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Frantz Fanon's 'The Wretched of the Earth': A Critical Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Postcolonial Theory as metaphysics, ethics and politics-addresses matter of identity, gender, race, racism and ethnicity with the challenges of developing a post-colonial national identity. The field of post colonial studies has been gaining prominence since the 1970s. The Wretched of the Earth was first published in 1961 by Francois Maspero and has a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. In it Fanon analyses the role of class, race, national culture and violence in the struggle for national liberation. The discussion here explores the short biography and the field of postcolonial studies and formulation of theories. Along with tracing a history of colonization, it covers a long stretch of prominent writers and their texts that form basis for such studies; it also discusses a representation of Fanon's views on religion and hegemony, violence insurrection and upheaval. This also evaluates Fanon's text in the context of Marxist philosophy and its impact on postcolonial studies. This article analyses the exploitative relationship that existed between the settlers and the Africans. The settlers used every means possible to secure their economic interests; Fanon blames the diametrical relationship existing between Africa and Europe entirely on colonialism. Says Fanon, the well-being and progress of Europe have been built on the sweat and dead bodies of Negroes, and he did not mince words when he made a strong claims that Europe is Africa's creation. To Fanon therefore, the colonized man only finds freedom in and through violence. In the course of this struggle, Fanon warns that the native should be prepared to ... sacrifice everything and water their native soil with their blood.

Keywords: Colonialism, Violence, upheaval, Identity, Decolonization, Resistance, Insurrection

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Introduction

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is 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 forty two years. Fanon was born in the Caribbean island of Martinique, then a French colony and now a French department. He was born into a middle class black family and received a typical assimilationist education. At the age of 18, Fanon enlisted in the French army and saw active duty in France. In 1944 he was wounded in battle and received the *Croix do Guerre* medal.

After recovering from his wounds Fanon returned home to Martinique, a decorated war veteran, already disillusioned with colonialism and the black mans place in it, Fanon stayed long enough to complete his baccalaureate and then returned to France where he took up the study of medicine. In 1953 he obtained his qualification as a psychiatrist and travelled to

Algeria, then a French colony, to take up a position at the Blida-Joinville hospital. The previous year, Fanon had published one of his seminal works *Black Skin, White Masks*, an Analysis of the impact of colonial subjugation on the black psyche. By now Fanon had made a clean break with his French assimilationist upbringing and education. Once in Algeria, Fanon threw in his lot with the FLN rebels, who were fighting to liberate Algeria from French colonial rule. It was during this time that Fanon produced his greatest works. *A Dying Colonialism* and perhaps the most important work on decolonization yet written, *The Wretched of the Earth*. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon lucidly analyses the role of class, race, national culture and violence in the struggle for national liberation. In this seminal work Fanon expounded his views on the liberating role of violence for the colonized; as well as the general necessity of violence in the anti-colonial struggle. Both books firmly established Fanon in the eyes of much of the Third World as a leading anti-colonial thinker of

