

Fanon's Wretched of the Earth and Traditional Marxists: Parallels and Variations.

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ABSTRACT: *The paper is aimed at reviewing the book *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon and then comparing and contrasting it with traditional Marxist theory. The book advocates for violence as the only means of dethronement of colonialism and also identified the strength and weakness of fight for independence while emphasising the fragile nature of newly independent states caused by indigenous elite. Fanon emphatically stressed the need for national identity as a prerequisite for true liberation. He also associated wars for independence and mental illness and calls for newly independent states to take a new and independent path to development. Comparing Fanon to the traditional Marxists, it is discovered that both have emphasised violence as a recipe for liberation from colonialism as both identify with the poor and oppressed, expecting a transition to a more just society. The differences noted concerns the group that is more critical to revolution. While traditional Marxists identified working class, Fanon listed lumpen proletariat. Fanon also seem to accord some blame to indigenous bourgeoisies for poverty in third world but traditional Marxists totally exonerate them. It is therefore concluded that although violence can be a viable force in liberation of nations from capitalism as emphasise by Fanon and Marx, it is not the only option that is feasible as reflected in the Martin Luther King Jr. dreams and struggle in the United States.*

KEYWORDS: *Decolonization, colonialism, Marxist, development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the book, *The wretched of the Earth*, authored by Frantz Fanon in 1961, Fanon uses the Algerian experience of colonialism and fight for liberation to present a thorough critique of nationalism and imperialism and discusses social and mental health of the indigenous people and the use of language in moulding the mentality of indigenous people that suits the aims of the colonial regime. Fanon adopting Marxist ideologies, analyses the evil effects of colonialism in third world countries and the broader implication and establishing a social movement for the decolonization of a person and people. In the book, Fanon stresses the importance of rural peasants in the success of decolonization struggles. He also advocates for the use force (violence) by the colonised people against the imperialist, a condition which he sees as necessary for psychological and political emancipation. The strong and weak points of the revolution are also identified, giving options in respect of what is needed to be done to ensure successful liberation, both psychologically and socio-economically. This paper analyses the book chapter by chapter with the objective of providing a critique, comparing and contrasting the book with the traditional Marxist assumptions and passing conclusion.

II. REVIEW OF THE BOOK

Chapter One: Concerning violence

In this chapter, Fanon indict colonialism, imperialism and its post colonial legacies and advocates for violence as a means of achieving mental, psychological and political liberation from the shadows of colonialism. To him, decolonialism is a programme of complete disorder, as colonialist are likely to hesitate, as his dreams to make dreams of liberty impossible. To Fanon, the act of violence binds the people in the third world country together fighting for their common future, as colonialism enforces separate tendencies and racism. He maintains that this violence is a cleaning force freeing natives from inferiority complex, despair and inaction to making them fearless with self respect. Fanon asserts that decolonization is always a violent struggle and those who undertake it must be prepared to get and keep the upper hand. Fanon describes the act of colonialism as where as one class of human beings subjugates another as pure violence, often accompanied by the brutality of knives and guns. Wherever there is colonization there is institutionalized violence of a type that systematically robs the natives of civil, economic and human rights, and thus a highly abnormal and unnatural condition. Therefore a complete upheaval of the colonial order which one class supplants another will only come through revolution. In

the international context, Fanon who calls for the struggle for liberation utter disconnection from the imperial powers.

He contends that European dynasty has been built on immoral grounds through deportation, capital flight, forced labour and slavery. He therefore calls for radical approach by newly independent third world countries; an indigenous socio-economic system for development. He calls for radical action against capitalism in Europe, proposing adoption of Chinese model of transformation called 'autarky' "(total closing the internal economy from external influence). This strategy could leave imperialists goods without market. Through this, the imperialist may be forced to end the exploitation of the thirdworld countries, assist them and propel their rehabilitation.

Chapter two: Spontaneity: Strength and Weakness

In chapter two, Fanon explores deeply the dynamics of an effective anti-colonialist revolution. He describes and explains internal conflict in the transitional points that marks the road from colonialism to independence drawing upon recent history and his own knowledge of the Algerian picture. He buttresses the strength and weakness of the revolution in respect of its success and maturity immediately after independence has been achieved, Fanon conclude the chapter giving suggestions on how the natives can successfully dethrone colonizers and form a government that benefit both rural peasants and urban natives. Fanon recognizes that in the struggle for liberation, the first step begins with the formation of nationalist parties by the indigenous elite. The aim of the party is to mobilize people and resources against the oppressive colonial regime. He notes however the one weakness of the revolution is the tendency of the nationalist to include proletariat (skilled workers, civil servants, working classes in towns) in the fight. The reason been that this group, which constitute the nucleus of the indigeneous bourgeoisie, are pampered by the colonial administration and are crucial to the stability of the system. The group, though aware of the struggle, is not interested in decolonization, but bent on the preservation of the system.

