

“The Oeuvre of Frantz Fanon and the task at hand: Deconstructing the Caribbean Oligarchy”

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With Frantz Fanon's oeuvre I have now located myself in the knowledge of a Caribbean person born in the island of Martinique who devoted his attention to dearticulating colonial domination and the condition of post-colonial/neo-colonial states. This pioneer body of work of Fanon is the foundation vitally necessary and must be deconstructed in the project to dearticulate the social order of the Caribbean. In 1961 "Les Damnés de la Terre" was published in French with the English translation "The Wretched of the Earth" in 1963. In this work Fanon wrote a body of analysis of neo-colonial/post-colonial states titled "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" which marks the commencement of this journey through Fanon's oeuvre.

Fanon states: "National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people; instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been." (Fanon 1963 Pg 148). For Fanon national consciousness is rooted in the mobilisation of all people of a former colonial state married to the concretisation of the hopes of the people. Decolonisation has to be driven by the involvement and input of the population of the former colonial state and the articulation and embrace of hope in the process and future of the newly independent state. But for Fanon there is no mobilisation and no hope only a travesty, a failure of the process and the leaders of the process. Fanon states: "The faults that we find in it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and independent nations, the nation is passed over for race, and the tribe is preferred to the state." (Fanon 1963 Pgs 148+149). The travesty even failure to build national consciousness stems from the failure to institute worship of the nation and the state as the worship of race and tribe is paramount. For Fanon the result of the worship of race and tribe is as follows: "These are the cracks in the edifice which show the process of retrogression, that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity." (Fanon 1963 Pg 149). The choice of race and tribe over nation and state cannot foster the birth and development of national effort and national unity. The reality is in effect formal independence did not result in the dismantling of the hegemonic European colonial discourse of race struggle and war. The leaders handpicked by the colonial masters to control the independent state embraced rather than dismantled the discourse inherited (see Figueira 2009). This is clearly seen in the refusal to build new non-colonial state institutions with independence and over time the state has become trapped in institutional inertia which renders it incapable of responding to threats that arise from present power relations that threaten the state. The old worn out explanation given of corruption, complicity and the need for institutional strengthening cannot grasp the reality that the inherited and embraced hegemonic discourse has crippled the state, placed it in the stasis of arrested development as the focus of the discourse is not the primacy of the state but of race and tribal interests. Under the colonial state there was no national consciousness much less hope for the future a discourse embraced under independence can only constitute what it was designed to produce colonial power relations.

Fanon blames the national middle class the hand picked managers of the state by the colonial masters as the entity responsible for these systems and fatal failures of the independence process. Fanon states: "We shall see that such retrograde steps with all the weaknesses and serious dangers that they entail are the historical result of the incapacity of the national middle class to rationalize popular action, that is to say their incapacity to see into the reasons for that action." (Fanon 1964 Pg 149). Why then can't the national middle class visualise, formulate and execute popular action? For one they simply cannot gaze upon the need for such actions as their worldview does not embrace popular action, mass action and inclusion. Their worldview is then colonial in origin. Fanon continues on the nature of the national middle class: "This traditional weakness, which is almost congenital to the national consciousness of underprivileged countries, is not solely the result of the mutilation of the

colonized people by the colonial regime. It is also the result of the intellectual laziness of the national middle class, of the spiritual penury, and of the profoundly cosmopolitan mold that its mind is set in.” (Fanon 1963 Pg 149). Colonial/neo-colonial domination does not only mutilate the colonised it also constitutes persons in the image and likeness of the colonial/neo-colonial hegemonic discourse to serve hegemonic discourse. Members of the national middle class view the world in a manner that is the product of hegemonic discourse. But the national middle class is non-white whilst the hegemonic discourse is racist anti-black therefore their worldview denies their being and humanity thereby they subject themselves to a netherworld of non-being the black abyss. Fanon continues: “Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise and it will in practice set up its country as a brothel of Europe.” (Fanon 1963 Pg 154). The national middle class is incapable to effect independence as its essential characteristics exclude it from the task at hand. It is obvious that a colonial discourse will not constitute an effective enemy for the post-independence colonial agenda. The national middle class constituted by the discourse of race struggle can only serve the colonial/neo-colonial agenda, and those of their race/tribe their political base. This explains their choice by the colonial master to animate the independent state. This process of serving colonial interests has been evolving since independence with the present stage being neo-liberal globalisation. Fanon raises the issue of the embrace and release of racism in the social order of the independent state as an instrument to ensure the hegemony of the elite in newly independent states of the neo-colonial world. Fanon states: “The national bourgeoisie of each of these two great regions which have totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form, takes over from the Europeans and establishes in the continent a racist philosophy which is extremely harmful for the future of Africa. By its laziness and will to imitation, it promotes the ingrafting and stiffening of racism which was characteristic of the colonial era.” (Fanon 1963 Pg 162). The racism is of a different variety from white colonial racism but its discursive origin is colonial racism. It has then to be an imitation as those releasing it on non-white bodies are non-white themselves. It is then tribalism that has now evolved into racism and the consequences are the embrace of genocide. A black on black racism that is the product of colonial discourse aimed at rendering non-whites docile a contradiction in terms rendering the instrument volatile (see Figueira 2010). A most volatile and paradoxical even ironical evolution of the hegemonic colonial discourse of race struggle/war in post colonial/neo-colonial states.

