

Frantz Fanon as Witness and Participant: Theorising a Peasant Revolution

Mohammed Moussa

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Istanbul
Sabahattin Zaim University, Istanbul, Turkey
mohamed.moussa@izu.edu.tr

Abstract

Frantz Fanon was not only a witness to colonial violence and its equally violent anti-colonial response, he was also a participant who contributed to the FLN's campaign for liberation from the French metropole. Thus, the twin roles of witness and participant in the Algerian anti-colonial struggle allowed Fanon to theorise revolution away from the putative detachment of the ivory towers of academic speculation or distant commentators. This paper's meditation on Fanon and his theorising of the anti-colonial struggle as a peasant revolution is divided into two sections. I will first sketch out the background of colonial Algeria and the nature of anti-colonial liberation in the Third World in the middle of the twentieth century. The second section will discuss Fanon's conception of revolution in which the peasantry, alongside the "illegalist militants," initiate a wave of mobilisation that begins in the countryside and embraces the colonised centre of the towns.

Keywords

Algeria – anti-colonial struggle – Fanon – liberation – peasantry – violence – revolution

Introduction

Colonial analysis gives rise to, provokes and unsettles the theorising of revolution in the writings of Frantz Fanon. What gives Fanon's insights a quality of intense focus, however, was his close proximity to the theatre of an anti-colonial war waged by the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). Decolonising

a colonised society involved its committed and thorough study, paying attention to the colonised and coloniser without discrimination, and the avowal to its liberation through political activism. For Fanon was not only a witness to colonial violence and its equally violent anti-colonial response, he was also a participant who brought to bear his expertise as a psychiatrist on his involvement in the FLN's campaign for liberation from the French metropole. Thus, the twin roles of witness and participant in the Algerian anti-colonial struggle allowed Fanon to theorise revolution away from the putative detachment of the ivory towers of academic speculation or distant commentators. In this paper, I will offer a reading of Fanon's conception of revolution that eschews an approach that treats him "as both totem and text" or being supremely interpretable (Gates, Jr. 1991: 457–458; Burke III 1976: 129). Instead, I situate his writings, namely *A Dying Colonialism*, *Toward the African Revolution* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, in a context characterised by the preoccupation with what the nature of colonialism is and how a colonised society, mainly populated by peasants, can truly embark on a path of decolonising itself. Fanon can be described with justice as a theorist of revolution in a period of dramatic political changes sweeping the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

While much of his work focused on anti-colonialism in Africa, Fanon's analyses, continually animated by his sharp and concerted rebukes of the reactionary national bourgeoisie, confound any trite attempt to locate them in the category of ideology (Gibson 1999). It can be more accurately conceived, in line with Cornel West, as an adaptation of Marxist theory in which the primacy of the economic sphere in a historicised account of oppression connected to the interplay between subject and structure, acknowledging the subjective, is situated amid interlinked yet specific conflicts in a "complex articulated totality" (2009: 229–232, 234–235). Fanon's dual role as witness and participant in a social milieu may seem to echo that of the ethnographer 'going native.' However, it can be more accurately construed as a repudiation of the foreign observer who contributes to the institutionalising of colonialism at the intertwined levels of knowledge in the metropole and political practice against colonial subjects. His clinical studies of colonialism, beginning at the plane of psychology, are an attempt to heal the colonised, without excluding the coloniser, through the movement of revolution that revives their individual subjectivities and horizontal solidarities in a fledgling national culture. Although a "second colonization," pointed out by Ashis Nandy, incorporates the colonising of both minds and bodies and goes so far as to pre-empt certain forms of anti-colonial dissent (2009: xi–xii, 1–4), Fanon was acutely aware of the absolute necessity of political struggle in a Manichaean world that could not be treated other than as a transient stage towards liberation. This paper's meditation on Fanon and his

theorising of the anti-colonial struggle as a peasant revolution is divided into two sections. I will first sketch out the background of colonial Algeria and the nature of anti-colonial liberation in the Third World in the middle of the twentieth century. The second section will discuss Fanon's conception of revolution in which the peasantry, alongside the "illegalist militants," embark on the struggle for liberation that creates a wave of mobilisation that begins in the countryside and embraces the colonised centre of the towns. I conclude this article with a set of brief meditations on Fanon as a theorist of peasant revolution and the relevance of his insights to the study of protests in a post-colonial world.