Another weakness pointed by Fanon in the decolonization process and governance immediately after independence is the overwhelming distrust of the peasantry (ruralites) by the majority of the nationalist leading to rivalry and constant suspicion between them. This mistrust is displayed during the revolution and its ramifications are found even after decolonization, the overt reason given by the nationalist in towns is the stagnant and unprogressive nature rural people. But to Fanon, a more cogent reason for the mistrust is the desire to of the town natives to usurp native customers hitherto under the control of feudal lords and destroy the rural structures which are threat to their business and occupation. The attempt to destroy rural structures rather than build on them for successful decolonization and good governance, becomes the death knell of nationalist struggle. Fanon emphasizes the importance of the peasantry (ruralites) to revolution. He stresses that peasantry play a decisive role in the maturing of national consciousness by substituting the nationalist in towns when they are been crushed and restrained by colonial forces through brutal use of their *armed rebellion*. For example, he mentions as parallel situations that fact in Kenya before the Mau-Mau rebellion, British colonial forces aided and abetted by Christian missionaries waged an unsuccessful campaign to drive back into the rural areas the young Kenyans who came into cities for job employment and better life, Likewise in Congo, Belgian Colonists military forces in 1957 removed hooligan rural youth from cities and placed them in resettlement camps operated by clergy. Both were act of political castration. These facts underline the truth that an enormous reservoir of energy and strength available to native rebels is the rural lumpen proletariat who can be a critical force in decolonization. The mistrust even manifests when the peasantry are taking part in the revolution. In so much as the revolution is dependent on the peasantry for success, the rural people become isolated by the nationalist during the struggle even though they are prepared and willing to take directives from them. There is utter disconnection between the nationalist and peasants. In most instances, nationalist deny any connections with the rural people. This marks the beginning of the failure of nationalists government and dictatorship.

When decolonization is finally achieved, the seed of distrust become more evident. Because the peasantry where isolated during the revolution and objectives of the struggle are not made known to them, they become slow to adapting to new reforms and structures brought by the new regime. The new government therefore see ruralites people who cannot adapt to change, hence the isolation and neglect the peasantry. Fanon notes that in towns, new government establish ties with trade unionists who are used to social amenities and welfare programmes. Soon enough trade unions become a threat to the government due to demonstrations for lack of social amenities and welfare programmes and protest against governmental policies. The scene for antagonism is set as trade union plans coup 'd'etat while government makes use of armed force to crush the resistance, as both resort to peasantry as *blind brute force*. The new regimes become a replica of the colonial administration, antagonising trade unions, isolating the peasantry and incarcerating intellectuals who challenge

their ideologies and programmes. And that it is the incarcerated people when officially pardoned use their experience to plan against the government.

Fanon however, states that strength and hope of the revolution lies in the actions of lumpen proletariat. To him the term is applicable to those not involved in industrial production like the peasantry and vagabonds, drunkards, drug addicts etc. These groups are not conscious of dominant colonial ideology, therefore ready, capable and willing to revolt against the colonial status quo for liberation. It is concluded that decolonization through violence can only be successful if nationalist, peasantry work together with trust and briefing in regards to the programme or objectives is been done to the peasants. This will lead to successful reforms and change of structures after independence, and will provide psychological satisfaction among the people that government is meant for.

