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**FRANTZ FANON'S JUSTIFICATIONS TO VIOLENCE AS  
DISCUSSED IN *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH***

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study is mainly devoted to approaching Frantz Fanon's influential text, The Wretched of the Earth, to explain how it is considered as a foremost representative of the post-colonial texts. This study concentrates on Fanon's consideration of the role of violence as an inevitable means of resistance in the colonial context. For Fanon, the colonized people's use of violence is a natural reaction to the colonizer's violence, and it is the most effective strategy of resistance that compels the colonial authority to negotiate and give the chance to the colonized to speak. This study highlights Fanon's call for organizing and teaching the spontaneous sectors of the resisting people to bring the people's struggle to success.*

**KEYWORDS:** colonial context, violence, resistance, native, colonizer-colonized

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A brilliant psychiatrist and revolutionary critic, Frantz Fanon is one of the most well-known intellectuals in post-colonial theory. Fanon's name is intimately connected with anti-colonial theorizing of resistance. He was born in Martinique in 1925. The first stage of Fanon's life is in some ways considered to be colonial. He volunteered for military service in the French army during the Second World War, and then studied medicine in France. The second stage is completely different; he went to Algeria to work for the colonial army, but he resigned because of the brutality of the colonial regime. Moreover, he joined the Algerian resistance and became a hated enemy of French colonialism.

Fanon is a revolutionary critic whose radical position is entirely a product of his experience in the anti-colonial Algeria. He was one of the voices of the central committee of the Front de Liberation Nationale FLN, and this means that "the Third World finds itself and speaks to itself through his voice" (Sartre 1963, 9). He was a sincere intellectual whose criticism was very useful to the Third World peoples. In addition, his writings about resisting colonial occupation are applicable across the globe, which makes him a global theorist. His name above all others is associated with both theorizing and the implementation of anti-

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colonial and post-colonial resistance to the degree that he is described as "the father of anti-colonial theory" (Young 1995, 161).

Moreover, in recent years, Frantz Fanon has been treated as the most important anti-colonial activist; he has become in the words of Louis Gates (1991) who maintained that "a psychoanalyst of culture, as a champion of the wretched of the earth" (1991, 458). Furthermore, he has come to be known, as one critic affirms, "a prophet of the Third World, a romantic hero of decolonization" (Memmi, 1973, 39).

Although he died more than fifteen years before the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Fanon and his writings take up a highly significant position in post-colonial theory. Even Said refers to him while thinking about resistance in the present context (Said 1989). Fanon and his fellow Martiniquan Aime Cesaire were regarded as authors of freedom who acknowledge the constructive energy released by glorifying the resistance of the colonized societies. In addition, instead of understanding the colonialist relationship in terms of arrangements with the structures of colonialism, they favored tracing the struggle between the inflexibly restricted powers of colonialism (Parry 1994, 179).

Fanon has become an outstanding post-colonial figure. Due to his writings, many arguments concerning the nature of the anti-colonial struggle between theory and practice continue to be debated. Some critics look to Fanon as an example of the active, committed political intellectual, who connects together theory and practice. Moreover, most of the issues and strategies of resistance debated in post-colonial theory are apparent in his own books. He derived his ideas and concepts from the core of the Western intellect and used them to resist the most essential project: the colonial enterprise. "The list of figures who informed Fanon's work," Gilbert and Staton suggest, "includes Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Sartre and Lacan" (1997, 14). Thus, Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism are reflected clearly in Fanon's approach to colonialism.

Throughout his own writings from the fifties and early sixties, Fanon developed one of the most thorough analyses of colonialism's political, psychological, and sociological consequences. He focused on the political, social, and psychological issues that are common among the colonized peoples. In this period, he wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). While in his first book Fanon is more concerned with the psychologies of the oppressed, the next two books are mainly about the revolt of the oppressed and the reasons and shape of the Algerian resistance. Whereas some critics want to detach Fanon the psychiatrist from Fanon the revolutionary, Ania Loomba maintains that they are "interrelated throughout Fanon's Work" (1998, 146).

