Frantz Fanon and the African revolution, revisited at a time of globalization

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Unchanged agenda
What makes us recall Frantz Fanon now, particularly his memorable works on the “African revolution” and the “wretched of the earth”? Has Fanon been long gone already? It is barely a decade since racism disappeared from South Africa and since national popular conferences made their voice heard across the continent. It is barely a few years since the Durban anti-racism conference was held. Since Fanon wrote “Black Skin, White Masks” in 1952 and the Wretched of the Earth” in 1961, hardly a decade went by without someone rediscovering the value of “human consciousness” and the need for a “second wave of national liberation, for a continual African revolution in the broadest sense of the word: a catharsis.

As globalization marches ahead, clad in arms, equipped with precise tools, versed in international machination, trumpeted by a pliant but wide-reaching media, how alienated have we become, caught in the iron grip of a new empire? How far do our “peasants” feel the crisis overshadowing fields? How far do the nations of the South feel the “new apartheid” rearing its head in the international trade agreements? How far do we all feel the need for a “new humanism?” And how much does the land of Algeria itself, in which Fanon wrote the bulk of his work, entice us to reconsider the “problematic” of “national culture”?

The need to revisit Fanon’s views has never been greater? And he is not the only one worthy of a fresh reading. The writings of Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Claude Ake are as relevant today as ever. The language of the revolution has taken on new meanings from Ben Bella to Nelson Mandela. And the spontaneity of the masses have left its mark in Seattle, Mexico and Porto Alegre. All these are reminders of Frantz Fanon, of the legacy - and controversy - he left behind. Here we are, in Africa his beloved land – contemplating the meaning of his work.

In this paper, I will go over some of Fanon’s favorite topics and see how relevant they still are to the issues surrounding the process of globalization:
1. From colonialism to imperialism; violence and liberation.
2. Alienation and presence.
3. Which social analysis?
4. The African revolution and Fanon’s dialectics in a new world.
5. Fanon’s presence in the Arab world.
6. Conclusion.

First: From colonialism to imperialism
Fanon was not just preoccupied with probing the political or economic origins of colonialism; he dealt with colonialism as a situation of dehumanization caused by Euro-centricity and its negation of the other. He methodically applied psychological research – among other things - to the colonial phenomenon, focusing more on the general social situation than on individual case studies. This helped him identify the global aspect of colonialism. With the first wave of political independence, 1950s Fanon was able to grasp the meaning of neo-colonialism as it transpired in regimes that grappled, less than successfully, with the issue of liberation. The term “neo-colonialism” had to wait for the All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo in 1961 to gain currency.

With this wide-reaching understanding of colonialism and imperialism, Fanon invented the terms “containment” and “negation” to analyze the situation in Third World countries ruled by colonial powers. He gave much thought to this state of affairs – which extended from the Caribbean to the Arab world and encompassed large parts of Africa – focusing particularly on settler colonialism and apartheid. Although some of his critics deny it, Fanon’s insight went beyond these specific points, particularly as he discussed the Congo and other colonized regions. He examined the significance of “colonial hegemony” in the colonized communities, their cultures, and the human situation in general. He defined “colonial violence” in a broad sense, incorporating the way in which blacks would assume “white masks” as a result of the tension between colonizer and colonized.

This early understanding of the concept of “negation” makes Fanon both a philosopher and sociologist. This concept was generalized by Walter Rodney and Cabral a few years later, when they spoke of “negation from history”, in reference to the impact of colonialism on Africans. Fanon spoke at length about the alienation of the individuals and communities from themselves not just from their homeland.

Were Fanon’s social and philosophical ideas a case of a reverse racism? If so, the value of his work would be gone with the disappearance of settler colonialism and conventional racism. It didn’t. His work is still relevant, particularly his early humanist approach in Black Skin, White Masks. Fanon’s work throws much light on the human conditions now imposed by the nations of the North on those of the South, or the “apartheid on a global scale,” as Samir Amin and others would call it.

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Fanon did not stop at the physical sense of racism. His lecture on “Racism and Culture” at the African Writers Conference, 1956, makes this abundantly clear. There is more to colonialism and racism than super- and infra-structures, he insisted in the course of his interpretation of the colonial phenomenon. The whites, who were invariably rich and in control of the super- and infra-structures, dominated the life and wealth of the colonial people. They were not just racists; they contained and subsumed “the blacks and their homelands.” Fanon has thus responded early on to the scholars who, using social and class interpretations, reject the totality of colonialism and racism. He used social analysis effectively to further his “national” interpretation.