20th century. In 1959 he compiled his essays on Algeria in a book called *L'An Cinq: De la Revolution Algerienne*. In this book, he drew an optimistic view of a revolutionary change underwent by Algerian people. He left Martinique in 1943, when he volunteered to fight with the Free French in World War II, and he remained in France after the war to study medicine and psychiatry on scholarship in Lyon. Here he began writing political essays and plays, and he married a Frenchwoman, Jose Duble. Before he left France, Fanon had already published his first analysis of the effects of racism and colonization, *Black Skin, White Masks* (BSWM), originally titled "An Essay for the Disalienation of Blacks," in part based on his lectures and experiences in Lyon. BSWM is part manifesto, part analysis; it both presents Fanon's personal experience as a black intellectual in a whitened world and elaborates the ways in which the colonizer / colonized relationship is normalized as psychology. Because of his schooling and cultural background, the young Fanon conceived of himself as French, and the disorientation he felt after his initial encounter with French racism decisively shaped his psychological theories about culture. Fanon inflects his medical and psychological practice with the understanding that racism generates harmful psychological constructs that both blind the black man to his subjection to a universalized white norm and alienate his consciousness. A racist culture prohibits psychological health in the black man. For Fanon, being colonized by a language has larger implications for one's consciousness: "To speak... means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (17-18). Speaking French means that one accepts, or is coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the French, which identifies blackness with evil and sin. In an attempt to escape the association of blackness with evil, the black man dons a white mask, or thinks of himself as a universal subject equally participating in a society that advocates an equality supposedly abstracted from personal appearance. Cultural values are internalized, or "epidermalized" into consciousness, creating a fundamental disjuncture between the black man's consciousness and his body. Under these conditions, the black man is necessarily alienated from himself. Fanon insists, however, that the category "white" depends for its stability on its negation, "black". Neither exists without the other, and both come into being at the moment of imperial conquest. Thus, Fanon locates the historical point at which certain psychological formations became possible, and he provides an important analysis of how historically bound cultural systems, such as the Orientalist discourse Edward Said describes, can perpetuate themselves as psychology. While Fanon charts the psychological oppression of black men, his book should not be taken as an accurate portrait of the oppression of black women under similar conditions. The work of feminists in postcolonial studies undercuts Fanon's simplistic and unsympathetic portrait of the black woman's complicity in colonization. While in Ghana, Fanon developed leukemia, and though encouraged by friends to rest he refused. He completed his final and most fiery indictment of the colonial condition. *The Wretched of the Earth*, in 10 months, and the book was published by Jean-Paul Sartre in the year of his death. Fanon died at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, where he had sought treatment for his cancer, on December 6, 1961. At his request, his body was returned to Algeria and buried with honors by the Algerian National Army of Liberation. Fanon's last work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), was called by its publisher "the

handbook for the black revolution". The book was 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. "In guerrilla war the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the places where you are going. Each fighter carries his warring country between his toes."

Handbook for the Black Revolution

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon develops Manichean perspective implicit in BSWM. To overcome the binary system in which black is bad and white is good, Fanon argues that an entirely new world must come into being. This utopian desire, to be absolutely free of the past requires total revolution 'absolute violence'. Violence purifies, destroying not only the category of white, but that of black too. According to Fanon, true revolution in Africa can only come from the peasants, or "fellaheen." Putting peasants at the vanguard of the revolution reveals the influence of the FLN, who based their operations in the countryside, on Fanon's thinking. Furthermore, this emphasis on the rural underclass highlights Fanon's disgust with the greed and politicking of the comprador bourgeoisie in new African nations. The brand of nationalism espoused by these classes, and even by the urban proletariat, is insufficient for total revolution because such classes benefit from the economic structures of imperialism. Fanon claims that non agrarian revolutions end when urban classes consolidate their own power, without remaking the entire system. In his faith in the African peasantry as well as his emphasis on language, Fanon anticipates the work of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who finds revolutionary artistic power among the peasants. The book (*Wretched of the Earth*) was 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. "In guerrilla war the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the places where you are going. Each fighter carries his warring country between his toes."

Post Colonialism

Post colonialism is a set of theories in philosophy, film, political science and literature that deal with the cultural legacy of colonial rule. As a literary theory it deals with literature produced in countries that once were colonies of other countries, especially of the European colonial Power Britain, France and Spain, it includes countries still in colonial arrangement says Leela Gandhi in her book. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998: 107). It also deals with literature written in colonial countries and by their citizens that has colonized peoples as its subject matter. Colonized people, especially of the British empire, attended British universities; their access to education, still unavailable in the colonies, created a new criticism- mostly literature and especially in novels. Following the break up of the soviet union during the late 20th Century, its former republics became the subject of this study. Post colonialism deals with cultural identity in colonised societies; the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the way in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity the way in which the knowledge of the colonised (subordinated) people have been generated and used to serve the coloniser's

interests; and the way in which the colonisers literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonised as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture. These inward struggles of identity, history and future possibilities often occur in the metropolis and ironically, with the aid of post-colonial structures of power, such as universities.