In his analysis of the national middle class Fanon offers an insight into the nature of neo-colonialism as distinct from colonialism. Fanon states: “Seen through its eyes, its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation, it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism.” (Fanon 1962 Pg 152). Neo-colonialism is then the ruling middle class of the independent state working in concert with capitalism in a subservient position for the exploitation of the state. The dominance of capitalism and the subservience of the ruling middle class is masked as the subservience of the ruling middle class in the face of the hegemony of capitalist interests render the discourse of a ruling middle class and the political power of the ruling class myths. This hegemonic capitalism has to be deconstructed as it comprises transnational corporations predominantly of the North Atlantic and the oligarchs of the independent state birthed under colonial domination and destined to grow in size, scale, wealth and power under the tenure of the ruling middle class. Fanon writes of the instruments of neo-colonial domination as follows: “In this way the former mother country practices indirect government, both by the bourgeoisie that it upholds and also by the national army led by its experts, an army that pins the people down, immobilizing and terrorizing them.” (Fanon 1963 Pg 174). The base form of

neo-colonialism is then indirect rule exercised via instruments of domination namely the ruling middle class and the army. Whenever the ruling middle class fails to ensure the conditions for indirect rule are present and sustainable the army is then mobilised and supported as the new instrument wielding power. This means that under the colonial regime elements of the middle class and the army were embraced and co-opted for the day of independence and this process continues with independence (see Figueira 2009). The ruling middle class at the dawn of independence is then incapable of shielding the army of the independent state from continued contacts with and the embrace of the West as they are themselves compromised. As the West repeatedly unleashed their instrument of power the army upon the state they then saw it fit to return their instrument to the barracks when it was strategically necessary to do so. It is expected that the entire state security apparatus of ex-colonial states were penetrated and rendered compliant in newly independent states of strategic importance to the West. It is instructive that it was the policing apparatus of Ghana that led the planning and execution of the coup d'etat to remove Kwame Nkrumah from power (see Figueira 2008).

Fanon in writing of the middle class states: "They have come to power in the name of a narrow nationalism and representing a race." (Fanon 1963 Pg 163). This ruling middle class which has framed a new concept of ruling class given its subservience is driven by a nationalism that is not national in expanse as it embraces the personal interests of a group, an elite drawn from a race, an ethnic group, a religious community etc. This middle class constitutes itself as a powered caste, the caste of the subservient rulers. How then does it represent a race? It can insist with its discourse that it does represent a multiplicity of social groupings including a race but in effect it seeks, furthers and protects the interests of the race that dominated the colony under colonialism.

Fanon insists that the racial prejudice of the national middle class is diametrically different from that of the Western bourgeoisie. Whereas the racism of the Western bourgeoisie "is a racism of contempt; it is a racism that minimizes what it hates." (Fanon 1963 Pg 163). The racism of the young national bourgeoisie "is a racism of defense, based on fear. Essentially it is no different from vulgar tribalism, or the rivalries between septs and confraternities." (Fanon 1963 Pg 164). The racism of fear is rooted in the colonial discourse of race struggle/war the product of black on black racism created for political purposes. The national middle class a small, visible, privileged minority must fear the marginalised masses and as on the plantation must constantly unleash instruments of suppression and control. But unlike colonial domination the powered elite and the powerless are all non-white but the racist discourse utilised was constructed to serve colonial whites in their domination of non-whites. Black on black racism then potently illustrates what Fanon named "the black mirage".