In addition, Fanon is interested in nationalism as a tool of resistance. He writes elaborately on the pitfalls of national consciousness. Moreover, he highlights the role played by national culture in resisting the colonial cultural hegemony. He also sheds the light on violence in the colonial context, in terms of its causes and its results. Eventually, although he did not live to see Algeria gain its freedom from France, dying of leukemia in 1961 only months before independence, most of his writings were published in the context of the war of liberation, making him the voice of all the wretched of the earth.

### ***The Wretched of the Earth:***

Although first published in 1961, long before the emergence of post-colonial theory in the academy, *The Wretched of the Earth* displays much of its theoretical assumptions. It is the primary book in which Frantz Fanon presents different strategies of resisting colonialism. Using a revolutionary tone, Fanon refers to the role of violence as well as culture in challenging the colonial paradigm during the period of decolonization. In addition, he attracts our attention to some of the dangers and problems that newly independent countries face and presents logical solutions. *The Wretched of the Earth* was first published in 1961 and was republished several times in the following years. The 1963 edition, prefaced by the famous intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre, is the one used in this research. However, in a later book a critic comments on *The Wretched of the Earth* saying the book marked a turning point in African legislative issues. By the time it was distributed, a majority of African states had become independent. Algeria and Kenya, which achieved their independence a short time later in 1962 and 1963, were key cases for those that remained: the surviving colonies were mostly pioneer colonies, such as Rhodesia, the Portuguese African colonies, and South Africa, which would consequently fall into savagery (Young 2002, 280)

The book has its own significance in the African states, and has been received and appreciated by many African intellectuals. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams refer to Ngugi's comment on *The Wretched of the Earth* as "a kind of Bible among the African students" demonstrating the book's significance to Africa (1997, 59).

### **Violence: An Inevitable Means of Resistance**

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon directs his speech to the peoples of the Third World, presenting to them a challenging inquiry into the dehumanizing nature of colonial oppression. He explains to the wretched peoples of the Earth the possibility of achieving eventual freedom and a progressive future.

Fanon begins his book with a revolutionary declaration that "decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon" (1963, 29). He is the first intellectual since

Engels and Sorel who highlighted the role of violence in historical change. He suggests that the native should obtain his independence from the colonizer whatever the means used is. Violence is the most obvious form of resistance in the colonial context. For Fanon, this violence used by the native against the European settlers is not a natural thing with which he is born. It is an oppositional reaction to the severe violence inflicted upon him by the so-called civilized Westerner. From the first time of their meeting, violence appears to be the main characteristic of their world. In this respect Fanon comments that their first encounter was stamped by savagery and their presence together was characterized by the exploitation of the native by the settler under the threat of bayonets and cannons (1963, 30).

Therefore, colonialism is not to be achieved peacefully through the "reasoning faculties." "It is," Fanon maintains, "violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (1963, 48).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses the well-known crimes of European colonialism, he mentions the massacres committed by the colonial authorities: 45,000 killed at Setif in Algeria in 1945; 90,000 in Madagascar in 1947; whole villages in Algeria wiped out in response to the killing of one or two Frenchmen. This "violence in the colonies," Sartre comments, "does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men [the natives] at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them" (1963, 13).

In order to justify their violence in the colonies, Fanon suggests that the colonial authorities depict a distorted polarized image of the colonized peoples. He goes on to say that Native society is not essentially depicted as a society lacking in values. It is not sufficient for the colonist to assert that those values have vanished from, or never existed within, the colonial world. The native is pronounced morally absent; he does not only speak of the absence of values, but also of their invalidation. He is, let us confess, the adversary of values, and in this sense he is unbridled evil. (1963, 33-34).

The values of the natives are thus degraded compared to the values of the settlers. The customs, traditions, myths, and even the religion of the colonized people are to be considered as the very sign of the poverty of spirit. Thus, "the colonial world is a Manichean world" (Fanon 1963, 33). In this world the good settler is considered to represent values, while the bad native represents the negation of values. The native is considered evil in the shape of human being. Violence should thus be used to destroy the evil spirits of the colonized people, and the colonized must submit to this. If he resists, he will be killed by the gun, and if he gives in, he will be deprived of his humanity. However, writing about this Manichean world, Fanon echoes the future by speaking about ideas that motivated Said to write his influential *Orientalism* (1978), and Abdul

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JanMohamed to write his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" (1985).

