

## READING FRANTZ FANON'S *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* (1965) AS A SOCIAL DRAMA PERFORMANCE

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### Abstract

The present paper focuses on the process of performance, which takes the center of the stage in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965). The author's presentation of the conceptual features of Enlightenment in relation to his innovative theories of recognition, agency, and revolution will be examined as a "Social Drama", which is based on Victor Turner (1920-1983)'s anthropological perspective. This textual and discursive analysis attempts to explore how social reality and moments of conflict are performed in an artistic way where role-playing covers the breakdowns between official perspectives and countless counter stories revealing fragmentation. Such stories are reflexive about the cause and motive of dramatic action damaging to the social fabric. By using Victor Turner's theoretical concept of "Social Drama Performance" with its four constituents, the task is to prove that Frantz Fanon's discourse in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) is not a tool for "instrumental violence", but rather a social drama staging the suffering of victims of colonial oppression.

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### Parole chiave

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### Introduction

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* was written in the throes of the problematic nationalist discourse of the late 1950s and early 1960s when the very act of writing was also an effective tool of liberation. The author's struggle for national liberation, his prediction of the effects of decolonization on the social environment and his allegiance to what Antonio Gramsci calls the "simple people" through his call for man's emancipation through a political struggle against poverty, illiteracy and a parasitical bourgeoisie gave birth to a hot debate between his reviewers. Some critics present Frantz Fanon as an apostle of violence, neglecting his intellectual and humanistic dimension. They argue that Fanon sees violent rebellion as an eminently suitable response while boldly refusing to condemn violence. Michael Sonnleitner's *Of Logic and Liberation: Frantz Fanon on Terrorism* (1986), Marie Perinbam's *Holy Violence: Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon* (1982), Sohail Khalid's *Prophets of Violence, Prophets of Peace, and Understanding the roots of contemporary Political Violence* (2005), among many other critics, vilify him and depict him as an advocate of violence. Fanon has also been dismissed by political thinkers such as Hannah Arendt for his obsession and defense of violence. The latter does not remark that Fanon wrestled with two poles of this contradiction throughout his life. Arendt assumes only that Fanon is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers, she points out that violence does not repeat some natural cycle but brings into being something new, even though what this type of action brings into being is most probably

only a more violent world. Consequently, she finds that Fanon is politically irresponsible for advocating violence as part of national liberation (Coks.2002:63).

However, Fanon cannot be confined to his advocating of violence while addressing the questions of partisanship of no camp. Against this backdrop, this study makes an argument that Fanon was engaged in continuous struggle against imperial power and domination around the globe. His selected text provides a pointer into the factors that led him to perform what Tin Dant calls, a “mode of engagement that can be described as praxis knowledge action” (Dant.2003: 160).

The argument in this analysis of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* is based on the idea of society to retain both a socialist vision and a close connection with the oppressed people. The ethical and political aspects of his texts appear through his critique of colonialism, imperialism, and oppression of all kinds. His performance of the humanist values lie in the nature of his commitment to social change as it emerges as a common factor just as important as the vast similarities of the demands of the political contexts. In his performance process, the author reveals oppositions and re-enact conflicts in giving them contextualization by using meta-commentaries for remedial action.

