOLONIAL STRUGGLE

A new state or a new country will not come about all at once. One encounters several hardships on the path towards development. But the victory over the weaknesses is a necessity from which no government will be able to escape. The power of building a new nation lies in the hands of the masses: “the masses should be able to meet together, discuss, propose and receive directions. The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves and to put forward new ideas. At each meeting, the brain increases its means of participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity.”⁵¹

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon highlights the importance of political education, which he defines as opening the people’s minds, awakening them and allowing the birth of their intelligence. According to Césaire “it is to invent souls”.⁵² It does not consist in teaching the masses to make a political speech. But it consists in teaching the masses that everything depends on them; and it is their own responsibility to come out of stagnancy. This can be brought to fruition through the process of decentralization. The collective struggle presupposes collective responsibility at the base and collegiate responsibility at the top. In the words of Fanon, “to educate the masses politically is to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of each of its citizens.”⁵³ This birth is central to Fanon’s conception of a national culture and is made possible by the transformation of consciousness catalyzed by the revolutionary struggle.

The colonial rule created the national boundary. Fanon maintains that national liberation can be achieved through the process of decolonization and anticolonial struggle is a must. Indeed, if the social struggle does not become the national endeavor it will inevitably degenerate along the traditional,

⁵¹ Ibid., 195

⁵² Ibid., 197.

⁵³ Ibid., 200.

geographic, ethnic and racial lines which were created under colonial rule. With his critical insight Fanon foresaw the great potential for failure in the national movements, indicating that the process of decolonization should ultimately lead to self-determination. The social and political movements should eventually lead to humanism.

The new humanism needs to be sought for because the disappearance of colonialism means both the disappearance of the colonizer and the colonized; it thus includes a radical reordering of the social structure to prevent a neocolonial situation. It is the complex transformation of the colonized, not the simple departure of the colonizers, that will produce the new humanity. In short, to venture beyond manicheism is to transform the native into an active thinking historical subject; it means rising above the absurd drama that others have staged and in this new humanism the native will dictate terms for oneself. At his stage the being will reveal itself to all the natives.

Fanon aims at going beyond manicheism, which means to end the world of colonialism and racism and to inaugurate a new human reciprocity. Authentic termination of the colonial condition requires a new humanism and a new humanism requires total decolonization. Fanon turns away from liberal European humanism, which he considers hypocritical, but he makes serious attempts to create a more human and fundamentally different future from the dehumanized and violent experience of colonial rule. In part, Fanon's is a practical or ethical humanism, because it is after all an issue of life. Only at the level of new humanism the native will discover his/her real self and will become a being-for-itself. Fanon's dialectic of anticolonialism is grounded in the local, but to defeat colonialism or emancipation could become a reality only with the assistance of violence.

CHAPTER V

PHILOSOPHY OF VIOLENCE: EMANCIPATION THROUGH VIOLENCE

*National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, common wealth: whatever may be the heading...decolonization is always a violent phenomena – Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961*

Down the ages great wars have been fought on the pretext of bringing peace and development of a nation. Though the process of bringing peace has been a violent phenomenon, no nation seems to have openly justified violence. The recent US-Iraq war may serve as an example. One cannot be blind to the ulterior motives of US in waging war against Iraq. The US has often portrayed itself to be the saviour of the world and the protector of democratic standards, but they have failed to meet the cry of humanity or create a just world. Today more than ever before the human race stands divided on the basis of religion, culture and economic disparities.

This brings us to the central thesis of Fanon which is described elaborately in *The Wretched of the Earth*. For Fanon decolonization is a violent phenomenon and emancipation is possible only through violence. It is quite simply the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men. It is not a period of transition, but a total, complete and absolute substitution. The success of violence lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up and this change is willed, called for demanded. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon repeats the point that just as the Black is a product of White society, the native is a colonial product. The native comes to existence as a result of colonialism.

