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## Frantz Fanon in Africa and Asia

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**cc A W** Frantz Fanon is a loved and respected figure all over Africa and Asia. Samir Amin argues that his writing and the choice to join the liberation struggle in Algeria show Fanon was a genuine revolutionary.

Fanon was a person with a wide-ranging mind, a bright man with great qualities be it through the rationality of his ideas or for his courage to tell the truth. Specialised in psychiatry, he possessed all what was needed to be a very good psychiatrist. His publications, 'Black Skin, White Masks' among others, dealing with the mental trauma of the colonised patients of Algeria testify to the pertinence of his great ideas. His book, 'The Wretched of the Earth' makes explicit his vision of the revolution that need to take place to pull the human race out of the barbarism of the capitalist system. And it is by virtue of this great vision that he has won over the hearts and minds of all Africans and Asian freedom lovers.

### FANON, THE CARIBBEANS AND SLAVERY

Fanon was born in the Caribbean. The history of his people (the indigenous population which has been exterminated by the French), of slavery and of the indentured workers (brought in respectively from Africa and India) and the subservient relationship of the colonised Caribbeans by the French colonial masters triggered his capacity to think critically. The unique and very first social uprising that the American continent has known until recently is that of the slaves of Saint Domingue in Haiti who, by themselves, conquered their freedom. This Saint Domingue revolution coincided with the French Revolution. The radical faction of the French Revolution did spontaneously sympathise with the slaves who snatched their freedom to become full fledged citizens. But, of course, the colonial masters in power were not agreeable to that. The defference of the French Revolution had as consequence the reinstatement of slavery in the Caribbean which was once more abolished by the Second Republic in 1948, without however doing away with their status of colony until 1945, on which date came a new chapter of their history.

What was being sought? A seemingly remote independence - or political integration or the setting up of a 'Real French Union' - a multinational state. The communist political parties of the Caribbeans and of Reunion Island (Indian Ocean) fought for political integration and were, at the end of the day, succesful. Today the outcome of this political choice imposes itself : political integration has build up such a strong economic and social dependency that makes it extremely difficult to even imagine a shift from this integration movement towards real political freedom. Paradoxically, it would appear that if today the Caribbeans and Reunion Island are integral parts of France, this is an outcome of the effort of the communists of France and of the latter's colonies, crowned with success. As for the Conservative parties who have traditionally opposed political integration with equality of rights, who were former supporters of slavery and, subsequently, of colonialism, they would not have avoided that the fact that the movement leads here, in the British Caribbeans and in Mauritius, to the claim for independence.

Of course, notwithstanding the profound changes brought in by the departmentalisation implemented from 1945 onwards, the scars of the aftermaths of both slavery and colonisation couldn't be wiped off the collective mind of the victimised peoples, and surely not from the living conception of their identity, in their relationship with France. 'Black Skin, White mask' (published in 1952 when Fanon was aged 27 years) gives a very lucid insight of this experience of being black in an anti-black society. The extraordinary approach to the issues dealt with in this simultaneously searing and beautiful book gives a picture of the oddness, beyond the common denominator - contrary to the challenges faced by the black people of the United States those of the British Caribbeans, Brazil, the blacks of Africa at large and particularly those of South Africa. I would refer this difference to the distinction I make between external and internal colonialism ('From capitalism to civilisation', 2008, pages 145- 151).

#### FANON AND THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY'S CAPITALISM

The accumulation of wealth by some through the dispossession of others has been ongoing throughout history. Fanon had fully understood that the expansion of capitalism was founded on the dispossession of the peoples of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbeans; that is of the big majority of peoples of planet earth. The major victims bearing the brunt of this expansion - 'the wretched of the earth' - were therefore these peoples, called by the force of circumstances to legitimately and perpetually surge against the world of imperialism order.

Historical capitalism founded on the conquest of the world by the imperialist centres kills by its very nature the possibilities for the societies living on the outskirts of the capitalism system which try to 'catch up' and, as is the case for the imperialist centres, to become wealthy capitalist societies. The capitalist system as a way out for these peoples is a dead-end one, an impediment. Therefore the alternative is either socialism or barbarism. The widely prevailing belief that as a prerequisite, going through a capitalist phase in the form of an accumulation of wealth is necessary and is an absolute must prior to a shift to socialism is unfounded, once the real challenges that historical capitalism is are taken into consideration.

The conquest of the world by the Europeans constitutes an immeasurable dispossession of the indigenous Indian Americans. The subsequent slave trade taking over and exercised on a great part of Africa caused a trauma constantly holding back the progress of the continent for half a millenium. A similar phenomenon can be seen in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Algeria and in a more pronounced manner Australia and New Zealand. This practice of accumulating wealth through the dispoeseion of others is true for the state of Israel - now colonising. Not less visible are the consequences of colonial exploitation of the peasantry submissive to British India, Dutch India, the Philippines and Africa as demonstrated by the widespread famines. The method was introduced by the British in Ireland whose population at that time was equal to that of the UK and which nowadays represents only one tenth, torn by organised famine that Marx denounced.