#### Theoretical Framework

Victor Turner’s concept of “Social Drama” is mainly developed in his book entitled *The Anthropology of Performance* (1985) and many other essays. The anthropologist defines Social Drama as “a processual view of society where a sequence of social interaction of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type”. It occurs when the members of a given society or societies enter into a conflict or conflicts. Everyone in that society feels directly concerned by the conflict. Hence, all the society members endeavor and contribute, each in his or her own way, to the resolution of that disagreement. It may be important to point out that Turner introduced his notion of “Social Drama” during his attempt to understand the way of living in Northern Rhodesia and Zambia. He studied, for instance, the Ndembu tribe’s way of living and more specifically how they react towards conflicts. However, the author extended his explanation to introduce the concept of “Drama living” to show how the living tribes perform their lives”. According to Turner, the conflict passes through four stages: The Breach, which he defines as a transgression of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena”. It occurs when a member of a society transgresses and goes beyond the norms on which his society is built on. The breach is the outcome of the transgression of the social norms, the established conventions and order, which affects the community’s personal and social feelings and hence creates disagreements. The breach is followed by a “Crisis”, which extends around the community members. When no solution is proposed, it can lead to problems within the society members mainly between those who accept and reject the responsible of the breach. In this time, “People will be induced, seduced, cajoled, nudged, or threatened to take sides”. The third and most important constituent of Victor Turner’s approach is the “Redressive Action”, by which he means “The most reflexive or self conscious part of the social Drama”. It is the process that helps to fix and to heal the tension caused by the Breach. It is related to the various social efforts that aim to end the disagreements. Social Drama ends with “Reintegration” or “Schism”, which the theorist explains as follows: “Every Social Drama alters, in however miniscule a fashion, the structure and the relevant social field”. It takes place when the problem caused by the breach is solved and reconstructed. If the problem cannot be solved, Schism or a split between the members of the society takes place, concludes the theorist (Turner in “*The Anthropology of performance*,” Journal PAJ Publications: 04, accessed April, 2017).

The main concern of this paper is to illustrate the extent to which Turner’s main features of social drama can be identified in Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. The objective is about recovering the right to pose such questions as: How did Fanon analyze the confused states of affairs, crises of conscience, arising from socio-structural contradictions to shape the conflicts? How did he examine in detail the character and structure of its main constituents? How does he develop new categories to understand the nature of the conflict? And what did he suggest as a resolution? Such questions cannot be avoided as they are imposed by the greatest events in recent history, characterized by wars, social upheavals and human exploitation. By answering these questions, the intention is to explore the author’s performativity, which might help today’s people to find paths and know the importance of ethics in every aspect of their daily lives. Such ethics helps to challenge the fatalism and the drift to enslavement and subordination in all its forms.

## 1-The Premise of the Conflict in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*

Fanon analyzes instances of collective action where social individuals and group are caught in an atmosphere of violence. He communicates his primary concern with the project of decolonization with a process of "re-conquering identity and reconstructing the self" since: "The native's challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of point of view". It is also a starter of that "cleansing" perspective, including the push for national independence (Fanon.1990:31). Judging from history and by everyday events, Fanon provides a formula for the concrete analysis of society that no idealist argument can call into question. "Rational consensus" rests on a political and historical vision through a progressive movement of human becoming through collective action. Spiritual alienation, material exploitation, and dehumanization turn the colonized into an animal (Ibid. p. 34). Fanon stages the psychology of the colonized peoples and their path to liberation, reflecting the inner resentment of those nations who suffered from oppression. He avowedly asserts:

It is true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We have therefore, seen [...] to what mortifying set-backs such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance. When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders (1990:252).

The author refutes such negation claiming that the colonized had nothing to lose by adopting it otherwise, no liberation is possible. He rejects all moral injunctions which have similar basis as the European ones; the colonized needs to regain his identity, the psychological and material resources to win his struggle against domination. For him, the value of a society appears in the value it places upon man's relation to man. It is not individual knowledge that matters; it is rather what in reality is done by Europe. This passage illustrates the point:

The West saw itself as a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of the spirit, in the name of the spirit of Europe, that Europe has made her encroachments, that she has justified her crimes and legitimized the slavery in which she holds four-fifths of humanity. Yes, the European spirit has strange roots. All European thought has unfolded in places which were increasingly more deserted and more encircled by precipices; and thus it was that the custom grew up in those places of very seldom meeting man (p. 252).