Imperial containment, as described by Fanon, works in the physical, psychological, social and economic aspects of the life of the colonized. I am tempted to link Fanon’s understanding of racism and the “management of color” with Gramsci concept of “hegemony.” Fanon, makes rare references to Gramsci, perhaps because the containment/domination concept of Gramsci does not fully explain the cultural complexities of colonial life in the Third World, in which Fanon was fully versed. The Martinique, Fanon’s birthplace, was, for instance, so contained by France that it actually declared itself part of the latter. Fanon went beyond hegemony and containment to label colonialism an act of complete violence, an act that can only be confronted with revolutionary and spontaneous violence, the violence of emancipation and liberation, not just counter class domination, as Gramsci suggested.

The “negation of the African soul” by the colonists is not just a material or social act. It is, Fanon maintains, an act of depersonalization that can only be reversed through cleansing revolutionary violence. Here, Fanon turns “consciousness” from an abstract term into an all-embracing force. Fanon does not stop long at the consciousness of color, or the issue of black versus white, during his north African phase. White Masks outline a situation describing the way the dispossessed view the “other”. Fanon was more interested in the overall colonialist process than in the conventional methods of apartheid.

According to Fanon, the White Masks denote an insidious “oneness” between colonizer and colonized. Whiteness becomes a symbol, a situation that cannot be terminated except through absolute violence, through the destruction of the society and state associated with this symbol. This is why Fanon linked liberation with emancipation, with a new humanity. This is why he opposed the ideas adopted by the assimilated classes on reform and gradual change. Fanon dismissed the philosophy of non-violence and looked skeptically upon the transition from one “state” to another. “The freedom of the state does not mean - as neo-colonial leaders claim - the freedom of the human being,” he warned.

Fanon’s contemporaries would remember how he railed, at the All African Peoples’ Conference in Accra in 1958, at peaceful solutions and the non-violence approach. He was appalled by the influence Gandhi had on Nkrumah and other nationalists in South Africa and Kenya. The latter, at least for a while, subscribed to pacifist gradualism.

In the age of imperialist hegemony and imperial powers, we find them recalling colonial violence, in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo. Recalling Fanon, it is not just “colour” issue or militarization of colonial situation it is also the containment, he mentioned, on global level.

Second: Alienation and presence

Although not as cohesive as the “Wretched of the Earth”, “Toward the African Revolution” is perhaps the key to Fanon’s lifework. In this thought-provoking book, Fanon’s traces his journey as a revolutionary intellectual, a man of commitment, an individual who was alienated and found himself only through praxis. He merges philosophical ideas with psychiatric ones, drawing freely on his experience in the Antilles, Europe, North Africa, and the sub-Sahara. He comments on the Algerian revolution then moves on to discuss revolution in Angola, criticize Ghana. Fanon expresses sorrow over the death of Lumumba and is dismayed with the experience of the Congo with the UN. He brings forth many new ideas, including the alienation of doctor and patient, colonizer and colonized. This latter idea Fanon first described in the “North African Syndrome,” a study first published in Esprit in Paris in 1952 and republished in 1958 in “Toward the African Revolution.”

In White Masks (1952), Fanon discusses alienation due to the color of the skin and the status of western (northern?) colonizer. Drawing upon his experience with colonialism in Algeria, he concludes that individual alienation is both a human and general phenomenon. A thorough reading of White Masks, the North African Syndrome, and the Wretched of the Earth, makes it clear that Fanon gave prominence to culture over economy and science. His approach to the “world colonialist phenomenon” has been often described as being “culturist”. But he spared no effort in uncovering the element of exploitation in physical and oppressive colonialism. Even so, the main thrust of his argument was that “usurpation” or alienation takes place on the individual human level, as an act of overwhelming and direct violence. The collective violence among the downtrodden is a reaction to this act of direct violence. In Fanon’s writing, alienation is described in individual terms, whereas oppression and counter-oppression are described in collective terms. And culture remains the “vehicle of truth” in all matters concerning repression and rebellion.

Unlike most psychiatrists, Fanon did not confine himself to the pathological phenomena, but kept a close look at the entire process of imposed and repressing modernization, analyzing its effect on women, for example, as well as individual technocrat who poses as mediator with the West. He kept track of how the indigenous culture tries to shelter its members from contact with modern culture in order to avoid contamination. When insecurity becomes the norm and one lives in constant, daily, expectation of death, the indigenous culture becomes an ultimate safe haven.
Far from denouncing modernization, Fanon saw it as a requisite for the formation of a true national culture. Elaborate references to this topic can be found in “North African Syndrome,” and “Racism and Culture” (also in the letter of resignation Fanon submitted to the resident French minister). In the course of such works, Fanon describes how doctor and patient remain trapped into their pre-conceptions. He concludes that silence, in the colonies, is treasonous, and that the patients should be led down the path to revolutionary awareness, for this alone would save them from self-destruction. At which point, Fanon trades post for position, turning from a philosopher and doctor to a journalist with the Algerian newspaper el-Moudjahid (1958). He later became an emissary, then ambassador, of the revolution.

