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## Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism

## Fanonism

A: fikr Fanun. — G: Fanonismus. — F: fanonisme. — R: teorija Frantz Fanona. — S: fanonismo. — C: fanong zhuyi 法农主义

Frantz Fanon (1925-61) was a major intellectual influence on Third-World revolutionaries and New-Left radicals during the sixties. 'The Third World discovers itself and speaks to itself through his voice', wrote Jean-Paul Sartre in 1961 (Sartre in Fanon 1961, xlvi). Fanon's thought is characterised by three aspects. First, he proposes a radical anti-imperialist theory, which emphasises the central significance of 'race' in the context of colonial oppression; race is not a contingent determination that could be subsumed under the general category of class, but, rather - like nationality and gender - is a distinctive and autonomous form of social, economic and political inequality. Second, Fanon stresses the significance of the revolutionary act as also a psychological and intellectual transformation, which must accompany material transformation, or the socialist reorganisation of production, as its conditio sine qua non. Third, Fanon argues for individual freedom as an essential component of a socialist synthesis that should guarantee democratic participation in the construction of socialism.

1. Fanon, descendant of African slaves, was born in Martinique, the son of a minor official in the French colonial service. Blacks were 97% of a population rigidly stratified along racial lines, the vast majority of whom worked on white-owned sugar-plantations. As part of the small black middle class, he attended the *lycée* in Fort-de-France where he came under the influence of Aimé **Césaire**, the Communist

poet associated with the literary movement known as négritude. In 1944, Fanon left the Vichy-occupied island to join the Free French. In 1947, he began university-studies in Lyons, where he immersed himself in medicine, philosophy and radical politics. A major intellectual influence during this period was existentialism: Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and, most importantly, Jean-Paul Sartre. He also read extensively in classical Marxism as well as the works of Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and Kautsky, and became familiar with the conflicts surrounding the construction of socialism after the October Revolution. Fanon finished medical training in 1951 and began a specialisation in psychiatry. His mentor, François Tosquelles, a refugee from Franco's Spain, advocated a treatment that emphasised the social environment of mental illness.

In 1952, he published Black Skin, White Masks, a powerful intellectual autobiography that details his discovery as to how deeply embedded racism was in Western culture, and the devastating effect it has on the black person's self-identity. It also elaborates the fierce internal struggle by which Fanon reconstructed his own sense of self. In 1953, he took a position as a psychiatrist in a government hospital in French Algeria. When the Algerian Revolution broke out the next year, Fanon's sympathies were strongly with the Front de Libération National (FLN). Between 1954-6, while carrying out his normal duties, Fanon treated FLN-militants wounded and tortured by the French and engaged in other secret activities in support of the resistance. In 1956, he resigned from French government service and went into exile in Tunisia as a full-time FLN-militant. He became political editor of the French-language edition of the

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FLN's official organ, *El Moudjahid*, essays from which were compiled in two further volumes: *A Dying Colonialism* (1959) and *Toward the African Revolution* (posthumously, 1964). In addition to his political work, he simultaneously undertook medical duties at seven different locations in Tunis and regularly travelled to guerrilla-camps on the Moroccan and Tunisian borders to give medical training and treat the wounded. Once, seriously injured by a land-mine, he was sent to Rome for medical care and narrowly escaped two assassinationattempts. Diagnosed with leukaemia, he died in December, 1961, just weeks after the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth*.

2. Theory of Violence. — It was **Fanon**'s discussion in *The Wretched of the Earth* of the role of violence in the anticolonial revolution that was by far the most controversial aspect of his political theory. What is often ignored is his differentiation of the concept of violence, into immediately physical, structural and psychic violence. In particular, the context of his reflections has sometimes been neglected: namely, the extent of French barbarism in Algeria.