5.1 VIOLENCE A ROYAL ROAD TO SALVATION

Fanon's opening chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'Concerning Violence,' has been controversial ever since its publication. His understanding of violence and emancipation through violence has raised several ethical questions. Sartre in the preface makes a claim that "violence is a royal road to salvation, violence, like Achilles' lance can heal the wound that it has inflicted."⁵⁴ *The Wretched of the Earth* has often been reduced by critics into a text that glorifies violence and many critics and supporters have caricatured Fanon as a philosopher of violence. This one sided opinion is because many are generally familiar only with the first chapter of his work, ignoring the rest of his work.

The National bourgeoisie makes a constant effort to direct the colonial violence inward, to areas where this disruptive energy can be released without affecting the colonial set up of status quo. In short, the native's energy is directed or rather deflected to the self. However there comes a moment when the native's eyes are opened to reality, they find the real source of anguish and the process of decolonization can be said to begin. Thus one may retrospect and ask "if violence marks the appearance and essence of colonialism, does the emergence of counter-violence signal the appearance and essence of liberation?"⁵⁵ This may call to mind a fundamental question- Can violence help to create a new human being? Can it be a cause of new humanism?

There is no doubt that Fanon upholds the idea that decolonization is a violent phenomena but one needs to critically re-evaluate his understanding of violence. Fanon vehemently asserts that a new humanity emerges immediately through violence, while some critics question whether violence is capable of fulfilling the psychological functions which he claimed. Fanon's idea of

⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 30.

⁵⁵ Nigel Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (UK: Polity Press, 2003), 103.

violence need to be understood by taking into account his critical analysis of spontaneity, national consciousness and political organization, which he elaborates in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon glorified violence not merely for violence's sake, but as a result of conflict between the natives and the settlers. Violence can ultimately liberate the people from their stupor, fear and skepticism. In his whole understanding of violence Fanon emphasizes the psychological freedom that can be attained through violence. Hence we can say that violence does not have its own meaning but it has a context and a history and has to be approached in its proper perspective. In other words violence has to be historicized. Also one has to keep in mind that being a psychiatrist he had studied extensively the causes of aggressive behaviour in the youth. In his long search, Fanon had explored the world of the colonized and the implications of the brutality and cruelty that the blacks encountered during the colonial rule.

Fanon's violence is not merely a reaction to colonial violence but as a means to a positive notion of subjectivity. Violence thus becomes a means through which the natives come to a discovery of self-realization. One may define this movement as 'enlightening of consciousness' rather than 'national consciousnesses'.⁵⁶ Fanon's notion of violence is based on historical facts which consists of several factors; it is not exhausted in a Manichean reaction to colonial rule.

The myriad terms that Fanon uses while writing about decolonization point to the many levels of his thinking about violence. In 'Concerning Violence,' he frequently uses the words violence and force synonymously, virtually assuming that violence and revolution are interlinked, even though the word violence is used frequently and the word revolution not at all.

⁵⁶Ibid., 105.

According to Fanon anticolonial violence marks the end of the colonial regime and thus is an indicator of decolonization. It is a process which leads to a complete substitution of one species of human being for another.⁵⁷ Fanon's conception of violence is non-reductive, in that he includes within it every single relationship between individuals. In the colonial context every relationship is strained. In short, Fanon contends that the authenticity of decolonization, and thus the meaning of violence, depends on the degree of change in the social structure that is willed for, brought about, developed from the bottom up.

Fanon further talks about the role of the colonial bourgeoisie, who make every effort to strike a balance by creating a situation of non-violence. They believe in the idea of compromise and try to settle the unrest. They are scared that the masses may destroy everything and ravage the economy into deep crisis. The national bourgeoisie assert that people should not use physical force. They claim to have an objective look at the problems that the natives encounter and provide solutions to their problems. But for Fanon, the native intellectuals and the leaders of the nationalist parties are the least objective.

5.2 FREEDOM FROM MANICHEAN REALITIES

Colonial violence is not hidden. It follows the native everywhere, entering into every pore of life. It is ingrained into the native's head; it is reinforced by its ideology that all the native's customs, religion, and culture are the products of constitutional depravity. The process of colonial cleansing is the transformation of the native into an animal. It promotes dehumanization and speaks of the native in zoological terms: a piece of laziness stretched out in the sun. The colonial society appears as a Manichean one, which sees the colonizer as

⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 35

everything good, human, and alive and the colonized resemble all that is bad, brutish and inert. Violence eventually puts an end to this Manichean way of thinking and demands the total disappearance of the colonized people. The destruction of the colonial world is nothing other than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or the expulsion from the country.