The passage exemplifies the author's highly critical position of Western civilization and its universal claims, which lock people in situations of negation that demands a struggle for liberation. Fanon, according to Gordon R. Lewis, realized that the more he asserted his membership in Western civilization, the more he was pathologized, for a system's affirmation depends on its denial of ever having illegitimately excluded him; he is, as in theodicy, a reminder of injustice in a system that is supposed to have been wholly good (Gordon.2000:4-5). Gordon R. Lewis is right to the point because Fanon's primary concern was to deal with the place of the oppressed people of Africa in history and the project they have undertaken to achieve their freedom and that of the larger Pan-African community. The success of a revolutionary action goes hand in hand with the identity reconstruction, the knowledge of the past, and a clear vision of the future. Fanon locates his ideas of the value of life and the right to life within the wider context of care for people's well-being and respect for their autonomy and free choice.

## 2-Fanon's Staging Socio-structural Contradictions as Setting to Crisis of Consciousness

Fanon's performance of the breach through language provokes and persuades in ways that appeal to the frame of mind of the reader. His re-shaping of the established conventions illustrates not only his resistance, but provides counter-frames to bear on dominant ones. Meaningful action, the author maintains need not only involve violence; it could, rather, be a matter of "bearing witness" to violent assaults on human dignity. Through an examination of his discursive strategies, Fanon creates a new psychology of persuasion that would define his newly emergent point of view as well as new form of rhetoric which he handled against the opponents of human's emancipation in a contest of persuasion. Throughout his book, Fanon calls for the recognition of man by man. He uses the oppressed people to challenge the discourse of European Liberal Universalism upon which the French

justify their “Civilizing Mission”. In his *The Wretched of the Earth*, he maintains that such mission founded its principles on the assimilation and integration of the colonized. In reality, the practices were different; the right to emerge as “French citizens” was denied to the populations as they did not enjoy equality in rights in the public sphere of their own cultural and ethical making. To reinforce his arguments, Fanon refers to Monsieur Meyer, who states: “seriously in the French National Assembly that the Republic must not be prostituted by allowing Algerian people to become part of it” (p. 32). Fanon gives importance to the national culture that has to pass through a “national stage” on its way to found a world-system based on the ideals of global equity, dignity and peace.

The same situation supplements his intellectual analysis of the oppressed social, economic and political conditions. For Fanon, since peoples are under the colonial yoke, humanity, as a whole remains constrained. In his attempts to map out the necessary ways to get out of that labyrinth of inhumanity, he uses a methodology to reach his goal, which represents the ethos of an ethical way of life that the people of the Third World nations must embrace to find their way to universal citizenship and the creation of a “new man” (p. 198). He proposes a system which will be the embodiment of free action in concert with the revolutionary tradition. The path can be achieved through the decolonization of the mind and the advocacy of revolutionary action that can be reclaimed by the consciousness of the colonized. Decolonization can be understood as the veritable creation of a “new man”, which is conditioned by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values (p. 199). To achieve such a purpose, Fanon proposes a plan of changing radically the political and social structures from the bottom up by the withering away of the colonial state (p. 27), a system which goes beyond the Manichean vision in which the black or the colonized is seen as bad and the white or the colonizer is considered as good. This is why he sustains that making a new world is necessary in order to overcome the colonial system. His thought can be labeled as a Universalist desire as the author works to break up all relations with the past. To attain that objective, he sees that it is necessary to defend the values of liberty and conscience, which do not serve the interests of imperialism.

Fanon considers practical freedom, which exists only in its practice, as a remedy to purify the Manichean system and destroy the superiority and inferiority complexes. The following lines tell more about his call for the end of the colonial oppression: “The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization the history of pillage and to bring into existence the history of the nation- the history of decolonization (p. 40). This quote can be located within a broader project that Fanon wishes to implement for the imperative necessity to end colonization. The reasons for the need to end colonialism are linked to the colonized people’s desire “to begin to go forward again, to put an end to the static period begun by colonization, and to make history” (p. 54).