The wretched of the earth is a seminal work that has inspired generations of activists and scholars in the fight against operation and injustice. The book is notably a critique of colonialism but also a call to action for the colonized people to reclaim their dignity and humanity. Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925 and later moved to France to study medicine and psychiatry. During World War II, he joined the French army and fought against the Nazis. However, Fanon became disillusioned with French Colonialism and its treatment of Black people. He eventually joined the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria during the war of independence. Here, he witnessed firsthand violence and brutality of colonialism as well as the resistance of the colonised people. He believed that violence was a necessary tool for liberation and that the colonized people must use it to break free from the chains of colonialism. In addition to work as a psychiatrist and revolutionary, Fanon was also an accomplished writer. He wrote several books including "Black Skin, Whit Masks," which explores the psychology of racism and the effects of colonialism on the Black Psyche. The wretched of the Earth is perhaps his most famous work and is widely regarded as a classic of postcolonial theory.

The wretched of the earth is divided in to four parts. Each which explores different themes and key ideas. In the first part fanon argues that violence in a necessary tool for decolonization. He believes that colonized people must use violence to break the chains of colonialism and liberate themselves. Violence is transformative acts that can help the colonized people regain their dignity and self-respect. However violence is not solution in itself but rather a means to an end, once, decolonization is achieved, a new society must be built on the principles of equality, justice and freedom. Second part explores the pitfalls of nationalism and challenges of building a new society after colonialism. Fanon wants that nationalism can become a new form of operation and that the new leaders must be aware of this danger. He argues that the new society must be built on the principles of equality, justice and freedom rather than on narrow nationalist interests. Fanon also criticizes the idea that western style democracy is the only model for a just society. Instead, he argues that the new society must be based on the needs and aspirations of the people themselves. In the third part Fanon challenges of building a new consciousness after colonialism. He shows how colonialism has created a split within the colonized people and how this split must be overcome. The new consciousness must be base a new vision of the world and a new understanding of history. Fanon believes that colonized people must reject the myths and lies of colonialism and embrace a new identity based on their own culture, heritage and history. The fourth part explores the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized people. Fanon argues that colonialism has created a system of operation that affects every aspects of life. It has created mental disorders. And a new society must address these issues. Fanon also shows how colonialism has created a false binary between the colonizer and the colonized, which must be transcended in order to build a truly just society. Overall, it is a powerful critique of colonialism and its effects on the

psyche of colonized people. Fanon argues that colonialism is not just a political or economic system, but also a psychological phenomenon that affects the way people think and feel about themselves.

Post-Colonial Critical Imagination

Africa had to suffer under the colonial rule for decades and it has yet not freed itself fully from the vestiges of colonialism. Africa was heavily exploited by the colonial powers and people had to live under the laws imposed by the colonialists and had to face the crisis of values generated by the colonial politics. The result of this kind of colonialism created so many maladjustments between the African individual and the whole African society.

On such a condition of crisis and groupism, someone had to take the powerful step against the policies of Europeans. Peoples of Africa were not so strong; they were unaware, backward as far as the matter of their society is concerned. So, the African writers identified themselves with the political, social movements and gave prominence to the aspirants of the African people in their fight for freedom and human-rights. African writers as well as poets were deeply hurt by their countrymen's condition. These lines very clearly depict the conditions that Africans have lost every-thing which they had in the past.

In such a way Africans suffered a lot and could do little to emerge. They even lost their mental control to think wisely and live wisely. Colonialism entails in it a loss of innocence on the parts of both colonizer and colonised as well. Colonization leads to the lack of will, social prostration and also loss of confidence and amnesia. Writers like Fanon, Achebe and Ngugi had to take some powerful steps in order to bring awareness and to get rid of these problems.

Actually Fanon knows that his countrymen are strong enough to face this problem.