Chapter Three: Pitfalls of National Consciousness

This chapter demonstrates the fragile nature of the decolonized state. It analyses at length the fragile state on national unity and threat to its survival that could undermine, and eventually destroy the new nationalist's government. He also poses age-old Marxist's question of whether a bourgeoisie is a phase of revolution that can be in effect skipped on the road to independence. To Fanon, once the jingles are no longer sung and the passion that propel revolution has started to reduce, the delicate veneer of national consciousness begins to fall prey to regional and tribal interest and the revolutionary government creates just another class of petty bourgeoisie interested in pursuing their own interest at the expense of others. Fanon says, this new middle class is counter revolutionary in the extreme and creates news hurdles for a truly popular representative form of government. This condition cannot be blamed solely on damaging effects of colonialism but rather on spiritual poverty, intellectual laziness, emptiness of ideas and insurmountable desire for wealth accumulation. To Fanon, unlike the European Bourgeoisie who have achieved through hard work and innovation and has being responsible for industrialization in Europe; the indigenous national middle clan is not interested in transforming the economic structures, and completely lacks ideas on the path to transformation. With the desire to become like the European bourgeoisie overnight, they press on the resources of the native country, condemning the economy to oblivion. To Fanon, one of the strategy used by the nationalist or indigenous bourgeoisie to prey on the economy is nationalization policy. This policy is not for the over all national interest but for the sole motive of transferring benefits that hitherto accrued to settlers to themselves. To him, these bourgeoisie although in control of state enterprise lacks the vision and mission to drive it and the economy. They also lack the objective knowledge of the worth of the economy. Failure to understand the workings of their economy leads them seeking help from their former colonizers who would agree with strict conditionalities attached. Thus, the underdeveloped economy become but subjected to further exploitation by the western powers with the nationalist becoming their allies. To Fanon, it is thus laziness, lack of innovation and self seeking behaviour of the bourgeoisie that breeds racism, ethnicism and federalism. It also leads to discontent by the masses and fear of the unknown by the nationalist. A phenomenon that leads to dictatorship, mistrust between the masses and rulers and massive corruption. Thus, immediately after independence, the ruling class perpetuates inequality and monopolization of resources to the scorn of the masses.

Fanon argues that in order to correct anomalies meted on the people by the bourgeoisie, practical actions should be taken. To him, immediately after independence, bourgeoisie phase should be eliminated. They should not be given a room to develop. First step is to nationalise the middlemen (bourgeoisie trading sectors). This means reorganizing the whole sale trade and cooperatives on democratic basis and the decentralization of the cooperatives by involving mass of people in public affairs. Further, there will be the need to enlighten or educate the people politically, which is an indication of the desire to include people in process of governance. Fanon maintains that failure to educate the people on government programmes and enlighten them on the objectives of reforms, will not take the nation to the path of development but will spell doom for it. To him, collective building of destiny of an underdeveloped state is fundamental but neglecting , this will lead to anarchy, repression and resurgence of tribal federalism (ethnic nationalism). To Fanon it is the responsibility of the underdeveloped countries to psychologically give confidence and boost to its people.

Chapter Four: On National Consciousness

This chapter, Fanon buttresses the need for forms of cultural expression to give voice to the new consciousness as the stirrings of the revolutions begin to energize the natives. Fanon says since colonialism has throttled not only the native identity but also the indigenous culture and infused a culture of the mother country into the natives, an artistic renaissance often must be preceded by deep research into existing native culture. The chapter centres on the creation of national identity stressing the need for the natives to develop indigenous culture that seem to be suppressed by colonialism. This will help in the maturity of the nation and which without it, the nation will be vulnerable. Fanon notes that after decolonization, the natives had developed genuine

intention of calving identity for themselves. But in the process of achieving this always find themselves in the shadow of distorted inexistent culture label given to them by colonialists.

Colonialist tend to look at the colonised as people without identity. This is reflected in the ignoring of separate independent African countries and grouping the whole continent as a country, simply put, the colonizers see natives as people without history and culture. Fanon argues that the proclaimed non-existent of culture and history leads to cultural behaviour that is not national but continental and racial, reflected in movement towards Neo-African culture such as Pan African movement and Arab-Negro culture as Arab league. These movements always stress African nationalism or Arab culture. Thus the racialize claim by men of underdeveloped countries speak more of African culture than indigenous culture. Fanon calls for a break away from the conceptualization of African culture on the broad, continental and racial level; and proposed the installation of indigenous culture, which without it may leave the natives without roots. To Fanon, awareness of national culture, not racial or continental presents the identification of the history and root of Africans. Thus awareness originates from intellectuals struggle to bring the old customs (forbidden by colonisers) to bear on the people and also to prove of its good and truth which is in contrast to the so called white culture that is morally. The chapter argue that to instill national cultures effectively, the intellectuals must be willing to go down deep into the society, share the same sentiments, feelings and emotions; he must be rooted in the grassroot, a man of the people with the genuine interest for the freedom and liberation of his people. He must be prepared to fight for the entire nation and not just some section. Fanon mentions that the recognition of African culture can only be through peoples active struggle.