Modernization, in Fanon’s thinking, is inextricably linked with liberation. But what type of modernization should one pursue? Modernization can be imposed from abroad (globalization and the one village?). Or, it can be an essential part of the evolvement of national culture. How can the world transcend “new apartheid,” benefit from modernization and world culture, and maintain a stance of liberation? Occasionally, Fanon will come across as conservative. This is why an intensive effort by Third World intellectuals is needed to update his ideas. To do so, scholars are advised to consult the works of Nghe, himself a conservative Marxist; Herbert Marcuse, who was sympathetic to Fanon’s ideas; and Emmanuel Hansen, who deserves a careful reading, as his writings during the 1970s are just as inspiring as Fanon’s.

Fanon was neither a strategic planner or an angry prophet, but his insights on culture remain relevant to this day. Speaking at a gathering of African writers in Paris in 1956, Fanon maintains that western colonialism has moved from a hierarchical view of culture (during the renaissance) to banishing the culture of certain communities (the colonized nations), and then to cultural relativity (anthropology). For him, the repression of “cultural existence” is only a part of the biological and economic process of enslavement. Racism is born out of “cultural hierarchy” (note the relevance to today’s much-hyped clash of cultures). When culture is seen as something pertaining to one race to the exclusion of others, conflicts take on a crusader-like style. Racism, Fanon believes, is a systematic repression of the culture of the vanquished. Colonialist culture may not necessarily negate the vanquished culture, but it invariably manages to stunt the latter and limit the choices of the vanquished communities. This same trend is still in action today, in the early twenty-first century.

We should be aware herein that Fanon, was not that type of writers who are trying to theories the “non-western knowledge” or to build –as fundamentalist- a “reverse culture racism” despite his presence in Islamic- traditional culture.

Fanon was concerned with new human political culture against the mode of cultural mobility on lineage context according to the colonial –imperialist type.

Fanon’s interest in the “culture of the people” and in the spirit and spontaneity of the masses - particularly the peasantry with their conventional outlook – was tempered by his knowledge of the risk involved in “the perpetuation of backwardness.” He spoke at length of the risk of ethnic isolation and the “reverse racism” (which Sartre was encouraging him to endorse) involved in the question of “color.” Fanon warned of “national culture” when adopted as an absolute value for North and sub-Saharan leaders. In doing so, he was issuing an early warning to the Arabs and Africans of the pitfall of “national” and continental sense of culture. For him, national culture is something that should unfold, in a creative manner, during the process of revolutionary violence as far as it is a product of the new national consciousness.

In other words, national culture is born of the womb of the revolution and takes shape through self-awareness. Fanon foresaw that a crusader-style war may result from the persistence of backward cultural formulas. In particular, he spoke of a potential religious onslaught in Algeria and contemplated the implications of negritude - advocated by his friend Cesaire – in the Martinique and Africa. He saw the mass appeal of both religion and negritude and warned that their rise may isolate the intellectual strata, who – due to their false awareness – would drift closer to colonialists and to western culture. These strata, while calling for modernization, would adopt cultural ways that are alien to the domestic scene.

Fanon advocated a national culture that can evolve, and an international scene that maintains its sense of variety. He would not approve of the concept of a global village, or the triumph of a single oppressive and colonial culture. His views on such matters deserve our full attention at a time of globalization. We now have proof of how ethnic strife has undermined the stability of Africa and how religious fundamentalism has affected Arab and Islamic countries. We also have reason to believe that religious fundamentalism is making inroads in the western hemisphere.

One of Fanon’s favorite themes was self-awareness among the masses. He remained an intellectual committed to the masses, a man immersed in praxis in the Marxist and Gramscist tradition. Although he believed in the role of an enlightened popular leadership, he was skeptical of those committed to the promotion of awareness among the people, for many among them, he suspected, were little more than self-seeking opportunists.

**Third: What social analysis?**

For all his interest in the class issue, Fanon did not conduct a dialectic social analysis of classes. Instead, he focused on the role of class in revolution and liberation. Profoundly knowledgeable about the development of Third
World societies, Fanon was a structuralist revolutionary, not a sociologist or a political economist. He preferred to speak of social forces rather than class, although he was profoundly aware of the latter. He saw Third World communities as lacking any affinity with Europe’s capitalist development and industrial revolutions. The aim of Third World countries, he maintained, was not to achieve western liberalism or even socialism, but to resist total containment by a capitalist system with a global agenda. Fanon was particularly adept at describing the colonialist phenomenon and identifying its inherent violence and dehumanizing effect.

