

"since i am a dog,  
beware my fangs":  
violence as a means  
to an end in the  
wretche...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Readers of Frantz Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth* often find themselves conflicted regarding the message he conveys concerning the use of violence as a means of achieving liberation from a colonizer. His inherent requirement of violent methods by the colonized to counteract the foreign trespassers is undeniable. However, the question arises to what ends? After unpacking Frantz Fanon's position, I argue that he views violence as an instrumentally effective method of decolonization. Furthermore, I postulate that violence acts as an instrumentally valuable means under the crushing Manichean social construction as it rouses individual anti-colonizer sentiment to produce a collective effort in creating a sovereign state. This paper will explore Frantz Fanon's theories regarding the use of violence, arguing that his beliefs point to an instrumental value rather than mere glorification. Instead it acts as the only way of altering the colonists' compartmentalized reality. Additionally, it shows that the utilization of violence only produces social movement when it exists in a collective and driven manner.

The social structure within Fanon's examination of the colonial reality creates an immensely polarized state in which the only means for political change is violence. With the arrival of the foreign invaders comes a distinct alteration of the native's social makeup through the erection of new institutions. The colonists alter the history, culture and identity of the colonized. In exchange, the native becomes an outsider in the new " world configured by the colonizer" (16). The new, or Manichean order is defined by its compartmentalized nature. It boils the social fabric down to the supremacy of the foreigners and the backwardness of the natives. The system creates an entirely black and white reality. The identity of the

colonized is not that of man, but rather that of a subhuman being. In the new, compartmentalized narrative of the oppressor, the colonized transforms into a living, breathing representation of "absolute evil" (6). Despite his position as a beast, he is "by no means convinced of his inferiority" (16). The native wants change. With the knowledge of the freedoms that come with sovereignty, he yearns to escape the crushing weight of the foreign invaders. The colonist wants to return to self-governance, but lacks the tools to do so. As a result of his lack of alternate resources for instituting change, "He patiently waits for the colonist to let his guard down and then jumps on him" (16). This animalistic burst of outrage is the only instrument the colonizers cannot take from the natives. Left without a political or social voice, as well as identity under the colonial institutions the oppressed is humiliated. He has nothing and therefore cannot lose anything in attempting to free himself. The native, yearning to return to his state of freedom, must lean on the only tool he has left: violence. While some may argue non-violent methodology is the best course of action for the native it is not feasible within the hegemonic control of the established ruling class.

The thought of peaceful arbitration between man and beast or colonizer and colonized is deeply idealistic. Nonviolence is not an immediate option for the institution of political change. The colonist lives with his foot on the throat of the colonized. He has full control over the native's identity and resources and has no incentive to free the oppressed. Not only is the colonized a constant reminder of the foreigner's dominance, but he is a profitable resource in his availability as a means of labor and provider of his land's natural resources. As a result, there are significant economic, social and

political motivations to maintain the structure as it exists. Certain conditions may arise for the mediation of compromise; however, they do not present themselves until " the [native] masses... take matters into their own hands and start burning and killing" (23). It takes this rebellion to pose a serious threat to the colonizer's " sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage" (4). Without a political outlet for their grievances, the only impactful instrument is the usage of violence. Under the reorganized social structure, the colonized has no seat at the negotiating table. Since the native is a dog, he must bear his teeth and even bite his master to catalyze change. Their only leverage comes from putting their oppressors in direct danger. Attempts at other forms of peaceful dissent will fail to have any impact, as the word of the native is entirely meaningless to the foreign oppressors. However, the goal of the native is not to maim and kill aimlessly, but rather create a situation in which their grievances are taken seriously. Not until their luxury is at stake will the colonists consider taking a seat at the negotiating table.

The colonists' state of military and monetary surplus puts them in a state of absolute advantage. This power dynamic exists in a state which the colonized has no democratic momentum to catalyze political movement as, " colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence" (23). The only viable means of change therefore lies in violence. It is the only common language which dictates the dialogue between the two forces, as well as the only tool not stripped from the colonized. The altered social fabric exists to elevate the foreign colonizers while trapping the

colonists in their subhuman role. The only means of undermining this structure lies in confronting the colonial system with the same means that keep it in place. Optimally, creating a reverse wave of counter violence and posing a serious threat to their oppressor's way of life the colonized will either find themselves in a situation with leverage to begin democratic negotiation or in a state of sovereignty. However, if violent action is made without direction, significant backlash may occur including outcomes such as significant loss of life. Therefore, the natives must act in a calculated manner to create productive political movement. While some may claim that Fanon's repeated calls for the expression of the "constant muscular tonus" (17) of the colonists through unleashing rage upon his oppressor as a glorification of violence, he thinks that fury without direction is futile.