Colonialism, Nationalism and the Rise of a State-Party

The rise of Algerian nationalism was very much borne from the encounter, both conflictual and complicit, between the coloniser and the colonised and the eventual process of decolonisation. I will briefly sketch out in this section the impact of colonialism in shaping Fanon's immediate context in Algeria in particular and Africa in general. North Africa's incorporation into a European colonial order through a process of diplomatic crises and war occurred between the late eighteenth century and the end of the First World War. France's conquest of Algeria throughout the nineteenth century substituted a local political tradition with a new set of political, economic and social relations directed to and managed by the metropole. Its colonial experience centred on the dispossession of its culture differed from its Maghrebi neighbours, Morocco and Tunisia, while the 'Muslim' status of the colonised was reinforced by colonial France in the colony (Djaït 2011: 184, 188–189). Orientalising of colonial subjects was part of a wider claim to civilisation and domination. Although European colonialism was emblematic of modernity, namely the uniformity and surveillance ensuing from a method of control resting on the binary between 'representation' and 'reality' (Mitchell 1991), the 'medieval' irresistibly perpetuated the status of the Arab and Muslim 'other' in the colonial order.

France "had the most contact with Islam in the Mediterranean basin" with no less passionate opposition to Islam (Djaït 1985: 34–35) that was manifested in the invoking of the crusades during colonialism (Yassine 2000: 34). Moreover, the idea of crusade, with its converse of *jihad*, appears to unite disparate instances of modern French colonialism, including the conquest of Algeria and the war between 1954 and 1962, culminating in the continuous expansion of the hegemony of the West around the world (Arkoun 2006: 314–315). Colonial power was often not left uncontested. From the tribes led by Emir Abd al-Qadir in the countryside in the 1830s to Ferhat Abbas's post-war Democratic Union

of the Algerian Manifesto (UDMA), changes to the repertoire of ideas, practices and approaches to resist colonialism are evident. Nonetheless, the notion of *jihad* did not entirely disappear following the demise of Abd al-Qadir's emirate and was given renewed salience by the FLN calling its militants *mujahidin* (those waging jihad).

Although the impetus towards decolonisation was present before the Second World War, it gained increased traction in an emerging post-war bipolar world and with a high cost of war to the European colonial powers. Fanon's arrival in Algeria in the 1950s had coincided with rapid changes to the colony's internal relations between the colonial authority, European settlers and Algerian natives, and the external circumstances of the Cold War. Concurrent trends witnessed the working-class movement in the metropole and liberation movement in the colonies, namely in Africa, Asia and Latin America, struggle against capitalism, in a shift of the balance of power in the world (Nkrumah 1968: 2–5). While the novel idea of the nation in North Africa competed with the Islamic conception of self and people, both commingled, at times in uneasy syntheses, in anti-colonial struggles. Islam was a primary component in the identity of Algerians for the Islamic reformist Abdel Hameed Ben Bades, founding head of the Association of Religious Scholars, that was compatible with the national principle of a homeland (Yassine 2000: 36–37). Islam could and did lend a ready-made vocabulary of rebellion and legitimate authority to movements opposed to colonial governments.

The swift rise of the FLN as a “state-party” was accompanied by the relativisation of Islam, increasingly occupying a secondary status, within an overarching Algerian ethnic identity (Schulze 2000: 160–163). Such a development was a precursor to the *parti unique* in the post-colonial period, which briefly enjoyed constitutional primacy in the state, such as the parliament and presidency (Lewis 1966: 166–167). While the FLN pursued a revolutionary unity of combat, Fanon's advocacy of “a profound ideological solidarity between colonies north and south of the Sahara” faced reticence or opposition from French Africa (Mortimer 1970: 365–8). African unity in the late 1950s was an elusive goal that pitted an initial group of independent states, limited to eight, later joined by 13 former colonies, for the most part conciliatory towards Britain and France, with the Algerian liberation struggle waged in a classic colonial context in the same period (Nkrumah 1968: 30–36). Colonial Algeria for Fanon presented a case history for the general condition of the alienated colonised and their efforts at liberation, to which he sought to make a contribution. This involved transformations at the psychological, political, economic, social and cultural planes.

How to Carry out a Revolution?

Revolution in a colonial milieu was conceived by Fanon to be tantamount to decolonisation. Here the analysis of colonialism presupposed the object of the liberation of the colonised through a movement or organisation dedicated to radical change. According to Mbembe (2012), Fanon formulated a “*metamorphic thought*” through which ran the thread of the insight that “the irrepressible and relentless pursuit of freedom required us to mobilise all life reserves,” namely in the employment of violence, in a critique of the colonial situation that bore witness to it (20–21, 22–23). In this section of the article, I will explore Fanon’s conception of revolution with reference to his understanding of colonialism and the type of movement needed to carry out the decolonising project and to achieve independence. For Fanon, the revolutionary movement in a colonial society combined the peasantry and novel social relations among its members in the forging of a new culture. A decolonised subjectivity would be the culmination of the bottom-up struggle that derived its mobilising capacity from both the countryside and the city.