As a nationalist revolutionary, Fanon chose not to examine the domestic social composition except to identify the elements of revolution and the susceptibility of various social groups to western domination. He wrote extensively on the situation governed by violence, racism, and alienation, while devising methods for ridding the colonized of the oppressive presence of the “great white error.” This is why Hansen describes Fanon’s classifications as a description of the agents of violence, rather than a categorization of classes. Fanon’s vision was more powerful than his analysis with regards to the social forces in the Third World. In 1961, when he wrote the Wretched of the Earth, the national bourgeoisie, which he—too early suspected of treason—had not yet basically appeared in the sub-Sahara, although it was already taking root in the Arab world.

Being a nationalist, Fanon zealously advocates a process of liberation both in his writings in el-Moudjahid (1958-1961) and his books. As his work took shape, colonialist powers were already offering formal independence to the colonies, imposing “conciliatory” leaderships, and guaranteeing the pattern of exploitation (this pattern continued through the nationalization phase. The economy was handed over to so-called national bourgeoisie but in essence remained under colonial control). Fanon dedicated the strongest chapter of his Wretched of the Earth to the “pitfalls of national consciousness” and the problems of national culture. He did so, in my opinion, because he was afraid of falling into the trap of deformed populism, although he did not escape altogether unscathed. Fanon’s clash with European democrats and progressive figures was not over the scant support the latter gave to the revolution in Africa and the rest of the Third World. It was over their social dialectic analysis, which Fanon said as irrelevant in a Third World context.

I do not wish here to give a detailed review of Fanon’s social analysis, or the elements of revolution and counter revolution as he saw them. But let’s pause to consider how much weight he attached to the revolutionary force of the peasantry, of women’s power, and of the latent power of the lumpen proletariat. Let’s also ponder his unflattering profile of the urban proletariat, which he suspects—as much as he does the national bourgeoisie—of identifying with the colonizers. Fanon was not a conventional dialectician, nor did he depend on history as an analytical tool. He felt the strength of the current “colonialist phenomenon” and he railed against the rape of cities and countryside alike by capitalism. This is why he was interested in the class he refers to as the middle classes but more often as the national bourgeoisie. He blames this particular class for its identification with the racist colonialists and criticizes its “treasonous” failure to carry out its historic role as a national tool of progress.

Armed with this vision, Fanon concluded that the proletariat was a subsidiary force that sought the crumbs of colonialist bridges. The only redeeming elements of the proletariat are, for him, the revolutionaries, the women, and their supporters from the ranks of the lumpen proletariat. His view of cities is barely flattering. He was right, perhaps, as far as cities created by the colonialists or apartheid systems are concerned. But for many historic cities, he obviously missed the mark. Having said so, Fanon’s assessment of the indigenous bourgeoisie still holds true, from the point of view of material dialectics and considering the course taken by the current world capitalist order.

The indigenous bourgeoisie in the former colonies seems to have learned little from its European counterpart, and the world capitalist order is not allowing it to learn anything new, apart from what it learned between the two great wars. I agree with Fanon that, in its current state, the indigenous bourgeoisie is much worse than before, for it has succumbed to the media, cultural, and consumerist invasions. It has adopted new patterns of consumption and embraced new life styles. It has also shown indifference, bordering on persecution, to the fate of the urban working classes. Its acceptance to the “peace policies” imposed on it from abroad has magnified its sense of inferiority versus the West. Its tendency to equate violence, or rebellion, with suicide is something would have appalled Fanon. The Egyptian Camp David accords, the Palestinian Oslo accords, the Lancaster House and Komati arrangements in southern Africa, and the IMF and WTO treaties are all cases in point.

Some of Fanon’s ideas and early notions of national bourgeoisie and its socio-economic and political options are worthy of rehabilitation, regardless of how far one agrees or disagrees with them. It is perhaps such early ideas of Fanon that inspired his views of the countryside, local and global, and the power of the peasantry as a spontaneous force of rejection.

The power Fanon attributes to the peasantry has generated wide-scale debate. For some of his critics, the sanctity he accorded to this class, and the spontaneity which rarely played the role he hoped for in the Third World, gives his writings an ahistoric touch, a hint of revolutionary romanticism. Yet, he may have an excuse, if one is to consider the developments that the Third World has undergone. The peasants, according to Fanon, are a revolutionary class ready to embrace the revolutionary system and capable of retaining a communal spirit while upholding pre-colonial creeds and legacy. Unlike city dwellers, the peasants are not subjected to westernization. Unlike the national bourgeoisie, they have no feelings of inferiority. Their folklore supports the notion of resistance and their impoverished status makes them ripe for revolutionary ideas as well as self-awareness. Fanon backed such views with examples from Algeria and Morocco, from the Mao Mao revolution in Kenya, from the central and
Fanon was not a great fan of conventional Marxism, not of its European manifestations, and not of the Soviet school that supported it. It was this Marxism, he argued, that provided protection for the petit or national bourgeoisie and its pitfalls. What Fanon truly admired was the far eastern revolutions, those in China and Indo-China, where “revolutionary consciousness” seemed pure and true revolutionaries were in charge. Therefore, Fanon was not a romantic rebel or an isolated intellectual, but someone intent on identifying a global pattern. He was also certain that colonialist violence would trigger spontaneous and systematic violence among the peasants, and that the violence would banish their sense of negation. This, he maintained, is something that should happen before the peasantry moves to the cities. Once they emigrate to urban areas, the peasants would become a tool in the hand of the bourgeoisie. Ultimately, they would only swell the ranks of the lumpen proletariat.