In the second section of the chapter titled Reciprocal bases of national culture and fight for freedom, Fanon attempts to demonstrate a mutual relationship which exist between national culture and struggle for liberation. It has been argued that national culture is synonymous with cultural identity and that to repress his culture is to gradually send it into extinction. Thus denying the native people the freedom and right to their culture is to deny them the right to their nation. Fanon asserts that under colonialism, national culture is heavily despised, contested and subjected to systematic destruction. Under colonial domination there is a tendency to see national culture as illegitimate, therefore non-existent. But how can something that does not exist be discarded in the first instance?. This therefore means that in concrete terms, national culture exist. The chapter argues that after years of gradual and systematic destruction of national culture, a new dominant, alien culture is enthroned. To Fanon the repression and expulsion of the national culture will only plant the seed of discontent and struggle for cultural identity and freedom from the natives. Within the natives arise the need to overtly express this discontent, install their native culture and domination. Fanon insist that national struggle is the struggle for national culture, and that efforts by colonised people for decolonisation presents the obvious and most complete manifestation of existence of culture.

Chapter Five: Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders

In this chapter, Fanon elaborates on the effect of war for independence and psychological/mental problems among indigenous Algerians. He shows a connection between mental illness and the struggle for liberation using empirical evidence from his work as a psychiatrist. In the hospital, Fanon had encounters with people affected by the colonial war. These people seemed to be suffering from different mental conditions which had been predicated on the war. The different conditions experienced by people led to different mental disorders and that the hospital witnessed high rates of mental related problems. Further, the Algerian's impulsiveness, anger and propensity for violence and murder had its roots from the experiences from their war for independence.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter is a wakeup call for the newly independent third world countries to devise an independent blue print for development. Fanon notes the urgency and the need for these countries to abandon legacies created by Colonialism and Europeans and initiate new path for progress that is entirely different and independent of the Europeans. Specifically, he insists that third world countries must turn over to a new leaf by forgetting the old legacies of Europe and creating a society with new orientation that value humanity. He reiterates the creation of society that not a reflection of the Europeans and it is through this that third world countries would forge a new society and develop in a direction that is entirely new.

III. CRITIQUE

Fanon's thinking that liberation can only be achieved through violence also contradicts that of Martin Luther King Jr. in the Dethronement and Defeat of Repressive Regimes. While King advocated for non-violent struggle, Fanon argues that oppressive regimes are systemic violent acts itself, therefore their dethronement need to be executed by violence.

IV. THE MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

Marxism is a socio-economic and political perspective which originates from the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). The analysis of the perspective is based on class and contains two fundamental ideas; materialism and class struggle. By materialism, the theory notes that engine which drives society is the economy which is more or less complex and pervasive. According to Marx economic factors determine one's thinking, "*Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product.*" (Mazlish, 1984). The Mode of Production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. Marx argues that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence that determines their consciousness. The second basic idea of Marxist analysis is hinged on class struggle which proposes that all of human history can be explained and predicted by the competition between antagonistic economic classes (Bourgeoisie and proletariat) also known as capital and labour. To Marx, "*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*" Thus history of society is predicated on inherent struggle between the exploited and exploiters (Asiatic, Feudal and Capitalism) (Bottomore T, Harris, Kiermam V.C, Miliband R; 1983) To Marx, the perceived dominance of capitalism is an illusion, predicting the rise of class consciousness and supplanting of capitalism with socialism through revolution. The rapid expansion of the economy and of the factory system is the most important thing that has ever happened in human history and its consequences cannot be avoided. The more that production is concentrated into factories, the more the revolutionary working class is strengthened the more acute becomes the competition and antagonism between bourgeoisie and Proletariat, capital and labour. There is no escape from this inevitable social struggle. "*What the bourgeoisie produces above all, is its own gravedigger.*" Marx asserts that *capitalism sow the seeds of its own destruction...* (Mazlish, 1984, Kaustky, 1917). Marxist line of attack is based on economic and socio-political enquiry which is applied to the analysis and critique of the development of capitalism and the role of class struggle in systemic economic change. Marxism includes an economic theory, a sociological theory, a philosophical method, and a revolutionary view of social change

