Fanon and the Limits of Non-Violent Resistance

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Abstract

Fanon was born into a middle-class family in Martinique in the French West Indies. He had the influence of Aime Cesaire, the Martiniquean poet and politician, and of the movement of negritude of which Cesaire was a leader. He was a psychiatrist and this had a major impact on his analysis of the Third World revolutions. It made him more sensitive than most to the sufferings of individuals in the grip of the colonial system and of the ambivalences of colonizers and colonized (Burke III, p: 128). Frantz Fanon believed that colonialism hampered individual growth and they relied on the colonizers for their sense of identity and self-esteem. He argued that due to an inferiority complex, black people are ashamed of recognising themselves with any kind of black identity. Fanon claimed that white people consider themselves superior to black people. He quoted, "Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation…. Nothing doing. I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me" (Fanon,2008, p: 89).He further added "I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning Y a bon Banania…I refused, however, any affective tetanisation. I wanted to be a man, and nothing but a man. There were some who wanted to equate me with my ancestors, enslaved and lynched, and decided that I would accept this. I considered this internal kinship from the universal level of the intellect- I was the grandson of slaves the same way President Lebrun was the grandson of peasants who had been exploited and worked to the bone" (92).

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Fanon claimed that the assimilation policy adopted by the colonizers had affected the culture of the colonised peopled which resulted in an inferiority complex in these people. As he asserted, "I was not mistaken. It was hatred; I was hated, detested and despised, not by my next-door neighbour or a close cousin, but by an entire race. I was up against something irrational. The psychoanalysts say that there is nothing more traumatizing for a young child than contact with the rational. I personally would say that for a man armed solely with reason, there is nothing more neurotic than contact with the irrational… I felt the knife blades sharpening within me. I made up my mind to defend myself. Like all good tacticians I wanted to rationalize the world and show the white man he was mistaken" (98). He further stated, "So here we have the Negro rehabilitated, 'standing at the helm' governing the world with his intuition, rediscovered, reappropriated, in demand, accepted and it's not a Negro, oh, no, but the Negro, alerting the prolific antennae of the world, standing in the spotlight of the world, spraying the world with his poetical power, 'porous to every breath in the world.' I embrace the world. I am the world. The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself. He discovers he is the predestined master of the world. He enslaves it. His relationship with the world is one of appropriation. But there are values that can be served only with my sauce. As a magician I stole from the white man a 'certain world,'lost to him and his kind. When that happened the white man must have felt an aftershock he was unable to identify, being unused to such reactions. The reason was that above the objective world of plantations and banana and rubber trees, I had subtly established the real world. The essence of the world was my property" (107). Fanon believed that the psychological health of the individual depended on the family environment. As he quoted in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "In both cases, the characteristics of the family environment are projected onto the social environment. Although it's a fact that children of thieves or bandits, used to a certain law laid down by the clan, are surprised to discover that the rest of the world behaves differently, education of another sort- except in cases of perversion or retardation (Heuyer)- should be able to moralize their vision and socialize them" (121). He further quoted, "However- and this is a most important point- we observe the opposite in the black man. A normal black child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world. This argument may not be immediately understandable. Let us proceed therefore by going backward" (122).

Fanon condemned the native intellectuals for following and adapting the European culture saying, "the native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture. Like an adopted child who only stops investigating the new family framework

at the moment…" (Fanon, 1961, p. 177). According to him, they were bourgeoisies and they were the part of the colonial powers. Fanon felt that as the liberation movement started mobilizing, these intellectuals would feel like strangers in their own land. At that point in time, they would try to get away from the White culture.

Fanon's anti-colonial, universal humanism rejected cultural humanism. In his book, Black Skin, White Masks, he examined how race, language and culture shaped the self-perception and self-esteem of colonised subjects. He believed that it is the psychological colonisation of identities that imposed deformed self-consciousness of the colonised subject within and outside of their communities (Farhan, p: 97). He related violence with gender and stressed on the fact that Fanon's assessment of violence and gender as categories of analysis of colonial and anti-colonial processes had received mixed responses from scholars. Fanon claimed that the colonisers perceive colonised women as the epitome of stillness and backwardness, and their emancipation and role in society become sites of contestation. He explained, "veil removed and reassumed again and again," becomes an ornament of contestation, 'manipulated and transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle" (98). Fanon further claimed, "In unveiling the Algerian woman, the coloniser attempts to detach her away from her society, thus undermining struggles of resistance. But, the Algerian woman senses the underlying themes within this equation and clings to the veil as an act of resistance" (98). Therefore, as patriarchal structures were challenged by national liberation struggles, women were not only the site of these manifestations but also central actors in the resistance.

Fanon believed in adopting violence for liberation from the colonial exploitation. However, it is claimed by some scholars that the logic of Fanon's argument had been misrepresented and understood regarding it. According to Sonnleitner, a broad focus on violence may fail to show how his underlying assumptions are logically linked to his conclusions regarding the class of violent action that is terrorist (W. Sonnleitner, p: 287). Fanon was a revolutionary of the Algerian War of Independence. As he stated that, "this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence" (37). Fanon believed that violence clearly included terrorism. He stressed that terrorist action became justified as a physiological response to internal tensions that, if not released externally, would result in a high occurrence of self-destructive forms of mental pathology (290). Fanon believed that settlers keep alive in the native an anger that has no outlet which result into bloodthirsty explosions. As he stated, "muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosion" he described it as, "the accumulated libido, the hampered aggressivity," which was seen as reflected in

"symbolical killing and imaginary mass murders" that, taken a step further, led to a state of becoming "completely possessed" (290). Fanon regarded non-violent activities as a "practice of therapy by hibernation" (Fanon, p: 66) and also proclaimed "the need for a redistribution of wealth" (1961, p: 98). Similarily Fanon claimed that only violence had the capacity to destroy myths and beliefs and control of the land. As he quoted, "ultra conservative policy" where compromises are made with the oppressor while seated around a green baize table," (W. Sonnleitner, p: 291).

Contrary to Fanon, Gandhi advocated satyagraha as a potent means for the attainment of independence of the country. Nonviolence was the main principle of his life. The Ends and Means theory had a great impact on the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence and truth. Gandhi used the term satyagraha for the first time in South Africa and he meant by it the moral, spiritual, soul, truth, love and non-violent force for achieving social, economic and political evils and injustices (Khimta, P: 232). Gandhi recommended that ideal satyagraha must work for the social upliftment and development. He further recommended that a satyagrahi must live a sattvic (pure and truthful) life. He used satyagraha in his life to resolve conflicts and problems even in his personal life. He used it in all spheres of life and used it in his life to resolve conflicts and problems. Gandhi's satyagraha is comprehensive and universal in nature (P: 234-235).

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