Not being a patient dialectician, Fanon failed to see that the implications of the peasantry’s isolation from the process of capitalist accumulation (Marcuse criticism hits the nail on that point). He also failed to see that the peasantry’s lack of alienation would limit their awareness of the ongoing contradictions. Fanon did not realize that historical traditions, particularly in the Arab and Muslim countries in which he lived, would hinder the level of awareness required for the revolution he hoped for.

One mustn’t forget that Fanon saw the Chinese revolution as a landmark in the confrontation of colonialism. This revolution popularized the idea of the peasant revolution and suggested a pattern in which the countryside would encircle the imperial cities - to use the words of Mao’s doctrinaire Lin Piao.

Fanon was obsessed by notions of ending the “old system”, whether conventional or inherited from colonialism. Revolution, and revolutionary violence, he hoped, would bring down the inherited structures to the benefit of the more oppressed class, the peasantry. Unless the peasants are moved by their revolutionary consciousness, their own social structure would not entice them into action. This is why the sense of consciousness, for Fanon, was existential rather than super-imposed.

From the ranks of the impoverished peasants, a new stratum emerges, one that caused controversy among Marxists and liberals alike; the lumpen proletariat. Marx was harsh about the lumpen proletariat, whereas Lenin was relatively sympathetic, for he saw this stratum as a revolutionary reserve that can be tapped by the Bolsheviks. In the lumpen proletariat, Fanon saw a great potential. Those countryside people, much praised by Fanon, seek the cities to make a living, but end up living in shanty towns bordering the cities, leaving their families behind. They, Fanon argued, were allies of the revolution because of their spontaneity, their courageous ability to rebel, and their resentment of the social colonial system. Unless the revolutionaries recruit the lumpen proletariat – as Lenin advised – the colonialists would. Fanon tried to figure out ways to keep this class separate from the petit bourgeoisie and the traditional proletariat. Perhaps Fanon’s concern about this stratum should draw our attention to the armies of the unemployed in our midst, the millions of impoverished city dwellers who often – quite spontaneously – carry out bread riots, stage popular uprising against corruption, and mount protests against unemployment (an affliction they share with their peers in the industrial countries).

Studies in political sociology often warn that neo-colonial states and the local forces of globalization, may use this category of people to their advantage. They could recruit the lumpen proletariat as well as shanties population during referendums or entice them to support the presidents against the opposition…. etc One must here recall Fanon’s warnings about the role of this local bourgeoisie.

Therefore Fanon critics were worried of the space Fanon gave to the peasants and their spontaneity but I think they are not yet fortunate as the globalization impact nowadays on agrarian issues (WTO) are changing the rural structure and developing consciousness of peasants.

We may recall Samir Amin current writings on these issues after Porto alegre and Cancun to recall Fanon arguments in this connection.

Having mentioned political sociology, perhaps this is time to refer to the sociology of the revolution, as Fanon saw it, and the status he gave to women in revolutionary work – as opposed to the colonialists’ attempt to alter the situation of women through modernization. The last thing the colonialists want is a society wrapped up in tradition. Fanon, for his part, saw women as part of the cohesive social structure facing the colonialists, as part of the revolution. He was not interested in modernizing women in the way the colonialists suggested.

It is easy to understand the modernist schemes of colonialists, who want to integrate the “active forces” of society in the capitalist economy. Fanon dedicates the most part of his book “Year Five of the Algerian Revolution” to the matter of women and family and their links with the revolution. When he speaks of the liberation of women, Fanon means their liberation from the colonialists’ attempt to liberate them. This is why the above book was translated in Arabic, aptly, under the title “Sociology of the Revolution.”

Fanon saw through this, the French intentions, discussed often at the time by French sociologists and parliamentarians. The French, he maintained, want to destroy the so-called stagnant social environment and introduce European-style modernism in its place. The revolution had to encourage women to be liberated from this
type of colonialist liberation. The dress code of women and their appearance alongside men on the Algerian street were hotly debated. The colonialists, Fanon claimed, wanted to lure Algerian men and women into French lifestyle so as to create a new “social condition” and thereby undermine the traditional society.