Fanon insists that the hegemony of the middle class over independent states will not result in the development of these states at best these states will be plagued with arrested development and lost generations of its citizens. Fanon terms this phase "a completely useless phase" in the history of the ex-colonial country (Fanon 1963 Pg 176). Fanon is fervent in his position that this caste must be excised from power as he states as follows: "The changeover will not take place at the level of the structures set up by the bourgeoisie during its reign, since that caste has done nothing more than take over unchanged the legacy of the economy, the thought, and the institutions left by the colonialists." (Fanon 1963 Pg 176). The basis of neo-colonial domination and the strategy that makes it possible is the retention of colonial discourse and state structures across time regardless of the reality that this domination and retention of colonial structures fail to deliver to the overwhelming majority of citizens of the neo-colonial state. Any attempt to dismantle the structures of domination is met by concerted covert and overt action by the dominant external overlords and the threatened elements internally who wield power and amass wealth by actively propagating the power relations of external and internal elitist dominance. The most poignant example of this today is the full court press to dismantle the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela. The retention of colonial structures of domination can only determine

underdevelopment.

Fanon's position is that with the acquisition of political power in the newly independent state the national middle class moves to utilise its political power to acquire the wealth and the means of production to evolve into a national bourgeoisie. This act to combine political and economic power sets in train dynamics which utilise the state and racism to acquire and accumulate wealth and productive means for a visible minority. These dynamics include racism, race war/struggle and further collapse of the state institutions. The social order then melts away under the assault of endemic corruption, state paralysis and endemic violence. Fanon states: "The bourgeoisie of an underdeveloped country is a bourgeoisie in spirit only. It is not its economic strength, nor the dynamism of its leaders, nor the breadth that ensures its peculiar quality as bourgeoisie. Consequently it remains at the beginning and for long time afterward a bourgeoisie of the civil service." (Fanon 1963 Pgs 178+179). Colonial domination ensures that at the moment of independence there was no grouping of persons posing a viable threat to the continuation of colonial domination under a new instrument: neo-colonialism. The middle class that desires evolution to a bourgeoisie can only plunder the independent state with a scale and manner of reckless plunder as pirates of the Caribbean that rips apart the social order and the state. A lesson they did not learn from their colonial and neo-colonial overlords is the discourse of sustainable domination.

Fanon's insights are of crucial importance to the project to dearticulate the social order of the Caribbean but the shortcomings of this work of Fanon is non-analysis of the existence of colonial oligarchs and oligarchies that made the transition to independence and have flourished as a result of the enabling support of the politicians and the power relations involved in this symbiotic relationship. Why then in these states the middle class wielding state power refused to place limits on the power of the oligarchs but chose instead to ensure that the wealth and power of the oligarchs exploded overtime in the independent states to the detriment of the majority race? A question that has to be answered with complex explanations being not a member of the oligarchy and the political elite I can only posit possible explanations derived from my involvement in politics.

The fundamental question that arises is why do the politicians of a black majority enable and foster the growth and expansion of the business interests of a non-black oligarchy that enhances the power of this oligarchy over the black majority? The said oligarchy having blocked the access of blacks to the oligarchy with the full consent and support of the black politicians has retained its non-black race origins dating back to colonialism. Why? Members of race groups who arrived in the Caribbean after the end of enslavement and more recently have entered the ranks of the oligarchy whilst Africans as a majority race group remain absent from the ranks of the oligarchy. Why? The most relevant issue is why has the black majority accepted this reality as normal? Possible explanations must include the continued unleashing of a racist discourse that insists on the incapacity of the African to manage the resources necessary to create and expand an enterprise of the requisite scale to qualify for entry to the oligarchy. There is then no strategy in place to limit African mobility the African is incapable of grappling with the task at hand therefore she/he limit themselves. Another variant of the discourse of African inferiority. To frame an explanation Fanon's oeuvre must be further explored.

Fanon in "Black skin, White masks" states: "It is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:- primarily economic,-subsequently, the internalization..or, better the epidermalization- of this inferiority." (Fanon 1967 Pgs 10+11). "The educated Negro, slave of the spontaneous and cosmic myth, feels at a certain stage that his race no longer understands him. Or that he no longer understands it." (Fanon 1967 Pg 14). For Fanon the black man is alienated but from what? This alienation expressed as the product of the epidermalisation of inferiority or black being inferior and less than human is the product of social and economic realities.