The Manichaean World of Colonialism

Fanon’s analysis of the colonial order identified a clash between two opposing forces. While colonialism constituted a single world, the dyads of structure and individuals on the one hand and economy and race on other hand blurred into each other and created a total complex of elements. The subjectivities of the colonised and coloniser were an interdependent construction in the political, economic and social realms. For without the coloniser, the colonised could not come into existence. Fanon understood and approached the colonial world as a “system of compartments” in which “the language of pure force” is both symptomatic of and reinforces a geography of separate and opposing zones i.e. the “reciprocal exclusivity” of settlers and natives (2001: 29–30). Further, the description of “a Manichaean world” applied to colonialism highlights its total, if not totalitarian, nature whereby the references to the “absolute evil” and “the bestiary” of the native are constituent parts of a dehumanising whole (Fanon 2001: 31–33). Colonial rule created physical and psychological boundaries between two social groups. Thus, colonial domination and later anti-colonial struggle were defined in basic Manichaean terms.

In his reading of colonialism on the African continent, Fanon introduced a novel category that substantially modified existing Marxist explanations of capitalist exploitation. The “human realities” of colonialism were not obscured by its “economic reality,” simultaneously a substructure and superstructure,

with race given primacy connected to domination that was not chiefly based on the mode of production but on violence (Fanon 2001: 30–31). However, race is not a fixed attribute in Fanon's analysis. It refers to the immanent construction of racial identity and its institutionalising at the levels of the individual, society and state. The salience of psychology was emphasised by Fanon in his critique of colonialism. Psychiatry was instrumental in revealing how the psychology of racism assisted the material dimensions of economics and politics in the colonial context through the internalising of inferiority and guilt (Obiechina 1972: 97–99). Fanon's mode of analysis, influenced by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, privileging a form of reason addressing a "historically-concrete world," was located in a "Manichean world" containing metropolises and colonies (Wallerstein 1970: 222–223). And while social relations in the colonial order did incorporate domination and subordination in the economic sphere, the distinguishing component was the hierarchy of a foreign elite imposed on an indigenous population. In addition, "the special character of the colonial situation" driven by the logic of war aiming at the "enslavement" of the native population equally entails "the sacking of [their] cultural patterns, or at least condition such sacking" and results in a "cultural mummification" followed by "a mummification of individual thinking" with the native becoming an "object man" (Fanon 1970a: 43–45). Domination alone fails to account for colonialism's "systematic negation" or dehumanising of Algerians that reduces them to "the *natural* background to the human presence of the French" (Fanon 2001: 200–201).

This domination was merely a part of the broader experience of colonial oppression that produced psychological and physiological effects among the colonised. It created an abiding muscular tension in the native. Yet the prevailing order stops him, through the symbols of force embodied in the police and military, from targeting it and instead this aggressiveness is manifested "in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs and in quarrels between individuals" (Fanon 2001: 40–42). What makes Fanon's reading of colonialism instructive is the wide margin of agency recognised in the colonised despite its Manichean nature. The colonised is not reduced to a passive entity. Paulo Freire reiterates Fanon's insight on the channelling of aggression by the oppressed against their fellow comrades, who have also internalised the image of the oppressor, in "a type of horizontal violence" that indirectly attacks the oppressor (1996: 43–44). A humanising of the colonial subject is fervently pursued in Fanon's colonial analysis. Although violence is an inescapable response, initially among the colonised, to colonialism's own violence, Fanon describes this development through reference to a specific relational process between the colonised and coloniser. In addition, the examination of the colonised includes the psyche

and behaviour in a social context that avoids essentialising on the basis of race or religion. However, Fanon's granting of agency to the colonised is met with caution from Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The latter contends that colonialism's inscription on the colonised's psyche can be found in the avowed declaration of a new identity or a *tabula rasa* in any emancipatory discourse (Gates 1993: 8–9).

The Revolutionary Peasantry

Fanon's treatment of colonialism as a phenomenon constituted by psychological and material factors determined the urgent prognosis of liberation of colonial society. The two compartments of the Manichaeic world, noted above, still prevailed during the period of decolonisation (Fanon 2001: 39–40). The colonised thus faced the coloniser in a struggle aiming to end the hierarchy, or to be more precise a binary, of superiority accompanied by domination and inferiority marked by acquiescence. However, Fanon was alert to the complex social relations coinciding with and departing from the quasi-Marxist dialectic of the colonial situation. For Fanon's Marxism was neither doctrinaire nor ideological in nature, but adopted analytical categories that could be and were adapted from Marx's focus on Europe and the proletariat in line with his attention on the Third World and the peasantry (Forsythe 1970: 6–7). Gradual recognition of the simultaneous sacrifice of the people and natives who are complicit in their exploitation during the anti-colonial struggle replaces the initial adoption of the settlers' "primitive Manichaeism" and its racial binary (Fanon 2001: 115–116).

