

## **AN APPLICATION OF FRANTZ FANON'S CONCEPT OF RACISM AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS TO POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

Africa as a continent and Africans as a race, have been at the receiving end of global discriminatory treatments. In the past, some of the severest representations of racial discrimination against Africa are the slave trade and colonialism. The Apartheid Regime in South Africa is the latest episode in the many episodes of where blacks are exploited and treated like slaves in their own land. While many believed the blacks in South Africa got some respite from their dehumanizing treatment on 27<sup>th</sup> of April, 1994 when Mandela was sworn in as the first black president in here are others who argue that real liberation has not really taken place in the country. Applying the analytic and historical methods, this study uses Fanon's critique of racism and advocacy for national consciousness to interrogate the problem of white-black discrimination in post-apartheid South Africa. The work discovered that what happened in South Africa on 27th April, 1994 was not a genuine liberation but a mere transition from apartheid to democratic dispensation that left the status quo in social and political arrangements uninterrupted. Fanon warned against this situation many years ago when he maintained that national consciousness must be directed to unify the people and carry everyone along in the process of governance. He also emphasized against the uninformed national bourgeoisie's hijacking the post-independence era, for such will lead to a continuation or even be worse than colonial era. Therefore, the work concludes that deploying Fanon's notion of national consciousness will bring about genuine liberation in that country. This implies, bringing an end to the racially marked structures and reimagining the Black condition through jobs, social and economic programmes aimed at empowering the back majority.

Keywords: Franzt Fanon, Racism, National Consciousness, Post Apartheid South Africa

### **Introduction**

In 2019, Nigerians living in Johannesburg, Pretoria and surrounding areas were attacked by South Africans. Many suffered the loss of their businesses and homes, while some lost their lives. Several explanations have been given as to why Nigerians are attacked. The most humorous argument is that South Africans involved in the attacks are working on false information that foreigners like Nigerians stripped them of all the jobs available for young men in the country, thereby making the citizens jobless. This can be seen as a transfer of aggression from the South African Citizen to their fellow blacks that were not the cause of their problems. In South Africa, whites still control most of the factors of production while, blacks who are the majority remain employees.

The idea of national unity has evaded the entire inhabitants of the entire country. The election of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994 theoretically marked the end of legalized racial discrimination in South Africa. “Legal discrimination along racial lines in South Africa ended with the demise of apartheid but racial categorization is still being used by the government for monitoring economic changes and continues to cause controversy”, as Mohammed Allie (Allie, 2021) writes from Cape Town. Patterns of racism and systemic racial inequality remain entrenched in South Africa despite the end of apartheid, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) said in a report. The commission (qtd in Allie, 2021) which receives different types of rights violations said racism had topped its list of complaints. The Commission said incidents of racism are being committed on social media, at schools, universities, and the workplace among others. The report says persistent inequality and extreme poverty contributed to the ongoing violations. However, racism according to Fanon (qtd in Allie, 2021) is a form of a negative discrimination arising out of the skin colour of person; in this case white against Black. In the context of this work, Fanon’s concept of racism shall be seen as discrimination arising out of the interaction between the Whites and the Negro that generates the feeling of inferiority complex and propelled by economic inequality (Adu, 1987, 27). National consciousness is a form of nationalist humanism that is fundamentally involved in unifying the people, particularly if they are involved in governance. In Fanon’s (Adu, 1987, 27) view, national consciousness stands for an ideology of hope for a new humanity that promotes genuine liberation, democratic participation in nation building and unity of all.

This work will study Fanon’s ideas on racism and national consciousness and apply it on the post-apartheid South Africa that is faced with challenges of racial discrimination. The crucial question outlined and addressed in this work, is how possible Fanon’s racial theory and notion of national consciousness can help reshape the post-apartheid South Africa that is faced with deep racial discrimination. This work defends the thesis that Fanon’s theory of national consciousness can solve the post-apartheid South African’s problem of massive marginalization, alienation, dehumanization of the poor blacks by the whites. The study is significant from two dimensions: the practical significance and academic significance. On the practical significance, the work explores Fanon’s national consciousness principles, and uses it to suggest possible cures for the ills of racism in post-apartheid South Africa. This will lead to a change in the everyday praxis of the racially abused in South Africa. It will also provide

liberation from racial abuse as it will eradicate the detrimental effects of psychological oppression and brings about a self-awareness that will unify the people of South African. On the academic significance, this work will add to the existing philosophical literature on national cultures and racism in Post-apartheid South Africa in Fanon's context.