To render a race servile the race has to be convinced that being less than human it is incapable of leading it must be led. The superrace/subrace binary in action. The educated black man is alienated from the masses of his race as a chasm separates him from the masses as he views the masses with incomprehension and distrust. Placed in a position of wielding state political power this individual can only cling to the North Atlantic and the oligarchs of the social order. Fanon insists that this individual has internalised and acts upon the spontaneous as it never hardens constantly evolving in response to the demands of power relations and cosmic as it is universal in expanse a scientific truth: Negro myth. Most of all mythic as it is rooted in the needs of power not in fact hence the need to epidermalise inferiority. The individual then inhabits the “vast black abyss” (Fanon 1967 Pg 14) condemned to serve race interests that deny his humanity and to view the world via a myth that was handed to you. But the servile black man is never bothered by the racial exclusiveness of the oligarchy which excludes him and those like him. He is only concerned with exercising power over the black masses, maintaining the chasm between them and looting the state for personal gain as this is the only means to accumulate wealth afforded them by the neo-colonial overlords and the oligarchs. Most of all there is the paralysing fear of falling from power and descending into the ranks of the black masses as many sleepless nights are spent visualising powerless poverty rubbing shoulders with the black masses. Fanon states: “The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny and it is white.. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence.” (Fanon 1967 Pg 228). The black politicians of the Caribbean took action on the belief that the non-black races of the oligarchy will make a viable contribution to the “development” of the island state that redounds to the benefit of the politicians making the oligarchs of paramount strategic importance whilst the black masses are incapable of such a contribution. The dynamics for “development” flows from the unhindered operation of imperial capital and the oligarchs. The black politicians willingly and their servile worldview compels them to enable the oligarchs to effectively effectively apply the strategies to lock out members of the majority race from creating and growing enterprises that empower them to enter the ranks of the oligarchy. Black politicians are willing to create at most politicised state enterprises that are feeding troughs for the politically connected but entry to the oligarchy is prohibited for members of the black majority. Caribbean post independence history records the collapse of any political regime that dared to present a challenge to imperial capital and the oligarchy with a journey through various programs of “socialism”. In these instances imperial capital leads the oligarchy in a torrid engagement with these Caribbean regimes to bring about their political demise by any means necessary as seen in the action to collapse the Michael Manley led PNP government's experiment with “democratic socialism” (1972-1980) and the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela since 1998. The black politicians of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have enabled the domination of the indigenous private sector of Caricom, the expansion of the enterprises of the oligarchy to the private sector of member states of Caricom other than their country of origin and the globalisation of these enterprises to countries external of Caricom and the Caribbean island chain and this reality also applies to Haiti the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. This reality was impossible to attain without the full support, lead and embrace of the strategic imperatives of the oligarchs by the ruling black politicians of Caricom. It is a fact the import of which must never be diminished that the oligarchs of Caricom are not the elected politicians wielding state power they have then to utilise instruments to persuade the ruling black politicians to march in lockstep with their agenda. The most potent instrument of persuasion is a commonly held worldview. The oligarchs have not only evolved a globalised footprint they have maintained their control over their enterprises and the genetic identity attached to ownership from the founding of these enterprises and have kept the black majority race outside of the spaces they exercise hegemony over in spite of independence and black dominance of the political system and the state. The

black races can serve at the highest levels in their enterprises but never share their space and bloodlines. The reality is that the growth spurt of the enterprises of the oligarchs of Caricom occurred under the regime of structural adjustment and neo-liberal globalisation being the premier beneficiaries among Caribbean citizens whilst the majority bore the assaults and the consequent collapse in their standard of living and are yet to recover the standard of living they had before the onslaught. What then are the benefits to the Caribbean island states where oligarchic capitalism dominates the indigenous private sector? Caribbean oligarchic capitalism refuses to invest in creating an export driven manufacturing base rooted in the local economy as the foundation for growth of the Caribbean economy. They have then essentially remained commission agents and or merchants spending foreign exchange they don't earn that originated under colonial domination. They import and distribute relentlessly building monopolies and oligopolies squeezing out any competition in spaces they dominate that arise from non-oligarchic sources. And in the era of Caribbean expansion and globalisation the strongest have replaced the weaker oligarchs at the apex of the pyramid and new families have risen to prominence whilst others have slid down the totem pole of oligarchs and whilst those knocking on the door have been selectively included. The master key to this post-independence social order is then the servility of the black politicians.

