

AN APPRAISAL OF FRANTZ FANON'S CHOICE OF VIOLENCE AS A TOOL FOR DECOLONIZATION

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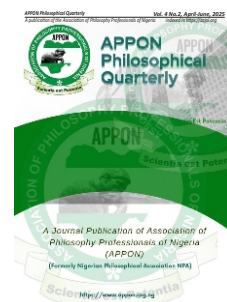
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ABSTRACT

This paper critically appraises the path of violence as an option to political revolution in Frantz Fanon's socio-political philosophy. In the history of political philosophy, violent political struggles have often been the last option in the struggle for freedom. Violent revolutionary approach does not always ensure peaceful political transition. When and how then, does violence become a desirable option if an incarcerating colonial or hegemonic structure forecloses peaceful options in the attainment of political freedom? That was the scenario in Frantz Fanon's embattled Algeria when the living were near dead under the choking and alienating social and economic policies the colonizers put in place. This structure was responsible for the racial and tribal violence the people suffered and the economic incarceration they suffered. However, where other options remain open they must be explored. Rather than subscribe to Fanon's belief in revolution as only option to national liberation, the work recommends that restructuring of socio-political systems, and development of humans and infrastructure, among others, remain major panaceas. The method adopted in the research work is expository and analytical with the aid of textbooks, articles and internet sources. The work opened up some other options to decolonization rather than violence. Then again, it will serve to deter some Nigerian youths who may likely do so from perceiving political violence as the most veritable option to end corruption, hardship, demagoguery and the like in Nigeria. In the same vein, it will serve as a warning to freedom fighters never to follow Fanon's principle of violent revolution. Historically, this has proved counter-productive in many respects. Besides, the non-violent approach has proven to be quite successful in bringing about desired political change.

Keywords: Colonialism, Violence, Revolution, Decolonization, Liberation

Introduction

The social, political, economic, religious and moral evils of colonialism on African peoples are far-reaching. This sordid history

began with the partitioning and parcelling out of African nations to colonial powers at the Berlin Conference, also called the Congo Conference, of November 15, 1844 to

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February 26, 1885. The Conference was for Europe's economic and political exploitation of African mineral, raw materials and human resources for their imperial interests. The peoples of the colonized passed through untold suffering at the hands of their exploiting European countries. Frantz Fanon lived in a time of this cruel colonialism in Algeria. His world was that of violent colonial world – a Manichean world; a compartmentalized world; a world of apartheid. Hence, his writing and description of colonialism as a violent system was out of his personal experience.

Fanon's war experiences and the legacy of colonial domination, together with his study of philosophical works and training as a psychiatrist, had a strong influence on his conception of decolonization within the context of anti-colonial struggle. It was the dehumanizing and excruciating circumstances in the colonial world that influenced Fanon's advocacy of revolutionary decolonization aimed at destroying the unjust colonial structures and liberating alienated consciousness. This is the major problem Fanon sought to tackle; the de-colonization of the violent colonial world – a Manichaeian world; a compartmentalized world and world of apartheid created by evil colonialism.

There is no gainsaying that colonialism had a significant impact on African societies, including the suppression of local customary practices, economic exploitation and the transformation of socioeconomic systems. Obviously, the legacy of colonialism has diminished Africa's economic potentials. In many African countries, the language used in government and media is that of their colonial power. But the problem now lies on the method or approach of the decolonization of the evil and violent colonial world advocated by Frantz Fanon. It is quite evident that Fanon's method or approach to decolonization has some flaws and loopholes. Thus, if reciprocal violence is the only option to

national liberation as Fanon claims, what about Negros, India, Nigeria, Gabon etc. that had their independence without such reciprocal violence? Are there no other better options to national liberation than violence? These and many other questions that may crop up in the process remain the central focus of the paper.