The colonised form a single exploited people. However, Fanon found divisions and complicity within this group that echoed Malcolm X's "psychic conversion" that broke with "double consciousness" in a rejection of the privileging of whiteness connected to the distinction between the co-opted "house negroes" and the resisting "field negroes," and an affirmation of "black self-love" that "simply rejects black captivity to white supremacist ideology and practice" (West 2001: 136–43). Fanon went further in his questioning of the alleged fixed essence of race. He pointed out its failure to explain the behaviour of cooperation across the colonial divide. Revolution in a colony would arise through the collective agency of Europeans and Africans on the one hand and urban dwellers and countryfolk on the other hand. Against the backdrop of an inevitable trend towards independence created by capitalism's multiple contradictions and the national will of the oppressed peoples, the anti-colonial struggle's character is one of movements and revolutions in the pursuit of sovereignty (Fanon 1970a: 124–125).

Fanon moved the centre of political gravity from the urban milieu to the countryside in a demonstrable departure from Marxist notions of political and

social change. Yet an indication of the persisting influence of Marx on Fanon can be seen in the adaptation of “the proletarian revolution” into the “peasant revolution” (Perinbam 1973: 434). The city no longer was the site of revolutionary movements. In the colony, the proletariat, consisting merely 1% of the population, the primary target of urban-based nationalist parties, enjoyed a privileged position in the colonial order who had “everything to lose,” in marked contrast in capitalist countries, because of their complicity within it (Fanon 2001: 86). Rather than search for a coupling of social movement and discontent among the middle or working classes, Fanon echoes the Khaldunian dichotomy between the luxurious sedentary and the courageous nomadic in a medieval milieu (Alatas 2013: 531–532). According to Fanon, the revolutionary credentials of the peasantry of having “nothing to lose and everything to gain” are attested by their exclusion from the colonial order’s class system whereby they discover its inherent violence can only be “confronted with greater violence” (2001: 47–48). While the proletariat are beneficiaries of and contributors to the colonial economy, the peasants, alongside the lumpen-proletariat, continue to be deprived due to its disproportionate focus on urban areas. Three key elements marked the peasantry for being a driving force in the transformation of African society: first, constituting three-quarters of the population; second, being the least affected by colonialism; and third, having gained the least from it (Obiechina 1972: 115).

The FLN’s rebellion in the countryside had borne out Fanon’s singling out of colonialism’s most marginalised spaces for potential radical change in a disavowal of the politics of the local bourgeoisie, namely Ferhat Abbas’s agenda of integration and the Messalist movement, in favour of the lumpen-proletariat and peasantry (Lewis 1966: 162–163). A partially embedded class structure among the colonised implicated in the wider context of domination according to a racial logic had presented Fanon with both the problem and the solution for decolonising Algeria and other colonies. Class and race were conjoined to produce the marginalisation of a social group to be willing agents to decolonise their society. However, it seems these were two necessary elements but insufficient by themselves to create a revolution. The peasantry, observed Fanon, possessed a paradox of attributes that made them at once regressive and progressive in colonial relations. The feudalism of the aboriginal society epitomised by traditional authorities, who are complicit with the colonial power, is counteracted by the country people who, despite clinging onto a “rigid framework,” are capable of “spontaneous movements” that “as a whole remain disciplined and altruistic” privileging the community over the individual (Fanon 2001: 87–89). In Fanon’s treatment of tradition in the colony, its ambivalence endows the peasantry with a latent organisational capacity for

rebellion and revolution. While Fanon's peasantry lacked the individualistic behaviour of Marx's European peasants, the latter attribute was applied to the proletariat in colonial society (Martin 1970: 387–388). Nonetheless, the making of a revolutionary peasantry remained incomplete.