The data to be used in this work is sourced both from analogue and the electronic libraries. This means that information for the work is sourced from books, journals and the internet. In analyzing the data, the historical and analytic methods are used. As a research method, analysis involves the process of breaking down complex ideas and concepts into simpler forms. The analytic method will help to dissect Fanon's ideas of racism and national consciousness to their component parts highlighting their implications for South Africa. Additionally, with the historical method, both Fanon's concepts and South African situations will be analyzed within their historical milieu. Hence attempts would be made to understand the colonial context within which Fanon speculated and the current South African situation motivating this reflection. These two methods are particularly *ad rem* for this study.

### **Fanon's Theory of Racism**

Fanon in his famous work *Wretched of the Earth* stated categorically that racism is just a super structural effect of determining economic base. He writes:

...looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich (1963, 5).

Thus, class and race are causally related and they also gain meaning from one another. They dialectically related to each other because neither class nor race pre-determines the other. Racism for Fanon is not a biological trait but, rather, a historically constructed phenomenon and culturally mediated artifact. He traced the origin of racism as history of decolonization and explaining how wealthy colonizers exist only through the interaction of the poor colonized (qtd in Nazneen, 2007, 356). Fanon (1963, 82-83) writes; "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man." The feeling of inferiority emerged as a result the interaction between the colonizer (whites) and the colonized (blacks). They exist only through the other and the nature of their relationship constructs their ontological polarization. Wealth exists in relationship to poverty, indeed it is predicated upon

poverty and whiteness exists only through the social construction of blackness (qtd in Nazneen, 2007, 356). For Fanon, human comparison bestows individuals with their sense of inferiority and superiority, with their sense of human worth and esteem. As the Negro and the colonizer relate with one another, the feeling of inferiority and superiority complex comes to play. Fanon (1967, 83) writes; “the black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other.” He explains the role of comparison in the ongoing and circular accumulation of racist ideologies in the colonies. Human comparison, he argues, is what bestows individuals with their sense of inferiority and superiority, in effect, with their sense of human worth and esteem. The Antillean Negro and the colonizer exist as inferior and superior only as they recognize themselves in relation to the other. Each understands the other only in relation to what they are not (the colonizer is not black, the colonized is not white) and from this relational comparison emerges polarized collective identities with structural consequences.<sup>9</sup> Fanon argues that black inferiority complex is not only historical build up but also has a social context, consequently the black body is associated as poor and inferior and the negro makes it worse by aspiring to change his statues to white. In view of this, the colonizer (white man) has constructed a narrative of the inferiority of blackness through a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. It is through socio-cultural institutions that hierarchy of race becomes substantial. Hence, Fanon understand racism as phenomena formed as a result of colonial interactions. Race comes into being as an accomplishment. This accomplishment becomes further embedded through the culture industry Fanon (1967, 83).

### **Colonizers Perversion of the National Culture of the Colonized**

Fanon in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the role of colonial cultures in maintaining and legitimating the racialized economic hierarchy. He shows how culture operates as the instrument through which the normalization of the social construction of race as a system of hierarchical power relations occurs. For him, through the culture industry skin pigmentation became deeply imbued with hierarchical meaning. In the colonial world, this system of signification became a system of power legitimating white supremacy. The task of the colonist was to replace indigenous histories and cultures and replace them with the newly constructed racial ideologies (Fanon, 1967, 83). In *Black Skin, Fanon White Masks* write that:

...it is the anger of all whose cultures, knowledge systems and ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated. This is not just

any anger. It is the universal fury against oppression in general, and the perpetual domination of the Western civilization in particular (85).