During the first four decades (1830-70) of colonialism, an estimated one-third of the Muslim population was eliminated; in 1945, 40,000 people were massacred in less than a month at Sétif alone. During the years of the liberation struggle (1954-62), over one million Algerians, overwhelmingly non-combatants, were killed; nearly 12 % of the population. By comparison, fewer than 12,000 French lost their lives during the entire war and of these, 9,000 were soldiers (Humbaraci, 2-55). In this context of massive French brutality, the use of physical violence to liberate the country was seen by Fanon as legitimate and morally justifiable, though he did not hesitate to warn in the penultimate chapter of The Wretched of the Earth of the dangers inherent in a reliance on mere physical violence.

Fanon employs the concept of 'structural' violence to describe the existing international capitalist system. The expansion of Europe into Africa, Asia and the Americas over the previous 500 years had created a global system of exploitation so rapacious that it forced

billions of people into extreme poverty, hunger and suffering.

The concept of 'psychic violence' is used to comprehend the mechanisms through which racism and colonialism debase their victims to such an extent that they begin to doubt their own value as human beings, accepting and internalising their inferiority. The dominant culture denigrated the language, the religion, the social mores, the very biological-genetic composition of the conquered people. The colonised were declared to be mere savages, sub-humans, dependant upon the conqueror for tutelage and protection from themselves. Deprived of his or her very humanity and selfrespect, the dominated person internalised a sense of shame and disgrace - the self-hatred of the colonised. In Fanon's view, the black man internalised the idea that the more he adopted the cultural standards and language of the white man, the closer he would come to being a real ('civilised') human being. In order to achieve an approximation of whiteness, he must denounce his own blackness. (cf. 'The Negro and Language' and 'The Fact of Blackness' in Black Skin, White Masks and 'Concerning Violence' in The Wretched of the Earth).

For Fanon, the moment in which the 'native' rejects his humiliation, his de-humanisation, his self-hatred, is the moment in which the revolution actually begins. Only through a radical claim of self-love could the disease of self-hatred be expunged. This self-redemption and self-purification could be accomplished by an uncompromising will toward action, which Fanon chose to call violence. Fanon's conceptualisation of human renewal is, in certain respects, an extension of that position that Marx and Engels formulate in The German Ideology, where they argue that both 'for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the transformation of men on a mass scale is necessary, a transformation which can only take place in a practical movement, in a revolution' (MECW 5, 52-3; trans. modified).

**Fanon** argues that this lost humanity can only be recovered through an absolute and uncompromising rejection of the *entire* con-

cept of – external *and* internal – colonialism: its cultural values, its political principles, its economic system. The more or less spontaneous assertion of one's self-worth alone cannot carry through a permanent transformation. It must be accompanied by organised resistance (Chapter 2, 'Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses'). Organisation, in its turn, creates obstacles as the movement toward a collective national liberation is in danger of falling under the domination of particular elements, using nationalist slogans, who establish themselves in the name of the nation as a post-colonial 'state class' and instrumentalise the revolution for their own narrow *class*-interests.

3. Nationalism and the culture of liberation. -Differently from the majority of the chief figures of African nationalism he met in recently independent Ghana in 1960 as a FLN-representative, Fanon pointed to the necessity of a dialectical relation of national liberation with internationalism: the national consciousness that needed to be created, in order for it not to turn into a new form of domination, must be articulated internationally. Aimed both against 'progressives' who claimed that an emphatic emphasis upon nationality corresponded to an obsolete stage of human development as well as against autocratic nationalists, Fanon saw the most urgent tasks of the African intellectual in the development of his nation, but which would only be able to represent the expressive will of the people if it were accompanied by the discovery and creation of universalising values. Here, Fanon's concept of 'culture' is decisive: 'If culture is the expression of national consciousness. I will not hesitate to affirm that in the case with which we are dealing it is the national consciousness which is the most elaborate form of culture. [...] It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture' (Fanon 1961, 199).

4. Fanon and Marxism. – Biographers differ regarding their assessment of Fanon's relation to Marxism. Gendzier, for example, argues that Fanon's writing fluctuated between

Marxist and psychological categories (Gendzier, 199). Caute says simply that he was not a 'traditional' Marxist (Caute, 76). Jinadu considers Fanon to be broadly within the Marxist-Leninist tradition (Jinadu, 98), while Woddis, an orthodox Communist, rebukes Fanon as a Third-World upstart who was not sufficiently appreciative of socialism's European origins, and insists that he had no understanding of Marxism (Woddis, 173). Geismar argues that his concept of Communism was not that of joining a party, but of joining a revolution (Geismar, 19).