Once postcolonial writings have taken up this anti-colonial stance, there is no end to it. A great majority of works flows in, along with majority of articles in support to comment upon the global dominance of the United States.

The point that Frantz Fanon is trying to get across is that colonization is not limited to the affluent or the elite. It is more widely spread and lives side by side with some very outdated social values and conventional attitudes of thought, which in their own way confine growth. This situation in society reveals how progress is neither linear nor cyclic. It is a movement to and fro like a pendulum, but it is much more complicated than that-it is divided, it is forked, it is conflictive, and hence, it is slow and contradictory. This creates problem for all cultural progress. Most post-colonial societies are timid where formulation of theories is concerned; perhaps they find it extremely difficult to step outside their own skins. There is requirement to move out of both imitative and regressive roles.

The struggle against oppression was the central thesis of Frantz Fanon's revolutionary philosophy. And colonialism was the target of this fury. Fanon condemned colonialism in the bitterest terms and advocated violence in its most extreme form to confront this plague. Colonialism is not a thinking machine nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its most natural state and will only yield when confronted with greater violence.

This revolutionary outlook is reflected in many of Fanon's works, among which include, The Wretched of the Earth. The latter book, acclaimed as Fanon's most accomplished work, has been described as the "bible of decolonization" because of

its radical impact on, and eventual success of the anti-colonial struggle. Half a century after Fanon's death, his thesis of violence still remains an object of heated debate. This controversy is increasingly fanned by the undying contradictions within postcolonial Africa.

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, He was pointed to the exploitative relationship that existed between the settlers and the African. The settlers used every means possible to secure their economic interests, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon blames the diametrical relationship existing between Africa and Europe entirely on colonialism. Says Fanon, the well-being and progress of Europe have been built on the sweat and dead bodies of Negroes. And Fanon did not mince words when he made a strong claim that Europe is Africa's creation. To Fanon therefore, the colonized man only finds freedom in and through violence. In the course of this struggle, Fanon warns that the native should be prepared to.... sacrifice everything and water their native soil with their blood. He further cautioned seriously that as a strategy in this struggle, the native can accept a compromise with colonialism, but never a surrender of principle.

Another damaging aspect of colonialism which Fanon vociferously decried in his book was the physical and spiritual partition of Africa. It was under colonial rule that Africa was split into several halves for European domination. Colonialism seized African land and minerals for European economic enterprise. It was under colonial rule that Africans were graded, degraded and finally classified into natives and as similes. Colonialism obliged Africans to carry identification badges on their own soil. On a more dramatic scale, colonialism dissected Africa because it bordered Europe, the land of achievement and wonder.

In Fanon's words, independence for Africa simply meant the replacing of one species of men with another species of men. This new species constitutes the core of the neocolonialist framework, the logical continuation and consequence of colonialism. Here, Fanon singles out two groups of people who need an equal dose of violence. These are the national bourgeoisie of the Third World and the lumpenproletariat. The former group Fanon says, balances its budget with loans and gifts. And together with the latter group, both simply serve the role which Fanon describes as a transmission line between the nation and capitalism.

Structure and Style

The wretched of the earth in written is a powerful and poetic style that combines philosophy, psychology and political theory. Fanon's writing is passionate, emotional and deeply insightful. He uses vivid imagery, metaphors and anecdotes to illustrate his points. His style is characterized by the use of powerful and evocative language. He employs metaphors and analogies to convey complex ideas in a simple and accessible way. For example, he describes colonialism as a "Manichean world" in which the colonized and colonizer are locked in a perpetual struggle for dominance. Fanon also uses vivid and graphic descriptions of violence to convey the horrors of colonialism and necessity of resistance. The use of personal anecdotes and stories are also key elements of his style. He draws on his own experience as a Blackman living under colonized rule in Algeria to illustrate his points. These personal anecdotes help to humanize the struggles of the colonized people and give the book a sense of urgency and immediacy. This book inspired many activists and revolutionaries around the world and helped to shape the thinking of the new Left in 1960s.

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