Fanon explains how this task came to be realized. Racial domination of the colonies was legitimated through racist propaganda by the religious institutions that equated darkness with evil. Gradually the phenomena will dominate the society and became hegemonic, embedded in a variety of institutional sites (schools, government, criminal justice, etc) all operating to mediate the polarized racialized economic systems of colonial worlds. Most importantly, racial significations are transferred and internalized into the psyches and structures of society through the cultural component of language. Fanon is particularly interested in investigating the movement of racism through culture, particularly language. He states that: “to speak is to exist absolutely for the other. To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture” (Nazneen, 2007, 356). When the colonized speak the language of the oppressor, they co-opt the racist ideologies of that world that are woven into speech. To co-opt the language of the colonizer is to co-opt racism and to “betray” one’s own self and culture, and to internalize one’s own inferiority. Through this historical process, this gradual loss of language and hence, culture, the history of the colonized is buried in the past, its great accomplishments and thinkers lost (Nazneen, 2007, 356). The colonizers forced the colonized into their world through imbibing colonizer’s language.

### **Fanon’s Theory on National Consciousness**

National Consciousness for Fanon (1967, vi-vii), is fundamental in unifying people, particularly if they are involved in governance. Fanon believes that national consciousness, if well channeled, will lead to liberation and to a new humanism for countries emerging from colonization. However, he cautions against national consciousness as conceived by the national bourgeoisie (17). Fanon discusses two forms of nationalism. The first form, antinational nationalism, is inspired by anti-colonial struggle; a force that is driven by the national bourgeoisies’ sole thought; “Replace the foreigner” (Nazneen, 2007, 356). However, the national bourgeoisie is incapable of being at the helm of the nation after independence. This form of nationalism regresses into oppression of the masses, corruption and dictatorship. This will make the national bourgeoisie to fall back and relate with former colonizers, which according to him, sustains neocolonialism. The second form of nationalism that Fanon

presents stands for an ideology of hope for a new humanity, a national consciousness that promotes genuine liberation, democratic participation in nation building and unity of all. Fanon's critique of the first form of nationalism hinges on the failures of the national bourgeoisie, because national consciousness as promoted by the bourgeoisie does not liberate the people but instead oppresses them as it repeats colonial rule. Fanon support stands for an ideology of hope for a new humanity, a national consciousness that promotes genuine liberation, participation in democratic building of a nation and unity of all.

### **The Evolution of Apartheid System in South Africa**

African tribes lived in South Africa before 1652, then the Dutch came and settled in it, a group called Boers (Afrikaners). They fought the tribes, built their community, and adopted South Africa as their homeland. Later the British came and colonized it, and their culture started to penetrate that society. In 1860s diamonds and gold were discovered, and the Boer and the British monopolized all the natural resources, and the natives became workers exploited as a labor force to an extreme level (Nazneen, 2007, 356). The whites built a nation in which the rights were only for them. They controlled the nation and became more racist. Due to large numbers of the whites in South Africa, the natives were not involved in any decision that forms the state. The natives were made to work for the white. With the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa it became an attractive colony and many European companies invested in it, getting it deeply in the capitalist system and lending it a structure which tended toward the development of a proletarian class (a humiliated and oppressed class built on economic exploitation and also on racism) (Samman, 2006, 114)

The history of South Africa contains many of contradictions, as two kinds of species (Boers and British) tried to replace another kind of "species" of people (South Africa). The evolution of South Africa history was accompanied by contradictions and conflicts. Colonialism in South Africa is more applicable to the Boers than to the British, because they wanted to replace the natives and not just exploit them. They fought the tribes to impose and protect their existence through military superiority. Eventually the natives struggle against the system until it collapsed, ostensibly. Also, since the beginnings of that history some laborers were brought from Asian countries and India to work for the whites, later becoming a distinct group (Samman, 2006, 114).