In fact, **Fanon** was influenced by and engaged in the non-Communist, Marxist Left during his student days. His antipathy toward the PCF had two sources: first, the Party's dedication to a chauvinist conception of French civilisation led it, at best, to vacillate on the colonial question and, at worst, to outright racism; second, the rigidly hierarchical, 'Leninist' form of party-organisation was at distinct odds with **Fanon**'s democratic conception of a socialist party.

Nevertheless, **Fanon** was deeply influenced by Marxism, which is attested to not only by the repeated use of Marxian categories and the explicit and implicit references to **Marx** and **Engels**. Even more decisive is the fact that **Fanon** argues that 'Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem' (**Fanon** 1961, 5). 'Classical' Marxism, whose treatment of race and nationality as mere epiphenomena concealed a Eurocentric approach, had not been able to do that.

5. 'Race' and 'class'. — Central to Fanon's analysis of the colonial social formation was the phenomenologically comprehended concept of race, of being the other. One's skin colour was an inescapable badge of subordination that determined the black person's existence and forced him to accept his own inferiority. Consequently, the simplistic transferral to the colonies of class-categories developed in the European context and appropriate to an understanding of industrial societies that were racially relatively homogenous was a significant intellectual error because it ignored

the racial-national dimension (and could, in turn, lead to negative political consequences). Fanon's saw the chief contradiction of colonial societies as that of race; those who ruled were those who came from elsewhere, those who declared themselves as belonging to a superior species. The essential criterion of their right to rule was not based on their ownership of capital, but on their belonging to a particular race. '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 the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because vou are rich' (Fanon 1961, 5).

Fanon therefore did not simply ignore class as an analytical category. His argument was that, in the colonies, class and race had a symbiotic relationship; the latter was dominant, but only insofar as colonialism continues. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon makes it clear that, with independence, the barriers to socialism are no longer racially determined, and the revolution must be transformed into a social (class-) revolution. In Fanon's view, the colonial society in transition had two alternatives: either it could make a total break with imperialism and begin the construction of socialism based on a thoroughly humanistdemocratic programme that addressed the political, spiritual, cultural as well as the economic needs of the broad masses; or it could sink into being a neocolonial appendage of world-capitalism that would keep the people in bondage. The alternative chosen would be determined by the configuration of classforces as they were formed during the colonial period but, more importantly, as these forces were influenced and re-shaped morally and politically by the struggle for independence.

6. Social analysis. – In **Fanon**'s model, colonial society was divided into two racial groups that were simultaneously expressed in five class-categories. At the summit of this pyramid the dominant race and the dominant class were interchangeable terms. He divided

the colonised population into four classes: the peasant-majority, the large and growing lumpen-proletariat, the tiny full-time working class and the national middle class.

The perspective of the colonial or postcolonial reality required a revision of the Eurocentric dogmas canonised by Marxism-Leninism. The typical African colony was a vast sea of impoverished peasants surrounding relatively small islands of urbanisation. African cities were not areas of industrial production, but primarily administrative centres whose task was to supervise the extraction of wealth in the form of agricultural and mineral products. Third-World Marxists, following the 'Leninist' model, argued that, despite its minuscule size, the leading revolutionary class must be the working class under the leadership of a proletarian party. The peasantry was seen as a necessary, but subordinate ally.