In consideration of the different conceptions of violence by different philosophers as sampled therein, this paper aims at exposing and evaluating Fanon's idea of violence vis-à-vis decolonization. Most significantly, the paper will enable an understanding of Fanon's unique idea of violence and come to term with other options to national liberation other than violence. More still, a wider knowledge of violence and its effect in society will be gained. In expounding the idea of violence in Fanon's perspective, references will be made to other concepts that are of help to the explication of Fanon's notion of violence as instrument of decolonization.

Frantz Fanon was born on 20th July, 1925 on the Island of Martinique to a descendants of slaves shipped to the Island in the 17th century. In Martinique, blacks were subjected to the French policy of assimilation. Against this colonial policy Fanon was influenced by Aime Césaire's philosophy of Negritude. This inspired in him the struggle for independence. But then his personal experience of the Second World War traumatized him, made him withdrawn and introspective. He was brought face-to-face with the experience of racism in Europe, Africa and in the French Caribbean. He observed that in the army, France had a different place for Black Frenchmen despite its national so-called value of liberty, equality and fraternity.

On the other hand he schooled on the philosophical works Jean Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and G. W. F. Hegel. On completion of his studies in Paris Fanon returned to his country, Algeria where he headed the Psychiatry Department of Blida-

Joinville Hospital in Algeria. At the hospital he observed the effects of colonial violence on the psyche of the Algerian people. It was his experience of the oppression of the Algerian people at the hands of colonial France that prompted him to join National Liberation Front (FLN) fighting for the liberation of the Algerian people. He wrote "if psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization."³ This paper therefore, sets out x-ray how Fanon set about his liberation struggle as he advocated for violent revolution. The methods of exposition and analysis were adopted. Furthermore, it undertakes a review of relevant literature, expose Fanon's idea on violence as a liberating political instrument, evaluates Fanon's advocacy of violence as only option for political freedom, then summary and conclusion.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Colonialism and coloniality are conceptually related but different terms. Colonialism according to Pachón Soto denotes a political and economic relationship wherein the sovereignty of a country is undermined by a stronger nation who exercises power, political authority over another territorial jurisdiction in terms of resource production, work and cultural identity.⁴ The concept 'coloniality' refers to the pattern or structure of exercising this power control.⁵ It translates into a kind of

ideology that determines how work, in terms of productive output that must be put in place, what knowledge the colonized must have, the kind of authority they must be allowed to exercise in a world of capitalist economy.⁶ This coloniality of power is masked by abstract epistemological categories of objectivism, individualism, etc that subverts values and places the colonized as the second *other*. Thus, it is easily seen that coloniality is a structure of dominion. In this, African people suffer violence⁷ and had the African system of knowledge supplanted by western epistemological categories.⁸ It is in this way that the life of the colonized people is systemically transformed to internalize the domineering worldview of the colonizer. Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* spelt out this exploitation and expropriation of Africa.

Violence, Hansen explained, is the "use of force to harm or destroy human beings or non-human objects, for the purpose of preserving or altering political institutions, systems, governments, or policies."⁹ He graphically captures it that while colonialism is the disease that alienates, revolution is its cure that leads to freedom. Hence, violence may take the physical or psychological forms of domination. It is physical violence when painful injury is inflicted by the use of instruments like whips, guns, bayonets and fists. It is psychological when hostile behaviour such as gestures and words are used to cause emotional damage or harm to the victim.¹⁰ A distinction is also made between instrumental violence and intrinsic violence.

³Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington. (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 39

⁴ D. Pachón Soto, "De-colonial Theories: Origin, Categories, and Critical Intents" *Análisis*, 55(102)2023, 4. <https://doi.org/10.15332/21459169.8603>

⁵ Soto, "De-colonial Theories, 5

⁶ Soto, "De-colonial Theories, 5

⁷ Soto, "De-colonial Theories, 11

⁸ Soto, "De-colonial Theories, 11-13

⁹ Hansen Emmanuel. "Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of, Frantz Fanon", *Africa Development Afrique et Development*, vol.2, No.1 (1977), 17 – 19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24486306>

¹⁰ Neil Roberts. "Fanon, Sartre, Violence and Freedom", *Sartre Studies International*, 10, 2 (2004), 143.