### **Apartheid in South Africa**

Nelson Mandela summarily placed the system of apartheid in South Africa thus; “The white man makes all the laws, he drags us before his courts and accuses us, and he sits in judgment over us” (Amaku, 2014, 6). South Africa was exposed to double colonialism: settlement colonialism within capital colonialism, and the relationship was highly intense, because the colonizer tended to completely destroy the other economically, socially, politically and culturally and not just to penetrate it and to control the state. The ideology that the structure of South Africa built upon is a master-slave relationship. This ideology started since the settlement of the Boers, and it developed and took various forms at different stages until it reached the apartheid phase. Apartheid imposed segregation between the Afrikaners and the blacks, which allowed the Afrikaners to control the state completely as if the blacks did not exist. Racism caused a lot of harm to the colonized. First it destroyed the colonized body as it divided them into small separated pieces and directed them toward “ethnicity.” Second it led these small bodies to be managed badly through the chiefs that were selected by the government and also the minority of the black bourgeoisie who had control in conformity with the colonizer. Third, it directed all these small bodies to its economy to exploit them. Exploiting them meant the development, the prosperity and the increase of the white economic power, correspondingly weakening the blacks.

The aim of the whites was to restructure the body of the blacks through changing and directing the internal relationship between the blacks and to return them to a reverse phase so that the Afrikaner continued to be in there to protect this master-slave relationship. Apartheid was efficient in achieving its aim, because it was structured and imposed legally through the laws of the nation and was applied efficiently. The Afrikaners knew that this system wouldn't succeed or function permanently. Apartheid was a historical phase in the master-slave relationship that aimed to strengthen the position of the master and weaken the slave so as to sustain this relationship. The Afrikaners tried to impose their sovereignty based on the supposed superiority of their own culture. They built the idea of racism according to the colour the skin but it is not a matter of color as much as a matter of existence. The apartheid system was symbolic of racism, inequality, exploitation and injustice (Amaku, 2014, 6).

### **The Post-Apartheid South Africa**

The end of colonialism and attainment of independence by South Africa did not put an end to apartheid system in South Africa. The system of apartheid past constitutes the problem that haunts South Africa even in the post-apartheid era. This continues because of the legacy of apartheid which was left uninterrupted during the elite pact that resulted in post-apartheid democratization (Ndhlovu, 2017, 33). The nature of the post-Apartheid state that was inherited from Apartheid is itself the logic of Apartheid which intends to marginalize, exclude, and continue where the former stopped. With the attainment of independence in South Africa, the remaining whites continue to marginalize the natives through the machineries (police, army etc) that constitutes majority of the natives. During post-apartheid era, South Africa became a huge market zone because of the presence of gold and diamond as the external investment increased. But the proceeds ended up in the pocket of the white minority. The wealth became within the control of few international corporations, its wealth is more than the government's wealth. A "large part of the formal private sector is in the hands of six or seven conglomerates, while the government itself owns more than 100 corporations, and the government has been reluctant to provide special incentives to foreign investors" (Samman, 2006, 228) As this market widened the more the gap between the poor and the rich increased. The poor natives became alienated from the state system as they became unable to cope with the new economic system, and that resulted in social problems, especially as unemployment increased. Some people have been deprived from the use of electricity and water because they are unable to pay the fees (229). This change in the economy increased poverty among the black community, and on the other hand the rich became richer. It was also notable that violence was directed internally. The political violence decreased whereas the social violence increased obviously, that it became a national horror. Violence developed on an extent that it became organized and on the other hand it created the gangs and the Mafia (229). Lyman holds that:

Much of the crime is organized, and it is increasingly linked to drug trafficking South Africa under sanctions was isolated from not only legitimate commerce but also much of the international narcotics trade. With an explosion of airline connections and a police force inadequate to the task, drug syndicates- the police estimates their number at nearly 200- have moved in with a vengeance. Youth gangs, particularly in the Western Cape are financed by drug sales and are becoming more violent. Crack

cocaine has arrived in South Africa, along with heroin, speed and many other drugs (230).