The minuscule colonial working class, while nationalist, was not particularly revolutionary. They were relatively well off compared to the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat and more interested in preserving and increasing their existing privileges than they were in fundamental revolutionary change. In this context, Fanon deployed the theory of the 'labour aristocracy' developed by Engels and then later Lenin. With his use of the term 'working class', Fanon was explicitly referring to only a small minority of all those engaged in wagelabour; those with regular, relatively skilled, relatively well paid, full-time employment (ibid.). He was not referring to the thousands of migrant workers, casual and day-labourers, workers on white farms, nor the masses of personal and household-servants. In the typical African colony, these latter groups of workers constituted 95% of the wage-earning class. In order to designate this majority, Fanon reformulates the concept of 'lumpenproletariat' that had been negatively deployed by Marx and Engels - motivated in part by the intention to provoke the French Left, whose cowardice and arrogance on the question of Algerian independence he despised.

**Fanon** clearly does not conceive of the lumpenproletariat in the European sense; as a marginalised minority, what **Marx** called a

social scum made up of vagabonds and thieves. Rather, **Fanon**'s lumpenproletariat was made up of peasants recently deprived of their land who had migrated to the urban areas in search of work and survival (sometimes he refers to this class simply as a fraction of the peasantry). It was in the lumpenproletariat that social rebellion would find its 'urban spearhead of the revolution... one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people' (**Fanon** 1961, 81).

Fanon's analysis of the 'national middle class' or 'national bourgeoisie' is his most important and most prophetic contribution to an understanding of postcolonial society. Fanon was referring to that portion of the colonised population who had benefitted from a European education and were engaged as small businessmen, doctors, lawyers, teachers and employees within the colonial bureaucracy. The upward mobility of this class was also inhibited by the racism inherent in colonial society. Consequently, they were the first to begin organised nationalist agitation and assumed the leadership of the emergent nationalist organisations that began demanding independence. Fanon saw this class, however, not as a potential revolutionary leadership, but as one whose primary interest was in assuming positions of political and economic dominance that would be available upon independence. Their interest was in taking the place of the Europeans in the colony, and then serving as middle-men, mere business-agents of European capitalism. The colonial middle class demanded the nationalisation of various sectors of the postcolonial economy, not in the interest of the new nation as a whole, but to gain control of the postcolonial state to advance its own interests. To accomplish this, they were perfectly willing to act as subordinates of international capitalism and continue the exploitation of the people as it had existed under colonialism.

It is important to realise that **Fanon** wrote his analysis of the emergent national middle class in early 1961: that is, at a time when it was only assuming power and the euphoria surrounding independence was nearly unanimous. **Fanon** was virtually alone in under-

standing the nature of this class and how it would function when in power.

7. Revolution, party, democracy. - Fanon's theory of revolution departed significantly from **Lenin**'s model of the vanguard-party. He emphasises the significance of the radical intelligentsia and particularly its ability to bring leadership to the spontaneously revolutionary masses. In Fanon's model, however, the radical intelligentsia, while providing the initial leadership, also learns from and becomes as one with the masses. Fanon's idea of radical leadership means that as the exploited classes as a whole experience revolutionary politics they also gain the knowledge and skills to exercise self-leadership. The party, consequently, develops a completely different internal organisational culture. It becomes a mass, radical and democratic movement in which the 'grass roots' feel power in their newly found selfconfidence, in their ability to participate in decision making and to determine the direction of the revolution they are creating a concept clearly marked by Luxemburg's influence.

Having theorised his ideal party, Fanon embarks on a devastating criticism of the oneparty state. He was referring not only to dangers he saw inherent in the evolving contemporary politics of the African revolution. His scathing reference to 'that famous dictatorship whose supporters believe is called for by the historical process' (Fanon 1961, Chapter 3; trans. modified) is an unmistakable allusion to the 'Leninist' concept of the proletarian dictatorship and democratic centralism. "The incoherent mass of the people is seen as a blind force that must be continually held in check either by mystification or by the fear inspired by the police force' (ibid.). Leadership gains its possible 'value and strength only from the existence of the people in struggle. It is literally the people who freely fashion a leadership for itself, not the leadership that tolerates the people'. Similarly, Fanon undertakes a critique of the 'cult of personality': 'The leader of the people no longer exists today. The people are no longer a herd; they do not need to be led. If the leader drives me on, then he

should know that at the same time I show him the way' (ibid.).