In the first it serves as a calculated means to achieving specific imperial end.¹¹ Violence is intrinsic if it does not operate in a means-end continuum but places positive value on a violent act, regardless of the outcome at a specific moment of employment. Coloniality involves the various forms and shades of meaning of the concept. In all its forms violence demeans the victim's sense of identity, dignity and self-worth.

Franz Fanon on Violence as Instrument of Decolonization.

Fanon conceives violence as a natural phenomenon. It is the settlers that are first alarmed at the consequences of their repression, arrest, slaughter of the citizens of their colonies. These measures generate protests and demonstrations as well as an awakening of national consciousness.¹² Fanon believes that violence is intrinsically valuable in the anti-colonial struggle for freedom. It is "in the atmosphere that it here and there bursts, and here and there sweeps away the colonial regime."¹³ But this instrumentality must be reversed for decolonization. Hence, the true definition of decolonization is "the last shall be first." The colonial power used violence of oppression. For Fanon it is intuitive that "liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force."¹⁴ A violent situation calls for violent approach.¹⁵

Fanon maintains that decolonization is a true creation of new people. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power but through the very process of liberation. Decolonization, therefore, implies the urgent need to

thoroughly challenge the colonial situation. As it were, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists. This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence. In support of Fanon's idea on violence, Walter writes:

Fanon argues that violence is necessary to advancing decolonization because colonialism itself is a violent process, and thus cannot be dislodged by appealing to the reason or compassion of the colonizer, and because violence instils a sense of agency in the colonized population.¹⁶

However, the success of the process of emancipation by violence requires that the course of action must be organized, guided and directed by the educated leaders of the freedom fighters. This ensures that the masses were properly informed of the truth of the social reality they were pursuing. Therefore, leadership and coordination is an indispensable ingredient in the liberation struggle.

Fanon's Analysis of the Colonial Situation

Fanon avers that violence is the defining characteristic of colonialism. The colonial world is characterized by a dichotomy and conflict between the settlers and the natives.

¹¹ Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence and Freedom", 146

¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 71-72

¹³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 65

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 73

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 202

¹⁶ B. Walter, "Critique of Violence." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms and Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Peter Demetz and translated by Edmund Jephcott, (Schocken Books, 1986), 277-300

Fanon states that colonial world is divided into two compartmental zones: the zone of the settlers and the zone of the natives. Barrack and police stations partition these zones. Narcissism and chauvinism permeate the consciousness of the settlers. They see their zone as being the sole sphere of humanity. So, if one does belong to that sphere, one cannot claim to represent a civilized human species.

The natives are being exploited, enslaved, oppressed, marginalized, dehumanized, abused and devalued by the colonizers. Fanon therefore writes: "The Negro problem does not resolve itself into the problem of Negroes living among whites but rather of Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white."¹⁷ Fanon views colonialism as a system of exploitation which makes the colonized feel inferior to the colonizers. He contends that the instrument of colonial rule is violence. This violence is cruelly executed by means of bayonets and canons and sustained by the police and the army. Fanon writes thus: "their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together – that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler – was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons."¹⁸ He explains further that in the colonial world, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; "he shows them up and puts

them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native."¹⁹ The racially motivated physical violence is perpetrated to subject the natives to awful abuse and traumatic experience in order to force them into submission. In the light of this, Hansen explains that physical violence does not only refer to "the wars of conquest, pillage and plunder by which in many places colonial rule was established but also refer to the day employment of strong arm measures to keep the colonized population in a subject state."²⁰ Psychologically, the colonized are robbed of their being and made to feel inferior and worthless. To be human is to be white. The white is civilized and rational but the Negro is primitive, uncivilized and inhuman. The colonizers do not recognize the colonized people as being human and thus treats them inhumanely. Sartre notes the physiological and psychological violence in the colonial world: Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill, if they have any spirit left, fear will finish the job; guns are levelled at the peasant; civilians come to take over his land and force him by dint of flogging to fill the land for them. If he shows fight, the soldiers will fire and he is dead; if he gives in, he degrades himself and he is no longer a man at all; shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self falls to pieces.