5.3 FREEDOM FROM INTERIORIZED VIOLENCE

Colonialism destroys the living element of the indigenous forms of organization and culture and creates the native. But the native has not so willingly accepted the colonialist portrayal, “He is overpowered by not tamed, he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority”.⁵⁸ Indeed, the constant exhibition of force by the colonial regime is ironically the telltale sign of colonialism’s lack of hegemony and confidence. In such an atmosphere of violence, the permanent tension of colonial relations, the pent-up aggression and anger must be allowed outlets.

Fanon using the psychoanalytic approach of Freud writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that in every society a channel must exist for aggression to be released.⁵⁹ Colonialism maintains its hegemony by directing and focusing the pent-up energy, making sure it is expressed and released in the native’s zone. He aims at bringing about psychological liberation and freedom from interiorized violence and feelings of inferiority.

Fanon observed that in the colonial situation the dreams of the natives manifest an expression of pent-up anger. Even though the colonialist tries to make the dreams of liberty impossible, the totalitarian colonial structure cannot control the dreams. Fanon is not content to have freedom limited to dreams. In fact, he

⁵⁸ Fanon Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 53.

⁵⁹ Fanon Frantz *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 145.

is very critical of the dream-like “magical superstructure which permeates native society and which fulfills certain well-defined functions in the dynamism of the libido”.⁶⁰ For liberation to be realized, he insists, this superstructure must be replaced. What also needs replacing is the structure of consent derived from tradition or customs which keeps the native in place.

In his analysis of the dream world, Fanon interprets the social character of dance, which exhibits a certain permissiveness under the watchful eye of the customary authority, as a huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. But this apparent self-liberation is really just another symptom of colonialism, because it is in fact only a symbolic and controlled release that returns peace and calm to the village and changes nothing. Thus, Fanon concludes, violence is controlled and sublimated:

We have seen that this same violence, though kept very much on the surface all through the colonial period, yet turns in the void. We have also seen that it is canalized by the emotional outlets of dance and possession by spirits; we have seen how it is exhausted in fratricidal combats.⁶¹

However, during the period of decolonization the direction of violence begins to change. The violence will now be directed toward the colonial bourgeoisie. While colonialism paints the militant as a terrorist, violence is also used by the militants as an object lesson to the leaders of the movement who still seek a compromise with colonialism. Once that movement goes over to violence, there is no turning back. The masses are now no longer satisfied with a compromise but they seek to create a new humanity, a new world. And in this new society those who are last will be first and those first will be last. At this stage any attempt at mystification becomes in the long run practically impossible.⁶²

⁶⁰ Fanon Frantz *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 94-95.

5.4 VIOLENCE A CLEANSING FORCE

In his analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon is critical of those slaves who think that liberation can be granted by White Master. Freedom has to be fought for and independence without a struggle is only a sham, a doomed pseudo-liberation. A transfer of power to a new elite brings no real change in the lives of the people. At the time of independence there are some who lamented that independence wasn't worthwhile.

According to Fanon it is violence that binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. He interprets that it is only through violence that one can fight against poverty illiteracy and underdevelopment. It is violence that can lead to liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. The colonial system does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it a makes every effort to separate them.

Counter-violence, namely anticolonial violence is different from colonial violence because, Fanon maintains, it transforms the colonized and the colonizer. The formerly invincible settler and the dehumanized colonized become equals. Colonial violence is the violence of the master, it can create no new system; anticolonial violence, the violence of the colonized, it dialectical, it establishes, Fanon argues, the basis for reciprocal recognition.