Fanon argues, in a way reminiscent of both Luxemburg and Kautsky, that, in a one-party state, free and democratic political life is gradually stifled so that eventually only the partybureaucracy makes decisions. The single party is content to give orders and remind the people constantly that the government expects from them only 'obedience and discipline' (ibid.). Socialism, in order to exist, must also incorporate a free and democratic political life: 'the choice of a socialist regime, a regime which is clearly oriented toward the will of the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions, will allow us to go forward more quickly and harmoniously, and thus make impossible that caricature of society where all political power is held in the hands of a few' (ibid.).

That epigones of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy quite clearly understood the implications of **Fanon**'s thinking explains the virulence of the attacks against him as well as the severe restrictions on access to his work. In the GDR, for example, **Fanon**'s writings were only published in 1986 (more than 20 years after they were published in the BRD) and, even then, in a severely truncated form.

8. The woman question. - References to the women's struggle are found throughout Fanon's work, but he devotes particular attention to the question in A Dying Colonialism (1958). His points of departure are the veil (Chapter 1) and the family (Chapter 3) and the ways in which the meaning and structure of these were changed by the revolutionary experience. Traditionally, the Algerian woman had been completely dominated by men: father, husband, brother. The veil had been one of the most significant symbols of that domination, but colonialism itself had transformed the symbolic meaning of the veil. French colonial policy was predicated on the destruction of Algerian culture and, in part, this necessitated gaining control over Algerian women (Fanon 1958, 35-67, 99-120). To this end, the French discouraged wearing the veil, in order to make women 'allies' in the work of cultural destruction (36 et sq.). Nevertheless, Fanon believed that the conflict between men and women could find its resolution in the context of the revolutionary struggle, which itself requires changes in the female-male relationship. The success of the revolution required the active participation of women, as a consequence of which the veil lost its inviolability. The liberation-struggle thus, ultimately, led to entirely new perspectives in the relations between men and women and to the breakup of the traditional monolithic family. The historical process had produced conditions wherein men and women were changed and, in turn, were forced to change conditions. - The outcome of the revolution in postcolonial Algeria, however, turned out to be quite different from Fanon's utopian vision (cf. Humbaracci 1966; Scheil 1969).

9. During his lifetime, Fanon was little known outside the ambit of the French leftwing intelligentsia and the Algerian Revolution. This changed dramatically with the 1963 English translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translations of his other works into English as well as other languages followed shortly after. His fame spread in the political context of the mid-sixties, a high point of revolutionary optimism in the Third World. In the United States the civil-rights movement had become a potent political force, while, throughout Western Europe and North America, the New Left was posing a challenge both to bourgeois capitalism and state-socialism.

In this situation, there developed a sort of proxy-war around and over **Fanon**'s theses. In the United States, the centre of the 'Fanon controversy', the assault was undertaken by an amalgam of liberals, social democrats and some orthodox Communists, with the goal of maintaining ideological and political control over the activists in the new progressive movements, who referred to **Fanon**, alongside other figures.

Both sides concentrated their attention on a very narrow interpretation of **Fanon**'s theory of violence. Critics charged **Fanon** with revelling in bloodshed, advocating a Sorelian fascism and having an almost Satanic influence over young radicals. The best known of these critics was the philosopher, Hannah Arendt, In On Violence, a diatribe tinged with racism against the New Left and the revolts of the (in her eves, unqualified both socially and intellectually) African-Americans, she argued that the influence of Fanon was responsible for endangering social peace. While polemicising against Fanon's supposed glorification of violence (Arendt, 14-20, 65-96), she downplayed both the 'naked violence' of the colonial powers as well as the role of violence in American history, above all, violence directed against humans with dark skin. Finally, she utterly failed to see the violence of a brutal, racist war the United States was then waging against the Vietnamese people. - Most of Fanon's defenders contented themselves with revolutionary posturing. Only a few interventions, often by African-American intellectuals, attempted to analyse Fanon within the context of his overall work. However, it was generally the anti-Fanon critics who published their views in widely read journals and, therefore, dominated the debate. The consequence was that Fanon was politically demonised.