The colonialist interest in the lot of women was so great that the Algerian revolution had to give the matter considerable thought. Meetings of the higher bodies of the revolution were held specially to discuss this topic. The situation of women became central to the revolution, and various decisions were made concerning the dress code women should follow, their participation in combat, and their role in protecting the cadres of the revolution. The program of the Algerian revolution contained analysis of these issues as early as 1955, only one year after the revolution started. Comprehensive war against colonialism meant that women should have a comprehensive role, not just be a reserve army for the revolution. It is unfortunate that the revolution – and also Fanon – were too busy formulating a solution for a specific era to conceive of a lasting political and social culture.

Those who know the nature of Arab and Muslim society would be surprised at how Fanon pushed the case of women into new horizons, far beyond anything yet accepted in most Third World countries. The way in which most Arab – and African countries – still deny the role of women in society, transformation, and modernization is in sharp contrast with the ideas that Fanon advocated. Current debates about gender could use some of the insight of Fanon and the Algerian revolutionaries, at that time if only to break free from the limited formulas, those that confine gender to the question of poverty and unemployment and to programs sponsored by international capitalism.

Fourth: The African revolution and Fanon’s dialectics in a new world

Fanon left the Antilles to fight with the Allies for promised liberation from Nazism and Fascism. Following the war, he was so frustrated by the realities of colonialism and the denial of self-determination for many nations that he decided to turn his back to colonial citizenship and extricate himself from the “white great error”, as he called it, Fanon went in search of another identity, one that he referred to as the “new human.” Having tried unsuccessfully to find a chance in Senegal, and just at the time when his Black Skin, White Masks came out, he landed a job in Algeria. In a letter he wrote when he was 27 old, he remarks that colonialism and capitalist exploitation are world phenomena and that the confrontation of colonialism is a personal, national, and world choice.

Having arrived in North Africa, Fanon abandoned his French citizenship to join the Algerian revolution. The situation in Africa and the Far East inspired him to voice strong opposition to the Antilles’ decision to join the Francophone. He maintained that acceptance of colonialism is detrimental to individuals as well as nations. Because Colonialism is a form of material and moral violence, he argued, it has to be confronted with revolutionary violence. Solidarity among the colonized is a form of absolute praxis, a true act of commitment, he stated. It was early in his life that Fanon concluded that resistance to imperialism is a global mission as well as an individual and collective task.

As a journalist with the Algerian newspaper el-Moudjahid, Fanon played a major role in spreading daily awareness of the revolution. His semi-daily articles were later incorporated in his book “Toward the African Revolution”. Fanon warned the revolutionary cadres and the Algerian liberation movement against liberalist deception, maintaining that the liberals speak out only because of the revolutionary violence the colonized mount against colonialism. Colonialists do not understand the dynamism of national resolve and are bound to continue their violence. Meanwhile, the “national bourgeoisie” and its affiliated intellectuals would be desperately seeking reconciliation with the colonists. The national bourgeoisie is more interested in partnership with the colonists than in protest against them, he said. The colonialist powers understand this psychology of capitulation and allow a certain margin of opposition to take place, as they feel safe from counteraction.

In his constant search for a unified African stand, one with which to confront the unity of colonialism, Fanon maintains that it is untenable to have an Africa that fights colonialism and another Africa that collaborates with it. The colonialists are not going to withdraw easily, he said, pointing to the situation in Congo and the assassination of Lumumba. Fanon was convinced that the unity of the African revolution calls for solidarity against settler colonialism as well as the new forms of colonialism (the latter, I believe, was in reference to countries that won independence only in name). He kept calling for the creation of “another Algeria” in Angola, Congo, and South Africa.

Fanon, who fought with the Allies against the Axis, was apparently hoping that European leftists, democrats, and working classes would act in solidarity with revolutions among the colonized nations. His disappointment was clear in scattered paragraphs of his books and in a whole chapter in “Toward the African Revolution”. This chapter is a worthy reference for anti-globalization activists in the third world, for it throws light on the nature of global alliances and clears out any lingering doubts concerning the position of European democrats. Fanon offers several hints here, some still relevant and others are controversial, the most aggressive is that colonialism creates a repressive presence that marks every European in the continent as a repressor. He argued the apologists among the European democrats. They, he maintained- speculate on the natural end of colonialism, mentioning the Bandung conference, which he deals with aside from the issue of Algeria specifically. Others argues that colonialism is connected to the ills of the French system or those who considered the assessment of the cost of war.