Just as colonialism begins in and continues through violence, self-consciousness is the product of counter-violence. Thus colonial violence is negated not by nonviolence but by counter-violence. Fanon expresses this turning of the tables of the settler/native relationship as "an extraordinary

reciprocal homogeneity.”⁶³ In contrast to nonviolent propositions that many people prophesize, he maintains that colonial violence, which is a central element of colonial rule, can only be broken by a violent resistance to the colonial regime. That is why he credits the act of violence by the colonized as an act of emancipation, because it aims at removing the structure of violence.

Contrary to the colonialist’s truth that the native is a lazy, dishonest, greedy, good-for-nothing, Fanon asserts that the unemployed and starving peasants do not lay claim to the truth but are the truth because they understand most clearly how things really are in the world of colonial manicheism. It is not a relativist idea of truth but a certainty of being and the whole of truth. Fanon proclaims “in every age, among the people, truth is the property of the national cause. The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood...In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior and the good is quite simply that which is evil for ‘them’.”⁶⁴

After having analyzed Fanon’s schema of violence, it is not violence *per se* but it is a process of liberation that is central to the embodiment of history and the creation of a revolutionary agency that begins to strip away colonial reification. The native transcends nativehood only through self-determination and by close association with revolution. What play a significant role are not the traditions which initially sustained an element of resistance, but rather a new sense of the possibility of freedom.

Fanon views violence as a cleansing force; it frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction. It makes him fearless and restores his self respect. In the eyes of Fanon violence is looked upon as an

⁶³ Ibid. p. 61

⁶⁴ Fanon Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 50.

illuminating factor which makes the natives responsible. They will now no longer allow anyone to set themselves up as their liberators. They will not place their future, their destiny or the fate of the country in the hands of a living God. Under violence any attempt of mystification becomes impossible.

After having gone through the various implications and the use of violence in the colonial situation, a question may crop up in our minds: Can violence provide an answer to the existential misery, oppression, inequality and poverty in today's world? Under what circumstances can violence be justified? Violence is not an end in itself; it is only a means for the creation of new humanity. What Fanon aims at is to rehabilitate humankind, the poor sections of the society who have been kept suppressed for centuries. He wants to make them victorious everywhere, once and for all. But this task will remain unaccomplished, if the middle and the elite class of society remain indifferent or turn deaf ears to the cries of people who long for liberation and a life of respect and dignity. Counter-violence is a dual movement- it transforms the colonized as well as the colonizers. It is a moment of realizing the responsibility of every individual in striving towards the good of humanity and thus create a just world. In this new world 'the last shall be first and the first last.'

CONCLUSION

The theme that follows from the preceding pages is the theme of invasion. Fanon meticulously loosens the unlawful and unjust treatment given by the invaders, the Europeans to the people of Africa. Colonialism was a military project, and the counter movement ought to be a violent phenomenon. Some people would disagree with Fanon when he exalts violence as a necessary pre-condition for the problems his people were facing. He was a witness to history: to the violent decolonization of a particular people who had been violently colonized.

The philosophical overview of Fanon has been influenced by the Algerian war. Fanon's endeavor consists in overcoming the binary system in which the black is associated with evil and white is considered to be good. Fanon argues that an entirely new world must come into being; he aims to create a new humanity. This utopian desire, to be absolutely free of the past, requires total revolution, 'absolute violence.' In this new world those who are last shall be first and the first last.

One may ask, whether violence can ever have the redemptive or regenerative role that Fanon attributes in his 'ethic of violence.' Violence is generally considered to be the very opposite of fraternity. Fanon's use of violence may raise serious ethical problems for the moral philosophers and theologians. Sometimes life situation demands that the process of liberation should take a radical form to put an end to oppressive structures and create a 'new species'.

Fanon challenges us to respond to our times as he responded to his own. What we should imbibe from Fanon is not merely his call to violence but his compassionate anger at what he saw happening around him. 'The wretched of the earth' are still prevalent in the present day society. In spite of all the modernity and technological development, the disparities between the rich and the poor is ever at an increase. Fanon poses a challenge to be a voice to

the voiceless, just as Fanon remains a voice for the Third World. Can we still afford to remain a silent spectator to the miseries inflicted on our brethren? Aren't we called to shed our masks of comfort and respond to the cry of humanity?

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