

Frantz Fanon and the Post-Colonial World

Social Sciences

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Abstract

Frantz Fanon was one of the most intense and profound intellectuals of the twentieth century. His works on colonialism are the most keen assessments of the subject. The research article analyses the key concepts of Racism and Violence that occupied Fanon's writings. The article also inquires about the plight of third world countries and application of Fanon's ideas in the contemporary world. The article has mainly used secondary sources for the conduct of the study.

Keywords: Colonialism, Racism, Third World, Violence, Wretched.

Introduction

Today we hardly remember Frantz Fanon. His name is confined to the age of decolonization. The apostle of decolonization who predicted the doom of colonization. The psychiatrist from Martinique (a French Colony) who advocated the cause of Algerian (another French Colony) liberation. His books, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* conjure images of a colonized world. The oppressor and oppressed are dissected on an operating table. The man who introduced us to the inhumanity of colonization. A psychiatrist who came to work for the French in Algeria. The oppression and torture shook his convictions.

It has been many years since the third world became independent of European colonialism. The third world, underdeveloped world or developing world, whatever the name maybe. The world of confusion and turmoil, Poverty, corruption, instability are its characteristics. Frantz Fanon died in 1961 before the Algerian liberation. He didn't witness the post-colonial world in Algeria.

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The developing world is free and not so free. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are beset with problems. The Arab spring has turned into an Arab nightmare. Hundreds and thousands have been killed and millions have become refugees. The Palestinians are still dispossessed. The neo-liberal agenda and globalization are wreaking havoc. In times of deep disillusionment how best we can remember Fanon? What he teaches us? Does his ideas matter anymore?

Algeria

The French occupied Algeria for over 100 years. One million French settlers lived in Algeria. Decolonization increased after the Second World War. Britain was bankrupt and gave up her colonies. France was humiliated by Nazi Germany during world war two. She was determined to hold on to Algeria and Vietnam. Algeria became independent in 1962 but one million Algerians lost their lives. The French were routed at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in 1954.

When the Algerian war of independence began Fanon witnessed the violence and torture and its effects on both the colonizer and the colonized. He resigned from his post as a psychiatrist and became the most outspoken opponent of French rule in Algeria. As a psychiatrist it enabled him to develop a detailed analysis of the relationship between oppressive social and political forces and the mental health of individuals (Hopton, p-723).

Racism

Fanon faced severe racism during his stay in France and it had a deep impact on him psychologically. He wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* to find the answers to questions that troubled him. The inferiority complex that is felt by blacks with regard to whites. The dependency and inadequacy that a black man feels and wants to take the place of white man. It is the anger of all whose cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and in some cases eliminated (Sardar). It was the era of 1960's, civil rights movements led by Martin Luther King Jr. who favoured passive resistance against racism and oppression. Malcolm X favored armed resistance.

Fanon died in 1961, but racism has not ceased to exist. The shootings of black teens by the police in U.S, the racism against refugees in Europe are a disturbing part of our world. Our biases and prejudices against anything that is black or coloured have not gone away.

Concerning Violence

One of Fanon's most controversial ideas has been the justification of violence to attain liberation from colonialism. In the preface to the *Wretched of the Earth*, eminent French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre writes, "Violence in the colonies does not only have its aim the keeping of the enslaved men at arm's length, it seeks to dehumanize them" (Fanon, p-15). According to Fanon the native by use of violence becomes free and regains his humanity. He becomes free of myths, prejudices and the inferiority with regard to the colonizer. "Violence", Fanon argued most famously, "is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction: it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." (Shatz). The native realizes that the oppressor is a man like himself and no different. It is only a matter of time when the master is replaced by the slave.

Fanon like Malcolm X believed that decolonization can only be achieved by violence. De-colonization which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of natural shock, nor of friendly understanding (Fanon, p-36). Fanon like any other man belongs to his time. A time of World War Two and then the decolonization. It is one of the enduring debates that passive resistance or counter violence is the answer to imperialism and colonialism. Fanon raises a most troubling and powerful question; is violence necessary at times, and if so, does it, or can it, put an end to further violence (Lawrence, Karim).

Dependency Theory

After Second World War most of the third world countries achieved self rule. Frantz Fanon didn't witness the independence of Algeria but many countries like India and Pakistan had become independent. Although many third world countries have become independent for almost over fifty years yet are faced with deep lingering problems. The instability of regimes, tyrannical governments, corruption and poverty are common themes in third world countries. It would have been interesting how Fanon would have viewed the current problems in the third world. However, by delving deep into the Fanon's ideas, we can judge with confidence that he would have looked at the world from the point of colonized and oppressed. His views could be associated with that of Edward Said, Wallerstein, Gunder Frank and Samir Amin against neo-colonialism.

Like Fanon, Edward Said is regarded as one of the eminent post-colonial thinkers. Said depicts the negative perceptions of the West with regard to the East. For centuries the myths and misinterpretations of the Orient (east) by the Occident (West) have played out and these prejudices continue to our present day.

The World System Theory was put forward by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970's. There is very little difference between dependency theory and World system theory. According to the dependency theory the Capitalist world can be divided into a core, periphery and semi-periphery. The core comprises of the developed countries, the periphery of the third world countries while the semi-periphery is associated with the core as well as periphery. The periphery countries are dependent on the core and are exploited by them. According to the WST, the present world system is highly unequal because in this system the core dominates over the periphery by means of its economic growth. (Chatterjee, p-28).

Fanon lived in the age of decolonization. The Korean war, Suez war and later the Vietnam war had enthused a euphoric feeling of liberation in the third world countries. Finally the third world was free after centuries of humiliation and exploitation. There were visions of a just world and the newly liberated countries looked towards the future with hope. However, the future has not been kind to the third world. The noted intellectual Eqbal Ahmad writes about Fanon, "He saw with clarity the pitfalls of nationalism, the kind of structure that it will produce, the dependencies that it will develop, the post-colonial state that will be nothing more than a new instrument of imperial domination" (Ahmad, p-24). The colonial elite have been replaced elites of the third world countries. The elites play the role of the agent or intermediary between the nation and capitalist forces. We find in the developing world the elites living lives which are reminiscent of the colonial days. The huge line of servants, the palaces, the bank accounts would have made the Colonialists proud.

Validity of Fanon's Ideas

Fanon believed that de-colonization is a violent phenomenon (Fanon, p-27). He lived in an era when Algeria and many other African countries were undergoing radical de-colonization. He said, "The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity (Fanon, p-69). Fanon was influenced by the ideology and revolutionary fervor of his time. However, many changes have taken place in the world since the time of

Fanon such as end of cold-war, collapse of Soviet-Union and China's path to Market economy but some of his ideas are worth consideration. For example, the following paragraph from 'The Wretched of the Earth' still seems to be valid in the perspective of most of the third world countries:

“A bourgeoisie similar to that which developed in Europe is able to elaborate an ideology and at the same time strengthen its own power. Such a bourgeoisie, dynamic, educated and secular, has fully succeeded in its undertaking of the accumulation of capital and has given to the nation a minimum of prosperity. In under-developed countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness”.

Fanon's analysis of relations between the great powers and the developing countries is also helpful in understanding the today's world.

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