

Franz Fanon (1925-1961) “Concerning Violence” (Chap. 1 of *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963)
Only way to do away with colonialism and its effects is through violence

1925 Born on island of Martinique - French territory (French Antilles, together with Guadeloupe)

Rigid class structure:
small upper class - native and French whites
middle class - mulattoes and blacks
working class - majority of populace (black)

Note: Two methods of colonization (in general):
French: Direct rule/assimilation (eradicates native culture; produces stabilizing “centripetal” forces, supposedly)
British: Indirect rule (allows culture to exist; produces stabilizing “centrifugal” forces, supposedly)

1943 Joins French army in WWII.

1947-51 In France in medical school.

1949-50 Writes Black Skin, White Masks.

Provides Fanon’s views on human nature:
“No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be set free.”
• Recall Rousseau’s emphasis on freedom/liberty.
• Recall Marx’s notion of alienation: 2 aspects of being human; oppression occurs when these aspects are alienated from each other. For Fanon, universal aspect involves freedom.

1953 Head of psychiatric department at Blida-Joinville Hospital, Algeria.

1954 National Liberation Front (Front de Liberation Nationale - FLN) declares war on France.

Aside: France colonizes Algeria in 1830. (prior to French - Barbary Coast /pirates; etc.).
Fanon becomes active in the FLN. Sees psychiatric disorders as direct result of social situations - to cure self, need to cure society.

1957 Moves to Tunisia.

1960 Fanon becomes official representative to Ghana of exiled Algerian government.

1961 Dies of leukemia in U.S. Had just finished draft of *Wretched of the Earth*.

1962 Algerian independence.

“Concerning Violence”

Various notions of “violence” in Fanon:

- 1. force
- 2. physical or psychological injury
- 3. aggression
- 4. coercion
- 5. militancy/radicalism

Decolonization: Two Senses:

- (a) The physical act of freeing a territory from external control of a colonizer.
- (b) The psychological act of freeing the consciousness of the native from the alienation caused by colonization.

Fanon’s claim: Violence is required to do both - “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.” (pg. 99)

<WHY?>

I. Characteristics of decolonization

- (1) Total, complete, instantaneous substitution of one “species” of man with another.
- (2) Brings into being “new men, new language, new *humanity*”.
- (3) No supernatural forces: The production of new men is *solely* a result of *their act of obtaining their freedom*.

- So - violence is required to destroy the alienation of the native. It’s required to liberate the native’s consciousness and restore humanity to him.
- The violent victory over the settler is the victory of the native’s *humanity*. (pg. 102)
Violence as a purifying agent - it cleanses the native of alienation.
- Again: Decolonization requires a complete reversal of the order of society: “The last shall be first and the first shall be last”. The native goes from “animal” to “human”.

II. Why Violence? (4 reasons)

- (1) To liberate the native’s consciousness (to restore humanity to him).
 - (2) As a natural response to the violence perpetrated by the settler.
- } moral reasons

The settler’s world is ruled by violence:

- (i) Directly: Segregated schools.; army barracks and police stations - the Tools of Oppression. The police and the army are the official go-between for native and settler.

→ In Capitalist society, the methods are less direct: education and moral codes. Instead of police and army, there are “moral teachers, counselors, ‘bewilderers’”.

Other ways the colonial world is different from the capitalist world: In the former, the governing class is foreign, and *racial* differences underlie class differences *and* economic differences. Both physically and psychologically - “you’re rich because you’re white; you’re white because you’re rich”.

- (ii) Indirectly: The settler is all that is good and of value. The native is the negation of the settler’s values.

Fanon on Christianity (compare Rousseau on morality):

It’s just like DDT - it eradicates the bearers of disease; i.e., it advances the value system of the settler.

Qualification: Fanon says it is the settler’s church - “the Church in the colonies” - that is the culprit:

“...it does not call the native to the ways of God; it calls the native to the ways of the white man.”

(Compare later with King)

What constitutes morality for the native? (pg. 103)

“To put the settler out of the picture.”

“No professor of ethics, no priest has ever come to be beaten in the native’s place.” (Compare later with King, again)

(3) To physically bring down the colonial social/political/economic structures.

(4) To build solidarity in the struggle for freedom.

} practical reasons

What about the overwhelming material power of the colonial state? "Tanks and bombs".

Fanon thinks this factor can be overcome:

- (a) Guerrilla warfare (Spanish against Napoleon; Americans against British).
- (b) Help from other socialist countries.
- (c) Capitalists in colonial nation will pressure government to refrain from use of force.
Overseas native markets are too valuable.

III. Psychological Profile of the Native

The native engages in mechanisms of avoidance to suppress his violence:

(1) Dreams. Native avoids realities of colonial limits/boundaries with dreams full of action.

(2) Redirection of aggression:

- (a) Towards fellow native - tribal warfare, quarrels, etc.
- (b) In terrifying myths - malefic spirits, zombies, fatalism.

2 purposes of myth:

- (i) Avoidance - mythic world is far more terrifying than the world of the settler.
- (ii) Gives native status and integrates him into the traditions of native society.

(c) In ecstatic dance and possession.

Is Fanon's interpretation of dance feasible?

- Was it absent in pre-colonial African society?
- Will it cease after independence?
- Other interpretation: Dance as validation of culture.

IV. Parties Involved in Decolonization

(1) Political parties: Urban intellectuals with some stake in colonial system. They desire *reform* of system, not its removal.

(2) Colonialist bourgeoisie and Nationalist bourgeoisie (native intellectual): They promote compromise and non-violence. "Bus boycotts", etc. According to Fanon, these allow the people to work off energy, but not to effect real change. They are "sleep cures"; compromise is "therapy by hibernation".

Fanon's story: The native intellectual, the "voice of moderation", will get Put Down by the settler. If lucky, the intellectual will find himself amongst the peasants, who will sweep him into their movement.

(3) Peasants: "In the colonial countries, they alone are revolutionary." They have the most to gain and nothing to lose.

Fanon distinguishes between:

- (1) National bourgeoisie: middle class
 - (2) Urban proletariat: urban working class ← The revolutionary class for Marx
 - (3) Peasants: rural farmers ← The revolutionary class for Fanon
 - (4) “Lumpen”-proletariat: urban unemployed
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V. Potential Causes for Uprising

- (1) Violent undertaking of peasants.
- (2) Action of neighboring countries - as “brake” to settlers.
Ex. Dien Bien Phu heralded the end of the French presence in Vietnam; scared other colonial powers into quick action.

How (1) plays out:

- (a) Build-up of tensions.
 - (b) Colonial displays of power.
 - (c) “Guns go off by themselves.”
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VI. After Independence

After nationhood, the atmosphere of violence remains. Ex: Aggressive, exasperated rhetoric of new leaders.

Central cause: International conflict between capitalism and socialism.

Fanon: No kow-towing. New nations should demand reparations from former colonial powers.

Why are Reparations the Native’s Right?

- (1) Morally:
 - (a) To make up for the settler’s particular world of violence.
 - (b) To make up for the history of Western European exploitation of the Third World.
- (2) Practically: Investment in the Third World is essential to the health of International Capitalism, because:
 - (a) If capital is not invested in developing countries, it “remains blocked in Europe and is frozen” (pg. 129).
(Assumptions: (i) International capitalism requires many outlets to remain healthy. (ii) Third World outlets in particular are essential in preventing its stagnation.)
 - (b) International commerce will suffer without a strong overseas market.