More significantly, Fanon first explains his understanding of the inhumane conditions and harsh realities of the colonial world. He speaks of the “colonizer” and “the colonized”, “the national struggle”, “national consciousness”, and “African consciousness”. He does not limit his concern to the Algerian case or the North African situation; he rather reminds the reader that the colonial order devalues the colonized and his intention is to focus attention on the fact that Europeans represent the natives as irrational and primitive, when he refers to local traditions which are associated with superstition and fanaticism (p. 45). He also points out that colonialism sought to affect the natives’ mind that if the settlers were to leave, they would “at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality”. The importance of a radical change of political, social, and cultural structures are more than important in the process of rehabilitation, which can be launched through the interventions of native intellectuals who can reinvent new structures through which may revolve the struggle for liberation. But how fanon transfers his outlook into the daily politics?

### 3- Fanon’s Call for an Improvement of Social Structures as A Redressive Phase

Motivated and informed by the nationalist struggles of many African countries, particularly Algeria whose war for liberation was in progress, *The Wretched of the Earth*, stands as the basis for the “Redressive action” and the new humanism that Fanon preaches. It rests on the fact that to be human means to live in a world in which one is recognized as a subject and in which that recognition should be gained through the fulfillment of freedom of thought and understanding the self within others. The various meanings of individual and collective freedom, as they appear in the rhetoric and thinking of Fanon, as an important participant and an advocate of human rights, focus upon how anti-colonial

revolutions could succeed through specific political, social, and cultural strategies. The other important goal of the author is his tireless effort to create and make a new sense of individual and collective identity, self-respect among the colonized people through political and social organization. Both types of organization lead to the attainment of individual liberty through the dismantling of the colonial system.

By extension, *The Wretched of the Earth* displays the project that Fanon seeks to achieve; one that will end the colonial domination so that the individual can live free in society. To achieve that purpose, the author stresses the importance of the social practices, values, goals, and discourses around which identities take shape and self-respect and dignity are regained. For, in his words: “there is no use in wasting time repeating that hunger with dignity is preferable to bread eaten in slavery” (p. 167). Without the social organizational elements, there can be no self, no freedom, and no “new man” (Ibid). The foundations on which Fanon’s argument rests is both on the individual and the collective identity of the historical revolution, which he sees as an arena of struggle where domination is overthrown, a hierarchical social order is destroyed, and a new one constructed. He perceives a progressive trend in history endowed with a high level of political consciousness, a movement toward political, social, and cultural orders that maximize freedom and self-realization for people. His project seems important for two reasons: first, it is the starting point of African liberation from colonial domination as it is the drive for racial equality. Its capacity for historical action in the interest of racial liberation defines the modern world Fanon aspires to.

More notably, it can also be a site of resistance to French colonialism, which leaves the colonized, oscillated between revolt and passivity; he suggests a process of achieving freedom and self-realization through an indivisible network of human will and economic and cultural facts (p. 157). His approach to African people in terms of the political, social and cultural plan with its well-developed ontological and ethical dimensions points to a pattern of the specific historical challenges that his project of selfhood permitted him to undertake and which he, then, extends to all the oppressed peoples of the world. Such process of structural changes can be sustained and legitimated by revolutionary pronouncement, which calls for the rise of a consciousness of the colonized. The following passage tells more:

During the period of national construction each citizen ought to continue in his real, everyday activity to associate himself with the whole of the nation, to incarnate the continuous dialectical truth of the nation and to will the triumph of man in his completeness here and now (p. 163).

In articulating the nature of this existence, Fanon proposes a “Resolution” through a variety of discourses in his examination of the self developed from European existentialism which he grounds in the socio-historical forces that were interacting with dynamics of the self. His portrait of the Algerians was constructed from their revolts, their contributions to the war of independence, the struggle for democracy, and the struggle for Socialism, which he oriented in the direction of democratic, social, and cultural reconstructions.