V. PARALLELS BETWEEN FANON AND MARXISM

Fanon and Marx gave much premium to violence as indispensable force in the dethronement of the oppressive (capitalists) system. In the first chapter of the book (Concerning violence) Fanon stressed the application of violence to overthrow colonial regimes, which he termed an aberration, arguing that it is the most potent force necessary to unite the indigenous population, boost their self esteem and ensure freedom from colonial domination. In agreement with Fanon, Marx opined that revolution is the only recipe to remove oppressive capitalist systems and supplant it with socialism. He argues that capitalist system has the tendency to resist change because the oppressors benefit from it, therefore removing such regime require revolution which takes a form of sustained violent actions by the oppressed. The two scholars represent the greatest emancipatory project that is closely identified with the poor and the oppressed. Fanon's works tend to identify with the poor colonised population in developing countries oppressed by the colonial powers. He writes extensively on the plight of the indigenous people including their psychological and economic domination by foreign powers. Similarly, Marx identified with the masses or the ruling class exploited by capitalist due to the difference in the access to the means of production. He points to the domination and control of resources by the ruling elite and concomitant alienation and subordination of the masses and working class. Therefore in as much as Fanon is critical of colonisers and sought for the emancipation of the indigenous people in third world countries, Marx too is sceptical of the ruling elite advocating for the liberation of the working class from bourgeoisie exploitation. Another parallel drawn from the Fanon and Marx is the expectation that there may be a transition of the society from that which is composed of inequality, exploitation, suppression and oppression to that which more or less represents a utopia, a better society that benefits greatest number of masses. In the book, *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon advocated for liberation indigenous people from shackles colonialism and establishment of indigenous government for the indigenous people. Marx on his part advocates for the replacement of capitalism with socialism. To him, socialism is an utopia which represents a perfect society that is devoid of exploitation and suppression of the masses. He argues that society has progressed through many stages and at each stage, there is an exploiter and exploited and that the last stage of societal evolution is the socialist society which is a perfect society for mankind

VI. VARIATIONS BETWEEN FANON AND TRADITIONAL MARXISM

The book *Wretched of the Earth* is not without criticisms. The first criticism stems from his definition of lumpen proletariat which contradicts the definition offered by Karl Marx. To Marx, lumpen proletariat are considered the lowest, most degraded stratum of the social class-especially criminals, vagrants, alcoholics, thugs, and unemployed who lack class consciousness to actively participate in the anti-colonial revolution. Yet Fanon

applies the term to identify colonial subjects who are not involved in industrial production especially the peasantry or rural people who are independent from dominant ideology of the colonial ruling class.

Another criticism originates from Fanon's recognition of lumpen proletariat as a critical force in the revolution and rejection of the proletariat as a class opposed to revolution. This thinking is inconsistent with the traditional Marxist thought. To Marx, the proletariat are indispensable in the decolonization process. This is because of the awareness on the nature of their exploitation and their position as the class exploitation. Other Marxists see trade unions through intellectuals as forces that can spur revolution (Lenin, 1917). To Marx, the revolution started can be adopted by the proletariat. Marx, history has also shown that peasantry can not necessarily dethrone oppressors but may replace them. Marx gave example of French small holding peasants who used their to perpetrate capitalism instead of embarking on revolution (Napoleon III). To Luxemburg (1899) the social experience is more important to revolution than Lumpen proletariat and it is social experience that creates class consciousness which guarantee success of revolution. Still, on the position of class consciousness in revolution, Fanon insists that class consciousness is harmful to revolution as it neutralises the proletariat, making them to aspire to becoming bourgeoisie themselves, thus can only be interested in preserving the status- quo. For that reason, lumpen proletariat who are without class consciousness have been seen by Fanon as a critical force on decolonization. But to Marx, class consciousness is central to successful decolonization as it is class consciousness that propels proletariat to revolution. Unlike traditional Marxists, Fanon seem to identify the shortcomings of the indigenous bourgeoisie and government in the third world countries. Traditional Marxists heap blame on the capitalists on development predicaments and poverty in these countries, however, Fanon points that development problems witnessed in third world countries in caused by the indigenous ruling elites lack of innovative and ideas including the prevailing spiritual poverty of the ruling elite. He criticises leaders of third world countries for their lackadaisical attitudes towards development and their emptiness. Traditional Marxists rather ignore this which has become a notable difference between traditional Marxists and Fanon. Despite these criticisms, the ideas of Fanon have been consistent with Luxemburg (1899). Luxemburg (1899) seem to agree with Fanon on the role of proletariat in successful revolution. To him, patronization of the proletariat by the intellectual elite in the course of revolution will only lead to weakening national consciousness there by reducing the potential to defeat dominant powers.

VII. CONCLUSION

It should be concluded that both Fanon and Marxists recognise and advocate for the use of violence in the liberation of the oppressed against exploitative ruling elite. They are empathetic about the plight of the oppressed and see the need for emancipation of the group from oppressors. Fanon's writings are specifically about evils of colonialism while Marx's attention is mainly on the limitations of capitalism. However, it should be noted that colonialism is a form of capitalism that involve both economic exploitation and political domination of the third world countries by the advanced capitalist nations. Fanon and Marx have been faulted for preaching violence as the only feasible measure of political and economic freedom from exploiters. This is because the relative freedom gained by most dominated groups such as the African Americans in the United States was not gained through violence and Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the liberation movement always emphasised non-violent agitation for the freedom of the Black people in the US.

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