Some democrats prefer to keep their peace and refrain from supporting colonialism. Some prefer to focus on the Anglo-Saxon competition on international level or towards the role of certain individuals, such as Gamal Abdel-Nasser…. etc Some discuss alternative forms to maintain the ties with the metropolitan, while giving advice to the
Algerian revolution, or criticizing its methods whenever revolutionary action leads to casualties, some begin using the term "terrorists". This is a rudimentary summary of Fanon's essay, which deserves the full attention of the anti-globalization movement.

Colonialism is indivisible. This is a point on which Fanon was not ready to compromise neither with communists nor democrats. As a result, he had trouble staying on good terms with Aime Cesaire. To the last days of his life, Fanon was arguing with Sartre over that matter; this alone indicates how much it meant to him.

Fanon took part in every African conference he could attend, including those held in Accra, Tunis, and Conakry. In Accra, his assault on the philosophy of non-violence prompted Nkrumah to change his position and support armed struggle even in the framework of the Organization of African Unity.

Fanon was particularly interested in furthering African support to the Algerian revolution, noting that political solidarity is not enough and that actual action is needed. He supported the idea of forming an African legion, composed of African volunteers, to support the movements of African liberation, starting with Algeria. When the Algerian revolution appointed him ambassador of the Algerian interim government in 1961, he visited Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, all the time making preparations to smuggle weapons to southern Algeria.

In the course of his struggle to rally solidarity with national liberation, Fanon discussed two important issues. One is major powers, socialist and capitalist; the other is the United Nations.

He saw the Cold war and the conflict between the superpowers as a peaceful form of violence toward Third World Nations, warning that the Cold War may impose certain choices on Third World countries, and urging that nations choosing between capitalism and socialism should do so based on their own preferences. He viewed the Suez battle and Nassir as a model for Third World opposition to western imperialism, and the Budapest events of 1957 as a model for human liberation of communist totalitarianism. This epitomizes his view of liberation as a human ideal. Not hiding his socialist leanings, Fanon maintained that socialism in Third World countries is possible, even necessary to avoid authoritarianism and prevent bourgeois control of the one-party system. While deeply suspicious of the Soviet system, Fanon acclaimed to the peasant revolution in China as a triumph for human liberation worldwide, Fanon did not go too far dealing with the multiple form of this nation of peasants!

Concerning the institutional international system, Fanon spoke at length of the United Nations. The UN intervention in Congo, which ended in the killing of Lumumba, made him see the UN practices as a model and vehicle for imperialist violence. Fanon's references to the UN in "Toward the African Revolution" are quite relevant today. "The UN did not fail in Congo because of the difficulty of the situation," he said, "but because it is used as a legitimate cover by the imperialists at times when brute force fails. Partition, arbitration, and mandates are international legitimate tools used to torment and crush the resolve for independence and spread chaos, plundering, and havoc, as in the cases of Vietnam and Laos." Lumumba was wrong to trust the UN, Fanon concluded. I wonder what his views would be had he lived to see militarized globalization and the events in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq!

Fanon was not a romantic sentimentalist, although many portray him as such in order to discredit him, belittle his contribution to African thinking, and question his relevance to events inside and outside Africa. There is no room in this essay to review the insightful debate on Fanon's theories by revolutionaries in Vietnam (Nghe), Dar Es-Salaam, Guinea-Bissau (Cabral), and Angola (Mario de Andrade). In the 1970s, this debate enriched the course of the Soweto revolution in South Africa. Fanon's political and social discourse inspired much of Steve Biko's ideas about black consciousness. Such matters call for a comparative study involving national liberation and civil rights movements of Afro-Americans, the Black Panthers, and other wings of the liberation movement among blacks in northern America.

Surprisingly, or not, Fanon's topics are still there in Durban and Cape town post apartheid universities as well as amongst the Afro American groups and scholars.

More surprising is in the files of post modernists and post colonialism writers and their daily chatting on internet! (basically relevant to National culture and modernization). I am really aware of the anthropological approach they are framing Fanon in.