Frantz Fanon does not insist that the colonized, enraged by his new role beneath the foot of the colonizer, release his anger without aim. There is no inherent benefit from the expression of raw, unorganized violence. He explains that conducting a "fratricidal bloodbath" (17) in response to their oppression is nothing more than an attempt by the colonized to "convince himself that colonialism has never existed, that everything is as it used to be..." (17). This violence acts as a pacifier and numbing mechanism for the colonized. Instead of using violence as a means for productive forward political movement, the natives direct their frustrations toward the wrong enemy. And when directed toward the wrong goal, this violence only creates more ills. Therefore, Frantz Fanon is not glorifying violence in its rawest sense. He openly condemns its usage when executed haphazardly. This chaotic "head-in-the-sand behavior" proves pointless (17). Instead of

moving toward a solution regarding the foreign usurpers, this poorly directed outrage acts as a tool for dividing the natives and strengthening the colonists. The native aims to cure the ails of colonization by reverting to old habit, rather than aiming to make change. This shows that violence in itself is an instrumental means in reaching decolonization when performed with the right motives and direction. Therefore, it cannot be seen as a glorified tool as in its rawest form it is detrimental toward achieving sovereignty. Therefore, Fanon condemns aimless bloodshed, instead offering it as instrumental in rallying against a common enemy: the foreign invaders. While the expression of rage can be a fruitless labor as shown by "head-in-the sand behavior," (17) it can also act as the ultimate unifier for the natives by creating a collective dedicated toward breaking the proverbial chains of colonialism. Instead of imploding under the compartmentalized reality of colonial institutions, the colonized can contort the newly instilled social fabric as a rallying mechanism.

The strict divide between foreigners and natives results from the Manichean ethos engrained into the colonial reality. Through this logic, two sides naturally come to exist within society. Upon realization of the structure which inhabits the compartmentalized world, the colonized soon comprehend and adopt an "It's them or us" mentality (43). Under the heading of this mantra, they develop a Manichean construction of their own. The natives come to understand violence as a collective utility. They can bind together in the name of freedom to make effective political change using violence. By forgetting their disputes, violent means can act as an instrumental tool in unifying the people. After adopting a unified mindset, the natives find

themselves adopting a Manichean ethos of their own. This ideology spawns as a reverse wave to the colonists' as, " the Manicheanism of the colonist produces a Manicheanism of the colonized. The theory of the ' absolute evil of the colonist' is in response to the theory of the ' absolute evil of the native'" (50). Within this mentality comes an inherent necessitation of the usage of violence. The " them" of the Manichean social construction or in this case the colonizers are deserving of no mercy. For any alteration of the social climate, the colonized must relieve themselves of the embodiment of evil. They yearn for freedom. They yearn for dignity. These same individuals who have stripped the natives of their identities, abused them and endlessly degraded them are the last line between the oppressed and their liberation. Therefore, " For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist" (50). So long as the foreigners possess a sector in the nation, the colonized cannot help but be on edge, living in the shadow of their abusers. The natives lack the political tools to do so peacefully, so they must unite through violence to rid their homeland of the evil foreign oppressors. There is no other choice for the colonized than to eliminate their oppressors. The colonists represent the chains of colonization themselves and the only way to reach liberation is to hack and claw. Only from the usage of these violent means can the natives find sovereignty.

In a time period when pacifism and democratic negotiation seem to be the dominating rhetoric, it is easy to misconceive Frantz Fanon's work as being a blatant glorification of the use of violence. How, one may ask, could anyone justify the explicit use of force as a means to an end? The answers result from the fact that the social structure created through the institutions of

colonialism create a polarizing system in which the colonized experience abuse and dehumanization. Left with no seat at the negotiating table, the only tool left in their repertoire for change is violence. Desiring to rid themselves of the chains of colonization, the natives find themselves bound together by their common goal of sovereignty and with only one legitimate coercive instrument. As is such, Fanon's work argues that violence is not the supreme course of liberation from colonization. But rather that the mechanism is instrumental as it is the only tool available in the process of escaping the absolutism of the Manichean social fabric.

### **Works Cited**

Fanon, Frantz. "On Violence." *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2004. 1-96. Print.