All the organized crimes are related to the poverty regions, and those fields of work (organized crime) produce high rewards. Many of the police are involved in this organized crime, for example 25% of the police in the Johannesburg area was being investigated for a criminal offence in 1996. This shows how much the society is in a chaos and confused status (232).

The post-Apartheid South Africa also witness tribal conflicts. There was a lot of violence especially between the Inkatha and the ANC, conflict between the Zulu and the Xhosa. (Most of the ANC members are from the Xhosa tribe). Within the province of KZN (KwaZulu Natal), one major political issue unresolved by the election was the fierce rivalry. It is the one province where political violence persists at a very high level. More than 3000 people were killed in 1995, though some estimate that less than a third of the murders were “purely political”. The rivalry pits the ANC against Buthelezi’s Inkatha Freedom Party (233).

The spread of violence after the reconciliation with the colonizer shows how dualism appeared in a new form. The posts of the institutions were taken by the part of the political party and the bourgeoisie, the value system corrupted as they aimed to live high-level standard of living, and imitating the European life style, and working to take the approval of the colonizer. Also the police was directed for servicing them. This makes the value system collapses within the masses as they became unable to cope with the new system and were suppressed.

### **Post-Apartheid South Africa and Pitfalls of National Consciousness**

Fanon in his work, *The Wretched of the Earth* emphasized on ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’. Fanon made his predictions about the future of post-independent African states, and despite the existing evidence of their almost correctness and precision, South Africa, being the last African state liberated from the clutches of Apartheid colonialism, has failed to learn from Fanon and avoid the pitfalls of the national bourgeoisie of post-independent African states. Consequently, almost the entire diagnosis Fanon makes about post-independent African states applies with stunning exactness to post-apartheid South Africa (Mabogo, 2011, 1). The national bourgeoisie, which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime, is an underdeveloped bourgeoisie. Its economic clout is practically zero, and

in any case, no way commensurate with that of its metropolitan counterpart which it intends replacing (Fanon, 1963). Just like other African countries, South Africa also encountered pseudo-independence. Fanon laments the fact that pseudo-independence does not in any way affect the life chances of the peasants and the urban proletariats, nor transform their condition to a more dignified one. At the root of this tragic situation is the political, social and economic compromise that the national political parties reached with the settlers' regime (Mabogo, 2011). The South African situation since 1994 cannot be separated from the prophetic warnings of Fanon. The failure of national liberation to free the black majority from the forces of racism, oppression, and exploitation was and is still of a great concern all over the African continent.

### **Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Way forward**

Fanon's imagination of liberation is the realization of new humanity, which in the context of South Africa will translate into a new society. National consciousness if not hijacked by the bourgeoisie will be fundamental in unifying people after colonialism. This is because it will involve the masses in governance and socio-economic factors affecting them. The people will be carried along the process of governance. For there to be liberation in post-Apartheid South Africa, the blackness found in the loss of land, economic control, and humanity should not just be reimagined and must be reformed on the basis of liberation consisting of the black experience.<sup>32</sup> This includes the racially marked infrastructure; it should not just vanish but destroyed in fundamental and structural terms. A situation that must prevail is where freedom, justice, and equality are afforded to all as opposed to being reduced to mere pronouncements of national anthems, slogans, flags, symbols, public holidays, fake freedoms that propagates civil rights, and economic freedom, while the status quo remains intact.<sup>33</sup> The post-Apartheid era must accommodate the black majority and give possibilities to reimagine the black condition in fundamental terms consisting of economic rights, justice, and reparations.

### **Conclusion**

This work attempted to apply Fanon's racial theory and national consciousness to the post-Apartheid era through the systematic deployment of Fanon's ideas, this some to the conclusion that though apartheid system ended, but its elimination was not a result of the struggle of the blacks but the result of Apartheid's weakness The end of Apartheid put the blacks into a new phase of racial discrimination by the nationalist bourgeois that were not

capable to handle the leadership role. The work concludes that this situation can be alleviated if the national consciousness is well directed. It will unify the people and also carry them along in the process of governance.

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