Fifty: Fanon in the Arab world

Despite the special status of the Algerian revolution in political cultural life in the Arab world, the special nature of the July 1952 revolution, its leaders Nassir and the Free Officers, the Egyptian national militariat), and its demonstration in Arab world, left little room for much else. The July revolution reached its climax in the first half of the 1960s, just as Fanon star as an intellectual figure and works were on the rise. Several Beirut-based magazines and publishing houses were at the time actively promoting the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. The introduction the latter wrote for the "Wretched of the Earth" more than Algeria revolution literature called their attention to Fanon, and they began translating his works. From then on, Fanon became well-known in the region. Some writers took special interest in "Year Five of the Algerian Revolution" (translated to Arabic as Sociology of a Revolution in 1970) due to its important analysis of the situation of Arab women.
I have consulted seven leading Algerian works on political culture and the Algerian revolution, all written between 1965 and 1983 by key intellectual figures in Algerian society. (references annexed) In five of these, there was no mention of Fanon altogether, either as a source for analysis or as a figure of certain influence. One well-documented academic study by Souliman el-Sheikh could not avoid mentioning Fanon as an authority on violence in the Algerian revolution. Academic writers and seminars could celebrate him but I could- and I wanted to go only to the political cultures works. “Fanon and the Algerian Revolution,” written in 1972 by Mohammad el-Meili, a pan-Arab Algerian thinker, strongly put the point of belittling Fanon’s contribution to the Algerian revolution. The same book goes to lengths to prove that Fanon benefited more, morally and intellectually, from the revolution than the other way around.

The Wretched of the Earth is arguably Fanon’s most popular book in the Arab world, perhaps because it appeared at the right time. The rest of Fanon’s work was published in Arabic only on – or just after - the tenth anniversary of the Algerian revolution.

How does one explain Fanon’s spectacular absence from the depth of Arab political culture, both in North Africa and the Middle East? There are several possible explanations. One is that successful modern Arab “revolutions”, which recreated the “national state” after removing the colonial situation, were led mostly by the nationalist military, as in Egypt and Syria for example. Nationalist military figures of armed struggle also controlled the destiny of Algeria after the independence in 1962.

This means that we are faced with the regulated army that achieves “revolution” from above with a view to launching national revival. It was therefore difficult to propagate the ideas of someone who favors spontaneous popular uprisings, speaks highly of the peasantry, and scorns the indigenous (national) and petit bourgeoisie. Fanon’s ideas posed certain contradictions to the ruling classes. One cannot forget also that the Arab left in general was a hostage to Marxist Stalinism and its internationalism. The Arab left, largely close to the Soviets, hastily adopted the ideas of “democratic revolutionaries” and used it to justify the role of the national military and single party elites, as well as their chosen path of non-capitalist development. None of this sits well with Fanon’s view of the urban society and how corrupted the latter is by subsidiary nationalist bourgeoisie, nor with his rejection of totalitarian parties, his denunciation of East European events, his criticism of French communists and democrats, and his views of the Soviet bloc.

In view of the failures of the choices associated with the “national state” of the 1960s, and the liquidation of the legacy of such leaders as Nassir and Boumedienne, would alert the Arab world today – as happened elsewhere – of the importance of Fanon’s views. Fanon wrote of the negative role of peasant-based bourgeoisie, explaining its eagerness to dependency programs which is too similar to structural adjustment and globalization ones. At a time when Arab nationalist and Nasserite intellectuals and a small contingent of leftists, are once again addressing the question of the national state, it is necessary to recall Fanon’s works.

**Conclusion**

In the final lines of this essay, I will turn to the question I posed at the beginning. Why do we need to revisit Fanon’s ideas today? In my view, -contrary to those who recall fanon as romantic- Fanon offers excellent analysis of the spontaneous role of the marginalized masses and their movement toward potential consciousness and away from tangible subconscious. Lacking in political organization and deprived from a democratic civil society and intellectuals speaking on their behalf, the masses of the Third World (particularly in Africa and the Arab world) are now prone to spontaneous uprisings, particularly in cities filled with the unemployed and the excluded surrounded by shanty towns. Their situation matches the one Fanon so aptly described.

As for the peasants, the circumstances surrounding the agricultural question worldwide, the actions of the WTO, the ongoing exchanges between Europe and the US, food shortages, the alienation of African and South peasants in matters concerning food supplies, all of the above is related to the mechanisms of world capitalism. All of this should remind us of the “peasant question” that Fanon spoke about, as well as his references to the “indigenous bourgeoisie” in “dependent” countries.

The question of women and gender also recalls Fanon’s ideas on the sociological position of women and the need for a comprehensive approach to address women’s problems in developing countries. Women need more than just a few rights. They deserve more than nominal participation in power structures they didn’t help create, they need to be part and parcel the structural change.

The bulk of Fanon’s work and life focuses on “imperial repression”, a phenomenon now visible across the Third World. As the globalization proceeds with overwhelming military force to negate people and societies and suppress freedom and choices, one is tempted to foresee a “second wave of national liberation”, a conversion between the self-awareness of the intellectual and the collective awareness of the oppressed masses. In less than half a century, we are back to the questions Fanon raised in the Wretched of the Earth as well as we are in need of new Bandung.

The crisis of the agricultural situation brings us back to the roots of the peasant question. As the situation of the unemployed and marginalized in cities deteriorates because of current policies, and as unorganized popular uprisings become regular events in the Arab-African region and elsewhere, Fanon’s work becomes as relevant as ever.
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