Revolutionaries from the city would play the critical role of turning the peasants into political activists. Their break from nationalist political parties was motivated by the revolutionaries becoming critics of these organisations' complicity with the colonial powers which leads them to be marginalised and subsequently flee, with the police chasing them, to the countryside (Fanon 2001: 53). While the movements for independence in the urban areas are unable or unwilling to fully embrace a radical politics, they give rise, perhaps inadvertently, to creating the organisational capacity for revolution. Moreover, a cleavage on questions about nationalism and independence in nationalist political parties pits the revolutionary minority against the party machine or the "illegalists" versus the "legal party" (Fanon 2001: 98–100). The colony's rural territories acquire the force of, as noted above, the political gravity for Fanon's ideas about the anti-colonial struggle. The gulf between the city and the countryside is first bridged by the fugitive revolutionaries rejected by their erstwhile urban comrades. Once in the countryside, under the protection of peasantry, the illegalists turn into guerrillas or 'Maquisards' who abandon their hitherto commitment to reform after discovering "a coherent people" or a "nation" who "have never ceased to think of the problem of their liberation except in terms of violence" (Fanon 2001: 100–101). Through this encounter, the fugitive revolutionaries undergo what can be considered a political education, in the broadest sense, that makes them recognise who are the most efficacious agents of liberation. They join forces with the peasantry to launch a "spontaneous revolution" (Staniland 1969: 16). The convergence of spontaneity and revolution has been questioned in one quarter by the argument that Fanon's description of the former implies "instinctive or unselfconscious violence, brutality, energy, and collective action" or what is simply an insurrection by angry peasants (Perinbam 1973: 432–433).

How does Fanon propose or envisage the process for the development of the revolutionary process in a colonial setting? Revolution is first fomented in the rural margins of the colony but it must soon make its entrance in its urban stronghold. The lumpen-proletariat, considered an extension of the peasantry who reside in shanty towns, emerge as the most suitable candidates for taking revolution with the ostensible character of a peasant rebellion, thereby transforming it, to the cities as they turn to militancy (Fanon 2001: 101–104). Although the revolution against colonialism expands from its original site in its rural milieu, the wider anti-colonial struggle unfolds throughout the entire

colonial arena. Peasant revolts are a demonstrable sign of “the new nation” shaped by mass participation when “spontaneity is king” and manifesting “a government in miniature” in multiple local struggles for liberation (Fanon 2001: 104–105). A state-in-the-making emerges from the initial organisational impetus of the anti-colonial movement. The sites of anti-colonial recruitment and mobilisation expand from a local rebellion driven by the alliance of the militant nationalists and peasantry to a nation-wide movement with the urban element of peasant migrants. It can be contended that the wider anti-colonial struggle comes full circle from the fugitive revolutionaries rejected from the nationalist parties who flee the city. They find refuge in the country and embark on a mutually transformative relationship with the peasantry with their latent revolutionary spirit and solidarity, finally incorporating the lumpen-proletariat residing in the city in its revolutionary activities. Sulayman Nyang was pessimistic about Fanon’s “normatively prescriptive” hope of such a primary role awarded to the African peasantry when the political record demonstrates they were merely the national bourgeoisie’s “tool” to win elections (1979: 24–25). The reach of the radical thrust of the anti-colonial movement, however, to mobilise the most marginalised social groups in the colony was not taken for granted in Fanon’s treatment of colonialism: they could be mobilised as a force to uphold the status quo. He expressed caution about attempts to co-opt not only the peasantry under traditional authorities who cooperate with the colonial authorities but also the lumpen-proletariat, who if excluded from the anti-colonial movement, will eagerly fight alongside colonial troops (Fanon 2001: 109–110).

How could popular participation across social classes be ensured within the anti-colonial movement? Different social groups according to Fanon would become revolutionary only through the activities of militants, urban and rural, at a collective and coordinated level. National liberation is waged on a daily basis within the confines of an organisation founded by the revolutionaries from the towns and in the countryside with the peasantry increasingly taking the lead, in a mutual process of learning with urban militants, with traditional institutions taking on a revolutionary and political character and the rise of political commissioners to guide the people (Fanon 2001: 112–115). Here spontaneity is replaced by organisation. An institutional entity is required for Fanon’s peasant revolution and it subsumes existing social relationships in the most marginalised sections of the colonial system. In Fanon’s discussion of “the Algerian revolution,” the new relations forged between the intellectuals and the masses in the former’s observation of the latter’s dire poverty and consciousness occur in a context of expanding institutionalising of the

anti-colonial struggle: military, legal and administrative (2001: 151–152). The colonised intellectual's participation in this struggle entails a shift from individualism to solidarity with the people through the discovery of “the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people's committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments” (Fanon 2001: 36–37). Revolutionary urban activists can and do experience their very own political education. It leads to a heightened awareness of the latent capacity for revolution and the economic deprivation within the peasantry that contributes to the outbreak of a peasant revolution.