Culturally, the natives are degraded and devastated. Colonialism robs the African culture of its essential value. The colonists present their homeland's foreign culture as superior to that of African.²¹ African culture loses its autonomy and becomes an instrument of colonial oppression.

¹⁷ A. Césaire, quoted by Dennis Forsythe in "Frantz Fanon: Black Theoretician", *The Black Scholar*, 1, 5, (1970), 6

¹⁸ J-P Sartre, Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, 16

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 53

²⁰ D. Wright, "Fanon and Africa: A Retrospect", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24, 4 (1986), 683.

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 59.

According to Sartre the colonizer's use of violence not only enslaves the black and dehumanizes the black, it also alienates the blacks from what is rightly theirs as well as supplants African cultural values.²² The people are made to look inferior. As Kebede puts it:

The tag of primitiveness affixed on them, the contempt for and complete destruction of their cultural legacy, their forced assimilation into the European culture at a reduced price, all have resulted in the inculcation, deep into the soul of each colonized person, of a devastating inferiority complex.²³

Colonialists created a structure for economic alienation and exploitation. The natives are prohibited from meaningfully participating in the political processes that affect their authentic existence. They are subjected to forced labour, barred from possessing wealth and occupying high social status. As the economic condition constitutes Karl Marx's substructure, so does race in Fanon's view, determine consciousness of reality at the superstructure, namely, the material possessions and social status. He therefore, asserts thus:

When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies, the economic substructure is also a

superstructure. The cause is then consequence: you are rich because you are white; you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.²⁴

The above quote suggests that "the white man is the symbol of capitalism as the Negro is that of labour."²⁵ By implication the colonized Africans would remain impoverished, put on alienated consciousness and have their material conditions of life alienated. This leads to conflicts. Sartre writes:

Hatred, blind hatred which is as yet an abstraction, is their only wealth, the master calls it forth because he seeks to reduce them to animals, but he fails to break it down because his interests stop him halfway. Thus, the 'half-natives' are still humans, through the power and weakness of the oppressor which is transformed within them into a stubborn refusal of the animal condition.²⁶

As Fanon puts it:

The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism... The native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions – in tribal warfare, in feuds between sects and, in quarrels between individuals.²⁷

²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 71

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 70

²⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 64

²⁵ Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon: Portrait of a Revolutionary Intellectual*, 31

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 60

²⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 33

Sartre argues that the natives deteriorate their degrading and dehumanizing experience by transferring their repressed anger to one another. For him, such act does not amount to liberation but promotion of dehumanization. In the light of this background, Fanon believes that tribal violence does not predate colonialism. He views both “tribal and social divisions as the conjuring of colonialism.”²⁸ Violence, for him, emanates from colonialism which breeds and preserves tribal antagonism. Hence, in the words of Fanon, “The native intellectual has clothed his aggressiveness in his barely veiled desire to assimilate himself to the colonial world. He has used his aggressiveness to serve his own individual interests.”²⁹ Fanon explains that the nationalist bourgeoisie have no option but to conform to colonial model, having seen that the colonialist bourgeoisie have administrative apparatus in place to sanction and suppress dissenting and critical voices. Fanon understood, therefore, that exploitative and oppressive colonial regime increases the consciousness that “between oppressors and oppressed everything can be solved by force.”³⁰ The colonized now identify their real foes as the colonists and then believe that only violence can free them. They thus channel their violence towards the annihilation of the unjust colonial system. Fanon thus explains:

Yet in spite of the metamorphoses which the colonial regime imposes upon it in the way of tribal or regional quarrels, that violence makes its way forward, and the native identifies his enemy and recognizes all his misfortunes,

throwing all the exacerbated might of his hate and anger into this new channel.³¹