This dispossession has not only destroyed the peasant population ; it did devastate a great majority of indigenous peoples. It destroyed the peoples's industrial production (handicrafts and textiles), capacities that made these parts of the world much more prosperous than Europe itself : among others, China and India.

The 19th century marked the apogee of this globalised capitalist/imperialist system to a point where, henceforth the expansion of capitalism and its shadow, westernisation, made it impossible to distinguish between the economic dimension of that conquest and its cultural dimension, 'eurocentrism'.

#### 20TH CENTURY: FIRST WAVES OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONS AND AWAKENING OF THE SOUTH

The apogee of the system is short: barely one century. The 20th century is that of the first series of uprisings conducted in the name of socialism (Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba) and of the radicalisation of the struggles of Asia, Africa and Latin America, their ambitions expressed in the 'project of Bandung' (1955-1981). Such concomitance is not a stroke of luck. The worldwide spread of capitalism/imperialism has been the biggest tragedy in human history for the concerned peripheral people, thereby illustrating the destructive character of accumulation of capital. The law of impoverishment formulated by Marx, made real at the level of the system bringing along much more destruction than the father of the socialist idea would have himself imagined.

This chapter of history is now over. The peoples of the periphery do not accept any more the fate that capitalism reserves for them. This fundamental change of attitude is irreversible. This is the indication that capitalism has entered into its declining phase. This, however, does not prevent some persisting illusions: those pertaining to the idea that some kind of reforms are possible to give capitalism a human face (something that has never happened for the majority of people), a possible catching up in the system, so cherished by the ruling class of the emerging countries intoxicated by the apparent success of the moment. These illusions seem to be diehards ones being due to the fact that we are down in the dumps. The waves of the 20th century uprisings have already ended but those of the 21 century's new radicalism have not yet affirmed themselves. And in the dark confusions of the transitions some monsters are emerging, as Gramsci wrote.

The governments and the peoples of Asia and of Africa proclaimed their commitment to reconstruct a new world order on the basis of the recognition of the rights of dominated nations. This 'right to development' constituted the basis of globalisation of that time, implemented in an agreed multipolar framework, imposed on an imperialism compelled to adjust itself to the exigencies of the day. The Bandung era is that of the 'African Renaissance'. It is not by mere coincidence that African states are engaging in reform projects which impose socialist values mainly because the freedom of the people at the periphery should not necessarily match an anti socialism point of view. No need to disparage the numerous attempt on the continent, as is doing today: the abominable regime of Mobutu had, in only 30 years allowed the formation in Congo of a capital of education 40 times higher than what the Belgians had realised in 80 years. Whether it is liked or not, it is a fact that the African states are builders of genuine nations. And it is the 'trans-ethnic' option of its leaders that has encouraged this to take shape. The ethnic failures are subsequent to and consequent upon the exhaustion of the Bandung model, resulting in the loss of legitimacy of powers and recourse to fractions who use ethnicity to suit their own personal interests. I refer here to my book 'Ethnicity storming Nations'.

Is it right to believe that the long decline of capitalism is synonymous with a long positive transition to socialism? For this to be realised, the 21st century should be consistent with the 20th century while radicalising the objectives of the social transformation. This is absolutely achievable but still the conditions have to be made clear. Otherwise the long decline of capitalism is explained by the continuous degradation of human civilisation. (Here I would refer to what I wrote in that connection more than 20 years back: 'Revolution or decadence?' Nation and Class, Midnight 1979, pp 238-245).

The decline is neither a linear nor continuous process. It does not exclude some upward movements, the counteraction of capital. Such is the nature of things today. The 20th century constitutes a first chapter of a long apprenticeship by the people, of the surpassing of capitalism and of the invention of new forms of socialist experience (to quote Domenico Losurdo, 'Running away from history', Delga 2007). With him I do not analyse its development in terms of 'failure' (of socialism, of national independence). Contrary to this, it is the success rather than the failures of these first nationally popular movements that are the basis of the problems of the contemporary world. An analysis of the social contradictions specific to the respective systems, the groping inherent to such first advancement, explain their lost of momentum and their subsequent defeat, not failure. ( Samir

Amin, 'Beyond capitalism', PUF 2002, pp 11-19). It is therefore this loss of strength that has created the conditions necessary to counteract the prevailing capital: a new perillous transition of the 20th century liberations to those of the 21st century.

Fanon's political action lies wholly in this point in history, Bandoung era (1955-1981) and that of the pioneering struggles for victorious liberation. The choice he made to join the Algerian National Liberation Front and other African liberation movements was one worthy of a genuine revolutionary.

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