Fanon frequently raised the Algerian revolution in his analysis of decolonisation. In one reference, he highlights the role of “the Algerian combatant” or “*moudjahid*” in the creation of “the new society” that also posits the simultaneity of individual liberation and national liberation (1970a: 114–115). The rejection of colonialism for Fanon was manifested in a “decolonised masculinity” that remains according to Françoise Vergès caught in “a tyrannical ideal” that imitated “virile, militarised qualities” of a “new man” who is “modern” and “heroic” (1996: 60–61). Colonised subjectivities can be overturned through a will to liberation and the resort to force. The wide scope for agency among the colonised is evident for Fanon despite realising the effects of colonialism that “no *pure* pre-colonial culture” is able to survive alongside the fostering of new consciousness in a national culture continually created through the anti-colonial struggle (Ahluwalia 2001: 41–42). One of the most palpable effects of colonialism is the physical and psychological dislocation experienced by the colonised in a system sustained by a racial hierarchy. Fanon's colonial analysis of this phenomenon of alienation does not propose the native to be without any agency. The struggle to liberate the native from the colonial power also implies the need for political and cultural activities to create a nation. Widespread participation among the peasantry and lumpen-proletariat, forming the majority of the colonised population, gives the momentum needed to drive the anti-colonial construction of a new identity. However, a fledging national culture allows the natives to simultaneously make renewed contact with the pre-colonial and establish a future culture with a change in their psycho-affective equilibrium (Fanon 2001: 168–170). Genuine liberation of the colonised thus entails the decolonising of minds, bodies and land. At a later stage, the anti-colonial revolution is transformed from a peasant rebellion to a more coordinated campaign, noted earlier, in what can be described as guerrilla warfare with a moving national army of liberation in pursuit of the colonial enemy (Fanon 2001: 107–108).

A Symmetry of Violence

I will now shift my discussion from Fanon's conception of the organisational character of the anti-colonial revolution to his ideas about the role of violence in its unfolding. Scholars from across the ideological and disciplinary spectrum have expressed a certain degree of uneasiness about Fanon's seemingly passionate embrace of violence. The desirability of violence is perceived to be derived from purely subjective objects or motives of a therapeutic nature irrespective of its impact on reality (Hobsbawm 2007: 282–283; Burke III 1976: 132–133). Other explanations of the emphasis placed on violence by Fanon draw upon Hegel (the slave or the colonised cheated of the master's recognition) and Marx (autonomy of the self and political change) that led him to conclude the necessity of colonialism's violent demise (Staniland 1969: 10–11; Hansen 1974: 32–33, 35). While Fanon does display a philosophic debt to the notion of dialectic especially in the formulation of the Manichaeic world of colonialism and the ultimate synthesis of a decolonised society, the solidarity borne from specific social relations recast, rather than abandoned, existing pre-colonial or traditional and colonised institutions of authority and affiliation. As Wallerstein has pointed out, discussed earlier in this article, the basic thrust of reason in Fanon's analysis was aimed at a "historically-concrete world" as opposed to the abstract.

Decolonisation for Fanon was both a revolutionary break with colonialism, a *tabula rasa*, and a historical process pitting in concrete terms two irreconcilable forces made possible only through violence (2001: 27–29). If colonialism irrevocably changed the native's culture to a more subservient and conservative existence, decolonisation would similarly transform the colonial relationship but in a radical direction. Fanon reminds his readers that the choice of violence is not the native's but rather furnished by colonialism (2001: 66–67). A paradox surrounds the question of the justification and efficacy of anti-colonial violence. The only method to defeat colonialism compels the colonised to wage liberation according to the very logic of its system. However, Fanon did not conceive of violence in a purely deterministic way that precluded a creative dynamic in the relations between the colonised and the coloniser on the one hand and among the colonised on the other hand. Feuds and rivalries are replaced by reconciliation on the path of national unity constituted by solidarity among tribes and villages (Fanon 2001: 105–106). Colonialism subjugated the native and as a system created through and based on violence deterred, through the symbols of oppressive force, the dehumanised colonised from rebelling. Instead, the colonised whose very existence has been proscribed, humiliated and aggressive, turn against each other in conflict. When rebellion does break out, the inward conflicts of the peasantry and lumpen-proletariat

are directed at the origins of the hitherto internecine rivalries: colonialism in all of its manifestations. Anti-colonial violence is proportionate to the scale of colonialism in a given territory. It matches the latter's violence "in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity" in a cycle of violence and counter-violence defined by a Manichaeism found in both compartments of the colonial world (Fanon 2001: 69–70, 72–73). Achille Mbembe finds Fanon describing a type of "violence that the colonised chooses to *give to* the colonist" as opposed to being imposed from without, animated by an "ethical dimension" of the intertwining of violence and healing i.e. medical treatment to the victims of colonial war and even its perpetrators (2012: 23–24).