#### 4-The Democratic Consensus Recommended by Fanon as A Resolution

As a theorist and a fervent advocate of free and participatory democracy, Fanon’s project stands in his total rejection of an authoritarian style and its strategies of governance. As an alternative, he suggests a form of government whose people really participate in the business of governing their nation rather than obeying passively the established laws. The governors should invite their people to take part in the management of the country. It is a government which takes responsibility for the totality of the nation, whose work contributes to the unity of that nation rather than to its tribalization (p. 147). In other words, the author refutes racial or tribal conceptions through the crystallization of the caste spirit, which should be avoided by the political leaders. Instead of seeing the masses, by which he means people who battled for independence, as a blind force that must be kept in check either by mystification or by the fear inspired by police forces, the adequate government, Fanon insists, should welcome the expression of popular discontent. The party should play its role of serving people by putting away their ethnic differences (p. 150). The same party should not have mere links with people, but should be the direct expression of the masses (p. 151). The fundamental tasks of political parties are summed up in the following passage:

The political parties start from living reality and it is in the name of this reality, in the name of the stark facts which weigh down the present and the future of men and women, that they fix their line of action. The political party may well speak in moving the terms of nation, but what it is concerned with is that the people who are listening understand the need to take part in the fight if, quite simply, they wish to continue to exist (p.167).

Fanon establishes a link between the duties of the governors with what he calls “a revolutionary culture” which serves as a strategic means to urge people to create a national policy of the masses who have struggled for independence as well as for the betterment of their existence. It is by means of a “revolutionary culture” and a “political education of the masses”. His interest in culture is unquestionable; he abundantly referred to this issue in 1956, when he wrote an essay entitled “Racism and Culture”, an address to the first Congress of the Negro Writers and Artists in Paris. In the essay, he intended to unite the dominating cultural patterns of the European imperial countries in many Third World countries. From then on, for him, the revolutionary principles of social transformation become indissolubly tied to the political principles of cultural liberation and emancipation. The revolutionary principles should expel all forms of domination from colonialism to neocolonialism from an integral component of the national liberation and that the working class and the peasantry should form a class alliance against the regimes of oppression. It should constitute a revolutionary “avant-garde” to inform the politics of Pan-Africanism to form a unity of economic interests and political aspirations of Africa that ought to be represented in a single central government: the United States of Africa. It was towards these tasks and aspirations that Fanon spent the last years of his life, represented by his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

However, while advocating a national culture, Fanon does not lay claim to nationalism in its narrow sense; by nationalism Fanon means the creation of an authentic culture combined with a new revolutionary self, which is the outcome of the struggle, and not inherited values. Nationalism is not a political doctrine, nor a program, reiterates the author. The psychological connection between race and sovereignty demands the creation of a “new man and woman” with a psychology of consciousness that differs from the idea of an African personality suggested by the Seneghorian Negritude with its philosophic divide, which makes man regress into racial essentialism. To avoid regression, Fanon proposes a dialectical new humanism in which the future of every man and woman has a relation of close dependency with the universe. It consists in a rapid step that must be taken to move from national consciousness to political and social consciousness, and thus to seal the African continent in its customs and culture. It begins not with the emancipating project of decolonization, but rather with the humanity of Africa, its authenticity, and the particularity of her humanity as a universal factor. National consciousness alone, according to Fanon, is not enough if it is not enriched and deepened by a very rapid transformation into a consciousness of social and political needs, in other words into humanism, it leads up to a blind alley (p. 164,165).

Among the types of humanism, Fanon lists the corrupt European form of humanism which justified racism even as it advocated universal ideals; he underlines its contradiction embodied in the teaching of values in colonial schools which consider the colonized people as Europeans with black color and at worst as “natural resource beings”. For Fanon, the new revolutionary humanism would speak without incoherence or self-contradiction. The colonial domination has to be destroyed and be replaced by the “fraternal” contract among revolutionaries, a kind of connection that Neil Lazarus calls a “unisonant” of a decolonized state in distinguishing categorically between bourgeois nationalism and another would-be hegemonic form of national consciousness; a kind of liberationist, anti-imperialist nationalist internationalism, represented in the Algerian arena by the radical anti-colonial resistance movement as the following excerpt from *The Wretched of the Earth* illustrates:

The Algerian people, that mass of starving illiterates, those men and women plunged for centuries in the most appalling obscurity have held out against tanks and airplanes, against napalm and “psychological services” but above all against corruption and brain-washing, against traitors and against the “national” armies of General Bellounis. This people have held out in spite of hesitant or feeble individuals, and in spite of would-be dictators. This people have held out because for seven years its struggle has opened up for it vistas that it never dreamed existed (pp. 151-152).