However, the nationalist political leaders would not call for armed insurrection. Instead, they would opt for dialogue with the colonialist bourgeoisie in order to relax the tension and restore order. Fanon believes that all repressive measures and actions of the native elite cannot end colonial oppression. He sees any attempt by the natives to entrust their eventual freedom to negotiation between the native political elite and the colonizers as a false path. This is because, for him, the exploitative and oppressive rules will continue even if the colonial system is reformed so that the corrupt nationalist political elite rule the people directly under the dictates of the colonialist bourgeoisie.

For Fanon, colonialism is an embodiment of injustice and so deserves to be destroyed by whatever means possible. The injustice of colonialism includes the suppression of people’s right to self-determination, economic and racial exploitation, and violation of other democratic rights. Violent change would correct the injustice. The end of colonial exploitation would inaugurate “the unconditional reign of justice.”³² Fanon therefore thinks that the colonized peoples could “create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth through revolutionary violence.”³³

Fanon’s Decolonization Theory of Violence

Fanon advocates violent revolution within the context of anti-colonial struggle. He

²⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 35

²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 49-50

³⁰ J-P Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, (London: NLB, 1979), 803

³¹ R. Bernasconi, “The Wretched of the Earth as the Fulfilment of Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason’, *Sartre Studies International*, 16, 2 (2010), 39.

³² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 87

³³ J-P Sartre, “Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*”, 20

contends that the absolute necessity of violent revolution stems from the violent nature of colonial world. Colonialism "is violence in its natural state and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence."³⁴ Violence is a necessary ingredient of liberation without which there is no genuine freedom. He sees this violent break with colonialism as true decolonization that can only guarantee authentic liberation. In the light of this, Fanon writes: "National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of nation to the people, commonwealth; whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent event."³⁵ He explains that decolonization is a violent phenomenon because it is "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantiation which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies."³⁶ In this scenario, "the settler never ceases to be the enemy, the opponent, the foe that must be overthrown."³⁷ The process of decolonization is dialectical; "the dialectic is the practical consciousness of an oppressed class struggling against its oppression."³⁸ This dialectic can only be resolved through "the dialectical reciprocity of antagonism."³⁹ As Hansen puts it: "The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity."⁴⁰ This seems to justify decolonization.

Decolonization is necessary through violence because it seeks to right a situation that is created by violence in the colonial world. As colonization seeks to violently uproot the colonized people from their cultural placing and make them inhuman, so is decolonization a veritable means of creating new persons, so that natives become human during the same process by which they free themselves. Hence, for Fanon decolonization influences and fundamentally modifies the individuals, and transforms such from being crushed spectators into privileged political actors.⁴¹ In Fanon's view, therefore, it is only through violence that man creates himself. Violence restores the humanity of the colonized man which has been eroded by colonial violence. In the words of Fanon, "At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex, despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."⁴²

The native achieves psychological liberation and is rid of inferiority complex when the oppressors are removed violently and the existing political and socio-economic structures are violently changed. Fanon intrepidly avers that the colonial world is a white-dominated world. It is white to the extent that the colonized internalize the racist standards of the colonizers and begin to fight against themselves. He therefore urges "black men to overcome their inferiority complexes by killing the white man within themselves."⁴³ But this is only possible through violence, for it is "the

³⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 93

³⁵ C. E. Butterworth and Irene L. Gendzier, "A Review of Frantz Fanon and the Justice of Violence: An Essay on Irene L. Gendzier's *Frantz: A Critical Study*", *Middle East Journal*, 28, 4 (1974), 455.

³⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 72

³⁷ J. Penny, "Passing into the Universal: Fanon, Satre and the Colonial Dialectic", *Paragraph*, 27, 3 (2004), 53.

³⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 229–230

³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 17.

⁴⁰ Hansen, *Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of, Frantz Fanon*, 32

⁴¹ Hansen, "Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of, Frantz Fanon", 32.