The colonialist authorities divide the colonial world into two opposite halves. The area where the native lives is not integrating with the area in which the settler lives. In this respect, Fanon maintains that this world cut in two is occupied by two diverse species. Originality of colonial settings lies in the fact that economic reality, disparity, and colossal contrast of ways of life do not cover human nature. A close examination of the colonial setting reveals that what separates the world is the fact that one belongs to or does not belong to a given race, or species. Within the colonies, the economic substructure is additionally a superstructure. The cause is the result: you're wealthy because you're white, you're white since you're wealthy. As a result, Marxist analysis must be continually extended whenever one discusses the colonial issue (1963, 32).

For Fanon, in the colonial context, the division between the natives and the settlers is a simultaneous division of race and class. He suggests that Marxist thinking should be extended to involve racism to be able to fully understand the colonial world. In the colonies, the rich are white and the poor are black. The relation between the two divisions is "tautological and consists of a form of exploitation based on an originary violence" (Young 2002, 279).

Therefore, the native is forced to deliver his land to the settler, and work in it for him. Also, the European settler argues that the native culture and traditions have been degraded in order to justify wiping them out. In other words, the world should be divided into two warring factions: "five hundred million men and one thousand five hundred million natives. The former had the word; the others had the use of it" (Sartre 1963, 7).

However, Fanon refers to the tension and anger which the native suffers from because of the settler's unfair and violent treatment. He hears about his presumed inferiority but he finds that "his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler" (Fanon 1963, 36). Therefore, there is no reason to degrade himself in front of the settler. Consequently, he becomes angry by refusing to be animalized and begins to revolt.

Fanon shows how the natives' anger and tension find an outlet in their fight against each other. The different tribes fight each other, and the conflict continues because the colonial policy inflames it. This type of violence is really used by the natives to destroy the image of his degradation. Moreover, the native's anger finds its emotional outlet by "exhausting itself in dances which are more or less ecstatic" (Fanon 1963, 45). On certain days, Fanon says, men and women gather at a particular place, and there, under the serious eye of the

tribe, take part in an apparent unorganized spectacle that turns out to be an amazingly precise show. in which through various movements - shaking the head, bending the spine, throwing the whole body back - the tremendous effort of a community can be deciphered as in an open book to get out, to free itself, to clear up. (1963, 45).

The violence of the native has found an outlet in dancing. Additionally, drawing on terrifying myths helps the native to contain his aggressiveness. There are evil spirits like leopard-men, serpent-men, six-legged dogs, zombies, and a whole series of tiny animals or giants "which create around the natives a world of prohibitions, of barriers and inhabitations far more terrifying than the world of the settler" (Fanon 1963, 44). Therefore, the natives need not to fight against the settlers since what they care about more is the frightening enemy created by such myths.

However, Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* highlights the role played by national intellectuals in redirecting the native's violence towards its true goal: the settler. They produce many philosophic-political dissertations on various themes such as "the rights of man to freedom from hunger and human dignity" (Fanon 1963, 47). These intellectuals motivate the natives to get their rights back at whatever cost. Then a new phase of violence begins. This time, violence is used against the colonial system itself. This violence is an obvious tool that unifies the whole people. In this respect Fanon demonstrates that the native's violence binds together individuals. By its exceptional structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism does not essentially imply the presence of tribes: it reinforces and isolates them. The colonial framework strengthens the chieftaincies and keeps the old brotherhoods of the marabout alive. However, violence is in essence all-inclusive and national (1963, 73).

While colonialism establishes its powerful authority by facilitating or imposing the existence of a conflictual atmosphere among the tribes and regions, the native's violence unifies these tribes and regions to face one enemy. It thus constructs a national consciousness.