It appears from the quote that Fanon's advocacy was distinguished by two traits: it is not an abstract racial ideology, but a description of a lived reality. He develops these positions with great erudition, brilliant argumentation, and unfaltering courage; hence his towering figure, his personal dedication, and eloquence made him one of the founding figures of the Pan-African tradition. Fanon's vision of nationalism and the creation of new forms of cultural and political life, which might be measurable with mass participation, remain critical ingredients in their production. It is at the heart of national awareness that international consciousness lives and grows. Fanon's national project also has the capacity to become the vehicle and the means of articulation of social demands which extend beyond decolonization in the merely technical sense, and which calls for a fundamental transformation rather than a mere restructuring of the prevailing social order. "The building of a nation is more than a necessity when it is accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values" (p. 199). The author refers to the substance of village assemblies as a public sphere; he stresses the cohesion of people's committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings: "self-criticism has been much talked about of late, but few people realize that it is an African institution. He writes that whether in the "Djemaas" of Northern Africa or in the meetings of Western African tradition, quarrels which occur in a village should be settled in public" (p. 37). The author considers the communal self-criticism that also contains notes of humor, because everybody is relaxed, and because in the last resort, the same thing is wanted by everybody.

More importantly, Fanon establishes a link between national culture and post-colonial liberation. He warns that a revolutionary consciousness needs to be formed, as the newly independent countries have filled him with doubt because he has foreseen a menace on the sovereignty of those countries as colonialism was paving the way to neocolonialism. He explains his vision by stating many reasons; lack of ideology, the eagerness of the national middle classes who believe that they can conduct political affairs as if they were their own business, the overwhelming nationalist parties and finally, the militarist policy (pp. 121-122). Put together, these elements form oppression comparable to the one happening before independence. Therefore, the author persuades Africans that they have no reason to put up with the degrading interpretation of their past, that they can and must reinterpret it in a way consonant with their pride and interests. The purpose of the return to the source, Fanon writes, is to show that: "there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity. The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture (p. 169). Though Fanon expresses "little interest in the history of Africa, Négritude or any assertion of racial or cultural specificity, he refers to the past in so far as it created symbols of anti-colonial determination.

### Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of Fanon's performative pronouncements as a writer, political philosopher, anti-colonialist, and liberation organizer may be best appropriated for contemporary political and cultural issues. By stressing the need to contextualize acts of writing and rewriting in precise historical terms, the author points to the limitations, even the dangers, of the standard cultural binary oppositions (colonizer/colonized) and the static dialectic of colonial domination without considering their dialectical relationship. A reading and a discursive analysis of his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* may provide readers with a particular set of lessons about how history, legacy, and politics overlap and intersect, formulating a paradigm of suffering violence that can be crucial for the contemporary political struggles. The purpose is to bring together the integration of his thoughts, which marked him out as an intellectual of unusual passion and intrepidity. The argument is to suggest that what makes and defines the role of the intellectual is not simply mastery of a particular type of knowledge and social position; it is also the intensity and extensity of engagement at the community level. Fanon's performative pronouncement of the "New Man", has been already initiated in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* is repeatedly restated in his concluding remarks on the question of national solidarity and resistance to colonialism. The continuity of ideas is striking; he performs much of his earlier personal transformation of the "new man" in *Black Skin, White Masks* to the development of a national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth*, arguing that a new vision of the worldview is required.

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