Further indications of this ethical dimension can be discerned elsewhere in Fanon's thought. He brought out the ethical implications of liberation: "No man's death is indispensable for the triumph of freedom" (1970a: 105). The cause of decolonisation does not negate the intrinsic value of human beings. Thus, Fanon spelled out the need to achieve liberation in way that rejected 'barbarity' to demonstrate its nationhood (1970b: 12–13). The use of force both showcases the agency of the colonised in making revolution at the psychological, social and political planes and the creation of a postcolonial or decolonised subjectivity. It can be argued that Fanon emphasised the role played by social recognition in the psyche's healthy development in an example of the social world entering the hospital ward (Shilliam 2021: 80–82). Moreover, however, Fanon, witness, participant and theorist of peasant revolution, appears to have also reversed this equation on the question of violence. Clinical practice enters the theatre of revolutionary mobilisation of the previously dehumanised when they gain their subjecthood or humanity through channelling aggression against the colonial system. His experiences from Blida-Joinville hospital to political activism in colonial Algeria, reveal Fanon's activities, informed by the then-novel technique of institutional psychotherapy, to create new institutions for his Muslim patients and the rising Third World respectively towards a state of disalienation (Robcis 2020: 316–320, 322–323).

Conclusions

Fanon as a Theorist of Peasant Revolution

The theorising of decolonisation as revolution in a colonial milieu was undertaken by Fanon in the double role of witness and participant in French North Africa. Although he commenced his career in Algeria at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital, Fanon's experiences of treating patients who had suffered and perpetrated torture and applying institutional psychotherapy brought him

to the realisation of the redundancy of doing so in the larger setting of the colonial system and its dehumanising effects (1970a: 62–64). The psychiatrist from Martinique who became a theorist of peasant revolution would throw his lot with the FLN as it waged a war of liberation initially from the countryside that was brought to the centre of the colony: the cities and towns. During Fanon's time as a member of the organised struggle against French colonialism, he had formulated an analysis of colonialism. This analysis not only intertwined with a conception of revolution but it seems to have formed its core elements. The Manichaeian world of colonialism brought into existence the interdependent identities of the settler and the native. For Fanon, despite the intellectual and analytical debts to Marx, the economy of the colonial order was both substructure and superstructure mapped out onto a racial hierarchy. Colonial domination subsumed politics, the economy, society and psychology.

Anti-colonial revolution could only be efficacious or achieve its objective of the liberation of the colony when it decolonised the colonised subjectivities of the natives. To this end, the psychology of racism, rendering the colonised dehumanised and inferior, had to be confronted by an anti-colonial struggle peopled by the peasantry who were situated at the bottom of the colonial order and had the most, if not everything, to gain from sweeping away colonialism. These peasants were the most deprived and by extension the most revolutionary. The mobilising of peasants in the most marginalised spaces of the colony was enabled by the illegalists, fugitive revolutionaries from the towns, who were forced out of the nationalist parties and fled from the colonial police to the countryside seeking refuge. A popular movement initially led by the illegalists with the peasantry begins a spontaneous revolution that increasingly becomes more organised and incorporates the most excluded of all groups in colonial urban areas: the lumpen-proletariat. National unity emerges from the expanding recruitment and mobilising of the movement for liberation. Violence in Fanon's theorising of revolution is neither purely subjective nor merely a means to an end. If Mbembe is correct about Fanon's insight that acquiring freedom necessitates nothing less than drawing on "all life reserves," the recourse to anti-colonial violence can be considered an instance of a humanising agency aimed at a will to liberation. Fanon's clinical treatment of colonialism, influenced by novel psychiatric practices, sought to set in motion the decolonised and disalienated subjectivities of a colonised people-turned-nation.

Fanon as a Guide for Protests in a Post-Colonial World?

What relevance or insights does Fanon's theory of revolution have for the study of protests in a post-colonial world or the 'Global South' in the twenty-first

century? I will offer general reflections in my attempt to answer this question with reference mainly to North Africa. Since the 1950s, North Africa and the broader milieu of Africa and Asia have undergone considerable, if not unrecognisable, transformations. When Fanon was participating in the FLN's activities, decolonisation was still, despite his seemingly unwavering optimism, not accepted by the great powers who had suffered tremendous damage to their economies and political prestige as colonial metropolises. The post-war period ushered in a bipolar world leaving behind the Concert of Europe that emerged in the nineteenth century. It was filled with anti-colonial movements inspired by nationalist ideals and principles. One legacy of the declining imperial order stubbornly persisted in the internal state of affairs in colonised territories: Fanon's 'Manichaean world'. Nonetheless, Fanon the theorist of peasant revolution had already alluded to the prospect of its breakdown in *The Wretched of Earth* when he discussed the substitution of 'primitive Manichaeism' with an entirely novel conception of the colonised and coloniser that transcended racial identities. Elsewhere, Fanon observed anti-colonial liberation as a movement that cut across race, class and religion in its mobilising of Europeans and Jews (Fanon 1970b: 127–142).