⁴² Hansen, "Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of, Frantz Fanon", 33.

⁴³ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 37–38.

intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only be achieved by force.”⁴⁴ In other words, anti-colonial violence must be redirected against the instrumentality and structure of colonial violence. This rational principle must guide towards meaningful action, namely to changing the hitherto political scenario.

What is the use of theory or principle if not to guide action? Fanon writes,

But when one has taken cognizance of this situation, when one has understood it, one considers the job completed. How can one then be deaf for that voice rolling down the stages of history: ‘What matters is not to know the world but to change it.’⁴⁵

Fanon’s advocacy of violent revolution is patterned to the Marxian approach. The nationalist bourgeoisie and the urban working class are reluctant to embark on a revolutionary violence against a system that benefits them. Hence, this class cannot perform this revolutionary role because they would not only remain “conditioned to operate in the colonial mode of production”⁴⁶ but be also “subjected to colonial socialization which makes them accepts such order as natural.”⁴⁷ Hansen asserts naturally “a group which owes its entire privileged existence” cannot work against such a system, to destroying it.⁴⁸ Therefore, Fanon assigns the revolutionary role to the peasantry and lumpen proletariat for these are not integrated into the colonial system. They benefit nothing from colonial

rule and are not corrupted by it. So, this class are in touch with their culture and have not suffered from inferiority complex and cultural degradation. They are potential revolutionaries and possess a great deal of brute force for violent revolution because they suffered unemployment and deprivation and are willing to employ whatever possible means to bring the evil system to its end.

Critical Appraisal of Fanon’s Decolonization Theory of Violence

Fanon has demonstrated that the socio-economic conditions are at the root of the racial problem which engenders the feeling of inferiority complex. He notes that the prevalent racism in the colonial world is deeply rooted in social and economic conditions and so should not be regarded as a mental disturbance. It is the cruel and dehumanizing situation of colonialism that prompted Fanon to advocate a violent struggle for liberation. Fanon’s concern is social and political freedom – the freedom of the individual in the State. For this freedom to be achieved, it is crucial that the “state not only be free from external control but also that political and social arrangements should be such as to enable man to express and maintain his freedom.”⁴⁹ This call for counter violence is rooted in the realization of humanism, “the primordial concern for the human being and in all human beings, no matter their colour and their condition.”⁵⁰

But then, Fanon even admits that violence can cause more psychological damage to the psyche of both the colonized and the colonizers. His psychiatric case histories show that violence engenders

⁴⁴ Hansen, *Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of Frantz Fanon*, 25.

⁴⁵ A. Akpuru-Aja, *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, (Enugu: Keny and Brothers Ent., 2007), 112.

⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 64

⁴⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 37 – 38

⁴⁸ Hansen, *Freedom and Revolution in the Thought of Frantz Fanon*, 25

⁴⁹ [Sehar Shaheryar](https://www.e-ir.info/2020/05/09/is-decolonisation-always-a-violent-phenomenon/), *Is Decolonisation Always a Violent Phenomenon?* <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/05/09/is-decolonisation-always-a-violent-phenomenon/> accessed on 20th September, 2025

⁵⁰ [Sehar Shaheryar](https://www.e-ir.info/2020/05/09/is-decolonisation-always-a-violent-phenomenon/), *Is Decolonisation Always a Violent Phenomenon?*

neurosis and distort personality. Fanon's claim that violent decolonization will create new humanity, unify the people and build solidarity among them leaves much to be desired. Experience and studies have shown that harmony and friendship cannot be secured on the basis of violence, but rather through non-violent struggle which seeks to secure the cooperation of the opponent consistently with truth and justice. Fanon's emphasis on violence risks the reduction of action to reaction, that is, the determination of a solution by the nature of the problem it aims to solve. More often than not, the use of violent resistance is counterproductive and the end for which it is used is defeated. It is not true in reality that violence can be used to quench violence when erupted. More often than not, the path of violence has only succeeded in escalating violence.