By the seventies, the epoch of the neoconservative 'roll-back', Fanon played no role in the political debate any longer. This occurred at the very point that his prophetic analysis of the state-class in postcolonial society was proving so unerring in its accuracy. A number of scholars began producing analytical biographies (Gendzier, Geismar, Caute, Perinbam) and studies of various aspects of his political and social thought (Zahar, E. Hansen, Onwuanibe, Bouvier, Lucas, McCulloch). These studies gave impetus to a return to Fanon's work for insights regarding the nature of neocolonialism, of continuing racism, of corrupt dictatorships and the deterioration of the state in the Third World. A new generation of African intellectuals who were trying to analyse the disintegration of their own societies not only developed a far deeper understanding of Fanon's writing on violence, but also gave much needed attention to his thoughts on democracy, the party and the postcolonial state. Since the mid-eighties,

there has been a marked increase in **Fanon** studies, particularly in the United States, but also in Africa, the Caribbean, Britain and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America. (E. **Hansen, Onwuanibe, Bulhan, Jinadu** and **Sekyi-Otu**).

Fanon's writings have also influenced Third-World women's studies. African (as well as West-Indian and African-American) writers have acknowledged his influence on their fiction (Lazarus). The Wretched of the Earth and Black Skin, White Masks came to be regarded by literary theorists as important examples of modern protest-literature. - The collapse of state-socialism has also led to a re-evaluation of Fanon's views on the revolutionary party in light of democratic theory and the failure of the 'Leninist' proletarian dictatorship (Gordon). Fanon's thoughts on the symbiotic relationship of race, ethnicity, gender and class become even more relevant the more the multiracial, multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of Euro-American societies is widely recognised.

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## William W. Hansen

Alliance-politics, anticolonialism, Black Marxism, cadre-party, chauvinism, chief contradiction, city/ country, class-interests, class-reductionism, colonialism, colonial mode of production, cultural revolution, cult of personality, decolonisation, democracy/dictatorship of the proletariat, democratic centralism, developing countries, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, grassroots-revolution, human dignity, ideal, imperialism, internationalism, Islamic socialism, labour-aristocracy, leadership, left radicalism, liberation, lumpenproletariat, Luxemburgism, Marxism-Leninism, masses, mass intellectual, middle classes, nationalism, national bourgeoisie, national identity, national liberation, neocolonialism, New Left, new man, orthodoxy, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, populism, postcolonial socialism, race and class, racism,

revolution, relations of force, self-organisation, slavery/slave-holding society, state-class, Third World, transitional societies, universalism, Western Marxism, woman question, working class, vanguard, violence.

Antikolonialismus, Arbeiteraristokratie, Arbeiterklasse, Avantgarde, Bauern, Befreiung, Black Marxism, Bündnispolitik, Chauvinismus, Demokratie/Diktatur des Proletariats, demokratischer Zentralismus, Dritte Welt, Entkolonialisierung, Entwicklungsländer, Ethnozentrismus, Eurozentrismus, Frauenfrage, Führung, Gewalt, Graswurzelrevolution, Hauptwiderspruch, Ideal, Imperialismus, Internationalismus, islamischer Sozialismus, Kaderpartei, Klasseninteressen, Klassenreduktionismus, Kleinbürger, koloniale Produktionsweise, Kolonialismus, Kräfteverhältnisse, Kulturrevolution, Linksradikalismus, Lumpenproletariat, Luxemburgismus, Marxismus-Leninismus, Massen, Massenintellektueller, Menschenwürde, Mittelschichten, nationale Befreiung, nationale Bourgeoisie, nationale Identität, Nationalismus, Neokolonialismus, Neue Linke, neuer Mensch, Orthodoxie, Personenkult, Populismus, postkolonialer Sozialismus, Rasse und Klasse, Rassismus, Revolution, Selbstorganisation, Sklaverei/Sklavenhaltergesellschaft, Staatsklasse, Stadt/Land, Übergangsgesellschaften, Universalismus, westlicher Marxismus.