Frantz Fanon in "Towards the African Revolution" (1969) in speaking of West Indians and Africans and specifically of the reality of Martinique states: "In every West Indian, before the war of 1939, there was not only the certainty of the superiority over the African, but the certainty of a fundamental difference. The African was a Negro and the West Indian a European." (Fanon 1969 Pg 20). "The West Indian was not a Negro; he was a West Indian, that is to say a quasi-metropolitan. By this attitude the white man justified the West Indian in his contempt for the African. The Negro, in short, was a man who inhabited Africa." (Fanon 1969 Pg 20). The separation continues to this day but the lesson of Fanon is the separation is an expression of and the result of the failure to accept the reality of race position and in so doing you are defined by and constituted by a discourse that aims to render you servile as it is a binary terrain. This binary terrain and the discourse that constitutes it must also constitute what it portrays as a viable alternative to its dominance hence "blackness" thereby ensuring that those who reject the mainstream and embrace "blackness" are also servile. Hence Fanon's black abyss.

Fanon in writing about Martinique presents a potent analysis of the nature of racism in the West Indies and the impact of miscegenation on the social order framed by racism. Fanon states: "In Martinique it is rare to find hardened racial positions. The racial problem is covered over by economic domination and, in a given social class, it is productive of anecdotes. Despite the greater or lesser amount of melanin that the skin may contain, there is a tacit agreement enabling all and sundry to recognize one another as doctors, tradesmen, workers." (Fanon 1969 Pg 18). "there was not on one side the Negro and on the other the white man but a scale of colors the intervals of which could readily be passed over. One needed only to have children by someone less black than oneself. There was no racial barrier, no discrimination. There was that ironic space, so characteristic of the Martinique mentality." (Fanon 1969 Pg 26). The social order is distinctly West Indian the product of a race minority intent on sustainable hegemony utilising a psychoexistential instrument that disarms the majority race. Miscegenation across time indicates that there is no barrier to procreation between all races and the power relations arising from the operationalisation of this discourse constitutes a complex social order that demands miscegenation to ensure its sustainability. Without miscegenation the racism hardens, the discrimination becomes systematic and the sustainability of the social order is gravely threatened. The move by non-black minorities to police miscegenation out of its behaviour patterns especially within oligarchic families poses a grave threat to the sustainability of the instrument of control utilised. Selective breeding has created a visible super wealthy, powerful collection of families and individuals

from race minorities openly displaying in public the nexus between minority races, wealth and power to a black majority. With the majority of the black race faced with extremely harsh living conditions and challenged prospects for their future yet they are still cognisant of the power they hold and can wield thereby impacting the social order. By banishing miscegenation the oligarchs are now devoid of human diversity so common in Caribbean history since the entry of the Europeans which is a potent racist message to the social order. This is the response of the non-black races to independence and the black domination of electoral politics and the state a response of fear, fear of a black island. European scientific racism is then combined with the drive for wealth maximisation creating capital with a race identity. A racist fear that harkens back to the slave plantation and the fear of the slave majority one that is irrelevant to the needs of Caricom states today. Fanon provokes a question which asks why in the 21st century the black races of Caricom states bleach their skin in an attempt to diminish their black skin colour? When asked the reason for bleaching a common answer is that their original skin colour is too black to afford them social mobility or it was ugly and unattractive as it was too black. But bleaching the skin and altering the hair is now widespread in Africa and has now become symbols of upward mobility. What of Asian women who undergo surgery to alter their Asiatic faces in a bid to appear hybrid not Asian but closer to white. Then there is skin bleaching among South Asian women to become Indians with pale skins rather than black skins. Chemical alteration in a bid to end epidermalization of inferiority. Fanon resonates to this day.

The next stage of the journey is to deconstruct this Caribbean reality of the oligarchy drawing examples from specific Caricom states. A reality that the masses know and speak of but the black intellectual and politicians remain silent on in public. A most important Caricom reality that efforts are in action to silence as black politicians and academics of the region police themselves with vows of silence and denial as to its existence by propagating the myth of black political power and the powerlessness of the minority races in the social order in the face of black political dominance.

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