Furthermore, violence during the period of resistance struggle has its own significance at the individual level. Violence is cleansing and restorative: it ends the native's inferiority complex and restores his self-respect. This is one of the reasons why, for Fanon, "decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men" (1963, 30). Through violence, the thing that has been colonized becomes a man who can face his enemies. Thus, "to shoot down a European," Sartre comments, "is to kill two birds with one stone" (1963, 18). Violence destroys the oppressor and at the same time the fear of the oppressed.



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For Fanon, in the process of decolonization "the last shall be first and the first last" (1963, 30). This cannot be achieved as a result of magic or by friendly talks. Violence compels the colonizer to accept negotiation with the native political leader. However, a similar idea is presented by Said, who states:

"the colonizers search for an *interlocuteur valable*, and the colonized on the other [side] are driven increasingly to more and more desperate remedies as they try first to fit the categories formulated by the colonial authority, then, acknowledging that such a course is doomed to failure, decide that only their own military force will compel Paris and London to take them seriously as interlocutors" (1989, 209).

Violence thus presents a great opportunity to the native political leader by creating the possibilities of opening the door to negotiations that lead to independence.

Even after the withdrawal of the colonialist armies from the colonies, resistance does not stop. The newly independent countries face new challenges. Fanon realizes that the task of the newly independent nation is to rebuild its own state. The entire population of the country live in an atmosphere of a battlefield. The underdeveloped country should struggle against poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment. All these problems "are not separable from the relations with the former colonizing power" (Childs and Williams 1997, 54). Europeans, Fanon suggests, have caused a great destruction to the colonies. They left the colonies after sending them to the Middle Ages. But the newly-independent people accept the challenge.

Additionally, resistance is also directed towards the neo-colonialism imposed by the capitalist countries. These countries, after withdrawing from colonies, search for the acquisition of the prosperity of their economy and control of the world. Thus, resistance now takes an international shape. Fanon attacks the prosperity of the European countries by maintaining that going up against this world, the European countries become conspicuously rich. This European extravagance is truly shameful, because it is based on submission, feeds the blood of slaves, and comes straightforwardly from the soil and from the subsoil of the underdeveloped world. The well-being and progress of Europe were built on the sweat and corpses of the peoples of the previously colonized countries. (1963, 76).

The Europeans should thus not be proud of their richness, because this wealth they have is scandalous. European wealth is built by the hard obligatory work of the wretched of the earth. This attitude of Fanon makes him believe that the people of the under-developed countries have the possibility to prove to

themselves and to the whole world that they can achieve the same great progress that others achieved by utilizing them in the past.

In these conditions of the newly independent countries, Fanon favors choosing a national socialist system rather than the capitalist one. He explains that the choice of a socialist regime, a regime which is totally arranged towards the individuals as a whole and based on the rule that man is the valuable of all possessions will permit us to go forward more rapidly and more harmoniously, and hence make incomprehensible that caricature of society where all financial and political control is held within the hands of many who respect the country as a whole with scorn and contempt (1963, 78).

This national socialist regime helps the under-developed people achieve social justice suitable for getting necessary progress. It is more appropriate than the capitalist system undertaken by the enemies of the under-developed countries. Sartre agrees with Fanon that "in order to triumph, the national revolution must be socialist" (1963, 10).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is clear that Frantz Fanon has presented many justifications for the violence in the colonial context. He spotlighted the role of violence as an inevitable means of resistance in the colonial context. For him, violence is to represent a reaction to the violence of the colonizer practiced in the colonized country. Moreover, it is the most effective strategy of resistance, forcing the colonial power to negotiate and giving the colonized the opportunity to speak. It is to be regarded as an outlet for the native's anger from the unfair treatment imposed upon him by the colonial power. Then he goes further to claim that violence in the colonial context is to unify the diverse native elements of the society to resist the colonial existence, and it helps in ending the complex of the native's inadequacy as well as it reestablishes the colonized self-respect. Furthermore, it creates the conceivable results of opening transactions and negotiations that lead to freedom.

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