In the twenty-first century, post-colonial subjects in many formerly colonised spaces have struggled to give effect to Fanon's avowal to liberation at the levels of the political and the psyche. Although the rural element of the states that received independence has substantially shrunk, politics and the state in North Africa retain much of the materiality of power indebted to colonialism in its relation to the most marginalised social spaces. Islamism in North Africa and in other regions can be perceived to be a most modern or contextual phenomenon and an heir to Third World activism in opposition to the status quo (Roy 1996; Burgat 2003). During the post-colonial period, a politics of protest was seen in the activities of Islamist movements from running, when permitted and under severe restrictions, for elections under the banner of 'Islam is the solution' to organising pro-Palestine demonstrations in response to Israeli attacks in the Occupied Territories. The city has been the locus of political mobilisation and agitation carried out by national citizens departing from Fanon's analysis of the revolutionary peasantry. However, the ranks of Fanon's lumpen-proletariat, whom Bayat calls the "urban poor," have expanded greatly in a neo-liberal environment and their role has been observed in public protests and revolutions during the recent Arab uprisings (2015). Mass participation along the lines that Fanon analysed, envisaged and advocated gains a certain degree of salience in the most marginalised spaces of North African and other post-colonial societies. Whereas Fanon witnessed the suffering of Algerian peasants in the countryside who were the most deprived

in the colonial order, the middle classes and the urban poor, settled or recent rural migrants, in cities and towns provide case histories of an accumulation of post-colonial discontent. Such a drastic change in the demographic composition of post-colonial societies appears to have reinforced the colonial-era politics of mass protests and labour strikes to bring the machinery of the colonial government and economy to a standstill.

Two insights in Fanon's peasant revolution can be inflected into the twenty-first century: the necessity of a movement that arises spontaneously and the function of political education. Spontaneity of political action gave the peasantry a critical function as the mobilising force of revolution in Fanon's analyses of the colonial system's internal relations. For the writ and power of the colonial power are not absolute in the countryside. These gaps allow the fugitive revolutionaries to make links with the peasantry and channel their already existing rebellious energies against the converse side of the Manichaeic world and its imposition of 'reciprocal exclusivity'. Post-colonial urban spaces revolve around multiple and connected centres of the state and contain a ubiquitous monitoring and surveillance of citizens. However, the concentration of the materiality of power makes possible or enables the concentration of resistance in the form of mass protests such as coordinated nation-wide strikes that threaten to disrupt the apparently seamless intertwined flows of control and everyday life. Even here spontaneity of collective agency in cities can occur without the framework of a formal organisation. Leaderless revolutions or mass mobilisations in the Arab uprisings at the beginning of the twenty-first century's second decade defied the expectation that protesters need to be led by a single organisation or a charismatic figure. Protests are not necessarily linked to deprivation or class but can emerge in a Cairo slum, a middle-class neighbourhood in Tunis or a refugee camp in Gaza against the backdrop of authoritarian or neo-colonial political practices.

Political education of political activists also appears in Fanon's exposition of the revolutionary anti-colonial movement. The illegalists and peasantry create a fledging movement when the former escape to the countryside and find a section of the colonised population willing and capable of revolutionary action. The fugitive revolutionaries from the cities do not encounter a passive people. Instead, the peasantry, being the only spontaneous actors in the colony, make the urban revolutionary and native intellectual recognise the existence of a solidarity above that of the individual, elevating the unity of purpose of a would-be nation. A mutually constitutive political education occurs between the illegalists and peasants in a demonstration of collective agency. Post-colonial subjects or national citizens in the present have internalised changes in their political values, habits and activities while negotiating with

the national systems of formal education and the inculcation of the tropes of community, belonging and identity. Alternative sources of political education exist, however, in the forms of political parties and social movements which are usually either circumscribed or outlawed. Feminist, Islamist or labour movements exist between the formal and informal spaces of post-colonial societies. These collective sites of mobilisation allow citizens to join a group and to acquire new habits of thinking and doing for mobilising their fellow citizens and organising street demonstrations. New intersubjective solidarities at the local and national levels echo Fanon's observation about the inception of a self-awareness among the colonised subjects of their ability to exercise revolutionary agency for the cause of national liberation.

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