Furthermore, to use violence against violence is to add to the vicious circle of violence, thereby reverting to the Hobbes' state of nature where life is brutish and short. Revolutionary violence does not appeal to humanity and so is undesirable. Knowing that civilization and violence are antithetical concepts, it is difficult to find examples of the option of violence being successfully used unseat colonial power. In the chapter 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders', Fanon describes the long-term psychological damage that witnessing and participating in violence has on individuals and society in Algeria. Paranoia and distrust are common themes in the examples that he gives, it is therefore difficult to see how to reconcile violence as a cleansing force with the damaging impact that it would inevitably have on a post-colonial society.

It is also necessary to examine whether Fanon's thesis is applicable in the modern age. Gopal demonstrates how Maoists in India's central regions see their struggle for autonomy from India as a colonial struggle

against a democracy that acts as a colonial power. Here, peaceful methods which utilized the structures of the state failed to materialize any gains for the tribal groups, for example the buildings of dams on the Narmada River that occurred despite opposition from tribal groups. This therefore led to the feeling that change could only be achieved through violent overthrow of what is seen to be the 'colonial regime', which involved kidnappings, murders and other terror attempts. However, as Balagopal argues, "here neither violence nor peaceful methods resulted to change."⁵¹ This demonstrates the limitation of the view that 'decolonization is always a violent phenomenon' as it assumes that decolonization is always a possibility. Be that as it may, 20th century decolonization was in a time period of mass revolt and a changing global order, but in the modern age when colonialism is more subtle than direct empire, it is difficult to see the benefits from violence or non-violence, when the targets of the violence are less accessible. As Balagopal summarizes, "you can hold a gun against a landlord, but not the Indo-US Nuclear Deal."⁵² Therefore, it is unrealistic to use Fanon's thesis as a normative tool in the modern age, as the structure and meaning of colonial states has developed. Therefore, there are other best options to decolonization other than violence. Thus: Non-violent movement advocated and used by Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. According to Martin Luther, non-violence is a powerful moral force for social transformation and national liberation. Again, in his speech at Nobel Peace Prize award, he declared the award as a profound recognition that non-violence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time. He equally noted that civilization and violence are antithetical concepts. Another powerful tool for national

⁵¹ [Sehar Shaheryar](#), *Is Decolonisation Always a Violent Phenomenon?*

⁵² [Sehar Shaheryar](#), *Is Decolonisation Always a Violent Phenomenon?*

liberation other than violent revolution is Nationalists movement or advocacy.

Conclusion

Fanon is not totally wrong in his theory of violent revolution as a tool for national liberation. National liberation can be achieved through counter violence as Fanon upheld. Authentic examples are the apartheid in South Africa and Algerian liberation. It is clear that in the cases of 20th century decolonization, violence was an unavoidable means to overthrowing a violent system. The structure of the colonial state was inherently violent, whether or not native elites were co-opted into the leadership. Whilst the principles of Gandhi and Fanon have some similarities such as a desire to revert to the true pre-colonial 'self', it is clear that non-violence was and is ineffective in creating large-scale structural change. Non-violence movements failed to deal with the fact that "violence is the only language understood by the colonizer" Anti-colonial violence as described by Fanon is not intended to be senseless, but it has a purpose of freeing the body and the mind. Whilst there is a valid critique over the effectiveness of violence as a cleansing force, it is clear that Fanon's interpretation includes violence as a necessary evil that requires self-discipline. Whether this can be achieved without descending into barbarism is another question. It is also clear that 21st century examples of repression cannot be answered with 20th century solutions to colonization.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned flaws, Fanon is calling African governments today to nip in the bud the growing racial and ethnic tension across Africa by addressing socio-economic alienation and political injustices which he identifies as the root causes. There is ravaging hunger in Africa and the masses are in dire need of a decent living. The primary duty of any responsible government is the security of lives and property as well as the promotion of people's welfare.

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